



Holy Smokers!

or: Come to the Cabaret

BMI Workshop In-House Cabarets Play to SRO Crowds

Three years ago, Advanced Workshop moderator and two-time Tony Award-Winning composer-lyricist **Maury Yeston** had an idea that wouldn't quit. The subject of how to get more public exposure for BMI writers was being discussed at a Committee meeting. And Yeston (whose musical "**Titanic**" is currently breaking house records with its first national tour and preparing for International productions in Japan, Holland, England, Germany and Australia) remembered back to his undergraduate days in Great Britain at Cambridge University, where as a member of the **Footlights Club** (spawning ground for **Monty Python**, **Beyond the Fringe** and later, **Emma Thompson**), he and his fellow students wrote and performed original songs and sketches solely for their own amusement. A short year

after the debut of the Footlights Club, seats to these "Smokers," as the revues were called, were at a premium—and British theater insiders got their first glimpse of the new generation of extraordinarily talented writers and performers.

"We should do the same thing at **BMI**," Yeston said emphatically. "We've got some of the most tal-

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I Don't Do Exposition

by **Patrick Cook**

Treat Williams told me the following story:

A few weeks before a film shoot, Steve McQueen sent the script back to the writer with a number of his lines crossed out. The writer called McQueen and asked why he had crossed out the lines. McQueen replied, "I don't do exposition."

Exposition – the facts, the setting, the background of the characters that the audience needs to know to follow the story. Sometimes I find myself so frustrated by it that I consider giving the audience a pamphlet to read before the show starts.

One of my favorite examples of exposition is Act I, Scene 3 from "West Side Story" – the two page scene in the bridal shop that introduces the characters of Maria, Anita, and Chino. In *two pages* this is the information we get:

- 1) Maria is an innocent young Puerto Rican girl who has been brought to this country by her brother Bernardo.
- 2) She works in a bridal shop with Anita, who is Bernardo's girlfriend.
- 3) Maria has been brought here to marry Chino. But Maria does not love Chino and does not really want to marry him.
- 4) Maria and Anita are very close

and Anita is very protective of Maria.

- 5) Anita and Bernardo are in love and have quite a steamy relationship.
- 6) Anita is a realist – very sexual, very sharp.
- 7) They have been in America for a month and Maria is bored and anxious for adventure.
- 8) They are all going to a dance that night, and it is Maria's first social outing in America.
- 9) Bernardo loves his sister Maria and is very protective of her and Anita.

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**BMI-Lehman Engel
Musical Theatre Workshop**

Jean Banks – Senior Director

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Frank Evans
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Walter Edgar ("Skip") Kennon
Annette Leisten
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David Spencer
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Works

In Production:

AMERICAN GIRL REVIEW

A seventy-five minute musical, based on the **American Girl** books, commissioned by the Chicago retailer, **American Girl Place**, written by composer **Nancy Ford** (Advanced) and lyricist-librettist **Gretchen Cryer** (BMI affiliate), currently playing a unique venue: a 35,000 square foot American Girl emporium in the thriving shopping center of Chicago's Michigan Boulevard. The production features characters from American history and is aimed at an audience of 8- to 12-year-old girls and their parents. As the chain opens stores in other cities, new companies of the show will open concurrently. Ford told the newsletter, "The show was particularly fun for me to write because it involved characters from six different periods in history: 1774, 1824, 1854, 1904 and 1944." The Chicago production uses two casts and does sixteen performances weekly. Orchestrated by **Bruce Coughlin** ("On the Town," "Parade" and "Annie Get Your Gun") the show has just been recorded and produced by **Thomas Z. Shepard** (alumnus and 12-time Grammy winner). Cryer and Ford are starting work on a second show, "**American Girls Revue II**," featuring the same characters but using different stories from the American Girl books.

MIAMI BEACH MONSTERS

A new revue that answers the musical question: what happens to horror movie icons (**Dracula**, **Frankenstein's Monster**, etc.) after they go into retirement? Conceived and directed by **Helen** ("**That's Life**") **Butleroff** (non-member), the production features material by Workshop members **David Strickland** (Advanced), **Ellen Schwartz** (Advanced), **Jane Smulyan** (Committee), **David Metee** (alumnus), **Georgia Holof** (alumnus) and **Brad Ross** (alumnus). Debut is set for April 15 at **Queens Playhouse in the Park**.

ARTS AND ARTISTS AT ST.

PAULS presents SONGBOOK

On January 26, 1999, the monthly series featured songs by composer-lyricists **Lewis Flynn** (non-member) and **Clay Zambo** (Advanced). Flynn's work was Act One, Zambo's was Act Two, and the venue was The Donnell Library Auditorium, 20 West 53rd Street, NYC.

HIDDEN VOICES

A tribute to vocal doubles and the movie stars they dubbed. "**Hidden Voices**" played at Don't Tell Mama. The revue was performed by **Milla Ilieva** (non-member) with pianist/arranger/musical director **Jeffrey Chappell** (Advanced).

THE HISTORY MYSTERY

An hour-long family musical about time-travel adventure, was

presented by **TADA! Theatre** on March 12-28, Music by **Eric Rockwell** (Advanced), lyrics by **Margaret Rose** (Advanced).

THE LAST SUPPER

A controversial new musical theater rendering of the title event, that played during Lent at the Theater at Saint Peter's Church and during Holy Week at the Seven Angels Theater in Connecticut, in which Jesus Christ is specifically depicted as Jewish and ultimately sings in Hebrew. Music by **Gary William Friedman** (alumnus), book and lyrics by **Thomas Mitz** (non-member). The score will be published by Samuel French and is available on CD. To order, send \$16.95 to Seafarers and International House/Maritime Ministry of Southern New England/123 East 15th Street, New York, NY 10003. (Mr. Friedman received an Obie Award, a Drama Critics Circle Award and a Tony nomination for his score of "The Me Nobody Knows."

LEW & THE NIGHT & THE MUSIC

A celebration of the work of composer-lyricist **Lew Spence** (alumnus), who came to the BMI workshop with a catalog of standards (among them *That Face*, written for **Fred Astaire**, and *Nice 'n' Easy*, written for **Frank Sinatra**). He learned the craft of musical theater writing from Lehman Engel, and was working with **Burton Lane** on a musical based on the Actors' Equity strike just before Lane's untimely death.

His songs have been recorded by **Barbra Streisand**, **Peggy Lee**, **Rosemary Clooney**, **Nat King Cole** and **Bobby Short**, to name a few. "Lew & the Night & the Music" was presented at Danny's Skylight Room on March 7 and 8, 1999, with a roster of guest performers that included Musical Director **Tex Arnold**, **Joyce Breach**, **Eric Comstock**, **Gerry Dieffenbach**, **Jane Scheckter**, and our own **Jane Smulyan**.

MOSTLY MUSIC BY SOMEBODY ELSE

Advanced workshop composer **Nancy Ford**'s first-ever solo cabaret show played an exclusive two week engagement in February at the **Firedbird Cafe**. Her song *Old Friend* from the musical "I'm Getting My Act Together And Taking It on the Road" (written in collaboration with lyricist-librettist **Gretchen Cryer**) has become an anthem for the cabaret community. In "Mostly Music by Somebody Else," audiences were finally able to hear Ms. Ford perform it herself. Ford, a longtime veteran of the musical theatre, has written other works in collaboration with Ms. Cryer including "Shelter," "Now is the Time for All Good Men," and the legendary "The Last, Sweet Days of Isaac."

STAGE LEFT

A new play by **Isadore Elias** (Advanced), was given a staged reading by the **42nd Street Workshop**. The evening was made up of four short works about people

out of the theatre.

TAKE IT LIKE AMANDA

A one-woman show of original songs, written and performed by **Amanda Green** (Second Year), Saturdays in March at the Laurie Beechman Theatre at the West-bank Café, 407 West 42nd Street.

In Progress:

HUNGRY?

A new musical, book and lyrics by **Cassie Angley** (Advanced), music by **C. Colby Sachs** (Advanced), which was produced at **H.E.R.E.** space last March, had a new reading January 31st under the ægis of the **Coffee Clutch Playwrights Workshop**.

SUGAR DUMPLING

The musical by librettist-lyricist **Cheryl Davis** (Advanced) and composer **C. Colby Sachs** (Advanced) will be having a workshop reading at CAP21 on May 23rd. ("Peace," a song from the score, was performed by **Christianne Noll** as part of the **TRULove** cabaret benefit on March 8th.)

SUNNY

A new musical by **John thomas Oaks** (First Year) based on a modern-day "Prodigal Daughter" story as told by Tommy Oaks, will be produced by **Blue Ridge Community Theatre** under the direction of **Dr. Janet Speer** at **Appalachian State University** in

Boone NC, May 6-9, 1999.

A LITTLE PRINCESS

Music by **Eric Rockwell** (Advanced), lyrics by **Margaret Rose** (Advanced), book by **William J. Brooke** (alumnus, LA) has three presentations this spring. A staged reading of the full show will take place on Monday March 29 at 7:00 pm at the Dramatists Guild (1501 Broadway, Suite 710) and on Monday April 5 at 7:00 pm at TADA! (120 West 28th Street). To obtain reservations or information, call 212-581-8205. Then, on Tuesday, April 6 at 5:00 pm at the Dramatists Guild (1501 Broadway, Suite 710), an abbreviated version will be presented as part of the **Dramatists Guild Musical Theater Development Program**. For reservations and information, call 212-398-9366.

UDDER MADNESS

A madcap musical farce for children of all ages, featuring a score by **C. Colby Sachs**, was produced February 1999 by **Playful Theatre Productions** at the **Kelsey Playhouse** in New Jersey.

Personals

Composer and Lyricist or **Composer-Lyricist** sought for collaboration with book writer on an original musical based on 20th Century European classic drama. Non-profit Manhattan-based theatre company. Call (212) 399-2524.

Composer Wanted: message reads, "Got the book—got the lyrics—need the music for eleven songs in a contemporary Two-Act Musical Play set in Manhattan." Call Nina Reiter, or leave message, at (212) 582-3568.

Seeking Lyricist/Librettist for a sung-through musical adaptation of a classical text. "Enthusiasm for collaboration a must! New York area residency most practical." Fax or e-mail letter and resume to: Crystal Theater Productions (212) 582-1552, crystepro@aol.com.

Shelf Life

STAR QUEEN

The cast CD recording of **John Thomas Oaks'** first musical, which tells the story of Queen Esther, is available at Tower Records, HMV, and Footlight Records, as well as from Original Cast Records: Box 496, Georgetown CT 06829. The CD is also available from the songwriter himself: call (718) 836-1004 or e-mail hahaworld@aol.com.

And the Winner Is...

Amanda Green (Second Year) is the winner of a **1999 Bistro Award** (given to acknowledge cabaret excellence) in the **Outstanding Special Material/Comedy Song** category for her song *Every Time a Friend Succeeds...*

Dan Martin (Advanced) and **Michael Biello** (Advanced) are advisors to **GLAMA (The Gay/Lesbian American Music Awards)** which will hold their 4th annual ceremony Monday, April 12th at the Manhattan Center. Awards will honor recordings in more than a dozen genres including Original Cast Recording and Cabaret. Martin and Biello will present their special annual **Outmusic Award** to BMI-affiliated recording artist **Ani DiFranco**. For further information about GLAMA, visit their website at www.glama.com.

"**A Visit From the Footbinder,**" book and lyrics by **David Dreyfus** and music by **Jeffrey Hardy** has been named winner of the **1999 Jerry Bock Award**. The biennial award was established by Jerry Bock, BMI composer of such classic musicals as "**She Loves Me,**" "**Fiddler on the Roof,**" "**The Rothschilds,**" "**Fiorello,**" and "**The Apple Tree.**" The winning musical is chosen by Bock personally from the collective output

of musicals developed in the BMI workshop by BMI writers.

A private ceremony was held on March 11, 1999 at BMI's New York headquarters where Mr. Bock presented the recipients with their cash award of \$2,000 as well as plaques commemorating the honor.

The only musicals chosen for the **1999 Dramatists Guild Development Program** are two that have been developed in the BMI Advanced Workshop. They are: "**Dora: Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria**," with book, music and lyrics by **Larry Bortniker**; and "**A Little Princess**," with music by **Eric Rockwell**, lyrics by **Margaret Rose** and book by **William J. Brooke** (alumnus, LA).

Angelo Parra (Librettists) has won a **Special Opportunity Stipends Program** grant, sponsored by the **NY Foundation for the Arts** and the **NYS Council for the Arts**, to travel to California for the world premiere of his prize-winning play, "**A Heart of Flesh**," late this spring, marking the fourth honor the play—which dramatizes the complex and emotional issues involved in choosing a heart transplant recipient—has received (see previous newsletters). Administered by the **Garrison Arts Center**, Garrison, NY, the \$300 S.O.S. grant covers the airfare, enabling the playwright to attend rehearsals and opening night of the play, produced by the **Alliance Theatre Company** in Burbank.

"I Don't Do Exposition" (cont.)

10) We also meet Chino who is a quiet, shy boy.

11) Also, very importantly, we like these people.

This is the work of a master. We know exactly what we need to know. No more, no less.

The frustrating part of a scene like this is that if it's successful, the audience has no idea of the skill that went into it. The goal is to make the exposition invisible. Just as in songwriting, you have to show, not tell.

One approach is to follow Larry Gelbart's maxim: "Exposition only in anger." For instance, instead of saying, "Gosh, Harry, how long do we know each other? 20 years? Since we went to college together, right?" he might say, "Harry, you're the same idiot you were twenty years ago when we were in college!"

Another view is Robert McKee's idea of "exposition as ammunition" – something the character thinks will help them win the argument. In our scene from "West Side Story," Maria is trying to get Anita to lower the neckline on her dress. To get her way, Maria threatens, "I think I will tell Mamma and Poppa about you and 'Nardo in the balcony of the movies!" This is a painless way of establishing the relationship of Anita and Bernardo.

There is also exposition through humor (for those talented enough to do it). Check out the first dialogue scene in "...Forum." It tells us what we need to know, and is hilar-

iously funny as well. Be careful, though. Don't assume your dialogue is funny until you've heard a *paying* audience laugh.

Probably the most important thing to remember about writing exposition is this: do *not* have characters tell each other things they already know.

However you attack it, exposition is one of the toughest things to write. I don't find it unusual to write twenty to twenty-five drafts of a short scene. Every word counts!

"Holy Smokers" (continued)

ented writers around. Why don't we have our own Smokers and use their material?" He insisted that, as exclusive, in-house events, the Smokers would attain the status of a hot ticket, once word got out about the high quality of the writing they presented. Lest the literal image conjured by the sobriquet "Smokers" seem less romantic than intended, the term "in-house" became the eventual official title of the series—and Yeston's prediction proved correct. Since their inception in 1997, **The BMI-Lehman Engel Musical Theater Workshop In-House Cabarets** have been playing to standing room crowds. And members of the theatre industry have, indeed, been paying attention.

The most recent In-House Cabaret was produced, per usual, by Workshop Co-ordinator **Walter Edgar ("Skip") Kennon** on March 11. The 65-minute cabaret featured work by 20 BMI Workshop

composers and lyricists from all three composer-lyricist workshops. The cabaret included songs from:

- Composer-lyricist **Larry Bortniker's "Kinsey Report,"** a musical treatment of the life of famed sex researcher, Alfred Charles Kinsey whose works included "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male"(1948) and "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female"(1953).

- Composer **C. Colby Sachs** and librettist-lyricist **Cheryl Davis' "Sugar Dumpling,"** a transplantation of the noted French novelist **Guy de Maupassant's** short story "**Boule de Suif**" to an American Civil War setting.

- "**Surrounded,**" written by **Arlene Jaffe and Jon Cobert**, based on the real life hostage situation which occurred in Brooklyn on August 22, 1972.

- Disney staff-writer **Brian Woodbury's "Little Nemo in Slumberland,"** the tale of a young boy who is caught in his own dream.

- **Kleban Award**-winning lyricist **Glenn Slater's** collaboration with composer **Steve Weiner** that redefined the term torch song in **Tall Quiet Guy** (in which the Statue of Liberty confesses her attraction for the Empire State Building) from the upcoming Manhattan Theatre Club revue "**Island of the Damned.**"

- Award-winning cabaret artist **Amanda Green** and writing partner **David Sherman**'s sample from their new musical "**She's Out of Line.**"

- **Dan Martin** and **Michael Biello**'s preview of their new one-woman show "**Waitress,**" as well as material written specifically for the upcoming Chicago production of "**Breathe.**"

- Composer-lyricist **Keith Gordon**'s exploration of the rich musical language of gospel in his new musical "**The Gift.**"

Other writing teams included **Robert Lopez** and **Jeff Marx** ("**Kermit: The Prince of Denmark**"), **Daniel Aquisto** and **Steven D'Addico** ("**The Neon Bible**") **Jenne Wason** and **Alan Cancelino** ("**Bingo City**") and individual songs from composer-lyricist **John Thomas Oaks** and composer-lyricist **B.J. Bjorkman**.

WORKSHOP ALUMNI CABARET: A MUSICAL THEATRE THE- ATRICAL

On Thursday April 15, professional musical dramatists whose careers began at BMI will have their own in-house cabaret: composers and lyricists who are veterans of the Workshop will join several Workshop Committee Members to present new work in the forthcoming "**Musical Theatre Theatrical.**" Among those already scheduled:

- Composer-lyricist **Judd Woldin** (best known as composer of "**Raisin,**" a Tony-Award-winner for Best Musical) will be performing work from his new musical, "**Jonah.**"

- **Clark Gesner**, who wrote book, music and lyrics for the phenomenal off-Broadway hit, "**You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown,**" currently in revival on Broadway at the **Ambassador Theatre**, will be performing material from his newest show, "**Bongo Fever,**" which opens at the **Grove Street Playhouse** on April 14, one night before the BMI Theatrical. It will be the first time that Gesner has had two shows playing simultaneously in New York. Gesner's "**The Jello is Always Red**" played at the York Theatre last season.

- **Susan Birkenhead**, currently writing lyrics to the music of **Charles Strouse** for "**The Night They Raided Minsky's,**" wrote lyrics for the Tony Award-nominated Best Musical, "**Jelly's Last Jam,**" will also participate. Last season, she was represented on Broadway with both "**Triumph of Love**" (Tony nomination, cast album on JAY records) as well as "**High Society,**" which is currently on national tour.

- **Doug Katsaros**, who is currently Musical Supervisor for "**Footloose**" as well as a cast member of the new Cy Coleman musical "**Exactly Like You,**" has collaborated with **Richard Engquist** (Committee, Outer Crit-

ics Circle Award for "**Keni-Leml**"), **Ron Sproat** (Emmy Nomination, "**Rachel's Summer**") and **Frank Evans** (Committee, TheatreWeek Award, "**No Speed Limit**") on a four-character musical comedy "**Abie's Island Rose**." Evans will also be represented by work from "**Dinner at Eight**," the musical adaptation of the classic **George S. Kaufman-Edna Ferber** play with book by Pulitzer nominee **Julie Gilbert** and music by **Ben Schaechter** (Drama Desk and Outer Critics nominee).

• **Gary William Friedman** (Obie and Outer Critics Circle Award Winner as well as Tony nominee for "**The Me Nobody Knows**") will be showcasing work from two: his current "**Last Supper**" as well as his free-wheeling adaptation of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" entitled simply, "**Dream**."

• Composer-lyricist **David Spencer** (Committee, "**Weird Romance**," Public Theatre "**La Bohème**," "**The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz**," Gilman Gonzalez-Falla Commendation award-winner for Theatreworks/USA's "**The Phantom of the Opera**," forthcoming "**The Fabulist**") has invited the original cast of his latest Theatreworks/USA production to perform selections from his and librettist-director **Rob Barron's** YA musical version of "**Les Misérables**."

• **Georgia Holof** and **David Mettee**, best known for their contributions to the Obie-nominated revue "**A, My Name Is Alice**," will

showcase work from their adaptation of the late Pulitzer Prize-winner **Paul Monette's** novel, "**Taking Care of Mrs. Carroll**."

• **Patrick Cook** and **Frederick Freyer**, fresh from their Manhattan Theatre Club production of "**Captains Courageous**," will present the first public look at their new musical "**97 Orchard Street**," about the lives of immigrants in New York at the turn of the century.

• **Annette Leisten** (Committee) and **Shelly Markham** will be presenting work from "**Forge Of Freedom**," which traces the history of the American colonies becoming a nation during the Revolutionary War. Markham and Leisten are the composer-lyricist team responsible for helping establish the National Theatre Company (**Fran** and **Barry Weissler**, producers). The team wrote seven musicals for the Weisslers, which toured for 15 seasons.

The April 15th event, which will, like the other cabarets, be held in BMI's third floor Media Room, is scheduled for two performances, at 6 and 8 p.m. The audience may expect several surprise additions to the event.

An additional in-house cabaret for the season, showcasing more songs from the composer-lyricist workshops, is planned for May—date to be announced.

[Note: The forthcoming program described in the above article is accurate as of press time, but subject to change.]

You Are What You Submit

Part Three:

Demo Tapes: Presentation

by David Spencer

Everybody who enjoys music and has two cents to rub together has a Walkman.

Well, that's not precisely true: "Walkman" is a Sony trademark, and any other brand would be, officially, a "personal stereo" unit, to which the term Walkman would be applied colloquially; and while two cents won't get you one of those small cassette players, ten bucks or so will get you a bargain basement model at any chain drug store—and get you better than that at a Chelsea electronics wholesaler. And maybe not *everybody* has a personal stereo, but I'll lay odds you can't swing a dead opossum in the midtown area without hitting five people sporting earphones. And every one of those five will tell you *the same thing* about their personal stereo, no matter what the brand or model:

Even with fresh batteries, even connected to a wall outlet via AC power adapter, if it runs analog cassettes, the fast forward and rewind functions are sluggish.

At first blush, this doesn't seem too relevant to demo tape presentations, but it's actually vital information.

And that's because at a producer's office, or the office of a grant-

giving organization, most of the screeners can't get through all the tapes in all the envelopes assigned to them fast enough.

Office honchos will often set screeners up at desks, sometimes closed-off rooms, where they are provided with Walkmans (unless they've been asked to bring their own); that way, the submissions never get lost for leaving the office; and the screeners can listen to new demos more or less in private without the sound disrupting the rest of the workplace. So it's a bit of a day job.

And if a screener has to fast forward through a lot of garbage on a particular reel to get to the gem some misguided writer may have buried in the middle of Side A, the chances are even, at least, that the gem will go unheard...and *certain* that the screener will resent the writer making him wait while he watches the capstans torture their way through revolution after revolution—until he randomly stops the tape, listens some more, hears more garbage, and continues to fast forward, spot check (garbage), fast forward, spot check (garbage), all the while sighing and, to put it mildly, thinking less of the sender. And *then* when the screener is *done* with the tape (usual translation: loses patience), he has to rewind it, to be courteous to the next screener—there's usually more than one, for the sake of checks and balances—which

means waiting while the tape huffs and puffs its way in the reverse direction.

At this point, the only safe thing to be said for the writer's chance of serious consideration is a heartfelt Buh-byeeee.

Just as anything less than a professionally rendered libretto can sabotage the way your work is perceived, a sloppily, or thoughtlessly conceived cassette—and make no mistake, you must *conceive* the presentation, at least on a rudimentary level—is pretty much a death sentence. This can also apply to the packaging: what's displayed through the clear plastic of the cassette case can be almost as vital as the contents of the tape itself.

Before we begin, a teeny caveat. Unlike script formatting, demo tape presentation is not a standardized affair—there's margin for some personal variation. What you're getting here is specific to my approach. So if you find that, for whatever reason, it's not practical to follow the advice herein to the letter, adapt its general guiding principals to your needs. The main thing to keep in mind is this: you want your *work* to appear passionate, and to *inspire* passion in the listener...but you want the presentation to be as cool, collected, clear, organized, strategically advantageous and matter-of-fact as possible.

And now, to better promote clean demos, a little dissertation on—

Garbage

I referred to it before. Speaking demo-wise, what is Garbage?

Garbage is anything extraneous. Garbage is anything a screener or a producer should not have to be listening to, or wading through. Garbage is anything that makes the listener suspect a lack of professionalism. Garbage needs to be regarded as harshly as decency permits. Garbage is the enemy.

The most common manifestation of Garbage is The Overture. Speaking as an occasional reader/screener, I cannot *tell* you how many demo tapes float by with full-bore *overtures*. It's bad enough when they're elaborately sequenced (electronically orchestrated), but when they're *primitive* - *ly* sequenced, using nothing more than keyboard samples, generic drum kits and tacky brass sounds, they're simply excruciating.

Understand, the very notion of an overture on a demo tape can denote pomposity or arrogance at worst, naïveté at best. The overture is the last thing ever written for a show (assuming that the frozen version of the show even *has* an overture, a less and less frequent occurrence since the '70s) because, as common sense would indicate, *that's* when you know which of the many, possibly dozens, of songs you've written are actually *remaining in the score*. The same applies to dance music, or extended passages of incidental music: unless you're in production, working in tandem

with designers, a director and a choreographer, you can have no *idea* what the practical requirements of such music may be. Writing it in advance is folly. Presenting it as part of a preliminary vision is goofy. Accurately or not, the subtext a screener usually reads into an overture, dance music or incidental music is: "I'm a writer seduced by my own dreams of success, my own fantasy of omnipotence, my own insular vision—and not bothered by my own practical ignorance." It's almost impossible for a demo tape submission to recover from that. ("Our Founder" Lehman Engel used to archly refer to "accidental music"; but where demos are concerned, the term is less of a joke.)

Also avoid excessive narration. In general, I'd say avoid narration of any sort, but *occasionally*, depending upon the style of your demo, *some* narration may be necessary, and helpful. As a rule, demos that provide such interpolated continuity should be those in which the authors perform their own work because author-performance tapes can approximate the ambience of a live audition (as opposed to full-cast demos, wherein narrative can only violate verisimilitude—unless narrative is of a pre-existing theatrical device that is an actual component of the show's libretto). In one of the earliest demos of Pat Cook and Rick Fryer's "Captains Courageous," their original opening number, *Nothin' to Do* contains a *brief*, underscored interlude between verses, in which Pat, *as tersely as*

possible, tells the listener that, onstage, the seamen are working the ship, and that the work is incredibly hard. *Only* that, and in about that many words, before he and Rick (on multiple tracks, to create the effect of a full male chorus) *quickly* return to the song. It's not a demo that Pat likes to give out any more: it's years outdated, and like most any really splendid writer, he's defensive and a little embarrassed by work that rewrites and reconsideration have made obsolete. But it did its job, in its time, and as one of the few proud owners of a copy, I can tell you that, even today, it is rousingly effective.

There is a list of other things to avoid, and I'd be willing to bet that very few, if any, of the Workshop community are quite so green as to be quite this amateurish...but as it's a roster of common abuses, they're worth noting. Just in case:

- Apologias, editorial comments and/or excuses. I recently heard a tape in which some old coot, with what I suppose he took to be avuncular good humor, announced his hope that the listener wouldn't mind his inability to play piano; his dream being that the score would be arranged, harmonized and notated in production. Whereby he proceeded to sing *a capella*, whistle and hum. You can measure the length of time a screener will stick with a demo like this in *seconds*...

- Lyric-less music. As Madeline Kahn said in "Blazing Saddles," it's twue, it's twue: there are actually people out there—a *lot* of them—who send tapes of nothing

but accompaniment and melody lines, fully expecting the listener to follow along with the script and match the words to the notes. Which usually elicits a muttered response akin to: Hey, pal, follow *this*...

- Bad live performance tapes. A plethora of the entries that pour into producer and grant-giving offices are musicals that had a first staging on the community or university level. The performances tend to be taped live, from the house, which lets the listener know that the thing has been orchestrated (if it has) and that the audience is having a good time (if they are). Unfortunately, as often as not, the listener can't clearly hear the one *important* thing, which is the score itself. Unless you can record a live performance through a versatile enough in-house sound system to give you a good mix—and even then, the vocal and instrumental performances have to be impeccably rendered and theatrically exciting—these tapes can be self-defeating, and the audience reaction off-putting. Especially when it's clearly a sympathetic "local" or parochial audience, rather than more discerning viewers in a more professional venue. Never underestimate the power of snobbery.

And now that we've covered what to avoid, let's look at the things to work toward.

Judgment Calls

There are different schools of thought about what makes the

best kind of demo. Two of the most common—and for my money most highly debatable—dictums are: (1) that orchestrated tapes are trying to hide something; if the score can't be communicated effectively via piano, it can't be very good; and (2) that generic vocal performances are better than stellar, as they provide leeway for the imagination of the directors and producers considering the material to envision things for themselves—if it's too idiosyncratically "performed" (the theory goes), the listening honchos will feel that they've been given no room to contribute, and will be less likely to take on the project.

My personal feeling about this is—you can't be responsible for the stupid prejudice of somebody else, nor for second guessing a pre-conditioned reaction; you can only be responsible for creating the best product within your capability. As MIDI-generated music has become more and more pervasive, the piano-only philosophy has been rendered increasingly obsolete. And as our own Skip Kennon has pointed out, there is some music that simply isn't presented in its best light when rendered pianistically. The instrumental approach depends entirely upon the composer's imprimatur, and what s/he's trying to accomplish. (Personally, I happen to *think* in orchestral colors, and I can't play a decent piano lick to save my life; so my demos are *only* orchestrated, because I have no other choice.) As for "generic vocal performances"...if you think

your demo can survive them, it's your call. All I can tell you is, I want *my* demos to sound like polished cast albums, or as near to that as practicality allows. Communicating theatricality is half the game, and if your score can be brilliantly acted and sung, why waste the effort on anything less?

All that said, demos that use nothing but piano accompaniment are *perfectly fine*—as are demos in which the authors present their own work. But it is vital that the pianist be a dramatically sensitive, technically exacting musician—and if the authors sing their own work, *they must be able to sell it*. “Sell it” doesn't necessarily mean sing like a boid—it means you can gratifyingly deliver the intent, get the right message across, make it compelling. If you're an author with a voice that is bad, croaky, imprecise of pitch, self-conscious when acting, wobbly or otherwise unlikely to inspire confidence, bag the idea of doing it yourself. You won't do your work any favors, and your *chutzpah* will not be admired. On the other hand, if like Cook & Fryer, you can bring it on home, and you want your pure interpretation to be what's heard first, go for it. Author-performance demos, if they're in the groove, can generate a rare excitement.

Similarly, if you're using actors, take the time to cast the demo memorably and well. Often younger, less experienced songwriters will settle for weak performances by “substandard” actors with whom they developed amicable relationships in recent acad-

mic or community contexts; while it's not unheard of for more mature songwriters, who feel they're not really in the loop of the biz, to work with limited vocalists of their acquaintance, or friends (or relatives!)—*all of which is to be discouraged*. If you don't have a roster of first-rate people to call upon, don't be too shy or intimidated to ask around: that kind of networking is part of what the Workshop environment is about. You'll develop a reliable roster in time; and—I promise you—as long as your department is professional and considerate, you'll be flabbergasted at the quality, and frequently the identities, of the performers who'll say yes.

Demo Types

There are four kinds of theatrical demo tape. In no particular order, they are:

- **The Full Score Pre-Production Demo:** Exactly as the name implies, a recording of whatever complete draft you want to send out to elicit interest in your show. This can be a composite of individual recordings you've made throughout the creative process, or a wholly new demo. The drawback to the “anthology” approach is the likelihood of inconsistency: unforeseen circumstances may necessitate your changing actors in mid-stream for one role or another; or, due to revisions, earlier recordings may not match the accompanying script once it has sustained cuts, refinements, addi-

tions, etc. If the presentation is attractive, polished and professional, and if the inconsistencies aren't *too* distracting, you're probably in good shape with a composite reel. But if you're even *slightly* in doubt, or aspire to the ideal, start from scratch and do it over. Approach it like an album, so it's all clearly of the same sensibility and fabric. (Recently, Alan Menken decided that, despite the existence of a very respectable composite reel, he and I were better off to wholly re-demo our new version of "The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz" with a full cast, to reflect its current vitality. My point being, if no less a light than *Alan* is thus concerned about a demo putting its best foot forward, it's *certainly* best for writers who are *not* brand-name commodities to regard any "expedient" shortcuts with grave caution.)

- **The Post-Production Demo:**

The recording of the score you make—if you have to—*after* a full production. This can be in lieu of, in anticipation of, or by way of securing, a cast album. Failing the existence of an actual cast album, the post-production demo can be instrumental in placing your musical with a stock-and-amateur licensing organization. Copies of the demo can subsequently be the audio selling tool the licensers routinely send out with perusal scripts. (Since the post-production demo is a permanent record of a *finished* and *produced* score, it may well include some purely instrumental tracks—overtures,

etc.—that seem appropriate.)

If you're unsure of your show's future prospects, and *especially* if the show proved itself an audience pleaser, *never* let the opportunity to record the score yourself pass by. (As many of you know, Richard Engquist and Rafael Crystal just finished recording their charming score for "Kuni Leml," featuring their 15th anniversary revival cast. The show, an award-winner, has been performed with modest, respectable regularity since its 1984 debut, which is a testament to its innate strengths...but, given that, one can't help wondering how much *better* a stock, amateur and regional life it might have enjoyed had its authors taken it into the studio 15 years sooner.)

- **The Sampler:** This is but a *selection* of songs, the selection tending to vary, depending upon need. One competition may limit you to, say, five or eight songs; another may ask for material that runs a certain amount of minutes. A production office may ask to hear some representative selections; or a cabaret venue may be looking for stuff that will go over well in a club setting. But whether you newly create the demo to specifications, or assemble existing tracks, bear in mind what the recording needs to accomplish.

There will be exceptions, but in *most* cases, your few numbers should be more or less self-contained (needing little or no set-up to be understood) and emphasize *dramatic highlights* of the piece. A

beautifully arranged choral number may not matter worth diddly if the listener is not interested in the character singing, or not getting some *sense* of story. (I'm *not* saying you have to include plot numbers—you may, you may not—I *am* saying you have to imply dramatic context...with the highly arguable exception of cabaret-specific material.)

Similarly—and this principle is especially crucial for composers—*beware including music that may be too sophisticated or “artsy” for an untrained, slow or casual ear.* Said music may be every bit as breathtaking as you think it is; but if it doesn't communicate outside the full-show or full-score environment, it is *not* your friend on a sampler. Sometimes the only way to know for certain whether or not you've chosen well is by using trial-and-error upon the ears of friends and colleagues as your measure. (In the mid-eighties, Stephen Sondheim and William Goldman were meeting to discuss a possible joint project. Sondheim played a song for Goldman, who responded, he thought appreciably, by saying, “That's really clever. Now play me something pretty.” Sondheim leveled a hooded gaze at Goldman and replied, in measured tones: “I just...did.”)

Make sure your sampler demonstrates a range of song-styles (the old standby checklist—comedy song, ballad, charm song, musical scene—is not a bad general template if you're unsure what to choose). And whatever the published guidelines you're provided

for submitting your sampler, *follow them precisely...or, at any rate as precisely as your score permits.* (If you're submitting songs from several scores, the same criteria apply.)

- **The Maintainer:** Once you've secured an actual gig, with producers involved—and, presumably, some kind of concrete development and production schedule—it sometimes behooves you to keep a “running tab” on the score: to periodically revise the demo to reflect changes as it is rewritten and reconfigured, the better to provide all concerned personnel with updated reference material. How polished these updates need to be depends upon the environment; in most cases, interim adjustments—evolutionary tweaks between complete, broadly defined drafts of the entire score—can be realized, and distributed, in a quick-and-dirty fashion, like sound-byte memos: the mix needn't be perfect, and the author(s) singing the material should be fine (presumably by that point all parties concerned are used to the writers' voices anyway). So it pays to work out a routine that allows you to handle this as quickly and efficiently as possible, since you don't want it to become your life's work. However, if at any point the demo is required to speak for the impending production as a document of the score's current (and, however temporarily, definitive) state—especially if its purpose is some kind of distribution and/or exposure out-

side the immediate loop of the production/creative teams—then you need to overhaul, and recapture the polish of your initial presentation. The good news, at least in commercial venues, is: if your producers are in earnest, they'll cover the cost of that as a production expense.

The update process can be as “simple” as inserting new numbers and deleting old ones from the master reel. More likely, though, you'll *also* be digging into existing material that has been too heavily revised for the previous rendering(s) to stand untouched. While in many cases a wholly new recording of such a number is the most trouble-free, obvious answer, you may find that this can be where having a digital workstation, and/or a hard drive recorder-mixer setup (see Part Two of this series) is extraordinarily useful: the versatility of virtual editing techniques may allow you to implement revisions to music and lyrics via easily added alternate tracks and data manipulation. So remember, as you approach your *first* demo of a score, to consider what the best *long range* plan is for your ability and *sensibility*.

The Final Consideration: Packaging

With scanners and color printers being so inexpensive and pervasive, it's easier than ever to create fancy graphics and distinctive logos for cassette cases and CD jewel boxes right in your own home.

Which is why it's so important to remember that they're worse than useless unless implemented *very* sparingly.

In most contexts I can think of, elaborate illustration tends to make a demo seem less like a businesslike tool than a vanity project. More importantly, graphics take up too great a proportion of the *very* limited amount of printable “real estate” you have available to you. Real estate that *should* be devoted to the bare essentials applicable: the name of the musical, the authorship, the authors' representative (agent), titles of musical numbers, the names of the vocalists and the roles they sing. (Obviously, with regard to competitions where the rules require you to submit material anonymously, you reconfigure and edit this info as common sense dictates.)

A demo's printable real estate—if it's a cassette—has two parts.

The first is what the recording industry calls the J-card: the little insert that fits neatly into the larger component of the cassette case, named for the letter it resembles when viewed in position, edge-wise. The J-card has three subdivisions: from top to bottom, let's dub them the backflap, the spine, and the frontispiece. The fine points of how you arrange your information on this little slip of paper are up to you, but as a general rule, everything should be laid out in as clean and uncluttered a fashion as realistically possible. Personally, I use the backflap for

my manager's name and address, keeping that info discrete from the "art" data. The spine contains the title of the project and the authorship. The frontispiece reiterates title and authorship, and under that, provides the remaining information. To keep it all from seeming *too* bland, I may allow myself a modestly fancy (albeit appropriate) font for the title, and I'll print the whole thing out on pastel colored paper.

Figure #1 (illustration, page 20), modeled on one of my standard templates, is the J-card layout for "The Usual Suspects," a non-existent musical's post-production demo—with dotted lines added to indicate the folds between sections.

The second part of the packaging is the adhesive label that goes on the physical cassette. You won't really lose any points if you handwrite a basic title-and-author legend on one of the narrow crack-and-peel strips that came with the once-blank reel; but it is nicer—and recommended—to print out professional-looking, full-size labels. (Office supply companies such as Avery manufacture crack-and-peel labels especially for cassettes and CDs. A box of 50 sheets, 600 labels, is *obscene* - *ly* expensive—around \$40—but on the plus side, those 50 sheets will last you a very long time.)

The label need not duplicate too much of the information on the J-card; in fact, a clean, uncluttered presentation is preferable. Figure #2 (also page 20) shows the label on the first side of the

same Usual Suspects demo:

If your demo is in CD format—a more and more frequent medium now that you can actually "burn" discs at home—the jewel box architecture gives you more space in which to maneuver, and use tasteful, understated graphics. Title and authorship can, if you wish, claim exclusive rights to the top cover insert (which goes in the slot where CD booklets are found). Cast, contents, copyright and representation, etc. can go on the back panel (or L-card) that gets tucked behind the snap-out-able CD berth. There's nothing wrong with creating an actual CD booklet for the insert—its inside contents might include a brief plot synopsis, song set-ups and/or author bios—but keep the CD booklet to four panels, keep the auxiliary text tersely to the point (if you can't be economical, err on the side of conservatism and leave it out), and don't overdo the "production values."

Never forget, the packaging of your demo is the first thing a screener sees. The more assured the presentation, the more likely the listener is likely to feel in good hands. After that—

...what's on the inside has merely to live up to what's on the outside...

Representative for Tune Smith: The Tough Negotiator Company. Limited
340 West 55th Street / New York, NY10019 / (212) 555-7614

The Usual Suspects

Music and Lyrics by **Tune Smith** Book by **Fellow Scribe**

The Original Off-Broadway Cast in

The Usual Suspects

...a noir musical...

Book and Direction by **FELLOW SCRIBE**

Music, Lyrics and Orchestrations by TUNE SMITH

Angel Dunne **Jenny Reiger** Joe Pockets **John Wallyhood**
Grifter **Kenneth Boydon** Bluejaw McCain **Craig Oldfeather**
Mrs. Berg **Jean Reltaf** Carlotta **Nicole Salmon** Bunky **Michael Princeton**

Side A

Prologue & Misdemeanor
Throwin'the Book at You, Baby!
The Big Score (incidental)
ABag Marked Swag
Counterfeit Angel
Fingerprints on My Heart
Ali-bye-bye
She Read Me My Rights
Who's Miranda? (incidental)

Side B

Fugue for Tin Ears
Your Safe's With Me (incidental)
Cuff Him? I Don't Even *Know* Him!
AKind Word and a Gun
I'm da PD, He's da DA
Plastique Love
My Man (on the Upper Bunk)
Chalk Outline Cha-Cha (Finale)
Bow Music

(Fig. 1: J Card)

The Original Off-Broadway Cast in

The Usual Suspects

...a noir musical...

SIDE A

See case
insert
for
contents

Music, Lyrics and Orchestrations by **TUNE SMITH**
Book and Direction by **FELLOW SCRIBE**

(Fig. 2: Cassette Label)

Spotlight On...

Dan Martin and Michael Biello

by Frank Evans

When I arrive at Dan Martin and Michael Biello's downtown Manhattan apartment, I warn them that this may be a very personal interview. They are not only writing partners, but as life partners, and their intertwined lives are bound to be reflected in their work.

Dan and Michael are physically similar: tall and slim with short hair styles. At the beginning of my interview I threaten to print my own particular device for distinguishing one from the other, but as the afternoon progresses they both show two distinctive, albeit harmonious voices. For starters, Dan is the composer and Michael is the lyricist. Both are native Philadelphians (although they didn't meet there) but Michael is a product of the Italian section of the city while Dan is from the outlying suburban area. I ask how they met.

DAN: We were in a modern dance company together. Michael was a dancer and I was an apprentice. It was multi-media company where they brought dancers, musicians, film makers, set designers and sculptors together and we created these multi-media pieces. So we met in a dance workshop...

DAN & MICHAEL: ...*Group Motion*, they had come from Berlin...

MICHAEL: ...I was touring with them, [I had just come back from] Berlin, and Dan was in a workshop that we did at Antioch College. And that's where we met.

DAN: We met in a very creative situation and we fell in love. [An early memory] I have of Michael when we were courting was—the first song we wrote together. Michael wrote me a poem and we were sitting on the roof of his house in Philadelphia overlooking the city and I was playing the guitar at the time and I set the poem to music, so we actually had a collaboration early [in our relationship].

MICHAEL: I wrote a lot before I met Dan but never to music. I just journaled and wrote poems and used them in performance pieces and more political in-your-face monologues and autobiographical stuff.

Q: *Talk about your early exposure to music and musical theatre.*

DAN: I had a lot of music in my younger years. In elementary school I studied piano, guitar, and I wanted to play the flute, but they told me only girls can play the flute so they gave me a clarinet. I was a terrible clarinet player, last chair for my entire high school career and finally got back to the flute when I was in college [where] I was also in the choir.

MICHAEL: My dad was a singer when my mom met him. He was making recordings with big bands so I have records of him. When [my mom] met him, she kind of said, we're going to get married and have a family or you're going to go do your career. And he stopped. So he sang to us all the time, like all the time. We didn't do Broadway. We would go to the Valley Forge Music Fair—Anna Maria Alberghetti in *West Side Story* and Milton Berle in *Top Banana*. [Since we were from] a large Italian family, there was lots of drama and rhythm.

DAN: We've had a really interesting career together and I wouldn't call it a musical career, I would call it a performance art career. Michael is also a visual artist and a ceramic designer. [After our initial meeting through the dance company,] I got into music for dance, I accompanied dance classes at Temple University and started writing scores for dance companies. Together, we created pieces that combined movement, art, theatre and original songs, but never really did anything that was

traditional song writing for the musical theater. It was all for this very active creative performance world we were in.

Q: How does it feel getting into a more mainstream form?

DAN & MICHAEL: I'm thrilled.

MICHAEL: It's something we wanted to do, because we love the form. Being in that, sort of downtown, underground world—Dan and I would get up on the stage and do our thing. But there was this drive in us to create a bridge to more commercial musical theatre. We auditioned for the Workshop with our out-homo-love song stuff [*laughter*], so right from the beginning we said that if we're going to go in [the workshop], we just want to do what it is that we do. And through the years, we've been learning how to make it more accessible, creating a way that people can understand what [*more laughter*] we're talking about.

Q: You're juggling a number of projects. Can you tell me about them?

DAN: "**Breathe**" is one of our more "dear to our heart" projects. We had this had wonderful production in Provincetown in '96 and did two festival productions in '97 in Philadelphia and New York. We kind of let it rest for a while and started to work on two new shows, and as things always happen, it's going to go up in Chicago

in June in a small production at the Bailiwick. We started writing "**Waitress**," a light piece that would be easier to perform, and started working on an even bigger piece than we've ever done, "**David's Heart**," which is a more serious piece [about a female cardiologist who has exhausted all medical means to cure her husband's heart condition].

Q: Are you being recorded?

DAN: People are starting to record us. We've been invited to be on a couple of CDs and we have a couple of things coming out this year—up and coming singers are doing a couple of our tunes.

Q: Do you think of yourselves as gay writers or writers who are gay?

MICHAEL: Having been out there in the beginning of my career, I feel more comfortable with not having to put that out in front. I've done it. The more I can feel comfortable with it, [the more] my art really comes first. [Early on] I was saying I'm a gay artist—now it's art and I happen to be gay. I've done so much of it on stage and my family's been there and the whole deal. [It's reflected in our writing] in "David's Heart" and "Waitress." We're going more to the family now. In "David's Heart," there's a gay son. It's not eight gay characters.

DAN: I think I found from doing something that was more accessi-

ble to the public—even though "Breathe" is a gay-themed show—as we worked on it, we created characters who were not gay. We reached a lot of general audiences who were moved by the human issues. When you're younger in your experience, I think defining yourself as one thing or another seems more important. The older I get, the more I just want to make a difference in the human race; I want to communicate passionately to people, to humanize people, to wake people up.

MICHAEL: This has come in, too, through the BMI workshop, because, we're more and more comfortable to come in and just present our thing. I see that everybody is affected by it; we don't have to be [confrontational], like ACT-UP, to do our work. [*Laughter*] And that reflection is saying to me, just keep doing more of what you do.

DAN: Whether it's a female character in "David's Heart," or the waitress who's stuck in this place who wants to break out...I want to reach people and have a lot of joyful experiences and have fun and make a living through our art.

MICHAEL: Which we didn't have before the workshop. We were blocking ourselves. It was more "dig the ditch." But something's lifted in the last couple of years. I'm looking at the history of what we've done and we've dug the ditch already. Let's build the building. We've got the foundation.

We're really starting to get it and write and have fun with it and argue and play and throw things away and edit. That's our relationship. That's such a part of it. That's what we do.

One of the things I'm so grateful for is the education I got in writing comedic material. That's been so incredibly valuable to us because we've always had a really good grasp on expressing serious issues and I think that it's been a revelation to learn to use comedy to bring people in so that we can then talk about what we want to talk about.

DAN: I'm ready to cross a bridge from underground work to work that's more universal. I don't want to put a lid on what I'm doing.

In my umpteen years with BMI Workshop, I've seen double umpteen fringe writers and artists fall by the wayside, afraid that their unique voices would be stilled. Then there are those who take what the Workshop has to offer and apply it to their work. As Michael (or was it Dan) said: "The experimental work limited us. With the Workshop, we can concentrate on writing and the feeling of what we want to do with it. Some people may see the Workshop as limiting, but we don't feel it in there. When we're in the Workshop, we're getting all this information that only helps us expand our horizons."

Summer Schedule!

The Advanced Workshop will meet this summer on the following Mondays:

- June 14
- July 12
- August 18

Classes are from 4-6 PM. See you there!

We're On Line!

You can download an on-line version of this newsletter at <http://bmi.com>.

The Newsletter *Still* Wants You (and your stories)

If you're a Workshop member and have a notion or an idea for an article, we want to know about it, whether it's one you suggest that we write, or one you might write yourself (and please indicate your preference).

We'd be appreciative if you'd submit each idea as a terse, economical single-paragraph summary, in writing only (no phone calls or verbal pitches, please; use the submission procedure for listings, as described below). We'll examine all the proposals and "commission," or take on, the ones that seem most suited to the needs—or fancies—of the Workshop community.

There are no criteria for selection other than the vicissitudes of group discussion—but take heart that the group's diversity tends toward fair decisions. (For reasons of time, please also assume that you will hear from us only if we wish to solicit your article, or assign the idea in-committee. If your idea is not taken up, please don't view the silence as a snub, or as disapproval, or as you might the classroom presentation of a troubled song; the Newsletter environment operates on an entirely different basis.)

Within reason, there seems to be no constraint to the length of a

Newsletter edition, so several such pieces per issue can be accommodated. Don't necessarily limit yourself to parochial Workshop matters. The Newsletter is a place of sharing: relevant general advice, humor, think pieces, reports, anecdotes, and journals of theatrical experiences (on the job or observing the job), are welcome too.

Also welcome, as always, are your announcements. Use the Listings in any published BMI Workshop Newsletter as your model for submission. Please submit the information to the Musical Theatre Department. The medium for submission can be hand-delivered hard copy, faxes sent to **(212) 262-2824**, or email sent to **jbanks@bmi.com**.

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R₁ I₁ C₃ H₄ A₁ R₁ D₂ S₁
A₁ L₁ M₃ A₁ N₁ A₁ C₃

by Richard Engquist

"In the newsletter of The Loft, a Minnesota writers' center that I support, you read about African-American writers, gay writers, Asian-American writers, hearing-impaired writers, physically challenged writers, as if membership in an approved group were their certification as writers. At the University, you can't walk ten steps without being required to stop and salute multiculturalism."

A few years have passed since Garrison Keillor made those observations in a St. Paul Pioneer Press editorial. Happily, the passion for such Orwellian gobbledegook as he cites has cooled somewhat. But it has not disappeared.

As if being a writer were not difficult enough, many of us feel the pressure to hyphenate ourselves, to worry about labels, and to wonder whether we adequately (not to mention nobly) represent whatever tiny cultural niche we find ourselves in.

Silly, isn't it? Writers shouldn't burden themselves with such distractions. After all, we have to "get into the heads" of an infinite variety of personalities in order to develop characters that seem real to the reader or the audience. True, I may find it easier to create

the character of an elderly male Midwesterner with an expanding waistline and a receding hairline, but I must also people that character's world with myriad other characters, of every size, shape, age, color, gender, economic level, background and experience of life.

This is all so obvious; why bring it up? Because of a tendency—even in the ideal little world of our Workshop—to categorize one another with the various labels and hyphens; and to assume that, once a writer gets off the turf of his/her real life, the writing becomes problematical. As if we as *writers* were defined by the adjectives that describe us as *persons*.

Such defining is much too confining. And it is nonsensical. Can you imagine suggesting to Mark Twain or DuBose Heyward that he should write only about white people? Or to Langston Hughes or James Baldwin that he shouldn't let the world of his imagination reach beyond the world of Harlem? George Sand and George Eliot (regardless of the pen names) were women who created male characters as complex and convincing as their female characters. If Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee had

written only about white gay men, we would not have had Blanche and Stanley or George and Martha.

The idea is not that we should each erase the specifics of our individual experience and somehow become bland—Everyman or Everywoman—but that we should *celebrate* those specifics and use them in our work to achieve universality. To create a new world in each work of art and thus expand the universe of our audiences.

We must resist giving way to the tribal mentality that seems to have taken over the world. Even in America, the great Melting Pot has become a seething cauldron of animosity. Slogans, uniforms, labels, hyphens! What may begin as a celebration of diversity—or the recovery of self-esteem—becomes trivialized. We end up wearing lapel buttons proclaiming pride in the accidents of birth—our ethnicity, our pigmentation, our sexual orientation—as if these were achievements! In the process, we become not more than the sum of our parts, but less.

To me, even the political correctness of the '90's is a kind of straitjacket, and it has the same sour smell as the McCarthyism of the '50's: the smell of snobbery, self-righteousness, cynicism and censorship.

Writers can provide a corrective to this state of affairs. To do so we have to see labels and uniforms for what they are. In a grownup world where people think, feel, act and react, we can explore our

roots, learn our history, make the most of what nature has given us, discover our uniqueness, celebrate our diversity without apology, and then move on.

In "Our Town," Thornton Wilder created these lines of dialogue for the adolescent Emily Webb:

"I never told you about that letter Jane Crofut got from her minister when she was sick. He wrote Jane a letter and on the envelope the address was like this: It said, Jane Crofut, the Crofut Farm, Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America; continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; The Universe; the mind of God—that's what it said on the envelope. And the postman brought it just the same."

How's that for a colossal vision? No hyphens—no lapel buttons—just a limitless scheme of things.

Want to make a difference through your writing? Think big!