



**WELLS  
FARGO**

presents

## THE GUIDE

A theatergoer's resource prepared for  
**Portland Center Stage**

With contributions by Don Robertson, Karen Barrueto,  
Cynthia Kirk, Paul Miller, Darius Pierce, and others

# THE FANTASTICKS

PORTLAND  
**CENTER  
STAGE  
THEATER  
LIVE**

1111 SW BROADWAY  
PORTLAND OR 97205

[www.PCS.org](http://www.PCS.org)

book and lyrics by **Tom Jones**  
music by **Harvey Schmidt**  
directed by **Chris Coleman**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

This edition of *The Guide* is dedicated to the memory of Don Robertson, an avid theatergoer, a dedicated educator and *The Fantasticks*' biggest fan, whose spirit pervades this publication.

<b>INTRODUCTION: HOW TO TELL A SIMPLE STORY</b> by Cynthia Kirk and Darius Pierce .....	2
<b>SYNOPSIS</b> by Don Robertson.....	3
<b>CHARACTERS AND MUSICAL NUMBERS</b> .....	4
<b>CAST BIOS</b> .....	5
<b>THE COMPANY</b> .....	7
<b>SPOTLIGHT ON: INTERVIEW WITH JONES AND SCHMIDT</b> by Nancy Rosati.....	10
<b>MODERN ROMANCE AND THE FANTASTICKS</b> by Karen Barrueto.....	18
<b>ABDUCTION OF LANGUAGE: DISCUSSING THE WORD "RAPE" IN THE FANTASTICKS</b> by Darius Pierce ...	20
<b>THIS ACTUALLY IS HOW MUCH YOU PAY</b> by Paul G. Miller .....	22
<b>SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES</b> .....	23

# INTRODUCTION: HOW TO TELL A SIMPLE STORY

by Cynthia Kirk and Darius Pierce



Chris Coleman is now the Artistic Director of Portland Center Stage and the director of its current production, *The Fantasticks*. But at one time, like all of us, even he was subjected to the music of his parents. His parents loved musicals, so while others were listening to the Mamas and the Papas and Janis Joplin, they played soundtracks. Starting at those early ages, Chris has heard the music from *The Fantasticks* many times throughout his life. The only production of the show he has ever seen was at a community theater as a teenager, but on January 13, he will have to add his own production to that list.

Chris first considered *The Fantasticks* for PCS as a Christmas show with a possible hip-hop interpretation, but soon decided that would not work. He wanted to find a way to “blow the dust” off the piece and connect to its center, allowing it to live. The score is still captivating and the book is still about the most vulnerable place we ever get to — when we are on the edge of falling in love. This sentiment is perhaps best summed up by Chris favorite lyric from the show: “when love was an ember about to billow...”

He then imagined the play focusing on a 16-year-old girl, perhaps a local high school student, rifling thru her grandmother’s attic. He wanted to see the play thru a different lens and by doing so, see its essence. He wanted to get away from its production history, which is not only well-documented, but perhaps not always the best way to tell this story today. A story which does not fit well with the Broadway blockbuster style that was prevalent when *The Fantasticks* premiered and is no less prevalent now.

As Tom Jones explains, “We wanted to celebrate romanticism and mock it at the same time. To touch people, and then to make them laugh, and then to turn the laugh around, find the other side of it. To put two emotions side by side, as close together as possible, like a chord of music.” In the face of mega-musicals in the Rogers and Hammerstein and Lerner and Lowe traditions, *The Fantasticks* dared to tell a simple story — of young love — in a simple way, with minimal props and sets that only suggested reality. Its simplicity is inherently theatrical. Originally

conceived as a Broadway extravaganza, *The Fantasticks* kept getting smaller and smaller. Harvey Schmidt explains, “I realized that if you just gave me the characters and the story, I could believe anything. If you didn’t ask me to believe anything, I could believe everything.”

Director Chris Coleman was inspired to advance that quality of the musical with this production. Working with Dex Edwards, the set designer who created *This Wonderful Life*, they decided to set *The Fantasticks* at the strike for *This Wonderful Life*. Edwards observed that stage hands often sing while dismantling a set and that they usually have excellent voices. Under Coleman’s guidance, Matt, Luisa and all the rest begin as stagehands who pick out a tune on a piano that then becomes a fully-developed song. As stagehands, they tentatively don a stored costume or pick up a stray prop in order to become a character. The action becomes more intentional as set pieces, rummaged from back stage, begin to fly in and out. Keen-eyed PCS fans will recognize bits from many productions over the theater’s 18-year history in the Newmark Theatre. The theatrical and emotional effect is, indeed, *Fantastick*.



*Try to remember when life was so tender  
That love was an ember about to billow.  
Try to remember, and if you remember,  
Then follow.*

So opens our fable as the wistful notes of the opening song, *Try to Remember*, fade from our conscious hearing and settle into our minds and hearts. We will meet a boy, a girl, two fathers and a wall. And as in all fables, there are lessons to be learned. Luisa, the girl, has arrived at the wonderful age where she is aware of a world beyond her ken, which she expresses in *Much More*. Matt, the boy, shows his ardor for her by singing across the wall their fathers have constructed to keep them apart. The singing swells into a passionate duet: *Metaphor*. But when the fathers appear, they send the children away, apparently bent of thwarting the budding romance. Soon, however, we discover that the two men are best of friends, and they've conspired to pretend to be feuding in order to be push their offspring together (*Never Say No*). The figure this is the surest way to ensure that Matt and Luisa fall in love.

Ready to move on, the two fathers decide to hire a professional bandit, El Gallo, whom we have already met as the Narrator. They will stage an abduction in which Matt will fight off two aging actors, Henry and Mortimer, in his quest to save Luisa from El Gallo's clutches.

Matt and Luisa meet in the moonlit evening before an impending storm and sing *Soon It's Gonna Rain*. The abduction ensues and ends as an apparent triumph for Matt. The fathers tear down the wall that separates their yards, and as Act One closes, our young lovers and their fathers form the portrait of happiness.

The Sun dominates Act Two in contrast to the softer moonlight of the First Act. Things are starting to fray and come undone (*This Plum Is Too Ripe*).

Matt and Luisa break up, and their fathers are back to squabbling again. Matt envisions a shining world and sings about it in *I Can See It*, while the Narrator comments on his idealism. Rebuilding the wall between their homes, the fathers decide to concentrate on vegetables, since they are so much easier to raise than children (*Plant a Radish*) Meanwhile, Matt heads out on his quest, accompanied by Mortimer and Henry. As for Luisa, she has not forgotten the charms of El Gallo. She wants him to show her the world of parties (*Round and Round*). Luisa is given a laughing mask to wear while they dance. She can see Matt in some grim scenes being beaten, burned, and forced to sit on nails. Luisa is immune to feelings for Matt as long as she keeps the mask to her face.

They return home where El Gallo abandons her. The two young people have learned valuable lessons from their forays into the world. They sing of their real feelings in *They Were You*. It begins to snow as El Gallo sings:

*Deep in December, it's nice to remember,  
Without a hurt the heart is hollow.  
Deep in December, our hearts should remember...  
And follow.*

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

<b>The Mute</b>	A speechless observer and propeller.
<b>El Gallo</b>	The handsome, brave narrator and instigator.
<b>Luisa</b>	An energetic, idealistic girl with an active imagination.
<b>Matt</b>	An innocent, romantic, kind fellow.
<b>Hucklebee</b>	An avid gardener who wants his son to fall in love with Luisa.
<b>Bellomy</b>	An avid gardener who wants his daughter to fall in love with Matt.
<b>Henry</b>	An elderly, exaggerated thespian.
<b>Mortimer</b>	Henry's sidekick

## MUSICAL NUMBERS

### ACT ONE

<b>Overture</b>	The Company
<b>Try to Remember</b>	El Gallo
<b>Much More</b>	Luisa
<b>Metaphor</b>	Matt, Luisa
<b>Never Say "No"</b>	Hucklebee, Bellomy
<b>It Depends on What You Pay</b>	El Gallo, Bellomy, Hucklebee
<b>Soon It's Gonna Rain</b>	Matt, Luisa
<b>The Rape Ballet</b>	The Company
<b>Happy Ending</b>	Matt, Luisa, Hucklebee, Bellomy

### ACT TWO

<b>The Plum Is Too Ripe</b>	Matt, Luisa, Hucklebee, Bellomy
<b>I Can See It</b>	El Gallo, Matt
<b>Plant a Radish</b>	Hucklebee, Bellomy
<b>Round and Round</b>	El Gallo, Luisa, Company
<b>They Were You</b>	Matt, Luisa
<b>Try to Remember (reprise)</b>	El Gallo

## CAST BIOS



### **Adrian Bailey {El Gallo}**

Adrian has appeared in over a dozen Broadway shows. He was last seen on Broadway as Jacob in the Broadway revival of *La Cage Aux Folles*. Other Broadway credits include *The Lion King*, *The Wild Party*, *Smokey Joe's Café*, *The Who's Tommy*, *Kiss of*

*the Spiderwoman*, *Jelly's Last Jam*, *Black & Blue*, *Legs Diamond*, *My One & Only*, and *Sophisticated Ladies*, to name a few. Off Broadway credits: *Flyin' West*, *Storyville* and *The Boys from Syracuse*. His television credits include HBO's *The Josephine Baker Story*. Prior to appearing in *The Fantasticks*, Adrian appeared in the NY workshop of *Last Dance*. Adrian is proud to be making his Portland Center Stage debut.



### **Ron Daum {Hucklebee}**

Ron Daum makes his Portland Center Stage debut. He was last seen here in Portland as Hot Blades Harry in Stumptown Stages inaugural premier production of *Urinetown* (the musical) and this past summer as Amos Hart (Mr. Cellophane)

in *Chicago* (Broadway Rose). He has appeared locally as the Barber in *Man of La Mancha* and Mike in the West Coast premiere of *A View From The Bridge* (Portland Opera); Nathan in *Guys and Dolls*, Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* (Oregon Symphony). Other roles include *Oklahoma!* (Jud), *Carnival!* (Paul), *She Loves Me* (Kodaly), *I Do!, I Do!* (Michael), *Assassins* (Guiteau), *Carousel* (Billy) and the twin brothers Hugo and Fredrick in *Ring Round the Moon*. He is also a local director of merit and has directed and co-authored the original Children's musical *Silly Goose*.



### **Raymond J. Lee {Matt}**

Raymond Lee is thrilled to be making his PCS debut in *The Fantasticks*. New York: *Two Gentlemen*

*of Verona* (Guard; Public Theater/ NYSF), *Frankenstein — a rock musical* (Clerval) International: *The Golden Mickeys* (Simba; Disney Cruise Lines) Regional: *The King and I* (Prince Chululongkorn; Mill Mountain) Television: *Fame* (Finalist; NBC). He has performed with several orchestras at Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center and has also worked behind-the-scenes for several productions including the *VMA's*, *VH1 Hip Hop Honors*, and the *mtvU Woodie Awards*. A graduate of Northwestern University, with a major in radio/television/film and a member of the musical theater certificate program, Ray is currently a resident of New York City. He would like to thank God, all his friends, and his amazing family (especially his brave mother) for giving him the strength and courage to pursue what he's always wanted to pursue.



### **Michael Mandel {Bellamy}**

Michael appeared in the original *Christmas Carol* at Madison Square

Garden as the Ghost of Christmas Present. He appeared on Broadway in National Tours of *Big River*. Off Broadway credits: *Hit the Lights* (Vineyard Theater); *Once Around the City* (Second Stage Theater). Regional:



*A Man's a Man, A New Brain* (Lincoln Center Theater); *Triumph of Love* (Cleveland Playhouse); *Twist* (Walnut Street Theater); *Little Shop of Horrors* (Actors Theater of Louisville); *Machinal, Blood Wedding* (New York Shakespeare Festival); *William Finn's Romance in Hard Times* (Pioneer Theater); *Sweeney Todd, Man of La Mancha, Sunday in the Park With George* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival). Film: *Anger Management, Joe's Apartment, Come Fly Away With Me, The Living Wake*, Television: *The Rosie O'Donnell Show, Guiding Light, ED.*



**Rebecca Stanley {Luisa}**

Rebecca Stanley is a recent graduate of Carnegie Mellon University where she received her Bachelors of Fine Arts in Music Theatre. There she was seen as Sara Jane Moore in Stephen Sondheim's *Assassins*, Chloe in *Arcadia* and most recently as Paquette

in *Candide*. She is happy to make her regional debut in *The Fantasticks*, and wishes to thank her family and friends for helping her along the way.



**Brian Thompson {Henry}**

Brian appeared as Mr. Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*. Previous work at PCS: *The Cripple of Inishmaan, The Devils, Mrs. Warren's Profession, Private Lives, Arms and the Man* and *Noises Off*. Other Portland performances: *Snake in the*

*Vein, Taking Steps* and *End of Summer*. Brian spent two years with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival at Ashland in the mid 70's. A Seattle native and a graduate of the Goodman Drama School in Chicago, Brian was the founder and first Artistic Director of Seattle's Bathhouse Theatre. He has played at all the major theatres in Seattle, spent six years in the company of the Berkeley Repertory and done shows at Atlanta's Alliance, The Dallas Theatre Center, The Denver Center Company, Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C., and the West Coast Actors' Theatre of Vancouver B.C. He is the recipient of a Dramalogue award for his Gaev in *The Cherry Orchard* (San Francisco's Eureka Theatre).



**Tim True {Mortimer}**

Tim was seen at Portland Center Stage in *Pride and Prejudice, JAW/West '05* (*Number 3* and *Celebrity*

*Row*), *O Lovely Glowworm, King Lear, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Apollo II: The Dark Side of the Moon, JAW/West '03* and *'04*. Other Portland Credits include *Recent Tragic Events* (Third Rail Repertory Theatre); *Take Me Out, The New House, Touch, Night of the Iguana, The Laramie Project, Art* (Artists Repertory Theatre); *Gilgamesh, Happy Days* (Haven Project) and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (CoHo Theatre). Regional credits include: *Othello* (Actor's Theatre of Louisville); *Love's Labour's Lost, Cymbeline, Macbeth* (The Alabama Shakespeare Festival); *Much Ado about Nothing, Henry VIII, Cyrano De Bergerac* (Utah Shakespearean Festival); *Richard II, Troilus and Cressida* (The Idaho Shakespeare Festival); *Henry IV pt. I, The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Taming of the Shrew* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival). New York credits include: *Hamlet* (Center Stage), *Richard II* (Douglass Fairbanks Studio Theatre) and *Sweat* (Westbeth Theatre). Television/Film: *The Guiding Light, All My Children, Green Lights* and *The Spiral*.

## THE COMPANY

### **Chris Coleman {Director}**

Chris Coleman joined Portland Center Stage as artistic director in May of 2000. Since then, he has directed *King Lear*, *Things of Dry Hours*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Batboy: The Musical*, *Man & Superman*, *Outrage*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Seagull*, *Flesh and Blood*, *The Gimmick*, *A New Brain*, *A Christmas Carol* and *The Devils*. Before coming to Portland, he was artistic director at Actor's Express in Atlanta, a company he co-founded in the basement of an old church in 1988. In the twelve years of his leadership, the Express grew from a shoestring operation to one of the most highly regarded small theatres in the country. He has directed at major theaters across the country, including Actor's Theater of Louisville, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, A Contemporary Theatre in Seattle, The Alliance Theatre, Dallas Theatre Center, Asolo Center for the Performing Arts, Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, Pittsburgh Public Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop and Center Stage in Baltimore. A native Atlantan, Chris holds a B.F.A. from Baylor University and a M.F.A. from Carnegie Mellon. Chris has long been a public advocate for the arts both locally and nationally. From 1998 - 2004 he served on the board of directors of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national service organization for professional theaters, and currently sits on advisory boards for the Eastern & Central European Theatre Initiative and Sojourn Theatre in Portland. He is a 2004/05 Fellow of the American Leadership Forum of Oregon. Under his leadership, Portland Center Stage's budget has grown from \$3.2 million to \$4.7 million and the company has successfully balanced its budget for the past five consecutive years. Since moving to Oregon he has skied down Mt. Hood, rafted the White Salmon, repelled in the Dalles, traversed a ropes course at Mt. Adams, and biked most everywhere in Portland. He is a passionate student of how art can create community.

### **Rick Lewis {Music Director/Pianist}**

Rick was musical director for *Bat Boy: The Musical* at PCS. Rick is the creator of the hit Off-Broadway musical *The Taffetas*, with productions currently around the world. Rick has written: *Have A Nice Day! A '70's Musical Flashback!* (premiered at NYC's Theatre East), *G.I. Jukebox*, *A Taffeta Christmas* and

*The Cardigans* ( New York Backstage Bistro Award for Outstanding Musical Revue). Rick has written industrials for Honeywell, MGM/UA Home Video and New York City. Rick was Assistant Conductor/Vocal Director for the pre-Broadway workshop of Cy Coleman's *The Life* and casting pianist for the original pre-Broadway workshop of Stephen Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*. Rick has written musical productions for Disney Live Family Entertainment, American Hawaii Cruises, American West Steamboat Company, Great American River Journeys and American Classic Voyages. Most recently he developed and produced the Cinnamon Bear Cruise for the Portland Spirit. Rick is Director of Entertainment and Marketing for Portland Spirit Cruises.

### **Eric Skinner {Assistant Director}**

Eric Skinner has been living in Portland since 1987, dancing and touring extensively. Originally from Muncie, Indiana he received a B.A. in Dance from Butler University. He began choreographing in 1997 and over the years has created work for Aero/betty, Inland Pacific Ballet, BodyVox and is currently setting a new work for Polaris. In 2002 he co-founded the skinner/kirk DANCE ENSEMBLE, and has created three full evening productions with partner Daniel Kirk. He is a founding member of BodyVox, where he holds the position of Artistic Associate. Most recently his work was seen at The Joyce Theater in New York City. Eric last worked with PCS in 2003 assistant directing *Bat Boy: The Musical* and is happy to be working with Chris again on *The Fantasticks*.

### **Dex Edwards {Set Designer}**

Dex's last set design for Portland Center Stage was *This Wonderful Life* and *Bat Boy: The Musical*. His design work has been seen in theaters in the U.S., Canada and Europe, including the Long Wharf Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory, Northshore Music Theatre, The Brooklyn Academy of Music, Indiana Repertory, Alliance Theatre Company, Virginia Stage Company, Georgia Shakespeare Festival, Merrimack Repertory Theatre, The Drury Lane Oak Brook Theatre, The Jim Stafford Theatre, The Grand Palace Theatre, The 1996 Centennial Cultural Olympiad and Actor's Express in Atlanta, The Queens Mill Theatre in Ontario, Canada and the Berlin Opera House. Dex designed the world premiere of the Jimmy Buffet/Herman Wouk musical *Don't Stop the Carnival* (Coconut Grove Playhouse) and was the recipient of Chicago's Joseph Jefferson Award in Scenic Design for his work on *Comedy of Errors* (Chicago's Shakespeare Repertory Theatre). Dex also received the Boston Critics Circle Award for his production of *Miss Saigon* at North Shore Music Theatre.

### **John Armour {Fight Choreographer}**

John is an actor, director and fight director. He has assisted or choreographed violence for Portland Center Stage in previous productions such as *O Lovely Glowworm*, *King Lear*, *Bat Boy: The Musical*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *True West*, *Dirty Blonde*, *Closer* and *Hamlet*. Twice his fight work has been recognized with Drammy Awards for Best Fight Design: *Macbeth* (1992) and *Henry VI*, parts 1-2 (1995). John has choreographed or assisted in choreography for many other Portland theaters including Portland Repertory, Tygres Heart Shakespeare, Broadway Rose, Portland Opera and Artists Repertory Theatre. He also teaches workshops and choreographs productions at many colleges, middle, junior high and high schools in the Portland area and abroad. John is currently recognized with the Society of American Fight Directors and is the producer of the annual Portland, Oregon Stage Combat Workshop.

### **Jeff Cone {Costume Designer}**

Jeff Cone, costume shop manager for Portland Center Stage, most recently designed *This Wonderful Life*. Other PCS credits include *Underneath the Lintel*, *Things of Dry Hours*, *Anna in the Tropics*, *King Lear*, the world premiere of *Another Fine Mess*, *Cat*

on a *Hot Tin Roof*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *True West*, *Flesh and Blood*, *A New Brain*, *Closer*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, *Bus Stop* and *Dirty Blonde* for which he received a Drammy for Best Costume Design. Highlights of his sixteen year career include the world premiere of Pearl Cleage's *Flyin' West* at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, with subsequent productions at Indiana Repertory Theatre, Brooklyn Academy of Music and The Long Wharf Theatre; an expressionistic *Charlotte's Web* and ten annual productions of *A Christmas Carol* at The Alliance; and the coordination of costumes for the Seattle Opera's productions of *Andrea Chenier* and *La Traviata*.

### **Peter Maradudin {Lighting Designer}**

Peter is pleased to return to Portland Center Stage, where his previous work includes *Anna in the Tropics*, *Hamlet*, *The Bacchae*, *Little Foxes* and *Terra Nova*, among others. On Broadway he designed the lighting for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Kentucky Cycle*, and Off Broadway *Hurrah at Last*, *Ballad of Yachiyo* and *Bouncers*. Peter has designed over 300 regional theater productions for such companies as The Kennedy Center, The Guthrie Theater, American Conservatory Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, La Jolla Playhouse, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Old Globe Theatre, Huntington Theatre Company, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Steppenwolf, Dallas Theater Center and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. He is a Principal Designer with Visual Terrain, Inc., a lighting design consultancy for architecture and themed environments, and is the author of the plays *Eugene Onegin*, *The Woman in White* and *The Blackamoor of Peter the Great*.

### **Jen Raynak {Sound Designer}**

This is Jen's eleventh season at Portland Center Stage. She has designed sound for productions including *This Wonderful Life*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Underneath the Lintel*, *O Lovely Glowworm*, *Things of Dry Hours*, *Anna in the Tropics*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The SantaLand Diaries* and *A Christmas Memory*, *Another Fine Mess*, *Outrage*, *True West*, *Flesh and Blood* and *for colored girls....* Jen is a member of the Drammy Committee and serves on the Board of Directors of the Portland Area Theatre Alliance.

### **Mark Tynan {Stage Manager}**

Mark Tynan is happy to be entering his fourth season with Portland Center Stage. Previous PCS Shows include *Pride and Prejudice*, *O Lovely Glowworm*, *Things of Dry Hours*, *King Lear*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Bat Boy: The Musical*, *Outrage*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *for colored girls....* Previous to PCS, Mark toured nationally and internationally with musicals including *Dreamgirls*, *The King and I* with Rudolf Nureyev, *How to Succeed....*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Rent*. Mark is grateful for the hard work and support of Jamie Hill and Jacob Fenston, the PCS production assistants. The past several summers, Mark has enjoyed being part of the Broadway Rose Theatre Company productions in Tigard with shows including *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Chicago*.

### **Tom Jones {Book & Lyrics}**

Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt began their partnership at the University of Texas in 1950 with a musical revue called *Hipsy-Boo!*, for which Jones was sketch writer and Schmidt was musical director. The director of the show was Word Baker who later directed *The Fantasticks*. Following their successful collaborative efforts on *Hipsy-Boo!*, Jones and Schmidt wrote an original book musical and began writing songs together on a regular basis. After graduation, they both served in the Army during the Korean War and continued collaborating by mail. After leaving the Army, the pair moved to New York where Schmidt worked as a graphic artist for NBC television and a freelance illustrator for such magazines as *Life*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Sports Illustrated* and *Fortune* and Jones taught and tried to establish himself as a director. Writing together,

they contributed material to Julius Monk's *Upstairs-Downstairs* shows and Ben Bagley's *Shoestring Revues*. In their spare time, they worked on a full-scale musical based on Rostand's *Les Romanesques*. Originally envisioned as a big Broadway show, this effort eventually became *The Fantasticks*. For Broadway, the team has written *110 In The Shade*, a musical version of N. Richard Nash's tender southwest romance, *The Rainmaker*, as well as, among other shows, *I Do, I Do* adapted from Jan de Hartog's long-run comedy smash, *The Fourposter*. In the area of original musicals, they created *Celebration*, and working out of Portfolio, their own theatre workshop, *Philemon*, a show which brought the team the Outer Critics' Circle Award in 1975. The mission of Portfolio was to concentrate on the creation of small-scale musicals in new and untried forms. Jones and Schmidt also created a musical version of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, called *Grover's Corners*, and *Collette Collage*, a musical evening about the celebrated French author.

### **Harvey Schmidt {Music}**

Harvey Schmidt (born Texas, 1929) is a writer of musical theatre, best known for the longest running musical in history, *The Fantasticks*, which has been running off-Broadway since 1960. All of Schmidt's major musicals were written with lyricist Tom Jones whom he met at the University of Texas.

# SPOTLIGHT ON: TOM JONES & HARVEY SCHMIDT

The complete interview by Nancy Rosati



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**The following interview was conducted in late 2001 just before the close of *The Fantasticks* in January of 2002:**

Tom Jones wrote the book and lyrics, and Harvey Schmidt wrote the music for *The Fantasticks*, which closes January 13, 2002, almost 42 years after its opening on May 3, 1960. It is the longest-running production in the history of the American theatre.

Jones and Schmidt also wrote two successful Broadway shows, *110 in the Shade* and *I Do! I Do!*, and several small-scale musicals at Portfolio, their theatre workshop. The most notable of these efforts were *Celebration*, which moved to Broadway, and *Philemon*, which won an Outer Critics Circle Award. In 1998, Jones and Schmidt starred in a musical revue of their own work called *The Show Goes On* at The York Theatre. They received an OBIE Award and the 1992 Special Tony Award for *The Fantasticks*. They were inducted into the Broadway Hall of Fame at the Gershwin Theatre, and their “stars” were added to the Off Broadway Walk of Fame outside the Lucille Lortel Theatre.

**NANCY ROSATI:** I know you met in college but I want to hear a little bit about your background before that. What did you want to be when you grew up?

**HARVEY SCHMIDT:** We both wanted to be out of the state of Texas, (laughs) although now I’ve moved back to Texas. I always wanted to live in New York.

These little towns in Texas didn’t have anything back then. There’s more now with television but I grew up in the Depression years in the 1930s and all we had were movies, which were glorious when you got to see them. Then there was radio — two very separate things. That was it — our only touch with the outside world.

I wanted so much to learn more about music. I loved the music I heard on the radio. I lived for the symphony broadcasts on the weekend. Some of the entertainment shows at that time had wonderful music and so did the movies. I’ve always played and composed by ear but I never planned to have a career with music because I couldn’t read or write it. Instead I concentrated on art. I sat alone very happily, drawing while listening to Toscanini conducting on the radio. When I went to college at the University of Texas, it was like going to paradise because there were hundreds of people who did what I did.

**NR:** Did you go to school for music?

**HS:** No, I went there for art, but then fate, or “Dame Fortune” stepped in and I met Tom. Tom was a drama major a couple of years ahead of me. I was an art major but they needed a pianist for something called “*The Curtain Club*” so I started accompanying the drama students. LPs were just coming out for the first major Broadway shows like *Kiss Me Kate*. I learned all this music then and I got so interested in it just trying to accompany these drama students. Because of that, we did a show together. It was a revue of the first 50 years of American music. The director of this revue, a mutual friend of ours who later directed *The Fantasticks* in New York, Word Baker, asked if I would be Musical Director. I was thrilled. I didn’t know how to be Musical Director but my schooling had been through



MGM musicals, so I knew what they should sound like and when you have to do key changes, and when you have the chorus come in real big. I just played Musical Director and it was a smashing success. Tom did all the comedy acts and materials but our channels were separate. We didn't really work together. A year later we wrote our first musical together. Tom invited me and he was so bright it was an offer I couldn't refuse.

**NR:** Tom, how did you get to the University of Texas?

**TOM JONES:** I was from a small town in west Texas too and... we never had any live theater, except, every summer there was a wonderful tent show that would come up and tour these little Texas towns. They'd put up a tent on a vacant lot and they would play for a full week. They would sell popcorn and cracker jacks with a prize in each and every package, and they would have a drawing at intermission with kewpie dolls for prizes. They would do live shows with some music on the side. It was a mixture of rural drama, comedies, and vaudeville, so between the scenes the actors would play in the band or do something else.

I don't know how I knew that I was going to be in the theater, but I knew I wanted to be somebody other than who I was. By the time I was 12 years old, I could get attention by pretending to be somebody else. I performed for anybody. I was an usher at the local movie theater. On Wednesday nights they would have a talent show for local people. I was in high school and after ushering, I would run back and put on my bow tie. I was the MC introducing these acts and then I would do a routine that I stole from the radio. I would do my "Zero Mostel routine" and the audience looked at me as if I were from outer space. It was a very small western Texas town and I wore a sailor straw hat and carried a cane to school. I smoked a pipe and I signed all of my papers, including the column I wrote for the high school newspaper, "T. Collins Jones, Esq." It's a wonder they didn't stop me. They just figured "that's old crazy Tommy."

**HS:** I would have gotten beaten to a pulp at any of my high schools if I did that.

**NR:** How have you stayed behind the scenes in all these shows for all these years? Did you want to be on stage?

**TJ:** When you're little, you don't know there's anything but acting. You don't know there's writing or directing. When I prepared myself to be in the theater, which I'd never really seen, I went to the University of Texas and there were all these crazy people there. It was glorious. I got very nervous when I performed. After many years of analysis in New York I finally got over that, but I would belch. I became famous as a "belching actor." I did *Doolittle* in *Pygmalion* belching and Kit Carson in *The Time of Your Life* belching. It occurred to me at some point that maybe I wasn't doing the audience or my stomach any particular favors. I also realized that the power seemed to be with the director. If you're the director you get to tell people, "No, let's do that again" and that was very attractive to me.

**NR:** You discovered that fact in college, and that's when the two of you met?

**TJ:** Yes. Neither of us wanted to be writers, even in college. I was a director and he was an art student. We got the chance to do a college musical. I got the chance to direct it. It paid money. The scripts and the scores I got were just terrible and I thought, "I can do better than this. I'll just get this talented guy (indicating Harvey) on the phone" and indeed we wrote this college revue. It was a traditional title that they did every year called *Time Staggers On*.

**HS:** It was a play on the newsreel *Time Marches On*.

**TJ:** Even though we didn't want to be writers, our show was such an incredible success that it was just astonishing to us. In all of my years there, I'd never seen anything like this. We were in a 1,200 seat house and they sold it out. They sold out the aisles.



They sold out the windows. They opened the windows so people could gather outside.

**HS:** We've never had a bigger hit.

**TJ:** That's right. Our college friends think we've been going downhill ever since. Then we went in the Army and we were going on about our own careers. But something about all that just haunted us — the success and the fun of doing it. So we started writing songs by mail.

**HS:** Tom would send me lyrics in the Army. He was stationed in the "mysterious East."

**TJ:** Not the Far East — it was the "mysterious Baltimore, Maryland."

**HS:** I hadn't been to Baltimore so it was mysterious to me. Also, he was in ...

**TJ:** ... the Counter Intelligence Corps. I was countering intelligence wherever it reared its ugly head in the Army ... which wasn't too often.

**HS:** He had strange addresses that weren't real army addresses. If I asked him a question he said he couldn't answer that. We couldn't talk on the phone. He started sending me lyrics.

**TJ:** (teasing) What you didn't know was that they were coded messages to North Korea.

**HS:** I lucked out after basic training. I'm a very weak person. I went into the Lieutenant's office, practically in tears. (I wasn't crying, because you can't cry in the Army.) I said, "You have made a terrible mistake. I can't march these troops around," and he could tell I was serious, so they made up a perfect job for me. I was in charge of training aids at an army movie theater. I had offices in what had once been dressing rooms, which I constantly decorated with army surplus. Everything in the Army you have to steal or beg or borrow. Every morning a Jeep driver took me to the main post at Fort Bliss ... I went sailing by with my own driver to pick up two films for the day. The rest of the day I would draw and paint. Mostly I would do officers' helmets. They would get promotions and I would have to paint their new insignia on their helmets.

Tom would send me these lyrics and there was a stage there. I'd get out on the stage and I'd sing and dance working on these songs, alone in this theater. It couldn't have been more perfect.

**NR:** Does Tom still write the lyrics first?

**HS & TJ:** (simultaneously) We work both ways.

**HS:** You get a richer score that way.

**TJ:** And very often we sort of "cross pollinate." In other words, I'll have a title and part of a song. I'll give it to Harvey and he will fill it out with the music. Then it will come back to me for lyrics and it will go back and forth.

**NR:** How did you get from the Korean War to New York?

**TJ:** I'm older than Harvey. I know it doesn't look it, but I am. I went into the Army first and I got out of it first. Harvey always had "city intentions." I didn't. As a little kid, Harvey had these visions of New York City with glass streets like in an MGM musical.

**HS:** Because all the musical numbers were about Manhattan and they were always dancing on black glass floors with skyscrapers in the background, so I thought that was what New York was.

**TJ:** I didn't have those kind of romantic visions of New York but I didn't know where else I could go with this peculiar thing that I did, which was that I knew something about the stage. I didn't know anything about movies. There wasn't any television. I was on television many times before I ever saw television.



**HS:** Me too. We both did some shows but I had never seen it.

**NR:** You were both on television that early?

**HS:** They didn't have it in Austin. We had to drive to San Antonio. A professor would drive us down on Sunday and we did revues in a tiny room.

**TJ:** And the screens were very small.

**HS:** I thought, "I will never get a television set because this is so sleazy compared to movies." No one had a set.

**TJ:** Anyway, I knew of no place else to go or nothing else to do. My friend, Harry Rigby, who produced many things like *Irene* and *Sugar Babies*, used to say "Producing is the last refuge of the hopelessly inept." That was sort of my situation. I wasn't producing but I wasn't equipped to do anything else except wear a sailor straw hat and carry a cane and do imitations of Zero Mostel.

I came to New York with the intentions of being a director but it became evident right away that you could tell people what a wonderful director you were, but they weren't convinced. You had to have something to show. On the other hand, if you could write something down, like nightclub things or comedy material ... I had a friend, Tom Poston. He's been on sitcoms for 50 years now. He wanted to do comedy so I wrote and directed a comedy sketch which got wonderful reviews. Then we were hired at Le Ruban Bleu Supper Club. We were the darlings of New York for two weeks. We opened at Le Ruban Bleu and all of the things that we'd done at the showcase theater at the Mark Hellinger, which had been so deliriously well received, didn't do as well this time. It was really "anarchy comedy." We were ahead of our time ... or behind it. It was a disaster, so I realized I had to regroup.

Harvey was due to get out of the Army. My father was a turkey hatcheryman. (David Merrick always thought that was very funny that my father hatched turkeys, given the connotation in the theater.) I went back and got a job candling turkey eggs, which means you wipe the crap off of them with a little piece of steel wool, while listening to the radio all day long. It was one of the more restful jobs I've ever had in my life.

**HS:** I would have loved it. I love anything where you can work and play the radio and get paid for it.

**TJ:** I saved whatever meager money I got from that and waited for Harvey to get out. Our friend, Word Baker, had a wife and two kids and another one on the way. He had gone to teach at Auburn College in Alabama. We had this plan that we were going to put together a revue of comedy songs and material. We would all group together and go to

New York and take it by storm. It was a revue called Portfolio. We came to New York but we never could get the financing to do it, although a lot of the material caught the attention of some of these revue people.

Harvey immediately had a very successful career as a commercial artist — one of the top in America. Meanwhile, I was working in book stores and teaching a little drama group at St. Bartholomew's. We began to do material for Julius Monk's *Upstairs-Downstairs* and for the *Shoestring Revues* and things like that.

We began to work on a show called Roadside. We wrote five or six songs. We couldn't get the rights to it. I also didn't have enough skill to solve the problems of the book so we put it aside. We started working on this play based on something by [Edmond] Rostand. We couldn't get that to work, although we worked on it for several years. It just wouldn't work. Finally Word Baker said, "I got a job directing three one-act plays at a summer theater that Mildred Dunnock runs, using the stage at Barnard College. She said I could do one of them as a musical. If you can take that Rostand thing you've been working on and write it as a long one-act musical



in three weeks, I can give you a production three weeks after that.”

We threw out everything we had except a song called “*Try to Remember*” and went back to the original play. We’d been trying to do this in the style of Rodgers and Hammerstein, which we didn’t know how to do, and which this little innocent play couldn’t sustain. We decided, “What the heck. It’s never going to get put on anyway” so we did all the things we liked in the theater — all the presentation things, the commedia dell’arte, the Shakespeare, the Oriental theater, the invisible prop man sprinkling snow — everything that used the imagination, a celebration of theatricality. We put it on and lo and behold we got offers from three different producers. We chose Lore Noto. It took eight months to raise the \$15,000 that it took to put on the show. Then it opened ...

**NR:** And look what happened.

**TJ:** Exactly. It could just as easily have disappeared and been gone forever. It could have disappeared after opening, even though Jerry Orbach was dynamite. The whole company was wonderful but the first couple of notices were cool and there was some real serious talk about closing it on opening night. Nobody would ever have heard of it again. Now, I think if somebody were smart, they would re-issue some of the really good recordings of “*Try to Remember*.” “Try to remember the kind of September” of innocence. All of that has an amazing resonance and it has it now at the theater. You can just feel it.

**HS:** There was a wonderful piece in the *Wall Street Journal* recently. The woman who reviews for them was wandering the streets dazed the day of the bombing, and there were ashes everywhere and she was so depressed. She was trying to get home to Brooklyn and she suddenly found herself on Sullivan Street and saw the sign for *The Fantasticks*. She was tired of walking so she went in.

**TJ:** She had never seen the show.

**HS:** She had known it was going to close now so she decided to go in and rest her feet. At the top of the show El Gallo starts singing “Try to remember the kind of September” and she found it terribly moving so she did a long piece on the show.

**NR:** What are your thoughts on the closing? Are you ready to let it go?

**HS:** Oh yeah. As recently as our anniversary party last spring I was saying, “If this has run 41 years, I think it can run to 50” and Tom said, “Be careful what you say.” Here we are and it’s not running, but I don’t mind. We were young when it opened and look at us now. It’s been a long time. It’s been wonderful to have it. I’d rather it close when I’m still alive.

**TJ:** (to Harvey) How are you feeling? You going to make it to January?

**HS:** I don’t know what I think... I’m thinking about what’s coming up rather than what’s in the past.

**NR:** I’m sure you’ve changed over all these years.

**HS:** Yes. We’re both much more knowledgeable. I think we can write things more easily too.

**TJ:** We’ve changed but I think the principles that we have haven’t changed. We’ve never in that way been timely. I don’t like to say that we’ve been “timeless” but the stuff that we do has never been specifically au courant. *The Fantasticks* is not that... They’re not locked into time periods.

**NR:** I have a question about Grover’s Corners. I keep hearing that *Our Town* has so much more resonance after September 11th. I’m wondering if we might get a chance to see that.

**TJ:** We don’t have the rights anymore. They’ve reverted to the estate.

**HS:** They wanted a certain important production and it came close with us but it never actually happened. Once the estate had *Hello, Dolly!* ...

**TJ:** Just like the Lynn Riggs estate. It’s very tricky. The only other thing they



had from the Lynn Riggs estate was a little thing called *Oklahoma!*. Sometimes it's hard to explain to people that everything you do doesn't turn into *Oklahoma!*.

**NR:** I'd like to hear more about your Portfolio Studio.

**HS:** That was a wonderful period. Right after we'd done *I Do! I Do!* we had quite a bit of money rolling in with regular royalties and things, so we decided to do an experimental workshop where we would do everything — write, direct and I would design.

**TJ:** It's called "egomania!" Or hubris which is punished by nemesis. So we had both hubris and nemesis - act 1 and act 2.

**HS:** We looked all over New York. It's very hard to find a space in New York that doesn't have columns. Anything that's remotely large enough to make into a theater, it's very hard to find. One day we stumbled on this building. It had a wonderful location on 47th Street, just a few doors west of Eighth Avenue, so it was just on the fringes of the New York Broadway area. From the street it looked like a traditional brownstone, but when you went up the stairs and past the first room, suddenly there was this gorgeous space with no columns. It had been built as a wedding chapel for immigrant marriages back in the 19th century and it made a fabulous theater with very little redoing. We added some seats and we painted everything raw umber, which is my favorite color.

**TJ:** Harvey designed a basic set which was a modified "enter above, enter below."

**HS:** It was like Shakespeare. We did everything on that. We love to do minimal things anyway. Roadside is very minimal.

We had three or four floors above it. The whole top floor was our costume room. When we did *Celebration*, we wanted to do a musical as cheaply as you can do it, even if it was a big show that eventually moved to Broadway. We got all the costumes free. They were things that people gave us.

**TJ:** (laughing) It was called "thrift shop Broadway."

**HS:** Yeah, but it was a very elegant show.

**TJ:** It was very elegant.

**HS:** I decided the only way to make this look good was to do it by colors. There were five or six different sections in the show, so whatever we would get, I would do all the blues up here and nail them on the wall, and reds were over there. It was very exciting and the whole look of the show began to start happening that way. It was a real playhouse. It was great to show people through it. They were just dazzled. The building was more interesting to them than any of our shows. (Tom laughed in agreement.)

**NR:** What happened to it?

**TJ:** In five or six years, we did four shows that we showed to the public. We did a lot of others ... Of course this was during the period of the "artsy-fartsy" '60s. We would have exercise classes and circus classes for our actors. There were belly dancing classes and clown mask classes. We were paying for all of this ourselves.

**HS:** Nobody could complain about what we did because we were paying for it ourselves. What was really great was that at the back of the theater, there was a balcony with a railing, very high up, and it opened onto this big second floor room. That was my studio where I worked all the time. I had all these musical instruments and when we did these weekly workshops, I would improvise while the actors were improvising. There were no mistakes — the more pagan the better. I would have all these instruments lying around and while I was in the throes of dramatically playing this music, I was always knocking heavy musical cow bells off. Sometimes when we had an audience we came close to killing some people. It had a "*Phantom of the Opera* quality" to it, with all of this dark raw umber and this person up there playing this mad music.



**TJ:** In all those sections, we would begin with improvisations and mask things, and then we would close with ... (to Harvey) oh my God, how much Gallo wine did we drink? We would all sit in a circle and drink wine and it was like a group session. We'd talk about our lives.

**NR:** Did you run out of money or did it just go out of style?

**HS:** We had done everything we'd gone there to do. One of the shows, *Philemon* received very good reviews.

**TJ:** Probably the best reviews we ever got in our lives.

**HS:** Then it was done on the west coast by Hollywood Television Theatre. They took our cast and filmed it out there.

**TJ:** It got the Outer Critics Circle Award, but it's a hard show to do well. It's a show I like but it's very demanding. The first part is very comedic, but the second part goes to a full human sacrifice at the end, with the same people who'd been comedic in the beginning, and then to a transcendence beyond that.

**HS:** I feel it was the nicest use of that building for a show. Some of the church windows that were on the side, which we had covered and painted, had platforms under each window and a different character would be standing there. It was a very formal show and very beautiful.

**NR:** What's in that building now?

**HS:** It's been turned into swanky apartments. I wish I had bought it but we could never find out who owned it. It got more and more mysterious.

**TJ:** The owners were in prison eventually.

**HS:** Somebody would call and say, "Meet Bobby in a phone booth at 47th and Broadway and give him the money for the rent." Then we also got a bill one day for electricity that went all the way back to 1938. It was \$95,000 and they were threatening to put us in prison.

**TJ:** But it wasn't addressed to us. It was addressed to the owners who were in prison.

**HS:** And the back wall was about to fall down, so we decided it was time to leave.

**TJ:** One of the shows we did there was called *The Bone Room*, a middle-aged musical about male menopause. It was about a guy who glued bones at the Museum of Natural History and he was having this nervous breakdown in his life. We had this real human skeleton, so one of the last things we packed up as we moved out was this character. Also in this scene, there was a fake human skull with teeth that chattered and made a sound like maniacal laughter. Unbeknownst to any of us, it had gotten in there with the skeleton. We packed it all up. It was all taped and just as we were ready to move everything, we heard this maniacal laughter coming from the trunk.

**HS:** Mocking our whole existence!

**NR:** You two obviously get along very well.

**HS:** It's like a marriage. We've learned to work on separate continents. You kind of learn what to avoid.

**NR:** What's the best part about working together?

**HS:** Well, one nice thing after all these years is that we have always liked the same kind of theater and because we know enough about each other's work, there's a real shorthand in working together. If Tom indicates he's going to do something, I know sort of what he's going to do and I don't have to worry about it.

**TJ:** The best thing for me is I can't write music and I really like Harvey's music.

**NR:** Is there another show in your future?

**HS:** There are other things I want to do before I die and I'm 72 now. I feel time is running out.

**TJ:** You are going to make it to the closing, aren't you, Harvey?



**HS:** Yeah. I've had a very rich life. I want to get a book done on my whole art career. I've had wonderful assignments that would make a wonderful book. For many years, I did art work for Ben Bagley Recordings and I want to do a whole book of those. Then I want to write a book about my life, not that my life is that meaningful, but there have been 32 bizarre incidents that have happened in my life and I'm going to call the book "*32 Bizarre Incidents*." There's so much to do, just in taking care of what I've already done. I want to get my files of all the music in pristine, perfect shape and get everybody copies. I don't want to die and leave things that aren't clear. There's a lot of visual stuff in our shows that I want to organize.

**NR:** Sounds as if you've got a full agenda.

**HS:** I do. I've got the big studio down there in Texas and I want to just stay there. I've had to travel so much the last several years. I want to work on my health too. There's a wonderful gym two blocks from my house and they just added a huge new swimming pool. What I do is very minimal, but I want to do it. When I come up here I don't do anything. I just eat all of the time and don't do anything.

**NR:** Tom, what do you want to do?

**TJ:** I want to write some more shows. I've been working for a year or so now on a musical version of *Harold and Maude*. I have about three things I would like to do. Then I would really like to rest. After this show opens and *The Fantasticks* closes, I would like to go to my house in Connecticut. I haven't been able to get there much this year because my kids are in school in New York. I would love to go for three weeks and never leave. I'd put a fire in the fireplace and have the family come up on the weekend. I would take my dog and walk in the snow and read. I would love to read and listen to music and sit by the fire and drink martinis.

**HS:** In the last number of decades, there's been no time to do anything. I don't ever feel I have time to see a movie. When you're working on a show, you can never give it enough time. It's never good enough. It's a tunnel where the light is so distant at the end, you can barely see it.

**TJ:** And you can't think about other things. I go home after the show at night and I can't even watch

television. I turn it on because I can't go right to bed, but nothing registers. It's not that the show is in trouble, but it obsesses you.

**HS:** It has to obsess you. For years people wanted me to do a recording where I play our songs on the piano. I'm dying to do that, but my fingers are getting more arthritic so there are almost no runs in anything I play anymore. I want to play before it gets very club-footed.

**NR:** How do you want to be remembered?

**TJ:** I simply don't think in those terms. I'm not interested in that whatsoever. I'm interested in work. I'm not interested in history in that way. I'd like for my family to remember me affectionately and to feel that I did a good job.

**HS:** I'd like for people to remember "*Try to Remember*." I'm going to put that on my tombstone. I'm going to be buried in this very simple country cemetery in central Texas where my parents are buried, and my grandparents and all of my aunts and uncles. It's a beautiful rural church that was built and designed by my grandfather in the late 19th century. I bought his farm a number of years ago and I'd always hoped to restore that and live there but time goes by so quickly I'll probably never get that done. I'll be buried there but I want to design my tombstone before it happens. I want it to be in Roman type. I don't trust anyone else to do that.

**TJ:** I played the Old Actor in the original version of *The Fantasticks* under an assumed name. On my tombstone, I would like "Remember me in light." Maybe I'll just write a book instead and call it that.

**NR:** Thank you so much.



**HUCKLEBEE:** Children!

**BELLOMY:** Lovers!

**HUCKLEBEE:** Fantasticks!

This is the enthusiastic way two fathers describe their children in *The Fantasticks*. All children are “exceedingly or unbelievably great” to their parents. They are “incredible” — in the best sense of the word. This is the hyperbole of love. But the word “fantastic” can also mean “ludicrously odd,” “eccentric,” and even “grotesque.” And love can seem ludicrously odd and eccentric to those not directly involved in it.

The term “fantastic” has its roots in the Greek word *phantastikos*, meaning “to make visible” or “imagine.” The world of the imagination is often viewed as a lesser reality in our postmodern world. What exists in the imagination only, smacks of “fanciful ideas” or “wild notions.” The imaginary realm is unreal. Perhaps that’s the point. To be in love is both “unbelievably great” and fantastical. It is a kind of madness characterized by puzzling eccentricities that can amuse or even alarm onlookers. The play seems to comment on the tension between love as a wondrous thing and love as something downright crazy.

**HUCKLEBEE:** My son — he is fantastic!

**BELLOMY:** My daughter — is fantastic too.  
They’re both of them mad.

A review by Michael Smith in the *Village Voice* described the musical as a “balance between worldly wit and naiveté.” The librettist, Tom Jones, responds: “Yes, that’s it. That’s what we wanted: to celebrate romanticism and mock it at the same time.” And so the audience can maintain its postmodern realism and be charmed by this love story.

This musical owes its story to a long line of literary and classical antecedents. The theme of star-crossed lovers predates the written word. It began as a Babylonian folktale told and retold for generations. A young couple, a beautiful girl and a handsome boy, fall in love. Their feuding fathers try to forbid that love but the two lovers are able to talk to each other through a hole in a wall between their two houses. Eventually, misunderstanding leads to the tragic death of the lovers. The story reappears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Shakespeare drew on this theme for

two of his works. In *Romeo and Juliet* the storyline is very similar to Ovid’s tale, but in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* he creates a comic “play within a play” complete with young lovers, angry fathers and a wall. Fortunately, the lovers rise from the dead at the end of their less than convincing performance and then perform a rustic dance.

*The Fantasticks* draws liberally from these various traditions. There are the requisite lovers, two feuding fathers and a wall. Jones, the librettist, and Schmidt, the composer, were also influenced by Edmond Rostand’s spoof of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Les Romanesques* (“the romantics”) where the wall and the feud are part of a plot by the fathers to entice their children into marriage. What Bellomy and Hucklebee understand, which Montague and Capulet did not, is that the way you influence your children is by hiding your true intentions: “To manipulate children, you merely say ‘no.’” Rolfe Humphries, in his translation of Ovid, calls it the suppressed fire that “burns all the fiercer.” In *The Fantasticks*, this idea is expressed in the song, “Never Say No.” One can even hear the loose ten-beat metrical pattern of Ovidian hexameter in the lyrics of this song.

Jones trained in classical theater, and he sprinkles literary and classical references throughout the musical. In one scene Matt searches for a name to call the object of his attraction: “I don’t know what to call her. She’s too vibrant for a name.” Luisa carries the full range of qualities that “woman” can encompass in his imagination. He tries out a variety of different names: Helena, Juliet, Cassandra, Cleopatra, Beatrice and Guinevere. Each of them adds something different to the image of a woman. Helena is the beauty who causes the Trojan War; Juliet, the tragic



lover; Cassandra, the prophetess and heroine of Greek mythology; Cleopatra, the powerful seductress; Guinevere is the passionate adulterer; Beatrice, the sharp-tongued heroine in *Much Ado About Nothing* or the intercessor for Dante as he journeyed through purgatory to paradise.

There's little of the gossamer romance to these references. They have a decidedly dark tone. Jones writes that he and Schmidt were in fact reacting to the sweetness and light of Rostand's play: "The point of our own version is that one must give up one's youthful illusions and romanticism and move into the season of maturity and reality." Ultimately, Matt settles on the name Polaris, generally regarded as the most important star in the heavens. Romanticism reasserts itself. But not for long.

The two fathers build a wall and stage an abduction to achieve their end. They sing "*The Rape Ballet*." It is likely that this is more a reference to the archaic meaning of the word, "the act of seizing and carrying off by force," than to sexual exploitation. But it is an uncomfortable allusion nonetheless. It is an expression of the dark side of love, whether romantic or parental, abduction or sexual abuse. The musical draws from Roman myth with a reference to the Rape of the Sabine Women. This mythological event takes place just after Rome is founded. Rome lacks women and in an effort to grow quickly, a neighboring town is invited to a celebration honoring Neptune. In the middle of the party the Romans rush in and abduct the Sabine women who are forced to marry their rapists. The Sabines and Romans are prepared for war but are stopped by the women who place themselves between the two battle-ready groups. The cities are reconciled.

Jones and Schmidt season their musical with various quotes from Shakespeare's works. These phrases allow the audience the fun of an "aha!" moment of recognition. They also give the play more dark overtones. The phrase "Friends, Romans, Countrymen" is borrowed from Julius Caesar. It is from Mark Antony's eulogy for Caesar. It is followed by a reference to *Macbeth*: "Screw your courage to the sticking place." Here, Lady Macbeth presses her husband to find the courage to murder the king. During the abduction, a scuffle between Matt and

the perpetrators is punctuated by the phrase, "Once more, dear friends, into the breach!" This is drawn from a battle scene in Henry V. El Gallo quotes from *Hamlet*: "Good night, Sweet Prince." These are Horatio's words to Hamlet who has just died to avenge his father. The imagery of death appears again with a quote from Antony's death scene in Antony and Cleopatra and Luisa mentions the death of Desdemona in Othello. These are somber references for a romantic musical, miles away from the sugary Rodgers and Hammerstein tradition that had dominated theater for the decades before this was written. All of these hints of darkness make one yearn for resolution just like Luisa: "I want there to be a happy ending."

The musical has fairy tale-like qualities complete with a happy ending. Jones and Schmidt create characters and scenarios that are almost iconographic: feuding buffoon like fathers, lovers, the hero rescuing the damsel in distress, the villain. To reinforce this mood, there are even some fairy tale references. The fathers do a vaudevillian dance routine with their song "*Plant a Radish*" that mentions Jack's beanstalk. In this musical, the goose lays a platinum-plated egg instead of a golden one. Eggs and giant bean stalks are both symbols of hope and fertility. Toward the end of the musical Matt returns to Luisa after a journey of disillusionment. He is greeted by El Gallo who calls him the Prodigal Son. Two themes are reflected in this parable: returning home and reconciliation. Luisa and Matt end up in each other's arms, scuffed up a bit but that much wiser.

This musical may have the dark shading of modernism, but at its heart it is pure romance.

# ABDUCTION OF LANGUAGE: DISCUSSING THE WORD “RAPE” IN *THE FANTASTICKS*

by Darius Pierce



Dueling, from left: Jerry Orbach, Rita Gardner, Kenneth Nelson.

“I know you prefer Abduction, but the proper word is Rape.”  
—El Gallo, *The Fantasticks*

At first, it was mostly men who settled the city of Rome. It was a rough city and did not attract many women. Romulus realized this and tried to attract women from neighboring communities, for if Rome was to survive, it needed women to help populate the town. The Romans devised a brutal plan to solve their problem. They invited a nearby tribe, the Sabians, to a festival. Once inside the city, the men were attacked and killed and the women abducted. The Sabine men were furious and, led by their king Titus Tatius, made war on Romulus. When the fighting had reached its peak, the Sabine women, who had grown fond of their Roman husbands, rushed between the ranks and begged both sides to make peace. So the battle was stopped, and Romulus and Titus Tatius ruled together over the two peoples. This myth, supposed to be based on some fact, was famously adapted into the musical *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* and the myth itself is commonly called “The Rape of the Sabine Women”.

**rape** Function: *noun* **1**: an act or instance of robbing or despoiling or carrying away a person by force.

— Merriam-Webster

In *The Fantasticks*, the two fathers, Bellomy and Hucklebee, hire El Gallo to stage a faux abduction. El Gallo will begin to carry away Bellomy’s daughter and when Hucklebee’s son successfully fends off the would-be villain, the two children will fall in love. However, El Gallo insists on referring to the abduction as a rape.

He is utilizing the word “rape” in its original sense, dating back to antiquity. The word originates from the Latin *rapere*: to seize. “To rape a person” meant to capture the person for the purpose of enslavement, and was common in ancient warfare. In this context, the willingness of the victim is irrelevant to the categorization of the act as “rape.” In Alexander Pope’s epic poem *The Rape of the Lock*, the word “rape” is used hyperbolically in this context, exaggerating a trivial violation against a person.

Though the sexual connotation is today dominant, the word “rape” is still sometimes used in a non-sexual context. For example, environmental destruction is sometimes described as “raping the earth,” and the Rape of Nanking describes a violation both against a town, as well as the people. In “the rape of the Silmarils” in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion*, the



word “rape” is used with its old meaning of “seizing and taking away.” One could find many examples in modern writing, both fiction and non-fiction, of the “rape” of a village or a forest or an idea.

This in no way takes away from the absolute abomination that is the sexual act of rape, nor the fact that that has become the primary meaning of the word, despite the fact that Merriam-Webster reads:

**rape 1:** an act or instance of robbing or despoiling or carrying away a person by force **2:** unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will usually of a female.

—Merriam-Webster

*The Fantasticks* not only uses the more antiquated meaning of the word, but makes explicitly clear that it is an abduction that is being discussed. There is no sexual overtone. There is no darker insinuation. There is no attempt whatsoever to make light of the word “rape” or its sexual meaning. Because this instance refers to the abduction of a young woman, though, it may be more difficult to overlook the use of the word “rape” here than in reference to a village or a forest or a myth.

This knowledge will certainly not assuage all concerns, rancor, and possibly even offense at the use of this word. Nor could any discussion of the issue ever hope or want to. It is clear that since “rape” has taken on the meaning of one of man’s most heinous crimes, it becomes increasingly difficult to use the word in its original context. However, that is the context in which Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt place it. In honoring their work and desiring to present this canonical musical, Portland Center Stage asks you to join us in placing the word in its relevant context, not only as an abduction, but also as just one small part of the wonderful whole that is *The Fantasticks*.

# THIS ACTUALLY IS HOW MUCH YOU PAY

compiled by Paul G. Miller

**HUCKLEBEE:** We hire this man to assist us. He starts to kidnap your daughter. My son runs in to save her. Then, a battle.

**EL GALLO:** I allow the boy to defeat me...

**HUCKLEBEE:** My son becomes a hero... and the feud is over forever.

**BELLOMY:** How much for such a drama?

**EL GALLO:** That, Senor, depends... on what you pay.  
—from *The Fantasticks*

By 1990, *The Fantasticks* had repaid more than \$45,000 for every \$330 invested, more than a 13,500 percent return. Here are some other noteworthy figures.

<b>\$55</b>	Cost of 1/6 of a percent of the royalties
<b>\$309.57</b>	Actual cost of the costumes
<b>\$350</b>	Cost of renting the Sullivan Street Playhouse for one week
<b>\$480</b>	Initial payment for Ed Wittstein, the set, light, costume and prop designer plus \$24.48 a week, which by 1990 was still coming in the mail “as regular as clockwork.”
<b>\$541</b>	Total budget for the costumes
<b>\$900</b>	Budget for the set
<b>\$906.26</b>	Money lost the first week of the run
<b>\$1,000</b>	Net profit from a full house
<b>\$1,867.79</b>	Tickets sold to the first week of the run
<b>\$4,400</b>	Gross profit from a full house
<b>\$16,500</b>	Raised by backers to produce the show
<b>\$250,000</b>	The approximate cost of producing <i>The Pajama Game</i> in 1954
<b>\$800,000</b>	The approximate cost of producing <i>Follies</i> in 1971
<b>\$14 million</b>	The approximate cost of producing <i>Wicked</i> in 2003

## SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Before beginning your discussions with the class, it can be revealing to ask the students what impressions of music theater they already have. Have they seen any musicals before? Apart from the fact that there is singing, what a musical different from other forms of theater they have seen? The answers to these questions will provide a baseline set of expectations among the students as they prepare to see this special interpretation of a classic musical.

### Before the show:

The original version of *The Fantasticks* was conceived as a spoof of *Romeo and Juliet*. Are the students familiar with the basic plot idea behind Shakespeare's play? Discuss how the idea of a "spoof" affects their expectations about the play.

1. What does the title lead them to expect?
2. How would you describe the design concept behind the work? Choose a couple of adjectives that express the style and mood of the set, costumes, lighting and sound design. How do these elements achieve this effect? What do they add to the performance? Imagine the same play done on a traditional, blank Shakespearean stage in Elizabethan costume. How would this change your impression of the piece?
3. Read the plot synopsis provided in this guide. Choose a word and an emotion that captures the arc of the play for you and discuss how you would use costume, lighting and set design to illustrate your ideas. Use drawings, visual aids or writing to present your thoughts.

### After the show:

1. When the students first entered the theater, they saw a team of stagehands taking apart a set. Did the students take this at face value — in other words, did they believe they were looking at an actual set strike, or did they believe the play to be already in progress? Was there a particular moment when they decided the play had begun?

2. In plot terms, a "reversal" refers to a moment in a play where the audience's understanding is turned around. With this in mind, ask the students about their first impressions of the two fathers. Were they surprised to find the fathers had planned their children's attraction to each other? Did anybody suspect this from the start?
3. Do any lines from the play especially stick with the students? Why are those lines memorable?
4. In which characters of the play do you see yourself? How did your perception of yourself or someone else change after having seen the play?
5. Which character in the play would you say starts out with the most illusions? How does he or she lose those illusions? Is this something that everybody has to experience in life?
6. What scene do you find most memorable in this production? Analyze the ways that set, costume, and acting helped this scene come alive for you. Is there any way you would change it?
7. The play ends with El Gallo warning the other character they should not tear down the wall between their properties again, since "you must always leave the wall." What do you think El Gallo means by this statement? Do you agree with him?

# SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

continued

## The Set

1. The concept behind this production is that a group of stage hands are dismantling the set for the previous show, and they start tinkering with *The Fantasticks* and end up doing the whole play. Therefore the stage hands incorporate whatever's lying around the theater to help tell their story. Choose some form of performance you saw or heard recently (such as a movie or television show or a song). What if you had to stage a version of it in the school library? What materials would you find already in the library that would help you tell your story?
2. Imagine you are a set designer for a local theater. Create a model of a set for your favorite novel adapted to the stage. What is your vision? What do you want to accomplish for the audience?

## The Costumes

1. Costumes can be used to express a character's emotional journey over the course of the play. With this in mind, which characters have frequent changes, and which are unvarying? Choose one character that is especially memorable for you and describe the progression of his or her costumes.
2. Choose any characters from the play and create your own costume evolution for him or her. Plot out the changes or emotion that he or she undergoes and sketch out a costume to reflect each of these changes.
3. Choose your favorite character from the play and an important scene that involves your character. Create a costume design that is surprising and unexpected. How might your costume design affect the actor's interpretation of the character? How would your design change the audience's experience of the character and the play?

## Playwriting

1. The basic plot strategy behind *The Fantasticks* is that Act 1 shows us a familiar story, and then Act 2 reverses or inverts the traditional tale. Think of other familiar tales whose endings might suggest a sequel.
2. *The Fantasticks* affectionately makes fun of certain music theater conventions, such as the "happy ending" song at the end of Act 1. Take any song from show and rewrite it in your favorite music style (hip-hop or rap, for example).

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Cast of Hallmark Hall of Fame TV Production (NBC, 1964), from left to right: Bert Lahr, Ricardo Montalban, Susan Watson, Stanley Holloway, and John Davidson.



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