

Wicked – Stephen Schwartz Answers Miscellaneous Questions About the Show

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The following questions and answers are from the archive of the StephenSchwartz.com Forum.

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SECTION 1 – Miscellaneous Q and A about the Production

How long

Question:

Hey Stephen, I recently saw Wicked and was amazed by the beautiful music. Anyway, I just wanted to know how long it took you to fully write the score?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The whole show took about four years to write, counting all the revisions and rewriting.

How Close to Original Vision

Question from Eric:

I would like to know how you yourself feel about what you've done. I know you don't tend to read reviews of any kind, which is understandable. But how close to your original vision is WICKED? Really? I know as a creator one is never entirely satisfied. Would you be willing to specify any disappointments? In terms of what you envisioned and what is now the finished product? I know you can't help but be pleased with the show's success, but is there something you'd still like to do to it if such a thing were possible? Your score is so good, I love the show without having even seen it yet! Do you have a personal favorite song or moment from this show? I know it's a lot of questions. I love the fact that you are making yourself accessible through this forum, so I'd love an answer or two...? With deep gratitude and appreciation,

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Eric: You have actually answered most of your own questions, which shows your understanding of the process. When you say "you can't help but be pleased with the show's success" but "I know as a creator one is never entirely satisfied", you have described it insightfully. I would add that although it is inevitable, in a process as collaborative as putting on a new musical, that the author's original vision will never be exactly realized, I do feel that the final Broadway script and score of WICKED are surprisingly close to what Winnie and I set out to do four years ago. There are some small changes we are planning to make for the tour, but nothing structurally major. Having worked on and observed projects where the authors become considerably deflected from their original intentions, I am very pleased (and relieved) that didn't prove to be the case with this show. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Full Libretto

Question:

Hello, I was curious about something, some shows release the full book and lyrics to the shows, and they are available in book stores, will "Wicked" ever release a complete book and Lyrics in book stores?

Answer from Michael Cole:

At this point, I'm not aware of plans to release the libretto to WICKED. When and if they decide to make it available, we'll post an announcement on this site.

A rather stupid question about Wicked...

Question:

What would you say is the musical standard from Wicked? I chose to do a report on Wicked for my theatre class and this is one of the questions we have to answer. I'm sorry if this is a dumb question, but I've searched high and low and can't seem to find a definite answer! Thank you so much!

Answer from a Forum visitor:

I think the answer you're looking for is that this is a BOOK MUSICAL. This means that the songs are separated by the dialogue - and the songs provide extra strength to the dialogue and plot.

Added note from Carol de Giere: In other words, it's not a revue or an opera or operetta or a "jukebox musical," but an original adaptation in the form of a book musical. It tells a dramatic story through music, lyrics, and the musical's "book," (with the support of dance, scenic design, costumes and lighting.)

Wicked for Kids

Question:

My daughter just turned six and will be entering 1st grade in the fall. Thanks for taking the time to respond, I already bought tickets, but will try to find a friend to attend if it would be inappropriate for a younger child.

Answer from Michael Cole:

Dear Kate, There is nothing in WICKED that is offensive, i.e. language, etc., but a 6 year old is probably too young. Stephen Schwartz responds: "I think a 6 year old is too young to bring to a full-length musical, regardless of content, unless he or she is a very sophisticated six-year-old with a two-and-a-half-hour attention span." You might want to try and find an older friend to fill that seat. Hope you enjoy the show when you see it! Best, Michael Cole

Official Website answer – Ages 8 and older.

Galinda/Glinda

Question: I've seen the show, but I forgot when it was that Galinda - turned into Glinda... and why? Any responses would help me better understand!!

Answer from a Forum visitor:

She decides to change her name to try and get Fiyero to notice her again. She claims it's in solidarity for the firing of Dr. Dillamond, who couldn't pronounce her name properly; he'd say "Glinda." This scene is right before they leave for the Emerald City, in the train station.

Initial Investment in Wicked

Question:

Hello Steven. I don't know if this is available to the public, but I was wondering what the initial investment was on WICKED and how close is the show to recouping this? I know other shows have made this available. I love facts and figures and as geeky as this sounds, I've kept up with the grosses for WICKED and it's phenom success, which is almost 64 million ! I'm just curious how much it takes to put on a Broadway show, especially my fav, WICKED! Just curious. Thanks for any reply.

Answer from a Forum visitor:

Hi Rick, The story was sent around the country by Associated Press: WICKED will recoup in December 2004 - \$14 million in 14 months.

Political reference

Question:

Is the lyric in Wicked Witch of the East about being an unelected official a reference to the 2000 election and Bush's disputed election despite a popular vote? My mom thought of it and I was not sure? That would be great if you could let me know.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks. But actually the reference to Nessarose being "an unelected official" is in the scene preceding "The Wicked Witch of the East", not in the lyric itself, and as such was written by our fabulous and hilarious book writer, Winnie Holzman. And yes, it does refer to Bush. Now of course, he is an elected official; I'm not sure which is worse. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Wicked Tickets and Stephen Schwartz

Question:

Dear Mr. Schwartz, I was wondering- if you wanted to go see "Wicked" just whenever, would they let you in or would you have to purchase tickets?

Answer from Michael Cole:

If Stephen wants to sit in a seat, he has to pay for his ticket just like everyone else. Sometimes he slips in and watches the show from the sound booth - then of course he doesn't have to pay.

"Wickeder" Forbidden Broadway Song

Question:

Question: Dear Stephen, I was just wondering your thoughts on the song from the musical 'Forbidden Broadway' called 'Wickeder'. The song is mostly Piano and uses the scores, No One Mourns the Wicked, Popular and Defying Gravity. The song relates on the relationship between Idina Menzel and Kristin before the Tony's and after the Tony's, I was just wondering if you heard the song (Since they use your name in it) and if you gave them permission to use the scores in the song? Thank you very much!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I actually haven't seen the version of FORBIDDEN BROADWAY yet that includes material about WICKED, but friends and associates who have say it is very clever. There is also apparently a section set to the song "It Sucks to Be Me" from AVENUE Q, that includes an impersonation of me, which I also hear is very funny. I was so delighted by the lyrics to that section (as they have been reported to me), that I have asked the creator of FORBIDDEN BROADWAY, the wonderfully talented Gerard Alessandrini, to send me an autographed copy. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Elphie's laugh

Question:

Why does Elphie cackle after Glinda slaps her?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

First of all, it's a character moment -- that she is smart enough and insightful enough to find Glinda's fury at her amusing. Secondly, because she expresses it in a cackle, it shows how she is beginning to take on the characteristics we associate with the Wicked Witch of the West from "The Wizard of Oz".

Stephen, if you could play any male part in Wicked

Question:

Stephen, if you could play any male part in Wicked would it be: The Wizard? Fiyero? Boq? Elphaba's Father? Dr Dillamond? - Nick

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Come on. Obviously Fiyero (not that I would ever be cast in it, even if I were an actor AND the right age AND could sing it.) But I am a Party Boy from way back. Stephen Schwartz

Wicked Poster

Question:

Hello I've never seen the show.. but after seeing the cd around on the shelves (i work at best buy) my immediate thought was that the cover was nicely designed.. which lead me to check out some tracks on Rhapsody, which makes me want to buy the cd and take a trip to ny to see the show this summer. anyway, I was wondering who or what design firm created it?... sorry to be a nerd, I'm just a graphic design student who's interested in such trivials..thanks for the info, liezl

Answer from Michael Cole:

Dear Liezl: As I understand it, the WICKED poster was designed "by committee" at Serino Coyne in New York City, which is one of the top (if not THE top) advertising agencies. In any event, they have done great work on WICKED - poster, ads, etc.

Another fabulous Stephen Schwartz website....

Comment:

This is by far the best Wicked and Stephen Schwartz fansite website out there. It's extremely informative and shows every side there is to all of Mr. Schwartz's hit shows. This is DEFINITELY a site you CANNOT miss, just like the site you're on now. HIGHLY recommend it. <http://www.musicalschwartz.com/>

Wicked on stage – subplots, etc.

Question:

I haven't seen wicked and was wondering if someone could give me a brief description of what happens! because I understand there are lots of sub-plots going on underneath the main one. I'm absolutely dying to see it! thanks Lauren xx

Answer from Carol de Giere:

Hi - I created this web page for folks like you. <http://www.musicalschwartz.com/wicked-songs2.htm>

It explains the context of the songs and gives you an idea of the story and subplots. I tried to write it without too many spoilers. We're pretty sure WICKED will be in the UK at some point so you will be able to see it and you'll still be able to enjoy the surprises.

SECTION 2 - International Productions

Questions Regarding Broadway vs. London

Question:

Mr. Schwartz, First I must say, am I a huge fan of WICKED. I saw the show this past July, after countless hours of listening to the soundtrack, with the wonderful Eden Espinosa and Kate Reinders and it was absolutely amazing! I have two questions regarding the transfer of the show from Broadway to London:1) Why was the large witch hat removed at the beginning of the show? I personally enjoyed that effect very much and I feel it added a lot to the show as one of the first things the audience sees.2) After watching footage from a London performance of "One Short Day" aired on public television, I noticed there was an extra lyric of "One Short Day" towards the beginning with a wonderful jazz chord that I really enjoyed! Why was this added, and will this be changed in the Broadway production as well? Your musical genius never fails to astound me! Thanks so much!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks. There were a number of little (and a couple of not so little) tweaks made to the London show, some out of necessity and some because the team just wanted to make the show better. The elimination of the witch's hat is one of the former -- the construction of the "understage" in that theatre didn't allow for it; the "One Short Day" change was an improvement music supervisor Stephen Oremus and I wanted to make. Yes, all improvements will eventually be put into the other productions as well; many already have. Thanks for noticing, Stephen Schwartz

Reply from Nick

Living in London, I have to say that Wicked is hugely being anticipated here. It made £1.3 Million in the first weekend of tickets being released, and The Wizard of Oz is famous here as well. It's probably aired on TV once a year, at least - and I remember a kid seeing a very good stage show of it - which is what got me interested in the movie. I don't think Stephen has anything to worry about, as regards how "Popular" Wicked will be.

Novelty – [Question asked before Wicked opened in London]

Question:

To someone with your experience...does the novelty of having a show put on Broadway or London ever...wear off. Have you ever had something new put on and think 'no big deal..?? Just curious!:D Thanks, Sophie.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Hi Sophie: You know, what comes with experience is knowledge of what can go wrong, which supersedes any appreciation of the novelty. As the London production of WICKED approaches, for instance, I find myself wondering if the show will translate, whether it needs the cultural centrality the "Wizard of Oz" movie has in America, whether its psychological underpinning (of Elphaba's outsider status and her relationship with the "most popular" girl) will have the same resonance for British audiences as for Americans.

As an example of what I mean, my show PIPPIN, which has always been and continues to be very popular and meaningful for audiences in the States, has never worked in England. I think it may have something to do with the difference in class structure. A story about a young man who happens to be the son of a king trying to figure out what to do with his life just doesn't seem to make sense to Brits. So rather than feeling the novelty of this opening, I just worry about the possibility of catastrophe. Needless to say, this is even more extreme in the case of a new Broadway show, with my knowledge of the capriciousness of critics, etc. That alas is one of the prices of experience. But thanks for asking. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

WICKED: Japanese Translation

Question not available

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Although my schedule did not allow me to get to Japan to see the production, the rest of the production team (Joe Mantello, Wayne Cilento, Winnie Holzman, Stephen Oremus, the producers, etc.) all were there and were very pleased with how it turned out. Winnie and I did work extensively with the translators, with several meetings and back-and-forth Emails. I was presented with a "back translation" into English of the lyrics in Japanese, and I worked through many revisions until I was satisfied that they sufficiently conveyed the meanings of the original. Unfortunately, unlike for instance the current German translation on which I am currently working, I do not speak Japanese sufficiently to be able to have read the actual Japanese lyrics, but since apparently songs don't rhyme in Japan, that didn't seem to me as crucial as in the case of other translations. I can't say I was ultimately 100% satisfied with the translation, but I felt it turned out far better than I expected and in most important essentials conveyed the necessary content and subtext. I'm glad you enjoyed the Japanese production, which is apparently doing very well, and I look forward to seeing it myself when my schedule permits. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

WICKED: Non-Replicated Productions

Question:

BroadwayWorld.com recently has posted about the Denmark Wicked production with this quote: "Unlike these previous incarnations of the show, which have been reproductions of the Broadway original, Denmark's The New Theater is the first theatrical institution to have been authorized to produce and adapt its own version. This exceptional permission has been endorsed by Stephen Schwartz"

What parameters are you allowing them? How much can they fiddle with the locked show and still have it be your vision? Why risk tampering? Seems to me that this is an historic move. WOW

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Actually, there will be two "non-replicated" productions of Wicked happening around the same time, both in Scandinavia. There will also be a production premiering in August in Helsinki, Finland, and it too will not be a replication of the Broadway production. Both productions, Copenhagen and Helsinki, will of course be translated into the local language, and Winnie Holzman and I will oversee those translations carefully, but beyond that, they are free to do the show as they wish. Both theatres have a history of doing their own productions of shows very successfully, and all of us on the Wicked team look forward to seeing them with great interest. For one thing, since all the touring and foreign companies so far have replicated Joe Mantello's wonderful Broadway production, we really don't know how the show will work done any other way, so that will certainly be valuable to learn. We expect to learn a lot about the show

in other ways too, just by seeing two fresh takes on it. That's one of the exciting things about live theatre -- a show is always open to reinterpretation and reinvention. Seeing these two productions is one of the adventures I'm looking forward to in this new year. Thanks for your question and interest, Stephen Schwartz

SECTION 3 - Wicked Sets, Props, and Costumes

Wicked Clocks

Question:

How is the motif of clocks (within the scenery...on the cyclorama) related to the story? Is it because of the Wizard's mechanical creations? Or is it something deeper than that, that I am missing?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The best source for this answer is our set designer, Eugene Lee. It was his concept to put the clocks, as well as the wheel and gears, all over the set. I think it is meant to be a metaphor for the fact that everything in the Wizard's Oz is a machinism meant to create a certain illusion for the populace (sound like anywhere else you know?) Eugene's concept was that in revealing the inner workings, you had a behind the scenes glimpse at what was really going on, and this was a visual metaphor for the story of WICKED, which reveals the "truth" of what's going on behind the scenes in Oz.

Grimmerie on Stage

Question:

Hello Mr. Schwartz, I was wondering, what is actually written inside the Grimmerie used on stage in Wicked? Are there any pictures of the inside of it? Also, why are there two Grimmeries? Thanks.

Answer from Michael Cole:

I asked a friend who is in the show to check with stage management last night: There are actually four Grimmeries in the production due to logistical reasons. One of them has all of the chants that Elphaba needs when she reads from it onstage. The other three have non-descript text that is meant to look aged.

Defying Gravity

Question: I once heard that for defying gravity, Idina flew over the audience. When I saw it, she just flew up (which still REALLY COOL and it gave me chills, don't get me wrong). Did I just hear a rumor, or did she really fly over the audience?

Answer from Michael Cole: Elphaba has never flow over the audience. The monkeys do, but Elphaba has always just levitated to defy gravity.

Wicked Hat

Question:

Dear Stephen, I am just looking through my brochure of Wicked, and I was wondering two things: 1) Where was the big hat in the Chicago Production of Wicked? 2) How is the motif of clocks (within the scenery...on the cyclorama) related to the story? Is it because of the Wizard's mechanical creations? Or is it something deeper than that, that I am missing?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Some of the scenery had to be adjusted, to accommodate the different theatre, and that included the big hat at the opening (there was no place for it to disappear to.) In order to compensate for the differences from Broadway, some new "bells and whistles" were added for this (and the touring) production -- for instance, the broom at the end of Act One makes a much cooler entrance than in the Broadway version.

A change for the better? - Hat

Question:

I recently heard that some of the changes from the other shows were added into the Broadway show. Some of these, like the new lyric in One Short Day and the drumroll in Defying Gravity seem like they add a lot to the song in a positive direction. But I heard that the large witch hat has also been removed as well? I was wondering why this was done? I felt it added a lot to the opening scene and would be sad to hear that it is gone. Any insight on this? It'd be much appreciated!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The decision to eliminate the giant hat at the top of the show was Joe Mantello's, but I have to say I agree with it. I personally never liked it and found it stylistically confusing, and I thought striking it was clumsy. I think all the (admittedly minor) changes are very much for the better, including improved staging and choreography and vocal arrangements and improvements in a couple of scenes and numbers. I regret that you miss the hat, but I must be honest and say I disagree with you about it. Sorry, sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Hat

Question:

Where was the big hat in the Chicago Production of Wicked?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Some of the scenery had to be adjusted, to accommodate the different theatre, and that included the big hat at the opening (there was no place for it to disappear to.) In order to compensate for the differences from Broadway, some new "bells and whistles" were added for this (and the touring) production -- for instance, the broom at the end of Act One makes a much cooler entrance than in the Broadway version.

Spinning Wheelchair for Nessarose

Question:

How does Nessa's chair spin?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Would you believe that it's magic? OK, I didn't think so. It's mechanical -- operated by remote-control by a stagehand off-stage. What is important (I always have to give notes about this to remind the actress playing Nessarose) is that Nessa keeps her hands off the chair and visible to the audience, so that it doesn't look as if she's working it.

Green Bodysuit?

Question:

I read in the Grimmerie backstage book that Elphie wears a green body-suit. Where are the sleeves? In the picture of her where she's wearing that dress, I can't see any 'sleeves'. How do they manage that? Thanks, Elphiegreengirl

Answer from Michael Cole

The body suit is made so that the neckline and the sleeve hems disappear - the first time I saw the show I had no idea she was wearing it! I thought it was all body make-up. It's a terrific trick. It's also possible that they doctored the photos for the Grimmerie if the hems showed, but I doubt they had to do that.
Best, Michael

Wizard Question

Question: Is the voice of the Wizard Head pre-recorded - or does the actor playing the wizard do it live every performance?

Answer from Michael Cole: Yes, the Wizard's voice is pre-recorded for the parts where his voice is processed before his actual entrance.

Question: Who was the actor who prerecorded the Wizard head's voice? Nick

Answer from Michael Cole: The pre-record is done by each actor who is playing the role (even understudies have a pre-record in their own voice).

SECTION 4 – WICKED CAST

Wicked Cast

Question:

Hey Stephen! Hope all is well and you're keeping healthy! I have a quick question for you. I'm not sure where I heard this, but I had heard a rumor that when you wrote WICKED, you had Kristin in mind the whole time to play Glinda. I was just wondering if this was true or not, and if, when writing the music for WICKED or any of your shows you have certain people in mind and how that may influence your writing of the show. Sorry if I keep sounding like a broken record, but WICKED is def. my favorite show and it's my dream to be Elphaba one day. I met you at the CD signing, and you're such a wonderful person! Thanks for being you and writing such amazing shows!~ Amy

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks, Amy. While Winnie and I didn't originally conceive the role of Glinda for a specific actress, I thought from the beginning that Kristin would be ideal casting, if she were interested in the role. For this reason, I asked her to do our first reading of the full show. It immediately became apparent how wonderful she would be, and since she was also enthusiastic about playing the role on Broadway, from that day on the rewrites and changes in Glinda's material were written with Kristin in mind. In particular, I had originally conceived of Glinda musically as being a high belter, as in the song "Popular". But Kristin wanted also to have a way to use her magnificent soprano in the show, and after giving it some thought, I realized that the "public" Glinda could sing in soprano (like our common conception of the character from the movie) and that her more "private" side could be in her belt voice. I feel this really improved the musicalization of the character, and I give Kristin full credit for inspiring the idea. In terms of other roles and other shows or mine, I can't think of a case where a role was conceived for a specific performer from the get-go (as for instance, with Ethel Merman in GYPSY), but once a role is cast, the actor or actress playing it certainly influences musical choices made from that point on. Sincerely,
Stephen Schwartz

Wicked original casting

Question:

Hi! I was wondering about the original casting. When the cast (before they were the cast) was auditioning, could you tell right away that they were perfect for the part? Of course now while watching the show, they seem so perfect. When I look at Idina, I see Elphaba and not Idina acting and singing. When they auditioned, was it obvious that this was Elphaba? Or were there some difficult decisions?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Idina was one of a small group of ladies who auditioned for the role of Elphaba about a year and a half or so before our Broadway rehearsals, because we wanted whomever was playing the role to be part of the development process. I wouldn't say it was a difficult decision, since we all were enthusiastic about Idina from the very first, but as with all choices, we weighed other possibilities, including the actress who had done the role wonderfully for us in a couple of early readings, Stephanie Block (who is now playing Liza Minelli in THE BOY FROM OZ.) But ultimately Idina had the combination of personality, vocal and acting ability, and experience that seemed the best choice, and every performance at the Gershwin theatre confirms the wisdom of casting her.

Kristin was involved with the show from an even earlier stage and never actually auditioned. When Winnie and I were set to do our first reading of the full show, I found out that Kristin happened to be in Los Angeles and called her to ask if she would do the reading. She did, and it was instantly obvious to us and her that she and Glinda were a perfect match. But it's very rare that someone comes in to audition and is perfect for a part in every way. The other roles went through a standard (and therefore much longer) casting process, and while I am very pleased to hear that you feel that they are all giving such wonderful performances it's hard to imagine others in the roles, I assure you there was a lot of back and forth and even some contention among the creative team about the casting, as there always is. Stephen Schwartz

Cast questions – from a land far away

Question:

Hi, first of all I just wanted to thank you for such a powerful masterpiece as WICKED... It must feel very good to know that you and you alone could create that wonderful music and move and touch so many people. So here from Argentina (you've reached really far, lol), I appreciate what you did, you have a little but very enthusiastic fan club right here...I'd like to know, just out of curiosity, how often you attend to the show, especially now that the main two roles have been replaced, and how these actresses changed the dynamic of the play in terms of being other people the ones that interpret the roles in different ways, are they better, worse, or simply different? I hope to see the play the last days of February since I'm going to New York. And I'm so excited as well!!! I still didn't experience my first impression of the show, I'm sure it's going to be awesome!! No doubt about that! (sorry if there's any grammatical mistake, my home language is Spanish) Thanks again, Francisco

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Francisco: Thanks for your message. It is amazing to me to know that WICKED has reached Argentina! I really appreciated your letting me know, and I hope you enjoy the show when you see it. In answer to your question: One of the things I enjoy about live theatre is seeing what different actors and actresses bring to the same role. Each actor will have individual strengths, things he or she does particularly well, and individual moments that really shine, so yes, the performance does change a little. But the underlying dynamic of the play I believe remains the same. The WICKED team spends a lot of time and care on casting, so that the cast replacements are excellent and there is no decline in the

quality of the performance. I do go back on occasion to see the show and give notes, as does Winnie Holzman (the bookwriter), the producers, and of course our excellent and diligent director, Joe Mantello. So in short, I would say that with each cast change, the show is different, but still the same, if you know what I mean. Again, I hope you have a great time when you see the show, and I very much appreciate your message. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Kristin and Idina

Question:

Did you get the chills when Kristin and Idina sang your songs from Wicked for the first time? Their voices in the harmonies of your songs gave me the chills. It is one of the rare combinations of voices that seem to match up perfectly. Also, when you workshopped and took Wicked to SF, did you find yourself changing the score/arrangement to take advantage of those 2 talents? Thanks, Kevin

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Hi Kevin: You know, when you're working on a show, it's so much about trying to listen to what's wrong or what could be improved that you kind of forget about the chills part of it!

In answer to your other question ("when you workshopped and took Wicked to SF, did you find yourself changing the score/arrangement to take advantage of those 2 talents?"): Absolutely. Much of Glinda's material was particularly written for Kristin, and, for instance, we did a lot of work together, such as the timing of "It Couldn't be Happier", to make sure it would fit her as well as possible. Similarly, Idina and I worked out specific riffs she would sing, and material that was written for Elphaba's character later in the process, such as "The Wizard and I", was written with Idina in mind. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Wicked Workshop

Question:

I was on Sutton Foster's Website, and it said that she was a part of the Wicked Workshop process. I was wondering what part was she casted as? I would think it would be Elphaba. Plus was any other "stars" in the workshop?

Answer from Michael Cole:

Sutton was part of the reading that I was in (I played a train conductor and "riff raff" - none of the lines that I spoke in the reading remains in the show today!) Anyhow, Sutton played Fannee or Shen Shen - indeed a very small part for such a talent. It was the first time I met her and I remember someone telling me that she was coming to Broadway in her own show and that it was likely she would win a Tony award! By that point in the process, Idina was already on board. Best, Michael Cole

Stephen Favorite: Leads in Wicked?

Question:

I have seen many different casts of Wicked as I am sure you have too. Out of all of the Glinda's who do you say is the best? And Out of all the Elphaba's Who Do you say is the best. Deffinetly comparing the way they present the material...

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Obviously I can't answer the question, as it is somewhat like saying which of one's family members is one's favorite, always a bad idea emotionally and politically. However, I can say that we always strive to cast girls who can not only fulfill all the requirements of the roles but bring something of their own that no one else can. Stephen Schwartz

Choosing the actress

Question:

In *Wicked*, if they get a new actor/actress like Eden Espinosa, do they ask you for any recommendations on who to pick or do they pick on their own and you confirm or do they not inform you at all? Just curious.

Answer from Michael Cole:

Stephen Schwartz does have a say in casting of the show. If he learns of someone he thinks would be right and should be seen for a certain role, he will let Bernie Telsey's office know and they will schedule an audition. The casting directors do a series of auditions and once they have chosen a handful of actor/actresses the creative team comes in for final call-backs. In Eden's case, she was part of the original company of *WICKED* - she was the cover for Elphaba - so it was a natural progression that she take over the role. But in answer to your question - yes, Stephen is informed. Thanks for your interest. Best, Michael Cole

Transposing for voice parts

Question:

I would imagine the need to write for certain types of voices... Kristin being a soprano and Idina more in the alto range. is there a lot of rewriting of parts to adjust to a singers tessitura or do they just have to tough it out and work with the musical director? of course certain modulations are for mood and climactic purposes but what about when they don't work with the vocalists? for instance... "goodness know..." in "no one mourns the wicked" is first sung in E major and the reprise at the end of "no one mourns..." is in G major. This is where Kristen sings that really high melody over the hook. if kristin couldn't hit those A's as easily as she does would you still have modulated up there? so how much of the original music is it necessary to change if any? unless of course you are writing for a specific range to begin with and audition those vocalists based on characters whose voice you've already composed for. i think that is probably the answer that i just figured out. happy new year everyone.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Actually, in my experience with shows, a lot is based on the ranges of the original actors. I am happy to adjust keys for what works best for the performers, though of course I have basic vocal ranges (soprano, tenor, etc.) in mind when I write. This can even extend to replacements -- for instance, for the four weeks when Taye Diggs is filling in for Norbert Leo Butz as Fiyero, we have taken Norbert's keys down a bit to suit Taye's voice and even adjusted harmonies in his duet with Idina. And when I was starting out being a musical director in summer stock, I would very often transpose songs or adjust vocal parts for the singers I was working with. Hope this helps answer your question. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Dear Old Shiz and Transposing

Question:

Thanks for sharing with us Stephen. it is wonderful that you have this forum for fans.re: the question - i think what you are saying is if you wrote 'dear old shiz' in Db and the vocalists can perform it better in another key you willingly change the key of the song and it doesn't really change the message or function of the piece. i am curious about how key changes within a song are handled. probably doesn't come up often but curious if you change the key of the entire song or change the key/modulation within the song (even when a specific change was composed to evoke an emotion in the listener) btw...were/are you a genius at transposing at the piano or is/was that an acquired skill?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

You are correct -- "Dear Old Shiz" was, in fact, written a key higher, and we took it down because the chorus sounded better a step lower. In this case, it didn't matter because one simply had to adjust the intro music. Sometimes though, transposing an individual song can be more complicated, as in CHILDREN OF EDEN, where one number or musical sequence flows into another. For instance, at the recent NY concert of CHILDREN OF EDEN, Darius DeHaas was singing "Lost in the Wilderness" in his key of A, which is up a step from the written key of G. We had to experiment to find the best place to kick up the key; it wound up being within the introductory verse, on the lines "We will never grow ..." (modulate up a step to ...) "... if we never go beyond." So as you can see, sometimes one has to work out transitions within songs. For instance, with Taye Diggs doing WICKED for a few weeks, we took down his section of the duet "As Long As You're Mine", but didn't want to change Idina's key for the first verse. When Norbert sings it, the song jumps from C minor to A minor, which is meant to be a sort of shock jump-cut up. In working with Taye, we determined that the best key for him that would still allow that sort of startling jump from a flat key (C minor) to a sharp one, was if he did his verse in F#minor. So I worked out a different transition between verses to get there naturally but still with that slight musical jolt.

In answer to your last question -- no, I have never been anything approaching a genius at sight transposing, as some people I know are. When I was starting out in my career and thus doing a lot of accompanying and playing shows and auditions, I got to be good at it through sheer practice and repetition. I think that if one has an ear, one can learn to be better and faster at transposing simply by doing it a lot. But my instant transposition skills have gotten pretty rusty these days. Thanks for your questions, and all best, Stephen Schwartz

Performer Change

Question:

I have a question that I hope someone can answer. What is the process when a new actor(ess) enters the show? Does Stephen have any say in the way the performer sings a song? for example, did Stephen give input on the way Jennifer Laura Thompson sang "Popular", and what is the process on the music with a tour company, or another cast? Does Stephen have to go and teach, and listen to the performers? Thanks

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Most of the musical work with cast replacements and new companies is overseen by our exceptionally competent and meticulous musical supervisor Stephen Oremus. When new principals go into the show, I do go to see it and give notes (I'm going to see the new people in the New York cast tomorrow as a matter of fact), and also spent a few days working with the touring cast and the Chicago cast prior to their openings. I hope this answers your question sufficiently, sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

strongest company

Question:

Hello Mr. Schwartz. I was wondering, out of the three current WICKED companies (Broadway, Tour, Chicago), in your opinion, which is the strongest and why?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I am delighted to say I feel each company is strong in its own way with its own unique strengths. I would hate anyone to see the show, be it on Broadway, Chicago, or in one of our touring cities, and not see WICKED at its best. Thanks for your interest. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

SECTION 5 – Wicked Sequel?

Wicked sequel

Question: Rumor has it you are working on a sequel to "Wicked"?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

First of all, let me dispel this rumor immediately: I am not working on a sequel to WICKED, based on Gregory Maguire's new book or any other source. I am thrilled for Gregory's success with SON OF A WITCH, and I am extremely appreciative of his having dedicated the book to me and my collaborators on the musical version of WICKED, but I have absolutely no plans to make a musical out of the new book. I can't imagine that decision changing, so someone else is free to do it if they like.

Son of a Witch

Question:

Gregory Maguire's new book, "Son of a Witch" is the sequel to "Wicked" coming out this September. I was wondering if there are any theatrical or musical plans for "Son of a Witch"?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Your guess is as good as mine. I'm looking forward to reading the book, but I don't expect to be adapting it as a musical. I haven't heard of any other plans for it, but that doesn't mean there aren't or won't be. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

SECTION 6 – THEMES - Stephen Schwartz comments about the meaning of Wicked and its characters

Elphaba

Question:

Can you, in short, describe who Elphaba is? What are in your opinion the key elements to describe the character Elphaba?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Briefly and too generally, she is a girl whose green skin has shaped her character, made her feel an outcast, made her long for acceptance. But her inborn integrity and empathy prevent her from betraying her conscience in order to achieve the acceptance she craves.

Shows of Yours

Question:

What has Wicked meant to you? What are your predictions for its future?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

...WICKED is another show that means a lot to me, because of its subject matter. I am always attracted to stories about Outsiders, obviously because I feel like one myself. And it is also about the difference between surface appearances and what's really going on underneath, which is something I am very aware of in our society. I also love the characters and the milieu, so it was a pleasure to write about them for all the years it has taken. The process of putting on this actual production of the show has been challenging and even unpleasant at times, but in the end, I feel that the show expresses what I wanted it to when I began working on it. It's not possible at this stage, before its New York premiere, to

predict its future, but I can tell from the level of audience interest that whatever happens with this production, the show will have some sort of future life.

WICKED and current events

Question:

I was wondering how much you feel current events (September 11, the war in Iraq, etc.) affected the development of the musical (WICKED). I know the musical is more timeless than any particular current situation. I don't want to see connections where they don't exist. But, for instance, the addition of the reference to "a regime change" in the New York script seems at the very least a nod to the national conversation about Iraq. I know many of the themes in the musical are also present in Maguire's pre-9/11 novel, but surely some of the references to terrorism and a panicked and increasingly oppressive state became more pointed in light of world events. Just wanted to get your opinion on this; surely some of the references to terrorism and a panicked and increasingly oppressive state became more pointed in light of world events

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Absolutely. The themes were always there pre-9/11, including lines such as the Wizard saying "The way to bring people together is to give them a really good enemy". But obviously lines such as referring to the cyclone as a "regime change" were directly influenced by current events. We even played with the idea of having Madame Morrible announce to the citizens of Oz that they were now on "green alert", which I think is mordantly funny, but there wasn't really a good place for it in the show. We try to be careful though not to do too many references so topical that they will date or lessen the timeless aspect of our themes. After all, the current US administration did not invent the idea of using fear to keep a population in control, and I'm sure they won't be the last.

"Wicked": Spiritual Bent

Question from Marianne Bowles:

Dear Stephen: Just saw "Wicked" here in Chicago and loved it! (Had had the entire CD memorized before going, but to my credit, refrained from toe-tapping and mouthing your wonderful lyrics.) Ana Gasteyer and Kate Reinders were superb. In addition to the prominent themes of not judging others and believing in yourself, it seems there are many religious themes---both comedic and serious:

1. Galinda's fellow students calling her a martyr and her response, "These things are sent to try us." (So Catholic!)
2. Fiyero's "unexamined life" harkens back to the Greek philosophers and subsequent theologians who warned against living this way.
3. Elphaba's forward facing, full-body length ascent, holding (not riding) her broom on "Defying Gravity"--giving her saintly status.
4. Elphaba's delicious one word description of her guilt at sleeping with Fiyero, "Wicked."
5. Glinda's "Santa Evita" approach to her Ozians in "Thank Goodness", as she distracts them from their fears.
6. I would certainly call your magnificent "For Good" a song that touched my very soul.

7. And the biggest question of all---Just who and what is wicked? Every culture has a different definition.

Were these religious themes I picked up deliberate on your part? Congratulations on such a successful show! It reaches people of varying ages on so many levels. The best of success in your future.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Ms. Bowles: I don't know that I consider the themes and imagery in WICKED particularly "religious". I would say more that its themes deal with ethical and philosophical questions: What is "wicked" and what is "good", and what is the difference between how we see (and label) people in those terms and who they really are? Why are we so easily fooled by people who pretend to be good but whose actions are reprehensible (there are certainly plenty of current examples in American life)? Don't all people have both wickedness and goodness within them, and isn't it how they come to rise to the best of themselves or succumb to the worst that ultimately decides what kind of person they are? Aren't things always more complicated and nuanced than they seem on the surface, and certainly more complex than we tend to define them publically? In a society such as ours in which public discourse has become increasingly simplistic and simple-minded, it seems to me these are highly relevant issues. But I don't see them as "religious" per se, in that ethics don't necessarily have to do with belief in a divinity (or else perhaps many so-called religious people would be a lot more ethical). But thank you for your list of examples, and your enthusiasm for WICKED in general. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Themes Criticized

Question:

What themes within the show have proven to attract criticism?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Since I don't read reviews, I can't be too specific about this. But I understand some people have found the politics of the show "preachy". I was told that a review from (not surprisingly) Texas described the leading character of Elphaba as "a disgruntled liberal". I guess these days in America, if you choose to stand up for anybody's rights at all that's how you're characterized.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

See the other Wicked sections in this Forum archive for more information. See the "Stephen Schwartz" sections of the archive for more about Wicked's composer-lyricist, Stephen Schwartz.

For Broadway show data including length of run and cast, see

<http://www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=13485>

For the official Wicked Websites visit

www.WickedtheMusical.com and

www.Wickedthemusical.co.uk

www.Wickedthemusical.com.au

and others.