

Working

Working is a musical licensed by Music Theatre International. The Stephen Schwartz and Nina Faso adaptation is based on Studs Terkel's *Working*. The show "takes a look at the hopes and dreams of the American workforce." *Working* features music by Stephen Schwartz, Micki Grant, Craig Carnelia, James Taylor, and Mary Rodgers, with lyrics by Stephen Schwartz; Micki Grant; Craig Carnelia; James Taylor; Susan Birkenhead; Matt Landers and Graciela Daniele.

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SECTION 1 – General

Program Note for Productions of WORKING

PROGRAM NOTE FOR WORKING By Stephen Schwartz

WORKING is a non-fiction musical. A musical documentary. The words spoken, and generally the words sung, did not spring from a writer's imagination; they were spoken by real people. It is not the only musical of its kind. There was a wonderful off-Broadway documentary musical in the seventies called THE ME NOBODY KNOWS. To some extent, A CHORUS LINE and RUNAWAYS are documentary musicals as well, though those two are significantly fictionalized. But suffice it to say it is a rare genre.

In musicalizing WORKING, Studs Terkel's insightful collection of interviews with people about their jobs, my fellow songwriters and I were determined to try to preserve the documentary quality of the text. Therefore, in most cases, we stayed as close as possible in our lyrics to the actual words of the characters portrayed.

The music has a similar intention. When I was first contemplating composing songs for WORKING, it quickly became apparent to me that, in order to have the music reflect the characters, I was going to wind up writing a great deal of pastiche. After all, I don't naturally write in the voice of an older black parking lot attendant. So I decided to invite other songwriters, from other backgrounds and with other natural styles, to join me in the enterprise. That black parking lot attendant, for instance, became the province of Micki Grant. James Taylor had a notion for a song for the Millworker, whom I had never even envisioned singing. Craig Carnelia knew how to compose music for a man struggling with retirement that was so evocative, one knows who he is from the music alone, without even having to hear the lyrics. Mary Rodgers and Susan Birkenhead instinctively understood a teacher of long standing struggling with a changing neighborhood.

Of course there came a time when the show needed to be updated. Obviously, the workplace has changed greatly in the quarter-century since WORKING first opened. Just to cite one significant example, the advent of computers has made office work a very different experience. A monologue by a secretary about how she torments her boss by deliberately misspelling words is no longer valid in an era of word processors and Spellcheck. But in order to update, once again my fellow authors and I have striven to remain true to the documentary nature of the show. New interviews were conducted, and new material was based once again on the words of actual people.

We hope we have achieved our intention of honoring the real people whose words and lives we have borrowed for WORKING. And we hope you enjoy spending time in their company.

Working – Favorite scene

Question:

What is your favorite scene from "Working?"

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Without question, the "Millwork" sequence. First of all, it's an absolutely beautiful and devastating James Taylor song. And I'm very proud of the concept and how it combines the monologue, song, and dance in a unique, very theatrical, and yet simple way. The five minutes or so of "Millwork" are one of the things I'm proudest of out of all the things I have done in the theatre. As the operator in WORKING says: "Thank you for asking," Stephen

Working adaptation

Question:

In the musical "Working", was the Millwork scene in the book by Studs Terkel or was it added for the musical?

Answer from Carol de Giere: I've created a website page that includes a comparison of Working the Musical and Working the text by Studs Terkel – you'll find an answer there.

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/working-musical.htm>

SECTION 2 - WORKING HISTORY

Working: How the Songwriters Were Chosen

Question:

I'd be interested to hear about how you brought together such a talented and eclectic group of composers and lyricists to produce the score for "WORKING". How did you choose this particular group? I'm especially curious about James Taylor's involvement. I think he's a great writer and his songs in the show are terrific however as far as I know, had no previous 'theatrical' writing credits.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

When I first became interested in adapting WORKING as a musical, I originally intended to write all the songs myself. But as I thought about it more, it seemed to me that the breadth of characters and ethnicities went beyond my own personal style and that I would wind up writing pastiche or in other people's styles a lot of the time, and because of the necessity for authenticity in a documentary-style piece such as WORKING, I didn't want to do that. So I began to assemble a group of talented songwriters. In addition to James Taylor, who surprised me by writing a song for a spot I didn't expect to be musicalized and coming up with my favorite song in the show ("Millworker"), I approached a few

other pop writers -- among them Paul Simon and Joni Mitchell -- and although both were interested, James was the only one whose schedule and level of enthusiasm made his participation possible. One thing I've always regretted -- after the show was complete, I had a conversation with Billy Joel in which he said he would like to have contributed songs. I think he would have been a superb addition, and I've always been sorry about that unfortunate timing! Now that the show is being updated for the upcoming production at Long Wharf this winter, all the writers are being asked if there are any lyric changes they want to make, and some already have done some. In addition, the plan right now is to add James' song "Traffic Jam" to the score and to replace my "Newsboy" song with a new song for the supermarket checker which I have written. Hope this answers your questions; thanks for your interest. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

You and James Taylor; Working video

Question missing

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Working with James Taylor was a great thrill for me, because I had always been a fan of his music and been influenced by it. (That may be why the "Hey, Somebody" section of "All the Livelong Day" sounds like his style to you. It also seems obvious to me that "All Good Gifts" in GODSPELL was influenced by James Taylor.) Over twenty years later, I still remember the privileged feeling I had when I went to his apartment, and he took out his guitar and two yellow legal pads with lyrics scrawled on them, and played "Millwork". I remember sitting there trying to remain "directorial" and business-like as I listened to the voice that always seems to have the power to bring tears to my eyes, and thinking, "Oh my God, he sounds just like James Taylor!" James, as you may imagine, is very smart, and he is also surprisingly funny, with quite a dry sense of humor. However, I don't know that I or anyone else would ever have described him as a "happy guy", given some of his past well-publicized problems with drug dependence. In terms of how much acting he had done: as far as I know, his only other professional acting was his appearance in the film "Two Lane Blacktop".

In terms of the lyrics to WORKING: Since the show WORKING is essentially a documentary and all the monologues are edited directly from the words of the interviewees in Studs Terkel's book, the songwriters tried to use as much of the words and locution of the characters they were writing about as possible. That is certainly true in the case of my song "It's An Art". If you read the interview with Delores Dante, you'll find much of the lyric contained within it. The same holds true for songs like Micki Grant's "Lovin' Al" or Craig Carnelia's "Joe". The stated mission for all the songwriters was to be true to the characters. They were, after all, real people, not fictional creations. You are correct in assuming that "Fathers and Sons", though inspired by many of the interviews in the book, was a somewhat more personal song, and that's why I didn't originally give it to the Steelworker to sing but to another nameless worker. It was only later, as I realized that I couldn't be quite so doctrinaire about sticking exactly to the book, that "Fathers and Sons" got reassigned to the character of Mike (it works much better that way.)

Thanks as always for your interest. Hope this answers some of your questions about WORKING, a show I have always treasured. Best, Stephen

How Was Working Developed?

Question: [Was Working developed in a workshop?]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

WORKING was indeed developed through a workshop process. It began with me getting together a group of actor friends (most of them from various companies of GODSPELL), giving out copies of the book, and working on interviews that interested us for two days a week for a few weeks. After we zeroed in on some of the characters and sections that seemed most theatrically effective, we did a second workshop that was more concentrated and developed presentation and staging ideas. The idea of that workshop was that every idea anyone came up with had to be tried, no matter how dumb or impractical it sounded to the rest of us. Out of this came many good results, including the telephone sequence with the characters speaking contrapuntally and simultaneously (originally an idea of Nina Faso's that the rest of us thought wouldn't work.)

The show was then tried out at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. It was very long at that point (over three hours!) and I was still trying to find a central through-line character or story to hang the piece around. At that time it was a salesman named Fred Ringley who had moved his family from Chicago to Arkansas. Eventually, this idea was abandoned and the purer revue format emerged, with the Steelworker (now Ironworker in the 1998 update) being the slight through-line character who begins and ends the evening and appears a few times in ensemble sections. I hope this answers your question somewhat. Please be sure to introduce yourself to me when I'm up at Harvard. I look forward to meeting you. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Directing Working

Question:

What was directing Working like? How was the experience different/the same? How did it feel to have so many other people's music in your show?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

WORKING was developed through a series of workshops. I had come across excerpts from the book and was immediately taken with the idea, because it was about an everyday subject I had never thought much about and everyday people who had been essentially invisible to me heretofore. I, who had been in the habit of being rude to telephone operators when I was irritated with the phone company, was particularly struck by the excerpt from the interview with the Operator: 'Sometimes you get a caller who says, 'It's a nice day out, operator. How's your day been? Has it been a rough day?' You're so thankful for these people.' That passage remains in the show to this day. Again, it was that sense of looking at things another way, to quote a line from WICKED, that appealed to me. So I gathered together a group of actor friends, many of whom had been in various companies of GODSPELL, and we began to meet a couple of times a week and develop theatrical ways of dealing with the interviews in the book. Originally, I had planned to write all the songs, but as I worked on the idea more, it began to become clearer that the reality of the individual characters demanded songwriters who came to them naturally. So I began to assemble a team of composers to write the score. It was always a director's project, rather than a writer's idea, since the material was essentially documentary in nature and what was required were theatrical presentational ideas. So I had always planned to direct it. I found the workshops and regional phases exhilarating, but as I have so often experienced, the Broadway production part of it was pretty brutal. Fortunately, the show, slightly revised after Broadway, has gone on to a long and happy life.

Working Questions

Question:

I have become a big fan of your musical "Working". I think the music is some of the best I've heard. I was wondering who was who in the original cast? I was also wondering how different the one-act book is

from the two-act book. I have all of the songs from the two-book, so I was just wondering what was changed and why. Thank you!

Answer from Carol de Giere:

Hi Joe, This is just a partial answer. To find out about casts for any Broadway show, the best place to look is Internet Broadway Database

<http://www.ibdb.com>

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I first became intrigued with *WORKING* shortly after the publication of Studs Terkel's book, when I read a review which contained some excerpts. One of the excerpts was the interview with Heather Lamb, the telephone operator, who said: It's something to run into somebody who says, 'How's your day been, operator, busy? Has it been a rough day?' You're so thankful for these people.' I realized that I was one of the other kind of people -- the kind who was not only impatient with operators, but who on some level viewed them as functions rather than human beings. I suppose you could call it a consciousness-raising moment. I got the book, and somewhere in the middle of reading it, I began to hear music in my head. I contacted Studs in Chicago and told him I was interested in adapting *WORKING* as a musical. He thought it was a fairly crazy notion -- after all, there was no story, his book being simply a series of interviews with real people. But I flew out to Chicago, and eventually my passion for the project, if not my good sense, won him over.

In collaboration with my friend Nina Faso, with whom I had worked on *GODSPELL*, I began to select the characters that I felt were most stage-worthy and edit their interviews down to more manageable length. We collected some actor friends of ours, most of whom had been in various productions of *GODSPELL*, and began to work on the interviews a couple of days a week in workshop. The main rule of the workshop was that no idea was too stupid to try. Many interesting ideas emerged from it, including Nina's notion of having the phone operators speak simultaneously and in counterpoint, which sounded nutty when she suggested it but remains in the show today.

I began to work on songs, and it quickly became apparent to me that there was such a variety of characters and ethnicities that if I were to write the entire score, a lot of what I was writing would be pastiche or imitations of other peoples styles. Since I felt the songs should have more authenticity than that, I decided it would be better to have a team of songwriters approach the characters, and I began to recruit collaborators. Micki Grant, James Taylor and Craig Carnelia were among those I approached first, and I was delighted when they signed on, along with the team of Mary Rodgers and Susan Birkenhead. Among those I approached who ultimately turned me down were Joni Mitchell and Paul Simon. But my biggest disappointment was that after the score was completed and it was too late to add more songs and characters, I got a call from Billy Joel volunteering his services. To this day, I would love to hear what he would have written! Since its premiere in 1978, *WORKING* has been performed all over the country, and indeed throughout the world.

Recently, because it is based on interviews conducted by Studs in the 1970's and because the workplace has changed so much since then, portions of the show had become seriously dated. So in 1999, with the help of Studs and Nina once again, I conducted some new interviews with contemporary workers and replaced the most dated material in the show. I wrote a new song for the supermarket checker which acknowledges the arrival of scanners and PLU bar codes, etc. My fellow songwriters joined me in updating their lyrics. Consequently, there is now a new version of *WORKING* being performed which

reflects today's workplace. I only hope that a generation or two from now I'll be around and have the energy to update WORKING again! Stephen Schwartz April 17, 2001

SECTION 3 - WORKING SONGS

Working, 2 part question

Question:

Working is by far one of the best musicals you did when it came down to a real sense of Broadway Theatre. I heard that in the original production "Neat To Be A Newsboy" was replaced by "I'm Just Movin'", Why? Couldn't you just add "I'm Just Movin'" in some way. Now I could understand any other stuff that was changed, but this one it's hard to believe because it's such a great song!

"All The Livelong Day" is this best group song from the musical, What was the process and how did you come up with this song because if you look at it, all the other songs in the musical and other songs from other musicals during the time it was created, THERE IS JUST NOTHING LIKE "ALL THE LIVELONG DAY" there is no song like this back then, ITS SO ORIGINAL.

Answer from Michael Cole:

The Newsboy song was replaced because many productions couldn't get a kid and Stephen didn't like it when the Newsboy was played, as often happened, by the youngest female member of the cast in a baseball cap. Stephen asked me to send along his thanks for the compliments on the show and the song "Livelong Day" Best, Michael (Stephen is happy to have anyone add the song back into their production if it can be played by an appropriately aged boy - for more information search this forum for "newsboy")

Hots Michael at the Piano

Question:

I was curious about the number "Hots Michael at the Piano", and wondered if it was originally in the debut production or if it was just a special extra on the cast recording.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The number "Hots Michaels at the Piano" was originally written to open the second act. It was tried out in the Goodman Theatre (Chicago) production, before the original New York run. The show at that time was about 3 hours long, so many things had to be cut, among them Hots Michaels. As a fan of both the song and Craig Carnelia in general, I'm glad it has received some attention lately, probably because of its inclusion on one of the Varese Sarabande LOST IN BOSTON CDs. Stephen Schwartz

Cut Songs From Working?

Question:

Working is a wonderful amalgam of work from a large number of artists. I was wondering if there were any songs or scenes that were cut from the show that might be worthy of revisiting?

Answer from Carol:

I know Stephen is busy so I'll contribute a bit of an answer. Do you have the current recording of the show that came out several years ago? It includes additional tracks, one of which is of a song that had been cut prior to Broadway. – Hot's Michael at the Piano. Info on <http://www.musicalschwartz.com/working.htm#recordings>

During or after WORKING's development, several numbers eliminated from the show because the scenes related to them were cut, including "American Dreaming" by James Taylor. "I'm Just Movin'" was cut in recent years and some new songs have been added.

Un Mejor Dia Vendra Translation?

Question:

Hello everyone, I was just looking for a translation to the song "Un Mejor Dia Vendra" from Working. I know it isn't one of Stephen's songs, but I was hoping someone may be able to help. Thank you.

Answer from Carol de Giere:

Music by James Taylor, Lyrics by Matt Landers and Graciella Danielle.

If anyone has another version of this, let me know. When I interviewed Matt earlier this year, he gave me this translation (he was doing it from memory) -

A better day will come
When the poor people of the world will be rewarded
When the afternoon ripens I return tired home to my hovel
And I console myself with the idea that
A better day will come
Where has my life gone?
Where has my youth gone?
Those things are lost to me
In the words that the wind carries to me
And those words are
A better day will come.

SECTION 4 - Working themes

Working is Great!

Question/comments:

From Peggy: Hi, guys. I received the Working CD the other day, and absolutely love it! I knew nothing about the musical, except that Stephen had written some of the songs, so I knew it had to be good; and I wasn't disappointed. I love to hear people tell about their lives and their work, and while of course these are just actors, it gives a lot of insight into how people feel about the types of jobs they do, and it sure makes me appreciate the work others do that we so often take for granted.

I thought of the show today when my family and I were visiting my mother in the hospital --- not where we expected to be this Easter. Dan and I were chatting with a nurse, and we wished her a happy Easter. She thanked us, and said a little sadly that all her family was together celebrating except her. I told her there were a lot of people who were glad she was there at the hospital, and she agreed she knew she was where she belonged. And I'm grateful for the waiter at the restaurant where we had lunch after seeing Mom. So many people whose work makes our lives so much easier! I can hardly wait (well, maybe I can wait a little longer!) to get back to work tomorrow and serve others through my own job. :) Thanks, Stephen and all the others, for a great show!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Peggy: Thanks! That was exactly what I hoped people would feel after seeing (or hearing) WORKING -- that it would make us look at jobs we take for granted and see them in a new light, and we would realize our inter-connectedness with the people we come in contact with every day and tend to think of merely as "functions". It's why so many of the characters included in the final version of WORKING are characters the audience might come in contact with almost immediately after leaving the theatre -- a parking lot attendant, a waitress, a phone operator, a checkout person, etc. I know that for me, working on WORKING changed permanently the way I deal with the workers I come into contact with in my life. It was very gratifying to me to read of your reaction to the piece; thanks again for taking the time to share it. Best, Stephen

A Working Story

Comment from a director:

I am about to begin directing and music directing "Working" for the state theater of West Virginia.

First a story about "Working." Eleven years ago I directed a high school production; we sent each kid out to shadow each profession, except the hooker, of course. The 16-year old who played the executive (original script) didn't want to be assigned to his own father, who was a major chemical plant manager in the town: a real big boss. (So he tailed his father's assistant.) The best part was that the adult workers began coming and watching rehearsals, so we always had a small audience of about 15 sitting in the back of the theater. Three days before the production, a distinguished gentleman came up to me and introduced himself, as if he had to, as the "executive's" father. "You have no idea," he began, "what this show has done for me. We have lost one third of our work force this year, and I have had to do the firing...Last night, for the first time ever, my son and I sat down and actually talked about what I do for a living. We cried and cried." And so did I after he left.

After opening night, there was some parental hubbub about some of the language in the show. (We carried euphemism and mumbling to new heights.) The principal of the school threatened to shut the show down if we didn't doctor the lyrics and language. Just then he got a phone call; it was the plant manager, who threatened to withdraw all his and his company's support to the school, including the football team and every other fundraising organization, if we changed one word of the show. Strangely enough, the principal withdrew his objection and we went on to a production they still talk about even now. (The students are now grown and tell me often how true the show is!)....

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Original book by Studs Terkel from which the show was adapted: *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*

For Broadway show data including length of run and cast, see <http://www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=4061>

A complete history of the show, with photos, can be found in Chapter 10 "Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz, from Godspell to Wicked." It includes interview quotes from Stephen Schwartz, Nina Faso, producer Irwin Meyer, Music Director Stephen Reinhardt, and several cast members <http://www.defyinggravitythebook.com/>

For the DVD, recordings, sheet music, and other info <http://www.musicalschwartz.com/working.htm>

To read about Studs Terkel and Working

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/working-studs-terkel.htm>

For a Working Cross Reference between the book and the musical see

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/working-musical.htm>