

Working - Updates

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WORKING: Updates: Interviews/New Songs/Who Wrote What

2000 Update:

I conducted new interviews for the updated version of WORKING in 2000, but the only song affected was the new one for the supermarket checker ("I'm Just Movin'"), which combined the original interview with Babe Seconi with one I did with a more recent checker who talked about PLU codes, etc. In addition to new interviews, the updated show utilized more appropriate material from WORKING and some material from two of Studs' later books, THE GREAT DIVIDE and AMERICAN DREAMS LOST AND FOUND.

2009 Update:

The major change is two (amazing) new songs by Lin-Manuel Miranda (In the Heights). The first, "Delivery", is about the first job of a young guy working in a fast-food burger place and the joy he takes when he has to make a delivery. It is based partly on Lin-Manuel's own experience and partly on an interview he conducted. The second song, the poignant and beautiful "A Very Good Day" is about two recent immigrants, neither who take care of other people's kids or parents, doing the jobs most US-born Americans won't do. Both add a more contemporary take on the workplace and give further evidence of Lin-Manuel's great talent.

Other changes include interviews taken from Studs' original book that were not in earlier versions, such as a press agent and a flight attendant, and material derived from new interviews for the office workers (since the white-collar workplace keeps changing at such a rapid rate.)

Major contributions to the re-structuring were provided by Gordon Greenberg, the very talented director of productions at the Asolo Theatre in Florida and the Old Globe in San Diego.

Who wrote What:

Micki Grant wrote, "If I Could've Been", "Lovin' Al" and "Cleaning Women"; Craig Carnelia wrote "Just a Housewife", "The Mason", "Joe" and "Something to Point To"; James Taylor wrote "Brother Trucker", "Millwork", "Traffic Jam" and the music for "Un Mejor Dia"; Susan Birkinhead and Mary Rodgers wrote the teacher's song, "Nobody Tells Me How"; and I wrote the opening ("All the Livelong Day"), "It's an Art", "Fathers and Sons" and the newsboy's song, which for the 2000 version was replaced by "I'm Just Movin'". With the addition of the new Lin-Manuel Miranda songs in 2009 ("Delivery" and "A Very Good Day"), some of the above songs were eliminated for length reasons, but all the above writers are still represented in the 2009 version.

Updating Working 1999 version

Question missing

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The updated WORKING seems to be, if you will excuse the pun, working well. It is basically the same show, with sections such as the office sequence updated to reflect changes in the workplace that have occurred in the last twenty years. The updating was done through interviews with contemporary workers and approved by Studs Terkel, so the basic tone and message of the show have not been changed. There is one new song, for the supermarket checker, and a couple of new characters replacing ones whose jobs no longer seemed current, such as the hotel switchboard operator (replaced by the telephone solicitor from the original book). You get the idea. I'm glad you had such a good experience doing the show, and I hope that with the updates, people can continue to do it successfully for years to come. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

WORKING: Amanda McKenny/Nora Watson, Gender of "Mason" soloist

Question:

I am performing as Amanda McKenny and am also singing "The Mason" in Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts' production of WORKING. I was researching Amanda in the Studs Terkel book, and discovered that she was the only character in the play not in the book! Could you give me any background on her?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The material for Amanda came from new interviews done in 1999 as part of the updating of the show. The office sequence was almost completely updated, since offices have changed so much since the 70's, when Studs' book was written (what with the advent of computers, global markets, etc.) There are still elements in Amanda, however, from the interview Studs did with Nora Watson, so you might want to check that out in the original book.

As for singing "The Mason", I have seen productions where the song is sung by a woman, and I don't think it's a problem. The point is that the mason is being observed admiringly by someone else, who can speak of him more positively than he would be able to speak of himself. I don't think the gender of the singer is significant. Just make sure they transpose it to your key!

I hope you and your fellow cast members have a wonderful time doing the show.

Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

ADDITIONA RESOURCES

See the other WORKING sections of this forum archive.