

## **Stephen Schwartz Comments on the Movie *The Prince of Egypt***

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### **Dreamworks**

Question:

I wondered how you got involved with Dreamworks. - Catriona

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I got involved with DreamWorks because I had worked with one of the founders of the company, Jeffrey Katzenberg, while he was at Disney. When Jeffrey left to form DreamWorks, he called me to have a meeting about doing the songs for their first animated feature. The rest, as they say, is history.

### **Prince of Egypt: Ended Halfway?**

Question:

Prince of Egypt is great, but I think the feature ended halfway...don't you agree?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks for the message; I'm delighted you thought the film was great. I actually don't agree with you that it ended half-way; in fact, I think the mini-Epilogue with Moses receiving the Ten Commandments goes a bit further than the story we were telling warrants (though I think we couldn't have made the movie without including it.) This is because our way of looking at the story was through the relationship of the two brothers (Moses and Rameses) and the tragic way that character and destiny pulls them apart. The movie begins with them together, enjoying each other's company and support and clearly loving one another, and it ends with them literally divided by the Red Sea, enemies historically (if not personally) for all time. I find this an interesting and unique take on this well-known story, and it also allowed us to tell the story within the length of time possible for an animated feature. If the focus of the story were entirely on Moses, you would be correct and only half would be being told. Of course this is merely my opinion, but since you asked ... Thanks for writing and once again, I'm glad you liked the film. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **Short Questions on Prince of Egypt/Alabaster**

Question:

I'm wondering how you liked Egypt. Did it help to travel there while writing songs for Prince of Egypt?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Yes, the trip to Egypt was amazingly useful. It always helps me to be on the spot, to give the lyrics authenticity and the music a more specific flavor. I actually wrote "All I Ever Wanted" while on the trip, specifically one night at the temple of Abu Simbal. (As I did much of the lyric to "Out There" sitting atop Notre Dame on a trip to Paris.)

Question:

Why three CDs? What was your involvement beyond the songs on the soundtrack?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The decision to release three CD's (and to include an extraneous song on the PRINCE OF EGYPT soundtrack CD) had, I assure you, nothing to do with me. It was purely a marketing decision on the part of DreamWorks, and not one I had any say in.

Question:

Earlier on the Forum you said for previous films the composer wrote the score (with some input from you before they started) and then you added lyrics. My impression is that "Original Songs by Stephen Schwartz" for POE means you had some say on the music as well as lyrics-or you wrote the tunes that Mr. Zimmer used. Or what? What about for the forthcoming GEPETTO? Both music and lyrics, right?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

You are correct that I wrote both music and lyrics to the songs of PRINCE OF EGYPT, and occasionally Hans Zimmer did use some of the melodic content from the songs in doing the score, but not often. In the case of the upcoming GEPETTO, I have done a lot of the scoring myself (yes, I wrote both music and lyrics for those songs as well) and the other scoring cues, written by my orchestrator Martin Erskine, make considerably more use of material from the songs.

Question:

Abu Simbel is way South! I looked up photos, etc. of this temple where you say you wrote "All I Ever Wanted." Did you do something exotic like take a boat ride up the Nile to reach it?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Of course you are correct about Abu Simbal, which I mistakenly mentioned as the temple I had visited by moonlight in Egypt that inspired "All I Ever Wanted". Too hasty. I meant actually the temple of Kom-Ombo, which is indeed a stop on the trip up the Nile on one of the sunboats. We had docked there for the night and were granted permission to visit the temple by moonlight and without the tourists.

Question:

You used the word alabaster in "Beautiful City" as well as in "All I Ever Wanted." I thought it was mainly used for tombs, vases, etc. But it makes a great rhyme with special plaster. Any alabaster story?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I'm sure the cool white stone of the temple is not, in fact, alabaster, but I agree with you that the word "alabaster" sings well and sounds evocative on the ear, and that's why I used it.

### **"Prince of Egypt" on stage?**

Question:

Hello Mr. Schwartz -I just watched "Prince of Egypt" for the first time--my children were too young for it when it was in theaters. We loved it! I would love to see this on stage. Are there any plans to adapt it for live theater? Thank you.- Meg

Answer from Michael Cole:

Dear Meg: Unfortunately the decision to mount a stage production of PRINCE OF EGYPT falls to the folks at DreamWorks. They own the rights to it, so there's little Stephen can do unless and until DreamWorks decides to put it on stage. I guess you'll have to continue watching the movie or listening to the soundtrack until DreamWorks comes to the same realization that you've come to! Best, Michael Cole

### **Background Music**

Question:

Okay, this one came to me while my husband and I watched "Prince of Egypt" together last Sunday. I was listening to all the background music that emphasized the mood of what was going on, and started to wonder (yeah, yeah, I know) if it's harder to write background music (which I'm assuming you did write) for a show rather than the actual songs. I mean, how do you know how long to make it, or do you have to make it so it can be stopped or extended, depending on how long the actual action in the scene takes? Is it harder to write something like background music, because it doesn't have the structure and repetition of regular songs? Or perhaps its lack of structure makes it easier to just feel what the scene is about and just let the music flow. Would be interested to hear your comments. :)

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Peggy: Actually, I didn't write the background music for THE PRINCE OF EGYPT. Hans Zimmer did. However, I am beginning work on some of the underscoring for GEPETTO, and let me tell you, it's hard to do! To make it fit the picture and not be too intrusive but still feel like music -- I'm finding it very challenging. In answer to your technical question -- the background score usually gets added after the entire movie is shot and edited. Therefore, it must be timed to the film. There are computer programs that help work out the timing, and of course, the process involves watching the scene on videotape a LOT and trying different things till the music feels right. I'm enjoying the challenge, but let me tell you, in my opinion, writing songs is a great deal easier. Thanks for asking. Regards, Stephen Schwartz

### **Prince of Egypt: Hans Zimmer**

Question:

Steven, how was it working with Hans Zimmer and all the wonderful people in the Media Ventures Studio? --Abbay

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Abbay: As you know, Hans is a tremendously talented musician. What many people don't know about him is how good a sense of story-telling he has. So he had many helpful suggestions on PRINCE OF EGYPT; for instance, it was his idea that the music for "The Plagues" be based on thematic material from "All I ever Wanted". Two other talented arrangers who are part of Media Ventures -- Harry Gregson-Thomas and John Powell -- were also contributive. Plus Hans has two very fine recording engineers working there -- Alan Myerson and Slamm (I don't know his last name) who were great to work with. It's a very experienced team there, and as a composer one feels well supported by them. Though I think it's unlikely that Hans and I will wind up working together again, simply because our paths are unlikely to cross, I enjoyed getting to know him personally and will always have a great deal of respect for him professionally. Hope that answers your question. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

### **Ofra Haza - Prince of Egypt**

Question: [Someone asked about Ofra Haza following her death in 2000]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Ofra Haza was one of the great artists it's been my privilege to work with, and I considered it our enormous good fortune that she consented to lend her talents and her passion to THE PRINCE OF EGYPT. In her magnificent voice and her beautiful soul, she embodied the beauty, mystery, heartbreak and joy of the Middle East to me. Others could have sung the notes, of course, but no one else in the world could have brought the kind of depth that Ofra did. Add to this that she was always entirely easy to work with, tireless, meticulous, and unfailingly good-humored. What a beautiful person and citizen of the world we have all lost in Ofra Haza. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

See the Prince of Egypt Songs section of this Forum archive.