



Winthrop Faculty and Staff Publications

Fall 10-14-2020

Making a Musical: The Art of Adapting a Film or a Book for the Stage

David Wohl
Winthrop University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/fac_pub



Part of the [Playwriting Commons](#)

Publisher Citation

Originally published in Southern Theatre magazine, a quarterly publication of the Southeastern Theatre Conference.”

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Winthrop Faculty and Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Winthrop University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@winthrop.edu.

T s o u t h e r n *Theatre*



ANTI-RACISM STEPS

Best Practices for Inclusive Classrooms and Auditions

MAKING A MUSICAL

The Art of Adapting a Book or a Film for the Stage

RELATIONSHIPS

Getchell-Winning Play Explores the Mother-Daughter Bond



Contents

Volume LXI Number 4 • Fall 2020 • Southern Theatre – Quarterly Magazine of the Southeastern Theatre Conference

Features

8 Best Practices to Make Theatre Classrooms Inclusive

by Sharrell D. Lockett

16 Best Practices for Anti-Racist Auditions

by Sharrell D. Lockett

18 Making a Musical

The Art of Adapting a Book or a Film for the Stage

by David Wohl

2020 Charles M. Getchell Award

30 The Playwright

Getchell Award Winner Rachel Bykowski Explores the Bond Between Mothers and Daughters in *28 Light Years From Now*

interview by Laura King

32 The Play

Read an excerpt from *28 Light Years From Now*, the 2020 winner of the Charles M. Getchell New Play Award, given by SETC to recognize a worthy new play. The entire play is available for reading online at www.setc.org/28-light-years-from-now.

Departments

4 Hot off the Press

Plays That Answer the Call for a Diverse, Equitable Theatre

by Zackary Ross

6 Outside the Box: Design/Tech Solutions

Need to Create a Realistic Fire Effect? Build a 'Humid-A-Fire'

by Christopher Simpson

36 Words, Words, Words ...

Review of *Casting a Movement: The Welcome Table Initiative*, edited by Claire Syler and Daniel Banks

review by Derrick Vanmeter

Cover

Union organizer Johnson (played by Austin Bowen) secretly swears miners into the union in this scene from *Storming Heaven: The Musical*, which had its world premiere at West Virginia Public Theatre in Morgantown, WV, in June 2019, directed by Mia Walker. The musical was adapted from Denise Giardina's 1987 novel, *Storming Heaven*, about the coal mining wars in West Virginia in the early 20th century. See story, Page 18. (Photo by Joshua B. Williamson; cover design by Deanna Thompson)

MAKING A MUSICAL

The Art of Adapting a Book or a Film for the Stage

by David Wohl



Robert Plant, lead singer of Led Zeppelin, is said to have improved on the old biblical maxim, “There is nothing new under the sun” by contributing the coda, “You just get a can of paint out.” If that’s accurate, musical theatre is proof positive that almost anything can be repainted and reformatted into a staged musical. Over the past 100 years, musicals have been made from original works as varied as straight plays, novels, magazine articles, movies, short stories and biographies. In fact, the five longest-running shows in Broadway history are musicals based on a novel, a play, a film, a collection of short poems, and two novels plus a film – in that order. (Care to guess those musicals? The answers are on Page 28, along with those to a short musical theatre quiz on Page 23.) No fair Googling.

If you’ve ever dreamed of putting your own “can of paint” on a work in another genre, this may be the perfect time to give it a try as the coronavirus pandemic keeps most of us shuttered at home. You can pick up some ideas on how to adapt a work from the processes described below, detailing the recent development of two musicals – one adapted from a film and the other based on a novel. Both deal with Appalachian themes and characters. Coincidentally (and rather improbably), the source for each came from material created separately over 25 years ago by faculty members at a small, historically Black university near Charleston, WV. Both musicals were presented in the summer of 2019 by professional theatres in West Virginia.

**THE ORIGINAL WORKS:
WHERE THE STORIES BEGIN**

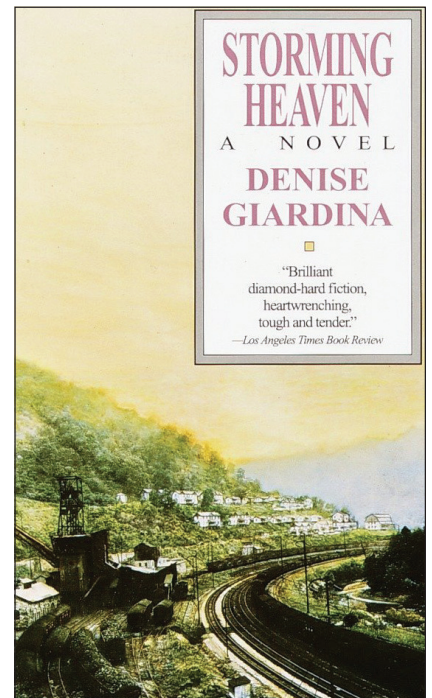
Paradise Park, a musical produced in 2018 and 2019 by Theatre West Virginia, an outdoor theatre in the southern part of the state, and directed by Neil David Seibel, was developed from a regionally produced film directed and written by former West Virginia State University film professor Danny Boyd in 1992. Released directly to video, the movie was a romantic fantasy that focused on a small, rural trailer park in southern West Virginia and the challenges faced by its residents. The low-budget film featured such non-actors as country singers Johnny Paycheck and Porter Wagoner and WWE wrestling star Dusty Rhodes. Boyd wrote the musical adaptation with singer-songwriter Larry Groce, who also played the lead character in the film. Groce has hosted the nationally syndicated public radio show *Mountain Stage* for over 35 years.

Storming Heaven: The Musical, produced by West Virginia Public Theatre in Morgantown, WV, in June 2019 and directed by Mia Walker, was adapted from Denise Giardina’s 1987 novel *Storming Heaven*. Giardina taught English and other subjects at West Virginia State University and served as the university’s writer-in-residence until she retired in 2013. The novel is based on the coal mining wars that took place in southern West Virginia in the early part of the 20th century and focuses



The original works: the film Paradise Park, released directly to video, and the novel Storming Heaven.

specifically on the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain, the largest civil insurrection in United States history since the Civil War and one that saw the U.S. government calling upon the military to put down the uprising. The musical adaptation was written by Katy Blake, Peter Davenport, Tracy Lawrence and Flip Anderson.



Opposite page: Carrie Bishop (played by Allison McCartan) leads miners carrying her husband Albion's body after his murder by a coal company guard in a scene from Storming Heaven: The Musical, presented at West Virginia Public Theatre.

Lehman Engel, in his seminal 1972 musical theatre text, *Words with Music*, noted that the practice of adapting musicals from works in other media “is not an evil one, nor is it new. The only ‘trick’ – and it is a

neat one if it works – is to recognize what properties contain the germs of useful ideas and then what needs to be accomplished in conversion. That is all; but it is a mighty all.”

How did the adapters of these distinct West Virginia sagas – one a movie and the other a novel – find the “germs of useful ideas” that would transform them into musical theatre? The accounts are as different as the works themselves.

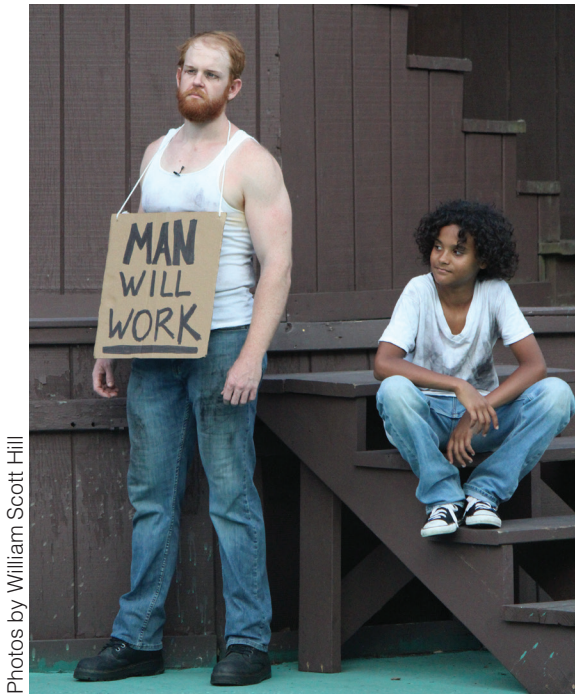
PARADISE PARK:

TAKING A FILM TO THE STAGE

William Scott Hill (known as Scott) was in his 20s when he and his mother attended the first screening of the film *Paradise Park* at the Civic Center Little Theatre in Charleston, WV, in 1992. At that time, Hill ran six retail pet stores in the state. During the next 20 years, his gift of gab (Hill won second place in the 2009 Liars Contest at West Virginia’s annual Vandalia Gathering festival) – combined with his experience promoting blood drives and speaking at community events as a donor-recruiting representative for the Red Cross – led him into the field of promotion and marketing.

In 2013, Theatre West Virginia, a long-established

One of the trailer park residents, *Man Will Work* (played by Kevin Stokes), sings “Something for Nothing,” a song that contrasts his pride with his humiliation, as his son (played by Jeremiah Allen) looks on in this scene from *Paradise Park*, presented at Theatre West Virginia.



Photos by William Scott Hill

Connecting Candidates with Theatre Graduate Programs

Auditions and Interviews

December 2-4, 2020 | Virtual Event

Low Cost Registration | 7th Annual LiNK

Dozens of Colleges & Universities Attending Interview Areas:

- > Design & Technology
- > Acting
- > Arts Admin., Management, and Directing



Register Now

setc.org/link or usitt.org/link

Registration Deadline: Midnight 11/5/20

outdoor theatre located 17 miles from Hill's hometown of Ghent, was on the verge of bankruptcy. The Board of Directors had all resigned, and the 2014 season was in jeopardy. One of the theatre's long-time supporters came to Hill and asked him if he'd consider running the company and reviving its fortunes.

"I said I didn't know anything about theatre," Hill recalled. "And he said, 'That's okay. They need a promoter.'"

Hill accepted the job, while recognizing that he knew a lot more about pet shops and the Red Cross than about theatre.

"When I first started at Theatre West Virginia, I could tell you plenty of things about a guppy, but not a whole lot about producing plays," he said. "That first season was like attending a theatre university. I definitely learned about theatre – but also about thunder, lightning, bears and racoons!"

Paradise Park the musical entered the picture as a result of one of Hill's other ventures. In addition to serving as managing director for Theatre West Virginia, Hill also promoted and managed the Rocket Boy Festival, an annual celebration of West Virginia native Homer Hickham, whose autobiography, *The*



Governor Harless, the fictional governor of West Virginia (played by Andy Woodruff), sings "Plates on a Stick," expressing his frustration with his job and comparing it to juggling plates, in this scene from Paradise Park, presented at Theatre West Virginia.

Rocket Boys, was made into the successful 1999 motion picture *October Sky*. Hill had never forgotten watching *Paradise Park* more than a decade earlier, and he had invited its writer and director, Danny Boyd, to be a guest at the festival.

"I told him that his movie was my favorite," Hill recalled. "He got tired of hearing it from me, and he told me that the film rights were for sale."

Hill met with Larry Kopelman, a Charleston

PERFORMANCE WITH **PASSION**

DEAN COLLEGE SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

- Hone your craft as an actor
- Serious musical theatre "triple-threat" training in acting, voice and dance
- Learn the business of the Biz
- Sink your teeth into production design and management skills
- Enjoy master classes and coaching taught by agents and industry professionals
- Production and performance opportunities from day one



DEAN.EDU/AUDITIONS

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
 Dean College – School of the Arts
 99 Main Street, Franklin, MA 02038
 1-877-TRY-DEAN • dean.edu/arts



Scott Hill (above) bought the rights to Paradise Park while working at Theatre West Virginia. "I thought, 'Wait a second, I'm managing a theatre company. I own this movie. Let's do something!'"

attorney who, at the time, owned the film rights, and a deal was struck.

"So, now I had the rights to this movie," Hill recalled. "I thought, 'Wait a second, I'm managing a theatre company. I own this movie. Let's do something!'"

Hill approached Boyd, the professor who had written the film, and suggested that he turn the script into a musical for the stage. Boyd talked to Larry Groce, who had collaborated with him on the film version, and Groce agreed to write the music for the musical. The adaptation process began.

One of the things Hill realized early on was the need to get out of the way and let the artists do their work. It was a learning experience for everyone involved.

"When we first did the movie back in 1992, we called it a 'Hillbilly Opera,' so it was, in some ways, already a musical – really a film with a lot of music in it," Boyd said. "So, we jumped into the idea, even though we knew we didn't have any real familiarity with writing for the stage."

Boyd ordered a playwriting textbook on Amazon to learn what he could about writing for the theatre.

"I was a screenwriter and film director and, to be

honest, I was never that enthusiastic about theatre," he said. "I was a film guy and really didn't enjoy going to plays. But, moving to this medium, I've found it totally liberating."

The "nuts-and-bolts first step" for Groce and Boyd was watching the movie together and making decisions on what would work on stage and what needed to be cut or eliminated.

"At the same time, we looked for places where there should be a song and places where there might be a song," Groce said. "Our ideas about this, thankfully, were in basic agreement. We noted many possibilities for songs. In the end, I wrote the possibilities that seemed absolutely necessary and that most inspired me."

Despite the fact that the film takes place within a 24-hour period, Boyd knew he had to make substantial modifications if he was going to turn it into a musical. And the script changed constantly during the creative process.

"We cut a lot of characters out, we had to combine a lot of characters, but, overall, I don't think there is a whole lot that I miss from the movie," he said.

Boyd's biggest adjustment was figuring out how many stage directions to include.

ACCADEMIA DELL'ARTE
TUSCANY, ITALY

Study abroad in one of the most inspiring locations you can imagine.

SPRING 2021
DEVISING & PHYSICAL THEATRE

- **Early Bird Discount:** \$2,000 off! ... *plus*
- **11 Scholarships:** \$2,500-\$5,500 ... *plus*
- **15 Course Credits!**

apply by November 1 at:
dellarte.it
questions? email: info@dellarte.it





How much do you know about Musical Theatre Adaptations?

See answers on Page 28

1. Over a dozen Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals have been based on comics or comic strips. Name five “comic musicals” and match each to one of the following composers or lyricists:
Charles Strouse, Johnny Mercer, Elizabeth Swados, Bono and The Edge, or Andrew Lippa.
2. It’s estimated that over 150 musicals have been produced on Broadway that were based on movies. Fourteen have won the Tony Award for Best Musical. Name 10 of them.
3. Shakespeare’s plays have always been ripe for musical adaptations. Some have been successful, some not so much. Name the five musical adaptations that enjoyed the MOST performances on Broadway and the Shakespeare play each was based on.
Bonus: What were the two Off-Broadway “Shakespeare” musicals that ran for more than 900 performances and what plays were they based on?
4. Name the three Broadway musical adaptations that won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the books they were based on.
5. Name the original title of the musical adaptation of Truman Capote’s 1958 novella, which closed after only four Broadway previews.
Bonus: Who were the two unlikely television stars who starred in this ill-fated musical? And who was the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright brought in for rewrites?

“When I wrote the first draft of the stage play, I overdid the instructions to the actors and director and they all told me, ‘Dude, too much description!’” he said. “So, I’ve learned in later drafts to cut back on that!”

STORMING HEAVEN: A NOVEL BECOMES A MUSICAL

Giardina’s experience with the development process was markedly different from Boyd’s because she wasn’t directly involved in the creation of the musical based on her book. The novel *Storming Heaven* had attracted some interest from film and television studios at the time it was published in 1987. David Wolper (producer of *Roots*) acquired the rights and wanted to turn it into a TV mini-series but couldn’t raise the money.

In the late 1990s, the television network TNT bought the rights to the book, and John Frankenheimer, the director of such films as *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Birdman of Alcatraz*, was set to direct. He died before the project could proceed, but a script was written, which Giardina describes as “horrible.”

“It was completely stereotypical – hillbillies on the front porch with a hound dog and a jug of moonshine – and it went downhill from there,” she said.

The TV script cut characters and completely changed their story lines. Then, as many Hollywood

projects go, it just died.

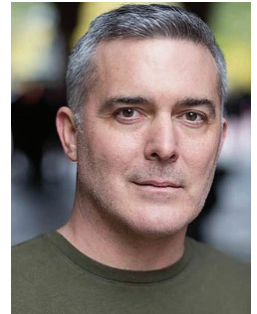
“Nothing happened for a long, long time,” Giardina said. “And [in 2013], I got a call from my agent saying that a couple of people – Katy Blake and Peter Davenport – were interested in turning it into a musical.”

Blake, an actress and songwriter, grew up in southwest Virginia, studied theatre at Virginia Tech and had been looking for a story that would reflect her interest in country music and Appalachian history. A family friend had recommended that she read Giardina’s novel, and it blew her away.

“I read the book, and it really sang to me!” she said. “I was hearing the sound of the music as I was reading, and I thought, ‘This is it; this is the story we had to tell and develop into a musical.’”

Blake had met Davenport when they were both performing in a short-lived Off-Broadway musical, and she knew that she wanted him to collaborate. Davenport, a native of Michigan who had played lead roles in Broadway touring companies, jumped at the chance to work on a project with Blake.

They approached Giardina’s literary agent about developing a musical from the book. The agent described their adaptation idea as “a musical with a happy ending” when she presented it to Giardina, leading Giardina to picture something that would



Peter Davenport, co-writer with Katy Blake of Storming Heaven: The Musical, notes that they found it important to draw from the novel by Denise Giardina, focusing “very specifically on the language and the culture, the people of West Virginia – there is such a musicality to the colloquial language Denise uses.”

play in Dollywood or Branson. The agent conveyed Giardina's skepticism to Blake and Davenport, but they insisted on speaking directly with Giardina.

"We took her out to dinner in Charleston and basically convinced her of what we wanted to do and that we were the people to do it," Blake recalled.

Their sincerity and respect for her novel were persuasive, and Giardina agreed to give them a two-year option to adapt the book into a musical: "I told them to go for it!"

Turning a 300-page novel into a musical has its own set of challenges. Both Giardina and Davenport were aware of the difficulties. Blake was confident but acknowledges that the process involved plenty of changes and revisions.

"When we were writing the first draft of the script, we did try to stay a lot more faithful to the novel," Blake said. "After a reading we did with friends, we realized that we were trying to do too much.

We had to make cuts and condense. We focused the narrative around one central character (which does not happen in the novel) and tried to tell her story and reduce the plot timeline down to 2 ½ years."

Giardina didn't mind the cuts and revisions. She knew a lot would have to change.

"A lot had to be lost – including a number of characters," Giardina said. "It was like shrinking it down to size. But they've done an amazing job of keeping the high points, keeping the bones of the story. They were able to focus on what was most important."

The process wasn't always easy for Giardina, who thought of her novel as "her baby."

"That was nerve-wracking for me," she said. "I knew there was going to be a lot lost – but with each revision, I've been pleasantly surprised at how much they've been able to stay true to the story."

Davenport says that adapting a novel

to the stage is much more difficult than working with a film.

"So many movies are being adapted for the stage these days, and that may be a little easier because the story has already been told using actors in a limited time frame," he said. "As a writer, you have to know the forms you're working in – whether it's theatre or film. And you write very differently for different media. Adapting this book for theatre, we have a captive audience for 2 ½ hours and that includes a 15-minute intermission. You have to work within that range."

Blake and Davenport went through Giardina's novel chapter by chapter and noted the most important events and characters. They broke down the action, plot, characters, conflict, and, as Davenport puts it, "we also focused very specifically on the language and the culture, the people of West Virginia – there is such a musicality to the colloquial language Denise uses."



Department of Drama and Dance



- ▶ **B.A. in Drama** (no audition required)
- ▶ **B.F.A. in Theater Arts** with specializations in Performance | Directing | Stage Management | Technical Direction
Costume, Scenic, Lighting and Sound Design
- ▶ **Interdisciplinary Minor in Musical Theater**

For program and scholarship information, contact: The Department of Drama and Dance
516-463-5444 | hofstra.edu/drama-dance

Hofstra University's Drama Program voted one of the "9 Great New York Acting Schools and Universities"

-Backstage

SONG, SONG, SONG: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN A MUSICAL

The most obvious difference between musicals and books or nonmusical films is the inclusion of songs. Songs can move the plot along, aid in character development and illustrate conflict.

Blake notes that the job of book writers and songwriters is to find those places in the story where the moment is ripe – whether from conflict or character motivation – for a song. If dramatic dialogue in a play is “language under pressure,” then a song is an example of that pressure being released musically.

“Whenever we found ourselves writing long passages or the character was getting to a very emotional place, we were like, okay – this is where the song is,” Blake said.

For example, Giardina remembers a scene with the coal camp doctor, Doc Booker, in *Storming Heaven* the novel.

“I took several pages to give his back-

TIPS FROM THE ADAPTERS ON CREATING A MUSICAL FROM OTHER SOURCE MATERIAL

The adapters of *Paradise Park* and *Storming Heaven: The Musical* share lessons learned and tips for writers and composers who might be thinking of creating a musical from other source materials:



DANNY BOYD, writer of the screenplay and the musical *Paradise Park*

- ◆ If you're working with another script or book, sit down with your songwriter and, together, “spot” the places where songs might fit. This may change later, but it will give you some preliminary ideas of pace and rhythm. And, in the back of your mind, be thinking, “Don't say it – sing it!”
- ◆ Be flexible and be willing to make changes during rehearsals.
- ◆ Above all: Trust your director – their suggestions will almost always make the work better.



LARRY GROCE, songwriter for the film and the musical *Paradise Park*

- ◆ Get intimately familiar with the original work. If you are adapting a work that you were not involved in creating, it will call for some serious commitment to the material. Do your best to try to stay with the story and spirit of the original work.
- ◆ Find opportunities for songs to enrich characterization of the original work or even introduce theme elements that were not in the original work but are compatible with it.



DENISE GIARDINA, author of the book *Storming Heaven*

- ◆ Adapters should consider they are adapting a work for a reason: On some level, the original worked. Its integrity must be respected.
- ◆ If you're adapting something created by a living writer or artist, be nice, be respectful, and keep lines of communication open. Adapters should be aware that if the original creator feels the integrity of her work has been compromised, she may have the power to pull the plug when the option is up for renewal.



KATY BLAKE, co-writer of *Storming Heaven: The Musical*

- ◆ Remember, if you are adapting a book or even a film to musical theatre, that live theatre has different challenges than film or novels. Film can jump in time and setting easily. Novels cover years and years in time and/or can give the reader insights into characters' thoughts. If you write with that at the forefront and keep it in mind as you are structuring your story, you will avoid issues like impossible scene or costume changes or long passages of exposition with no action.
- ◆ Work with people you want to be your family because once you start creating a piece, it's like creating a baby. And the writers are the parents. So, even if you want a divorce, you still have to find a way to co-parent and do what's best for your baby!



Arts People

Software for the Performing Arts

Sell tickets & classes,
manage marketing & members,
and everything in between.



Priced for non-profits with
complete, world-class
support included.

Get in touch for a demo
www.Arts-People.com

Ask us about our
partnership with NeonCRM

Made by and for people
who believe in the positive
power of the arts

a Neon One company

story," she said. "In the musical, Katy and Peter wrote a song about it. He just sings his story – a poor Black kid from Mississippi, walking to Washington, DC, putting himself through Howard University and becoming a doctor – and it works well, I think. It works as character development."

Giardina compares the songs in a musical to Shakespeare's soliloquys: "Just like in the real world, people don't break out into song, they also didn't go around talking to themselves and proclaiming verse in Shakespeare's time. It's the same kind of thing in a musical. And it works."

In adapting Giardina's novel, Blake and Davenport did not tie themselves to one particular musical genre. But they knew that the songs had to embody the spirit of Appalachia – a melting pot of Irish and Scottish traditional ballads, African American blues, and, of course, country music.

Blake had several connections in Nashville, and that's how she first became involved with Flip Anderson and Tracy Lawrence. Both men have had successful careers in the recording and music publishing business and were more than willing to collaborate with Blake and Davenport. Even before Giardina was approached, Blake had discussed the idea of writing a musical about coal mining, and the group had gotten together for a couple of songwriting sessions. The work continued as Blake and Davenport started adapting the novel for the stage. All four shared in the writing of the music for *Storming Heaven: The Musical*.

"In Nashville, it's kind of an unwritten rule that whoever is in the room when the song is written shares the credit for the songwriting," Blake said. "The writing credits for the songs as they are in the musical now are broken down with that in mind so there are some songs written by Flip, Tracy and me, some by Flip and me, some by Peter and me, and some by all four of us."

Each of the collaborators contributed

a particular expertise to the work, Blake said: "Flip and Tracy brought that country songwriting/storytelling style to the music, and Peter and I helped shape the songs to fit the needs of a musical theatre piece. In other words, in country music, a whole story can be told in roughly three minutes. In theatre, the music needs to forward the story plot line from point A to point B. The great thing about working with Flip and Tracy is there is always a sense of collaboration and shared ideas. Flip would usually come up with some chords, Tracy and I would hum out some melodies, and we all would push each other to get the best lyrics we could for the song we were working on at the time."

Working on *Paradise Park*, Daniel Boyd also found the music critical to the characters' development. He says Larry Groce, the film's musical composer, was a godsend: "Larry went much deeper into our characters with the songs he wrote."

After Boyd and Groce developed a basic blueprint for the musical, Boyd continued editing the script and Groce began writing songs.

"As I wrote," Groce recalled, "my aim was always to have the song replace pages of dialogue, and I often used words and phrases from the script in the songs. I always used ideas from the script."

An example of that, Groce said, is the governor's song when he visits the trailer park to make a pitch for his new economic development plan.

"It's a fairly long scene in the movie because the park folks give him a hard time and there is a good deal of back and forth," Groce said. "In the musical, the governor does all the singing, but he incorporates their accusations along with his defenses. It lightens up the scene but does not totally disarm the anger of the crowd."

Groce also added some commentary on Appalachian culture that wasn't a focus in the film.

"The best example of this is a song where a reclusive mother with an autistic child fantasizes that her husband, who

has deserted her, comes back,” Groce says. “He explains that he didn’t really leave her, but he and his son have both been away

serving in the armed forces. The song he sings is about how the hillbillies are the ones who always fight the wars that ruling

THINKING OF ADAPTING A MUSICAL FROM OTHER SOURCES?

What You Need to Know About the Law

Copyright laws are complex. So, before you dive into a project, you need to learn about the legal issues involved in adapting properties into musicals. The U.S. Copyright Office has published a useful pamphlet, *Copyright in Derivative Works and Compilations, Circular #14*, which is available at www.copyright.gov/circs/circ14.pdf. This document defines a derivative work as something “based on or derived from one or more already existing works. Common derivative works include translations, musical arrangements, motion picture versions of literary material or plays, art reproductions, abridgments, and condensations of preexisting works.”

The owner or owners of the original material or those who have obtained exclusive rights are, generally speaking, the only ones who have the authority to revise or permit another party to adapt their work. If you use copyrighted material without permission – just like performing a copyrighted play without permission of the owner of the performance rights – you are infringing upon someone’s intellectual property.

Here are three important legal “Do’s” to remember as you begin an adaptation:

1 Do spend time researching who has rights to the work and seek their permission.

Write to the agent, the publisher, the writer, the studio – whoever holds the rights to the work you hope to adapt.

2 Do wait until you have formal, written permission from the holder of the rights to begin your work.

Katy Blake, co-writer of *Storming Heaven: The Musical*, has close friends who did an adaptation on spec and were later turned down when they requested derivative rights. A few years later, a very successful Broadway musical was produced from the original material – and her friends were left with nothing.

“I knew from that experience that, before we even started doing anything with *Storming Heaven*, we had to get permission,” Blake said. “If you’re using source material – you MUST get the rights to develop it. Otherwise, you are spinning your wheels. You can put all this work into it, and nothing can happen.”

3 Do be careful with works you believe are in the public domain.

You generally are free to adapt works that are in the public domain – such as those that were never copyrighted or whose copyrights have expired. This includes works by Dickens and Shakespeare, for example. However, translations, copyrighted revisions and other versions of public domain works may still be protected. Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is in the public domain, but the Cambridge edition is not. Similarly, you can adapt Moliere’s *The Misanthrope* into a musical – but don’t use Richard Wilbur’s 1954 English translation without permission.

Looking for more information?

One excellent source of information on copyright in general and what is and is not in the public domain is the website www.copyrightlaws.com.



MSMT
Costumes
MAINE STATE MUSIC THEATRE

Costume Rental
Packages for
Musical Theatre

www.msmtcostumes.org
rentals@msmt.org | 207-208-8950





ANSWERS to questions in opening paragraph of story:

The five longest-running plays in Broadway history are:

1. *Phantom of the Opera*, based on the Gaston Leroux novel of the same name.
2. *Chicago* (the revival), based on the 1926 play by Maurine Dallas Watkins.
3. *The Lion King*, based on the 1994 Disney movie.
4. *Cats*, based on *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, a series of poems by T.S. Eliot.
5. *Wicked*, based on the 1995 novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* by Gregory Maguire. Maguire's novel was based on the 1900 book by L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and the MGM film adaptation.

ANSWERS to quiz on Page 23:

1. a. Charles Strouse – *Annie* OR *It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Superman*.
 b. Johnny Mercer – *Lil' Abner*.
 c. Elizabeth Swados – *Doonesbury*.
 d. Bono and The Edge – *Spider-Man: Turn Off The Dark*.
 e. Andrew Lippa – *The Addams Family*.
2. *Nine*, *The Band's Visit*, *Kinky Boots*, *Once*, *Billy Elliot: The Musical*, *Spamalot*, *Hairspray*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *The Producers*, *The Lion King*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Passion*, *A Little Night Music*, *Applause*.
3. a. *Kiss Me Kate*, based on *The Taming of the Shrew* – 1,077 performances.
 b. *West Side Story*, based on *Romeo and Juliet* – 732 performances.
 c. *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, based on *Two Gentlemen of Verona* – 614 performances.
 d. *The Boys from Syracuse*, based on *The Comedy of Errors* – 235 performances.
 e. *All Shook Up*, based on *Twelfth Night* – 213 performances.

Bonus:

- a. *The Donkey Show*, based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – 2,496 performances.
- b. *Your Own Thing*, based on *Twelfth Night* – 937 performances.
4. a. *South Pacific*, based on James Michener's *Tales of South Pacific*.
 b. *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, based on the book of the same name by Shepherd Mead.
 c. *Hamilton*, based on Ron Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton*.

[Note: Some musical theatre historians point out that *Fiorello!*, winner of the 1960 Pulitzer Prize, was loosely based on Ernest Cuneo's *Life with Fiorello*, although he was never credited.]

5. *Holly Golightly*, based on *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Bonus:

TV stars: Mary Tyler Moore, Richard Chamberlain.
 Playwright: Edward Albee.

class leaders get us into. This theme was not really in the movie."

Throughout his work on the music, Groce sought out Boyd's opinion.

"I tried to write the songs in the order of when they came in the plot," he said. "As I would finish each, I'd send the lyrics to Danny to approve or suggest changes. He never vetoed a song but, in a couple of cases, he asked me to include something that I had left out. The entire process went very smoothly."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE ADAPTERS: COVID-19 AND BEYOND

The creators of both *Storming Heaven: The Musical* and *Paradise Park* consider the musicals to be in the development stage, and they have ambitious plans for their works. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has played havoc with those plans.

Katy Blake and Peter Davenport were able to extend their agreement with Giardina for an additional three years. Before the pandemic paralyzed the arts world, Blake and Davenport were actively working with collaborators Tracy Lawrence and Flip Anderson on a concept album to help market *Storming Heaven: The Musical*. The album, which they had hoped to produce in Nashville in spring 2020, is now on hold – as are their hopes for another regional production in a bigger city.

They've been discussing further development of the musical with a licensing agency but, as Blake pointed out in a recent email, "Theatres have very few ideas of how to present live theatre in the time of COVID. Peter and I are continuing to hone and craft our story and script, and our hope is that once things open back up, we will be in an ideal position to get this show produced again and keep moving forward toward a Broadway production."

The creators of *Paradise Park* are facing similar issues. Danny Boyd's agreement with Theatre West Virginia gives the company one-third ownership of *Paradise Park* – and until July 2019, the show could be performed only at Theatre West Virginia.

Boyd and his collaborator Larry Groce

produced a cast album of the 2018 *Paradise Park* production at Theatre West Virginia and were using that as a marketing tool until the COVID-19 pandemic shut down most theatres. They had succeeded in booking a production of *Paradise Park* for late June 2020 in Charleston, WV (to be produced by a local community theatre as part of a 10-day annual arts festival), but it was canceled due to the pandemic. Boyd and Groce hope that it can be rescheduled for the summer of 2021.

They are currently collaborating on a children's musical, *Miss Dirt Turtle's Garden Club*, based on Boyd's experience over the past 10 years organizing a small community garden in his neighborhood. They hope to finish the play this fall. Boyd also has completed a musical adaptation of his science fiction comedy film *Strangest Dreams: Invasion of the Space Preachers* (released by Troma Entertainment in 1990) with Charleston-based music composer Mark Scarpelli. It is scheduled for production at the Alban Art Center in St. Albans, WV, in spring 2021.

Giardina has long had an interest in theatre and has even acted in a handful of community theatre productions. She has recently made the transition from writing novels to trying her hand as a playwright. Her most recent work, *Robert and Ted*, focuses on the relationship between U.S. Senators Robert Byrd and Ted Kennedy. She is seeking a theatre to produce it so she can collaborate directly with directors, producers and actors to flesh out the play.

Giardina is also working on a play about historical figures General Smedley Butler and John W. Davis. Butler was a decorated Marine who later renounced his past and became an outspoken critic of war and capitalism. Davis is the only West Virginian ever to run for President (he lost the 1924 election to incumbent Calvin Coolidge in a landslide). After Davis left politics and became a Wall Street attorney, Butler accused him and others of leading a 1933 coup d'état to overthrow Franklin Roosevelt as President. The conspiracy was

never proved and became known as "The Business Plot." Giardina hopes to complete the play by the end of 2020.

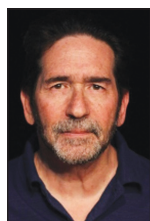
Closely following the process of turning her novel into a musical has helped her become a better playwright, she believes.

"One of the things I love most about doing theatre is the collaboration," Giardina said. "Other artists will see things that you never even imagined. There are so many moving parts and so many people that get to be responsible for different bits and pieces of it coming together into a whole vision. You're working with designers who create environments on stage and directors who describe through their art – so you can let all of that go – and, for me, I can just concentrate on dialogue."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Even as the coronavirus keeps Broadway closed, dreams of creating new musicals from diverse source material remain alive. Former Beatle Sir Paul McCartney is at work on a musical adaptation of the film *It's a Wonderful Life*. Other musical adaptations in the works for Broadway include *Archie*, a musical based on the Archie comic book; *The Honeyymooners*, adapted from the popular 1950s television show; and *Josephine*, based on Stephen Papich's biography of Josephine Baker. And who knows what Disney will be adapting in the years to come, as theatre returns to the stage? Perhaps *Black Panther: The Musical*? How about *Star Wars*?

One thing seems certain: An increasing percentage of Broadway musicals will be based on previously written and visual media. Why invent the wheel if it's been used successfully before? And how many of us have said, at one time or another, "Wouldn't this make a great musical?" Perhaps it will. ■



David Wohl is professor and dean emeritus at Winthrop University and a past president of SETC. Recently retired, he lives in Kiawah Island, SC, serves on the local arts council, and is an occasional actor and arts consultant.

Kean University Theatre Conservatory



Four Theatre Degrees

BA Theatre
BA Theatre with Teacher Certification
BFA Theatre Performance
BFA Theatre Design/Tech



Why Kean?

30 Minutes from NYC
NAST Accreditation
Small Class Sizes
Professional Theatre in Residence,
Premiere Stages
Guest Artists: Billy Porter, Gavin Lee,
Laura Osnes
Musical Theatre Degree Coming Soon!

Bring Your Love of Theatre To Life
www.Kean.edu

