

The Baker's Wife

The Baker's Wife is a musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, book by Joseph Stein, based on the film "La Femme de Boulangier" ("The Baker's Wife") by Marcel Pagnol and Jean Giono. The version currently licensed by Music Theatre International is a revised version, updated from the original 1976 production. This final version was produced at the Paper Mill Playhouse in 2005.

The following questions and answers are from the archive of the StephenSchwartz.com Forum. Copyright by Stephen Schwartz 2010 all rights reserved. No part of this content may be reproduced without prior written consent, including copying material for other websites. Feel free to link to this archive. Send questions to office@stephenschwartz.com

This PDF includes:

SECTION 1 – Assorted Questions

SECTION 2 – The Baker's Wife Songs

SECTION 3 – The Baker's Wife Song – "Meadowlark"

SECTION 4 - THE BAKER'S WIFE CAST ALBUMS

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

SECTION 1 – Assorted Questions

David Merrick

Question:

My question pertains to the booklet in the Stephen Schwartz Album in which you stated that "Meadowlark" was swiped from the orchestra pit during the trial run of THE BAKER'S WIFE-- causing it to be lost from the show. If this is in fact true, I was wondering if you wouldn't mind elaborating a tad on this interesting story. Who exactly is David Merrick?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Mr. Merrick (the producer of the original production of THE BAKER'S WIFE in 1976) was the pre-eminent Broadway producer of the 60's and early 70's, and quite a colorful character. Among the musicals he produced are GYPSY, HELLO, DOLLY, and OLIVER. He also produced many of the British play imports of the time, perhaps most notably MARAT/SADE. He was famous for his flamboyant and often adversarial relationship with critics (and some of the people who worked for him). One of his best-known exploits was publicizing one musical that had gotten negative reviews (I think it may have been SUBWAYS ARE FOR SLEEPING) by finding New Yorkers with the same names as prominent critics, treating them to the show, and then running their (obviously highly enthusiastic) "reviews" as part of a quote ad in the Times! Hope this little tidbit of theatre lore brings you up to date. Thanks again for writing. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Answer from Carol de Giere:

Stephen wasn't present when the music for "Meadowlark" was "stolen" but you'll details about in my book "Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz, from Godspell to Wicked." To research this story for The Baker's Wife chapter I interviewed Bob Billig, who was the music director/conductor at the time, Stephen, and also Josh Ellis who worked for Merrick as a publicist. They all had slightly different reports, and I included them in the book, along with the whole history of the show.

Baker's Wife: The Sadness That Pervades the Work

Question:

Stephen, I'm thrilled -- no, superthrilled -- to find that the century's coolest songwriter (OK, it's a tie with Jim Steinman, my other favorite) has his very own Internet discussion forum. It's well-deserved. Congratulations on the touching, thrilling work you've done over the past twenty-nine years. (And beyond, undoubtedly! Who hasn't wondered about "Pippin, Pippin"?) "The Baker's Wife" is undoubtedly -- at least to these ears -- the "lost classic" of all time. What's interesting to me is the sadness which pervades the work. I love "Godspell" for its humor ... "Pippin" for the vivacious, contrapuntal score ... "Children of Eden" for the sheer enormity ... "Reluctant Pilgrim" for the great pop-parody arrangements.

"The Baker's Wife" is the saddest to me. Was there something especially touching about the story to you? Your lyrics were quite poignant .. the insights were even more dead-on than usual .. and that's quite a statement in and of itself. What was it about "The Baker's Wife" that inspired all of those ballads and my favorite of all, "Meadowlark"? (My girlfriend is a HUGE Patti LuPone fan -- I swore that I'd never date a HUGE fan of a vocalist, but ... love is love...) .. So, needless to say, I'm treated to live renditions of that song often. What was it about that show for you? And -- and I don't mean this to be insulting, as I regard you as a genius among geniuses -- were you surprised that the show was treated as it was by audiences? Congratulations again. You can't scuttle Schwartz!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks for your message and your questions about THE BAKER'S WIFE. Without going into too much personal detail, let me just say that I was able to draw on experiences in my own relationships, some of them quite painful, to enable me to write for the characters in the show -- particularly the three principals -- from an extremely personal point-of-view. Obviously the specifics and details were different to suit the story of the show, but the emotions were true, and I guess that's where the universality (and the sadness you sense) came from. In terms of audience response, shows like THE BAKER'S WIFE -- that is, gentle and romantic shows -- have never been as commercially popular as the big hard-edged blockbusters (think of SHE LOVES ME or 110 IN THE SHADE as two other similar shows that never really score commercially). But the people who love them are so intensely devoted to them that in a way they can become one's biggest "hits", even if they never have the commercial success as some of one's other shows. I know I certainly have been surprised and enormously gratified by the continuing interest in and affection for THE BAKER'S WIFE from fans of the show such as yourself. Thanks for taking the time to write. Best, Stephen Schwartz

SECTION 2 – THE BAKER’S WIFE SONGS

The Baker's Wife Updates and Songs

Question:

I went to see the Baker's Wife at the Paper Mill Playhouse, an event I have been waiting for with enthusiastic anticipation since being introduced, in 1981 by an opera agent, to the Yekos recording of the 1976 show with Lupone and Sorvino. I have listened to that recording literally hundreds (and hundreds) of times in the past 24 years and so every musical nuance and lyric have become burned into my memory bank! (I think it is, indeed, my favorite recording.) Two trivial questions from the Paper Mill's production:

1. I understand you have re-worked this show on numerous occasions, but is there a reason you changed some of the lyrics to Chanson (e.g., sheep/bleat to gull/cry, a sound which I find a bit guttural and and image less soft, bucolic, and ethereal like the weaving and musical texture of the original), and

2. Did you cut "Endless Delights" because of the length of the show? I know, "everybody's a critic." Make no mistake, I LOVED the show and I give the Paper Mill decision makers a lot of credit for bringing back this ill-fated gem to a community of theater-goers who otherwise would not have had the privilege of this special, special musical theater experience. (I thank you, too, for creating the score, and the Yekos, for making the 1976 recording.)

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Robert: Thanks for your message. I am extremely happy with the beautiful production at Paper Mill, and I'm glad you were enthusiastic about it as well. Joe Stein and I are, I think understandably, very pleased that after so many years and so much effort, the show is finally done! We both feel this is the final version, and are delighted it has been so well received.

In answer to your "two trivial questions":

1. This is a change that had been made some time ago. I actually feel that the sound of "hear the sheep bleat" is less soft and evocative sounding than "hear a gull cry". Just personal taste, I guess. When I had decided I wanted to change the "sheep bleat" line because I didn't like the sound of it and thought it was a little clumsy to sing, I looked for something that would have a bit of an inner rhyme with the following "see with new eyes" -- hence the choice of "gull cry". Plus I remember being surprised that there were seagulls up in the hills of Provence, as it seemed pretty far from the sea to me, so I included that image.

2. [Did you cut "Endless Delights" because of the length of the show?]

No, we cut it because it has never worked in context. I have seen it tried in many productions, and it never works, and I finally felt that if Trevor Nunn couldn't make it work, no one could.

I think the reason it doesn't work is that we as an audience are actually angry with Genevieve and Dominique at that point in the show for hurting our beloved baker, and we don't want to watch them having a good time, even if it does have the subtext of their "protesting too much".

For the Paper Mill production, our director Gordon Greenberg suggested the solution which I think works very well: as you saw, there is now a waltz crossover during which we see Dominique and Genevieve in the midst of their most sensual time together, which contrasts with seeing the Baker simultaneously driving the villagers from his bakery and having a sort of nervous breakdown. This seems to do the story-telling work that "Endless Delights" did in a much more compelling (and shorter) way. So "Endless Delights" is from now on forever consigned to the land of cabaret and revues, where I have seen it work very well out of context.

Thanks again for your message, and again, I'm delighted you enjoyed the show.,
Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Baker's Wife: Chanson - Grammatical Error

Question:

[a question of how difficult it was to write the French verse in "Chanson"]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I do speak French, and it was fun and not overwhelmingly difficult to write the French lyrics (with the help of a French rhyming dictionary!), since so many French words rhyme. There is actually a grammatical error in the French lyrics that I discovered later on: Technically, the last line should be "AINSI C'EST TOUJOURS LE MEME CHOSE" rather than just "LE MEME" ... But because it doesn't sing

nearly as well, I have left it as it was. Also, I never really came up with a satisfactory adjective for the line: "... COMME LES AUTRES DOUX JOURS". Sometimes, I sing it without the word "DOUX" in it, and simply put the "AU" of "AUTRES" over two notes. Best, Stephen Schwartz

The Baker's Wife: Chanson - French Translation

For those interested, Stephen provides the translation for the French verse:

Every day is a day like the other days -- the soup, work, perhaps love. The sun makes its journey, the world makes a turn, and so it is always the same ...

Pop Style

Question:

Dear Stephen, It strikes me as interesting that you are one of a very select group of composer's to have successfully bridged the gap between traditional show music (whatever that is) and contemporary pop. Do you think that your success has influenced new writers in their approach to composing for the musical theatre? Also, THE BAKER'S WIFE is the only score you've written for the theatre that I would classify as not being directly influenced by a "contemporary pop" sound. I understand that the score was influenced by Debussy as well as Brel and French folk music. What made you decide to not incorporate any "contemporary pop" sound into that score? Just curious... Thanks, Shawn. PS Recently picked up the "PERSONALS" London cast recording and love your contributions!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Shawn: Thanks for the compliments. Actually I think of the BAKER'S WIFE as sort of "closet" pop -- there's a sneaky little pop sensibility around the edges, particularly in songs like "Meadowlark" and "Chanson". If you don't play and sing those songs with a little sense of pop to them, they come out sounding pretty flat. But it seemed to me that it was inappropriate to write a real pop score for a story that was supposed to be taking place in 1931 in provincial France. (Yes, I know they sort of wrote pop for LES MIZ, but no one actually believes that feels as if it's taking place in 1815 or whenever it's supposed to be, do they?) I have done the same thing for the score to my upcoming television show GEPETTO, which takes place in 19th century rural Italy -- used Italian folk and opera influences. But that score too has little closety pop elements to it. You'll see what you think when you hear it. Thanks again for writing. Best, Stephen Schwartz

The Baker's Wife: "Plain and Simple" & "Buzz-a-Buzz"

Question:

I noticed that "Plain and Simple" is not on MTI's list of songs (neither is "Buzz-a-Buzz") in the version of the show that's licensed. Are these not in the version? These are two of my favorite songs in the show, and I'm looking at producing it next year with a local company and I was just wondering if these songs were there. "Plain and Simple" is one of the reasons I'm looking into this show in the first place (to showcase the male we would have play the role) and I was wondering if these could be added if they aren't in the show already. Thank you!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

While I hate to say anything that might discourage someone from producing THE BAKER'S WIFE, I must tell you the two songs you mention are in fact no longer in the show. The reason they were cut was primarily for length -- in performance, we have learned that "Plain and Simple" plays as too much of the same moment as "Merci, Madame", and a slightly expanded version of "And Day Now Day" functions better than "Buzz a Buzz" as the end of the first act. I'm delighted you like the two cut songs, since I put

a lot of work into both of them, but I must tell you that the recent production at Goodspeed's Norma Terris Theatre was so successful that both Joe Stein and I feel that the show is finally finished and we don't wish to tamper further with it, now that we have it working at last. I hope this doesn't dissuade you from doing the show. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

The Baker's Wife: Question about "Feminine Companionship"

Question:

I am in the thick of the rehearsal process for the Baker's Wife and while I was working with the choreographer on "Feminine Companionship" I was reminded of an interesting question I had the very first time I encountered the song: Why is Simone the only Niece to have her own little introductory stanza? Did verses exist for the other Nieces in any earlier drafts? ("Inez is neat, and petite, and she...uh, makes...lots of...meals...with meat..." Ok, but you would have come up with something good, so why only the one verse?) Just wondering, Jason

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Jason: Because that seems to suffice -- any additional verses would, in my opinion, have simply been repetitious (as your joking experiment at coming up with another one ably demonstrated.) The point is not to learn about the individual Nieces anyway but to demonstrate the extent of the Marquis' (and the rest of the Villagers') desperation. Hope your production goes well and you all have a great time doing the show. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Bakers Wife- where is the warmth

Question:

I was just wondering what the song Where is The Warmth is about. I want to know what she's singing about and what she means in detail if possible. Thanx!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

"Where is the Warmth?" is sung by the title character in THE BAKER'S WIFE. Without giving away too much of the story (to the few people left who may not know it), she has run off with an extremely good-looking young man and they have had a brief but torrid affair. But as the sexual excitement calms down, she is realizing there is something more important that she is missing. She is ironically amused at herself for not knowing this sooner. As he lies in bed asleep, she looks at him and muses upon her feelings. Hope this clarifies it somewhat for you, Stephen Schwartz

SECTION 3 – THE BAKER’S WIFE SONG – “MEADOWLARK”

Baker's Wife: Meadowlark/Betty Buckley

Question:

hi there! A friend of mine mentioned to me that the song meadowlark (a masterpiece, btw....even acquaintances who dislike musical theater find something in this song...) was written for betty buckley and that mr. Schwartz originally wanted betty to star in the show...

So, my question is: what happened???

And , just a note: I've seen both patti lupone (who sounded great on the cats recording) and betty buckley perform meadowlark, numerous times... patti sings it "okay"....well, she tries to sing it the way she originally did and that approach is wrong for her now... but she is patti, and always a pleasure to hear/see. betty does a fine job with the number....even more than singing it, she tells a story...first of her memory of her childhood story, and then of herself....and her "beautiful young man"

Once, i had the pleasure of seeing betty sing meadowlark at a rally in union square, NYC....with only piano accompaniment..and that memory has never left my mind....a perfect song and a perfect rendition.....the crowd, mostly people there to see/hear dance-pop artists were jumping to their feet!
thanks, tariq-kieran

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

As you may imagine, I have heard several renditions of "Meadowlark" over the years. I agree with you that when Betty sings it simply, as when you heard her with just the piano accompaniment, it is an amazing performance, one of the best I've ever heard. (I also like Liz Callaway's version that she did in her "Sibling Revelry" act with her sister.)

It is true that Betty was the actress I was originally thinking of for the role; the director of the show however did not agree with me. (Another actress I very much wanted to see cast in the role was Anita Morris, but there too, the director did not go for it.) When you're casting a show, the director's preference I think needs to be given great weight, as he or she is the one who will have to get the performance from the actor. Anyway, that's one way it can happen that an author's vision of an actor for a role doesn't always turn into reality. Stephen Schwartz

The Baker's Wife: Metaphor for Meadowlark

Question: [a question about a metaphor for "Meadowlark"]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The metaphor for "Meadowlark" represents a story about someone who does what she knows is the "right" thing to do, but then it breaks her heart and she literally cannot live with the choice. I can't tell you exactly what inspired me to deal with the dilemma the Baker's Wife is facing in the show by writing the song that way. As I was thinking about her expressing the emotions she was going through and feeling them myself as I began to write, this story more-or-less popped into my head.

I guess I made it up out of bits-and-pieces of other fairy tales from Hans Christian Andersen, etc. It seemed to me like a strange round-about way to be expressing the character's feelings at the time, but that's what came into my heart and mind, and the fact that listeners such as yourself have responded to it so strongly shows that I must have tapped into something. Thank you again for taking the time to write. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Meadowlark – What's it about?

Question:

Forgive my ignorance but not being familiar with the show, I would welcome some input on the song "meadowlark" - out of context it seems just like a fairytale type song, but the last few lines make me think that its actually about something else. Could someone give me some guidelines! I absolutely love the song! Thanks, Samantha

Answer from Forum visitor:

Welcome Samantha, you've come to the right place. I'll be brief. The song Meadowlark is from the show: The Baker's Wife, and it is she that sings the tune as a sort of metaphor of her life at a moment in time when she is choosing between taking a lover or staying with her older husband. It's also one of the best songs ever written. Congratulations on your good taste. You may wish to purchase the soundtrack of the

show on CD to get the feel of the rest of the musical. Others on the forum can and will do more justice to your query. Have a great day. Mike Smith

Genevieve/Baker's Wife/Meadowlark

Question:

[a question on the meaning of the song]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The character who sings the song, Genevieve, is married to an older man. The man is kind to her and she likes him, but she is not in love with him. She has settled for this marriage because of heartbreak in her past. Then, unexpectedly, she has met a handsome young man, a man her age, who seems to have fallen for her. She finds herself increasingly attracted to the young man, though she does her best to hide her attraction from him and herself. On this night, the young man is leaving town forever and asks her to come with him, telling her he loves her. But of course she knows if she does, it will break her husband's heart. The song "Meadowlark" is her struggle with this dilemma. She remembers a story she loved as a little girl, and sees in it now a metaphor for her situation -- in remembering it, she realizes what she thinks she must do, but it is a decision that is not easy for her.

Meadowlark

The following are questions about the song Meadowlark, followed by Stephen Schwartz's answers.

Question:

Its magical quality comes from the imagery and the story telling technique. What gave you the inspiration for this style of ballad?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

While "Meadowlark" was written specifically for the character of Genevieve in THE BAKER'S WIFE, I wrote it at a time of personal turmoil, and I think some of that emotion got into the song; it may be the underlying truth of that emotion that makes so many listeners connect to the song and has led to its lasting popularity. The story itself of The Meadowlark, and its use as a metaphor for the character's dilemma, is one that just came to me and was clearly influenced by several familiar children's stories, including Andersen's "The Emperor's Nightingale".

Question:

Many performers just use one vocal colour for the song. Was this your intention? Or was your original concept a performance similar to Schubert's "The Elf King" where the singer defines each character with a different vocal colour.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The most effective renditions I've heard of the song do make subtle vocal colorations throughout -- the first verse sounding younger and more romantically idealistic, the second verse and bridge more passionate and adult, and the last verse (beginning with "And now I stand here") fully mature and knowing. These are subtle gradations but can be very effective for the story-telling of this long song.

Question:

I read somewhere that the original producer (David Merrick?) disliked the ballad. Why was that?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

It is true that the original producer of THE BAKER'S WIFE, David Merrick, disliked the song intensely, feeling it was too long and interrupted the dramatic action of the show. At one of the last performances of the original tryout tour, Mr. Merrick (famously) removed the orchestral parts from the pit so the song could not be performed. An extreme act, needless to say, but it certainly makes for a funny story in strengthening the "legend" of the song.

SECTION 4 - THE BAKER'S WIFE CAST ALBUMS

Original Cast Records

Question:

My question, when you have a chance (i.e., in November), is about Original Cast Records. I've recently just "discovered" this record company -- and their stunning array of off-Broadway releases. After a few hours of perusing their catalog (and spending to the point of Medicaid eligibility), it dawned upon me that these are the people who released THE BAKER'S WIFE. Indeed, they note on their web site, which I subsequently visited, that your score for TBW was their first release -- and is their best seller. I would love to hear how you became involved with this company, and, more so, just who these schoolteacher and scientist producers of the original cast recording of TBW are. Best, Michael Dube

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Hi Michael: At the time of the original production of THE BAKER'S WIFE, which was obviously pre-CDs and home studios, it was virtually unheard of for there to be a cast recording of a pre-Broadway show that didn't make it to Broadway. Thus it was with surprise and delight that I heard from the (then) husband-and-wife team of Bruce and Doris Yeko, who had seen the show out-of-town and wanted to preserve the score. There was no budget to pay the entire cast, so it was decided to eliminate the chorus numbers and do only those songs that involved the principals (a decision that was good for the record both economically and artistically, but which actually made it take longer to fix the show itself, since it mistakenly gave the impression that the show should focus more exclusively on the central story.) The record did not represent any actual performance of the show, since there had been no single performance in which all the songs chosen for the album had been in the show at the same time, but I selected those numbers I thought should make up the core of the score, and they have basically done so ever since. Because I had experience as a record producer, I produced the album, and the Yekos financed it and served as executive producers. Although to this day I have never received one penny in royalties for the album, I am still grateful to the Yekos for preserving the score and thus starting the BAKER'S WIFE on its (her?) road back to life. Thanks for your interest, Stephen Schwartz

Meadowlark recording?

Question:

Hi, heard this song sung by Judy Kuhn last year. I would really like to get it on recording but am having difficulty finding one! Hopefully some people on this board have managed to find a version they particularly like. Is there a cast recording of the Bakers Wife? Also is there a particularly good version that a solo artist has recorded? Many thanks

Answer from a Carol de Giere:

Hi Jade, "Meadowlark" is Stephen's most recorded song for which he wrote both music and lyrics. It's on two cast albums (US and London) and has been covered by I think 9 recording artists. You'll find the list and links for these at my site, although the US cast album may not always be available. If you have trouble, let me know <http://www.musicalschwartz.com/the-bakers-wife.htm>

Baker's Wife original Cd or London one + others...

Question:

I started getting really interested in the works of Mr. Schwartz, that I haven't seen or heard yet. One of the scores that most appealed to me from that group, is The Baker's Wife. I want to buy the CD and I was wondering which one am I better off with: the full London cast recording or perhaps the original partial one. Please note the minuses and pluses in your recommendation.

Answer from Carol:

I'll give a few opinions and perhaps others will as well. I'll include links to my site where you can find more information. THE BAKERS WIFE: If you follow the links on <http://www.musicalschwartz.com/the-bakers-wife.htm> to the Amazon.com pages for the CDs, you'll see a lot of comments. The only way to get the group numbers as well as solos and duets is to buy the London album. So if you have to buy just one, I'd say get that one. Some people feel it's more reserved (stereotypically British) than the American one. But the group numbers are important to understanding the musical.

Differences between score and recording

Question:

Dear Mr. Schwartz, I have recently discovered The Baker's Wife (a hugely romantic work, worthy of much acclaim, it is beautiful) And was excited at the prospect of singing 'If I Have to Live Alone' for auditions and the such. Upon finding the song in The Baker's Wife vocal selections (which comprises just three songs, where is Gift's Of Love, Chanson and When She Returns? etc..) I set about learning it. However there appears to be discrepancies between the vocal line in the score and what Mr. Sorvino sings (wonderfully) on the Original Broadway Cast recording. I wish to sing the Cd version...

Answer from Michael Cole:

Send me an email and I'll see if I can help you with the music you are looking for.
office@stephenschwartz.com

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Complete history of The Baker's Wife with song details

"Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz, from Godspell to Wicked"
www.DefyingGravityTheBook.com

Cast albums, sheet music, information

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/the-bakers-wife.htm>

Synopsis with photos from the Paper Mill Playhouse production of 2005 where the new version was finalized

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/the-bakers-wife-papermill.htm>

Licensing

http://www.mtishows.com/show_detail.asp?showid=000010