



PRODUCTION



David Lindsay-Abaire (Book and Lyrics) and Jeanine Tesori (Music) talk about the creative process that led to them creating SHREK THE MUSICAL.

(partly taken from Jeanine's interview with Producing Artistic Director of the 5th Avenue Theatre, David Armstrong at 'Spotlight Night' in April 2008)

You start with the characters – like any show, if you start with who the characters are and what they want and what world they are part of – everything has to follow from there. It's also truly the hero's journey – you are isolated, you are stuck in your place and then you are forced to take a step out into the world and what you learn there makes you a new and hopefully better person. Maintaining that theme became the basis of everything.

Shrek sets out on a journey to find out who he is in the world and that's the story we wanted to find.

What this story has at its centre is a beating heart – about a guy who wants to find love. That amazing heart of the story is there in the original William Steig book. Obviously the humour is there and we all love the irreverence, but it's also an emotionally driven story and, at the end of the day, those are the best things in a musical.

You wait for the moment in a musical when a song is going to crack open a character's heart and the audience has the opportunity to see inside of it. **SHREK THE MUSICAL** has the depth to it that allows it to be different from the movie so long as that heart is there. That's what we've done, we've worked hard to make it our own. We love the source material, and it is the *Shrek* you know and love, but we also had to let go of it and make it our own and DreamWorks has been fantastic and supporting of that.

If we didn't believe that this piece was theatrically rich, we wouldn't do it—it would just be a waste of everyone's time. This story has really great wit, great courage and great intelligence. Those elements lay down a path to people being able to sing to each other in narrative. In contrast, when you do the movie and you're scoring it, the music sits on top of the image and that's a very different kind of feeling. In theatre you're taking human behaviour, putting it up there and hoping that we can all share in something. That's how our songs will convey this story on stage as opposed to watching it on screen.

We were always asking ourselves: "What is it saying? Where is the moment you want to hear the characters sing?" In addition to that we ask: "What don't we know?" There are a lot of questions that the movie and the book raise that we were sort of curious about.

Princess Fiona, for example, how long has she been in the tower and what does she do all day? How does she get there? Who put her there? And you'll see that there is a song where we find out what this girl has been pining after for 23 years or however long she's been in that tower. And, Farquaad, what is his issue with those fairytale creatures and where did that come from? Those are all questions we answer in the musical version of this story.

It is such a great story. And, the most important part, we thought, was the humour involved; a humour that is appreciated and can be shared by both children and adults. This story is one that our kids can laugh at, we can laugh at, and sometimes we laugh along. It's just that humour on both levels that has been a really interesting challenge.

One of the most difficult things for us in the beginning was we were afraid to move too far away from movie. When we first started working with Jeffery Katzenberg and Sam Mendes, we were afraid to stray too far and one day Jeffery said, "You guys don't get it, you have to make this thing your own. The movie is great but if we wanted to do the movie on stage that is what we would do."

He and Sam, they think big, and have great ideas—so they actually needed to push us to be inspired by the movie, but not to obey it.

Our process is that we talk a lot before we do anything. We pick apart a moment and say, "Okay, how do we dramatise this?" That process can go on for a long time before we start something. Whether lyrics or music come first, there's not a set way, it's whoever has a stronger impulse to go and do something. Then it just goes back and forth like that many, many, many times. The Director is also a part of this process and, at the end of it all, we put it in front of the production level people and we make a decision.

We wanted to step away from the voices of the characters in the movie because Eddie Murphy is not going to be in the musical! So, we needed to reinvent those characters and let actors bring them to life in their own way.