

Stephen Schwartz Comments on Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*

The Disney animated feature *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) featured music by Alan Menken and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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SECTION 1 – About *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* Project

Hunchback question – getting started

Question:

Hi, Stephen. I don't remember ever reading in my many browsings through the forum archives, how you got involved with HUNCHBACK. Was this one of those assignments that you had to find the passion for, or was there something about the story that attracted you to the project? I think HUNCHBACK is my favorite of all the Disney stuff I've seen that you've done. I like the way Kwosimodo (sp) has to learn to see himself as a different person than what he's been led to believe he was all his life, and with that new vision of himself, he's able to make a difference in his community. Good stuff. :) So I'd be interested in hearing how you got involved with HUNCHBACK and what attracted you to the project. - Peggy

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

After Alan Menken and I had been working on POCAHONTAS for about a year and it was clear that the project and collaboration were going well, the folks at Disney offered us a choice of a couple of ideas they had been developing as a follow-up. We more or less immediately chose HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME. I was attracted to it for the same reasons I still like it -- I liked the underlying themes (the idea of social outcasts and the worth of people being different than what society sees on the surface) and the struggle of Quasimodo to break free of the psychological dominance of Frollo. I have said before that the hypocritical Frollo, who constantly justifies his behavior to himself and projects the blame for his actions onto others, was one of my favorite characters to write ever. I continue to feel that HUNCHBACK is Alan's best score, and I have always loved the final movie. Sincerely, Stephen

Hunchback

Question:

Dear Stephen, What do you think it is, about Hunchback, that makes it so special?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Nathaniel: I think it has once again to do with two underlying themes that appear often in my work -- the story of the Outcast (Quasimodo, in this case) and the generational father/son conflict (Quasimodo and his quasi-father, Frollo.) I just always seem to respond to those issues, and at the same time, Alan Menken clearly responded to the emotion of the story and the musical milieu in a way that elevated even his consistently high standard.

Hunchback

Question/comment:

As always I'll explain...the Hunchback of Notre Dame (Disney Version) is such a compelling story in that it was about a man who was hated and feared by lots of people, but when the movie came out nobody really knew what it was (in other words it certainly wasn't commonly used in film during that time)... and it was there before you guys and then you made it into a musical. So my question is how do you get audiences interested in a musical that everyone's saying "what's that?" basically how do you get the musical known instead people being clueless and not even caring because its strange and they can't understand.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I'm not exactly sure what you're asking. While not as popular as an animated feature as many of Disney's other movies of the 90's, HUNCHBACK still grossed a respectable 100 million plus in the United States and did fairly well overseas as well. While I don't look at box office figures as any kind of measure of artistic success, I cite this only because I think it goes against your impression that audiences were not interested.

However it's true that HUNCHBACK, being more adult-oriented than any Disney animated feature before or since, was not aimed at the core audience for animation, which is obviously younger, and thus did present special marketing challenges to Disney and tonal challenges for the movie itself.

Nevertheless, it remains the favorite of a small but passionate group of aficionados. I get more Email about HUNCHBACK by far than about my other two animated features. If plans to bring it to the stage are realized, it may find a more natural audience fit. Thanks for your enthusiasm for the film. I continue to feel it is Alan's finest score. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Reply:

Thanks for the info, now a question comes to my mind... say you are working on one of your shows and you held a casting call. Any person no matter what their ethnic background, can they audition for the roles that have to be very defined?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

For animation, it doesn't matter what the person looks like, it matters what they sound like. When we would audition people for the animated features, we would not look at them but stare down instead at a drawing of the character while listening. So age and ethnicity didn't enter into the decision at all.

For a live stage show, of course, sometimes it does make a difference. Some roles are ethnically specific. I think it would be weird to see a white person playing the lead in RAISIN IN THE SUN or a black person playing the bigoted Senator in FINIAN'S RAINBOW, to cite a couple of obvious examples. But when the role is not ethnically defined, I think it is simply about the talent and quality of the individual actor. For instance, in WICKED, we have had black performers play Elphaba, Fiyero, and the Wizard and Asian performers play Boq and Nessarose. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Translation of Your Work

Question:

Do you have any input or involvement in the process of translating your animated features for foreign audiences?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The studio handles hiring the translators and overseeing their work, and I as lyricist simply have to trust that they get the best people and that an accurate and artistic job is done. The only time I have worked directly with a translator of my work was with Michael Kunze, the translator of the German stage version of THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME (DER GLOCKNER VON NOTRE DAME). Herr Kunze is a brilliant man and a fine lyricist in his own right, so the work was exhilarating, and totally fascinating to me. But in terms of the other translators, I just trust and hope. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

(Since Stephen originally posted this answer, he has worked with Christian Gundlach on a German translation of GODSPELL)

Hunchback of Notre Dame TV Movie???

Question:

Hallo! I can remember that I've read something about a planned tv-movie of Disney's Hunchback of Notre Dame? Do you know something about this? Actually I had the luck to see the show about six times in Berlin. I loved it and I am really sad that there are no plans to bring it to London or Broadway, because the music of Alan Menken and the texts are great. So I am looking forward a TV-version! Greetings from Germany! Quasi P.S. I hope my english is ok

Answer from Carol:

Dear "Quasi": Stephen Schwartz and Alan Menken did some work for the show earlier but it's apparently on the back burner. A couple of weeks ago I checked with Michael Cole who checked with Stephen Schwartz about this. There's no new news and no forward movement at the moment at least in terms of the songwriters. Check back from time to time though. Hopefully it will happen. I'm glad you got to see the show. I love listening to the CD even though I don't speak any German. The added songs really fill out the score.

Hunchback Q and A

Question:

Mr. Schwartz, Do you or Alan Menken have any further details on the status of your movie for ABC of the Hunchback? It sounds like a very exciting project. I absolutely love the lyrics and music of hunchback. They seem to have the epic scope of musicals like Les Miserables. [questions continue below]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Anthony: Thanks for writing. I haven't heard anything about it for quite a while, which suggests to me it has pretty much been relegated to a far back Disney burner.

Question:

How much creative involvement did the two of you have in the actual film?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Both Alan and I had a lot of input in the actual film -- for one thing, we produced the songs, and Alan produced the score music. And we had a lot of input into details of story structure and specific visual ideas, etc. I have always found Disney, for all their reputation for autocracy, very respectful of and responsive to the authors' ideas.

SECTION 2 - HUNCHBACK SONGS

Hunchback music

Question:

How did you and Alan conceive the music? How much creative involvement did the two of you have in the actual film?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Alan could answer questions about the music better than I, but I know he always starts with what he calls his "musical palette" for a project -- that is the tone and style of the musical world it is going to live in. In the case of HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME, obviously, he drew from French music and liturgical music.

Opening Number

Question:

Tell us about the opening of Hunchback

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The storyboard artists, the Brizzi Brothers, had done a series of drawings, and Alan and I incorporated them into the structure of the song, which we had decided to write for the character of Clopin acting as a narrator. We went back and forth with the artists a couple of times before the final structure was arrived at.

Bells of Notre Dame translation

Question:

I was wondering if you could tell me what the priests were saying (in Latin and English preferably) at the beginning of the "Bells of Notre Dame".

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Latin: OLIM OLIM DEUS ACCELERE HOC SAECULUM SPLENDIDUM ACCELERE FIAT VENIRE OLIM

English: "Someday, someday ...God speed this bright millennium

Let it come someday ..."In other words, it's a translation into Latin of some of the words from "Someday"

Out there

Question:

Dear Mr Schwartz. This might sound like a very odd question but its something that i've been wondering about. In the song out there (My favourite ever song from yours and Alan Menken's collaborations) in the film the lyric is sung 'if I was in their skin I'd treasure...' But when I hear it sung by artists on Disney CD's or in external performances, its sung 'if I were in their skin I'd treasure' which I think sounds better (not that it reeeally makes much of a difference haha) But which did you write it as? Sorry If I'm rambling but also, what was writing that song like, did you know that you were on to something like maybe when you first heard it sung or orchestrated, I know that when I hear it that 'The Seine' line gives me shivers, the string section is a killer -- were the lyrics easy to write??I've probably asked too much here hehe but I'm an enormous fan of yours, and I'm so grateful that you take the time to answer these questions, its very kind of you. With love, Sophie. 16UK

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Hi Sophie: You're right about "if I were in their skin" as opposed to "if I was ..." First of all, "if I were" is more grammatically correct, and secondly, it implies an inner rhyme with "treasure" in the subsequent line "I'd treasure every instant". "If I was" came from an earlier draft, but when I realized "If I were" was better for the above reasons, I changed it.

The music of "Out There" was the first thing Alan wrote for HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME. He played me the entire tune when we first started to work, and I loved it and knew it would be perfect for Quasimodo's first song. When shortly thereafter, Disney sent us on a research trip to Paris, I used to go up to the bell tower in Notre Dame, sit there with a pad of paper, and imagine I was Quasimodo having lived his entire life in that tower and looking out at the city. What would I see from that vantage point in 1482? How would I feel? So many of the lyrics, including your favorite line about the Seine, came from that. By the time I returned from the trip, the song was written. Thanks for your question and your enthusiasm for the song, which remains one of my favorites too. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Hunchback Lyrics

Question missing

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The Latin words used in HUNCHBACK are all from various portions of the Catholic Mass (not always the Mass performed every Sunday -- sometimes from Requiem Masses and the like.) The only exception is the opening "Olim", which is a translation into Latin of some of the words to the song "Someday". I tried in all cases to choose words that were dramatically appropriate, though I knew there were few in the audience who would actually understand them. In "Hellfire", for instance, the penitent monks are going through the words to the Confessional while Frolo attempts to wrestle with his feelings for Esmeralda; while he is singing "It's not my fault", they are singing "By my fault, by my fault, by my most grievous fault". That kind of juxtaposition was particularly enjoyable for me to write. Hope this answers your question, and thanks again for the EMail. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

"Hellfire" Lyrics Changed To Get A "G" Rating?

Question:

There's a really good reference book called 'Mouse Under Glass' that describes a lot of the process of many of the popular Disney films. The book touches upon a lot of cut songs from Disney projects, and the reason they were cut. They include cut songs from Pocahontas and Hunchback. In the book it mentions that the lyrics to Hellfire had to be changed to get a 'G' rating rather than a 'PG' rating. Any chance Stephen or Michael could post the original 'PG' lyrics? I'd be curious to see how they were changed. -- Stephen G

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Stephen: The book is inaccurate on the subject of "Hellfire." There was some discussion at the time HUNCHBACK was being released of changing some lyrics, specifically the part about "this burning desire is turning me to sin", and a couple of others I don't recall now. In any event, it wasn't done. The animators did change some of the fire animation slightly to be less "sexually explicit", but fortunately no bowdlerization of the lyrics proved necessary. Strangely enough, I did have to change some of the lyrics to "Savages" from POCAHONTAS to make them less racist, since the ratings board couldn't understand that the lyrics represented the character (Ratcliffe)'s opinions, not Disney's. But "Hellfire" appears in the film as I wrote it. Thanks for your interest. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Frolo, Hellfire, etc.

Question:

The Hunchback of Notre Dame: I first heard HUNCHBACK when I was staying in an Italian Convent doing a passion play (don't ask!) and part of the excitement I felt when I first heard the score was your use of language, how long did it take you to get the right feel for the language used in the film, because I felt with Frolo you were very brave to push an animated character so far? Also - How long did the opening number take to structure and write, because as an opening scene setter I think it is a work that every one who wants to tell a story through music, drama and words should listen carefully to.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I'm not sure in your question about the use of language in HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME if you're referring to my use of Latin (which I studied in high school.) It just seemed appropriate to use sections of the Latin liturgy to accompany this material. Frolo's slightly stilted and pretentious locution was just an extension for me of his character, and it was also influenced (obviously) by the way the character spoke in the original novel (albeit I read it in translation.)

Topsy Turvey

Mr. Schwartz, could you talk about writing the song Topsy Turvy? I've combed this forum and haven't found anything about this great song. Obviously there's a lot of story to tell and this is one of the longest Disney songs. Some specific questions I have are these:

Question:

Due to its length, was this a hard song to finish with everyone on the Hunchback team satisfied?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I don't recall this being that difficult, once we came up with the idea. Of course, it is a sequence in which a lot of plot unfolds, so that had to be worked out among the directors, the artists boarding the sequence, and Alan and myself. But I remember us all being pretty much on the same page through the process.

Question:

Since you worked Alan Menken, did coming up with a title go like, "So Alan, what do you think of such-and-such for a title?"

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I'm not exactly sure where I came up with the title. I wanted something that explained to an audience unfamiliar with the Feast of Fools what the concept of the holiday was. I think I may have seen a storyboard sketch of a clown who stood on his hands and became a different character, and that might have inspired me, but the truth is I don't really remember, and that sketch might have been inspired by the song and not the other way around.

Question:

Did you have to read Victor Hugo's book for inspiration or ideas when writing the lyrics? (This actually applies to all the songs in Hunchback.)

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Absolutely. I returned to the book many times, and ideas and even lines from several songs came from the novel. I tend to pay a lot of attention to the source material if I am adapting something, and in this

case, because Hugo's descriptive writing is so vivid, more than most. As I have been quoted as saying: "In lieu of inspiration, do research."

Question:

Since there's so much story to tell in a short amount of time, were you pressured by the speed of the song? Having Quasimodo going from outsider to King of Fools and setting up Esmerelda's character in less than six minutes must have been tricky.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The compression of story-telling is a common challenge in musical theatre. Take a look at how much plot unfolds in the "Dancing Through Life" sequence in WICKED. It's one of the challenges I enjoy solving when working on a musical, be it for stage or film.

Question:

Was it fun writing for a character like Clopin? Since he's an eccentric character, did you think, "Okay, he would say something like, "Januervy." Thank you so much for your time and consideration! You truly are a magical person.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Yes, it was fun. I wish I could have come up with more lines like "Scurvy knaves are extra-scurvy on the sixth of Januervy" -- that sort of lyric writing is a tribute to one of my heroes, E.Y. Harburg, who was a master of that sort of word play (check out his lyrics for FINIAN'S RAINBOW or THE WIZARD OF OZ.) I hope these answers are informative; thanks for your interest. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Question on Topsy Turvy

Question missing

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Actually, I don't know that specific lyric is an homage to Harburg (it wasn't intentionally), but my admiration for Harburg goes so far back that he has certainly been an influence on my writing all my life. I think the most overt tribute I've ever given him in my work is in HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME, the lyric to "Topsy Turvy", specifically: "Scurvy knaves are extra scurvy/ on the sixth of Januervy, all because it's Topsy-Turvy Day." The word "Januervy" is definitely a conscious Harburg-ism. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

"In a place of miracles"

Question:

Anyone heard "In a place of Miracles" from Hunchback? It's a beautiful song. My questions regarding it Why was it cut? [other questions follow]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Nick: Thanks for your complimentary words about "In a Place of Miracles", a song I've always liked a lot. In answer to your question - Why was it cut? In the animated feature, it slowed the action down late in the film. The reasoning was somewhat akin to why "If I Never Knew You" was cut from POCAHONTAS. We then were going to use it again in the stage version, but wrote a song called "Out of Love" that immediately preceded the scene in which "In a Place of Miracles" was sung, and ultimately it seemed as if a reprise of "Out of Love" would function better in the scene. However, when we have

discussed the possibility of an English-language production of the stage version, the idea of using "In a Place of Miracles" has arisen again, so it may yet see the light of day.

Question

Did Alan do the rough orchestration in the demo recording I have found?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I'm not sure what demo you are listening to, but if it is one done in Alan's studio, with mostly Alan and me singing on it, then yes, Alan would have done them, as he always does with our demos. We did do a recording studio demo that Michael Starobin orchestrated, but that would not have had Alan and me on it.

Question:

Is that Stephen singing the line "In the city, there's a chance you may chance upon..."

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Yes, it could be. Usually, Alan sings all the parts on our demos -- on one of the demos for ENCHANTED, for instance, I was reduced to reading the internal dialogue (with my very bad acting) while Alan sang several roles! But in the case of "In a Place of Miracles", I think he did let me sing Clopin's lines on the demo. As I said, I really like the song and hope it finds its "place" in some version of HUNCHBACK.
Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Laurie Beechman's Someday

Question:

Why wasn't Lorry Beechman's version of Someday used at all? It was such a stunning version. She has such a beautiful voice, that suits the sentiment of the song so well and serves it in a way that non of the performers I heard singing it have. And the instrumentation in her version, is so much more beautiful than all the other versions. Why wasn't it used? Nathaniel

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

What was important was to find a singer who sounded as much as possible like Demi Moore, who was doing the dialogue for Esmeralda. We had auditions, which were interesting since they were entirely on tape, since what the person looked like was immaterial because we were looking only for her voice. Then the tapes were edited together so an excerpt of Demi's dialogue was followed by the singer's audition. In that way, it became apparent that Heidi Mollenauer would be the best match (and by the way, I think she did a wonderful job with the song.) Lori Beechman, who was a personal friend of Alan's and mine, was one of the voices we auditioned, but her voice wasn't a close enough match to Demi's. But of course Alan and I were delighted that she subsequently made such a lovely recording of the song.
Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Someday and rooftop scene

Question:

Anyway, I have always thought that the deleted song, "Someday" was intended for the rooftop scene right after Esmeralda says tells Quasi he is not a monster. The sky is getting darker, the theme is playing like an intro and then there is a cut to the gargoyles and then back to Esmeralda who has the most intense look on her face. I always believed this was the place that SOMEDAY was cut from. Now I know it was not. Was it ever considered? I think it is absolutely perfect. It would have placed to anthems

back to back, but who cares. The setting was right and the moon could have been appearing during the last line of the song. There could have been a short reprise of it at the end.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The song "Someday" was originally written to replace "God Help the Outcasts", but then ultimately we returned to the original song. But since everybody liked "Someday" as well, it was then used as an end title credit for the film. In the stage version, "Someday" is used towards the end, when Esmeralda is being led to execution. The scene on the roof with Quasimodo has a new song in it entitled "Top of the World" in the stage version, but in the film, it was never envisioned to include a song.

I don't know at this point whether there will be a television version or further productions of the stage version. Since HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME is also one of my favorites, I hope one or both of these will come to pass. But of course the decision ultimately is up to Disney. Thanks again and best wishes,
Stephen Schwartz

God Help the Outcast

Question:

I am listening to the Hunchback of Notre Dame CD - and the utterly gorgeous "God Help the Outcasts". What was the creative process for this song? Did you give the lyrics to Alan?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The writing process was essentially the same one Alan and I employed on most of the songs we wrote together: I came up with a title and a couple of lines of lyric, Alan then wrote the music, and I then took the melody and worked out the lyrics. Of course it's never quite as cut-and-dried as that, but that's our basic process.

Censorship and Versions of Songs

In The Hunchback of Notre Dame, there are some stories about Disney ask you to turn down the lyrics of "Hellfire". Is true? Something was censored? The sequence that got the most revisions was The Court of Miracles, and I heard that you and Alan Menken wrote three different songs for the scene... and a song called "As Long as There's a Moon" - supposedly a wedding song based on gypsy traditions. I wish that you can make some brief comments about these songs... and if any of these songs are in The Hunchback stage musical at Berlin?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I was never asked to censor any of the lyrics for "Hellfire", though there was some nervousness about the song's preventing the movie from getting a G rating. (Actually, we tend to think now it would have been better to have gotten a PG rating for that film anyway.) There was some re-animation done of the song to make it a little less sexually explicit (if a cartoon of a girl made of dancing flames can be said to be explicit). As for the songs Alan and I tried in order to have a love song for Esmeralda and Phoebus in the Court of Miracles sequence: we ran into the same problem there we had with "If I Never Knew You." We finally have seemed to solve it for the stage version now playing in Berlin, partly because the demands of stage are different and partly because we found a way to include Quasimodo in the song, which is called "Out of Love".

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

See also the Hunchback of Notre Dame section of this Forum archive about the stage musical version.

For the DVD, CD, sheet music, etc.

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/disney-movies-hunchback.htm>

“Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz, from Godspell to Wicked” includes the story of Stephen Schwartz’s work for Disney on *Pocahontas*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *Enchanted* – the three movies for which he wrote lyrics for Alan Menken’s songs. It includes quotes from interviews with Schwartz and Menken about their collaboration, as well as photographs.

www.DefyingGravityTheBook.com.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame cast and other movie data

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116583/>

The DVD of Disney’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* includes a special feature on the making of the movie, and also an audio commentary track.

The Victor Hugo novel: the Hunchback of Notre Dame