



PRODUCTION CONTINUED



Rob Ashford and Jason Moore on their roles as co-Directors on SHREK THE MUSICAL

JM: I think as a director of theatre you do a little of everything, help the writers write the script; help pick the actors who are going to be the best in the parts; help the designers decide what it's going to look like; tell people where to stand, listen to what it sounds like and help to choose how the music sounds. There are other people who do those things better than us, but we guide everyone so that it's all one piece and reflecting, ultimately, the story of Shrek.

RA: You're the captain of the ship. You have your hand in everything. And if you're lucky, and we're really lucky with **SHREK THE MUSICAL**, you have really great people that head each department and it's your job to keep it all moving and going in the same direction so that everyone is doing the same show.

JM: The first thing to make it a musical was to make the music.

Jeanine (music) and David (book and lyrics) wrote songs that are still in the show now and they wrote a lot of songs that didn't make it for one reason or another. What we were asking was, "what do we want to learn about these characters that the audience didn't learn in the movie, what do we want to know about them, and how does the musical form expose a little bit about where they come from and what they're feeling, a little bit more about being in love?" so that was the first thing, to choose where all the songs went.

RA: The other thing is not to literally transfer the movie onto stage. It's to look at what you can do on stage that you can't do in the movie and to expand on some of the characters and their backstories. And that's what's so great about the show, you get all of those great characters and the same story from the film, plus the additional layers.

With actors, the main thing that you look for is the spirit of the character, more than the look of the character: it's the spirit of Shrek, the spirit of Fiona, the spirit of Donkey and Farquaad – that's what you look for when you start the casting.

JM: On stage you can use lighting and make up and wigs and costume to make them look any way you want them to, but it's the spirit that they bring to the part that's key.

In this process, the design was a big part of the early process, because you have so many things to solve with Shrek, you have dragons, mice, talking cookies and big eggs so you have to understand a little bit about how those things are going to look on stage so that you can write properly for them. If you're going to write for a puppet or a person, it could be different – what's funny about it might be different – so we brought the designer in pretty early.

RA: Any time that you have great characters on a journey, it can make a great musical. And Shrek certainly is that. I always think with a musical that sometimes you have to sing about something that you're not comfortable in saying. If you have a lot of feelings, sometimes that's a great time to sing a song. It's one of the terms that we use in musical theatre all the time, the "I want" song, where the character says what it is that they're looking for. Most of the time they're sung alone on stage. These characters have that – they all have that, so that's fun and that's one reason why I think Shrek makes a good musical.

JM: It also makes a good musical because it makes you laugh, makes you feel something and makes you want the characters to win. These characters are all outsiders, they all live by themselves, probably talk to themselves and have to externalise what they're thinking. Singing is a good way to do that, to hear what the character's thinking on the inside. So, while Fiona's alone in the tower or Shrek's alone in the swamp, or Farquaad's alone in his crazy torture chamber. We can hear what they're thinking in a musical and that's something that you don't find in a film.

JM: The story of **SHREK THE MUSICAL** is the story of the first film, we wanted to recreate that world in a special theatrical way onstage, but people who know the Shrek world will recognise little bits and pieces that we also put into this story. We wanted to recreate that fairytale world specially, but the plot is the first film, how the characters meet each other and how they fall in love. The songs help to fill in what you don't learn in the movie – how Fiona got in the tower, how Shrek got in the swamp, why Farquaad is so angry about being a little guy, we wanted to fill in some of the backstory.

RA: I always love the end of Act 1, when Shrek tells Donkey that he would like to be a hero. I'm always very moved by that. I feel that's a message for everyone. That everyone feels that way, and I'm so happy for him that he actually has someone to say it to who actually cares and who he feels safe enough to say it to. Then you find out too that he's thinking the same thing and feeling the same thing. I think it's great way to send people into the intermission, feeling emotionally full.

It's always thrilling at the very beginning of the show, when the house lights go down, before the show even begins there's a roar from the audience because they're so excited. Their love for these characters is so palpable that they just cannot wait. And then, just like the movie does, the show throws you some twists and turns – it isn't exactly like you think it's going to be.