



Words and music: The songwriting team of CHAD BEGUELIN (left) and MATT SKLAR ("Elf: The Musical," "The Wedding Singer") signed an administration deal with Warner/Chappell.



Broadway "Book of Mormon" composer ROBERT LOPEZ

The Sacred And The Profane

'Avenue Q' Composer On His New Musical With 'South Park' Duo

The Tony Award-winning Broadway musical "Avenue Q" may owe its existence to Stan, Kyle and Cartman.

So says Robert Lopez, who wrote the songs for "Avenue Q" with Jeff Marx and cites the exuberantly profane 1999 animated film "South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut" as a key influence.

"'South Park' the movie is one of the greatest musicals ever," Lopez says. "I don't think there would've been an 'Avenue Q' without the 'South Park' movie."

So in 2003 when "South Park" creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone came to see "Avenue Q" in New York, Lopez didn't hesitate to invite them out for a drink after the show. During their conversation, the trio casually discussed upcoming projects and Lopez mentioned he'd been interested in writing a musical about the Book of Mormon.

"And they said, 'No way, that's what we've been wanting to do for 10 years,'" Lopez recalls.

The writers soon decided to collaborate on the music and script for what eventually became "The Book of Mormon," a new musical opening March 24 at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre in New York. The satirical production follows two young Mormon missionaries who are sent to Africa to spread the word of their faith.

"It's politically incorrect and it's offensive, but it's a traditional Broadway show and has a traditional uplifting ending," Lopez says. "It's about faith and someone who loses their faith, then regains it in a way that's stronger than before."

Lopez says the collaborative process with Parker and Stone differed sharply from his experience working on "Avenue Q" with Marx, when the two composers "were ruthless about knocking down ideas we didn't like."

By contrast, Lopez says, Parker and Stone "showed me a different way of working, where you don't say 'no' at first, you just bust out a lot of material and see where it leads, and later on apply the filter of editing. That was a revelation to me—I really liked working that way."

Lopez, Parker and Stone haven't yet discussed what they'd like to do with "The Book of Mormon" beyond its Broadway run. But Lopez says he'd like to see the release of a cast album in the near future.

"Right now we're getting this production done and making it as good as it can be," he says. "And then, depending on the reaction, hopefully there will be some future life for it." —MP

Overture To Profits

Warner/Chappell Eyes New Opportunities For Theater Biz

BY MITCHELL PETERS

Warner/Chappell Music's theater and standards catalog includes storied works by Stephen Sondheim, John Kander & Fred Ebb, Richard Rodgers & Lorenz Hart, George Gershwin and Cole Porter.

But the theater market presents a far larger opportunity than licensing classics from the Great American Songbook. To that end, Warner/Chappell has been beefing up its theater roster with new signings and is seeking new opportunities for its composers.

Late last year, Warner/Chappell signed worldwide administration agreements with theater composers Robert Lopez ("Avenue Q"); Lopez's wife and occasional collaborator, Kristen Anderson-Lopez (Disney's stage version of "Finding Nemo"); the songwriting team of Matt Sklar and Chad Beguelin ("Elf: The Musical," "The Wedding Singer"); and Neil Bartram ("The Story of My Life"). And Warner/Chappell inked a deal in February with Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman ("Hairspray") to handle administration of their songs from "Catch Me If You Can," a new musical opening on Broadway in April.

"In some cases I was looking for people who had established reputations and a history of productions on Broadway," says Sean Patrick Flahaven, VP of theater, standards and print at Warner/Chappell. "And in other cases, people who were much earlier in their careers and had some potential for writing in other genres as well."

While musical theater productions can be a high-risk business for investors, the overall

market is a profitable one for music publishers. Composers typically retain grand rights (rights to stage a theatrical production) for their own work, giving them a cut of box-office receipts. Even though publishers usually don't receive a share of that revenue, they reap income from licensing compositions for cast albums, sheet music, concert performances, cover recordings and synchronization uses.

A growing line of business has been licensing songs not originally written for the theater to musical productions that find their way to Broadway. Warner/Chappell administers the rights to the Green Day catalog and licensed songs from the band's 2004 album, "American Idiot," for use in the hit musical of the same name. The company also licensed such hits as Quarterflash's "Harden My Heart" and David Lee Roth's "Just Like Paradise" to "Rock of Ages" and Donna Summer's "Hot Stuff" and Maureen McGovern's "The Morning After" to "Priscilla Queen of the Desert," which is scheduled to debut on Broadway in March.

Warner/Chappell has also been encouraging some of its theater composers to write and co-write songs for pop, rock and country artists, as well as music for film, TV and advertising campaigns. A company spokesman declined to name specific examples, saying they're in various stages of development.

"It's a different skill than writing a theater song," Flahaven says, "but many of our younger theater writers grew up listening to pop, rock and

country as much as they listened to show tunes, so their musical vocabulary is a bit different."

And what of future generations of theater composers? Lopez, who won a 2004 Tony Award with Jeff Marx for their score to "Avenue Q," says Fox's hit TV comedy "Glee" has helped spark greater interest in musical theater among its mostly young viewership.

"It's maybe too early to assess the impact that it's having, because a whole generation of kids are now growing up with 'Glee' as their primary reference for this stuff," Lopez says. "Five or 10 years down the line, those people will be writing the musicals and determining the market for what they'll be. So I do expect it will have an impact."

In that same vein, Flahaven says he's particularly interested in exploring opportunities for Warner/Chappell's theater composers to write original music for films, rather than simply licensing their theatrical music works. Although Flahaven declines to reveal any specific names, he says the publishing company has pending deals for some of its clients to write original movie musicals.

"When you have people who are trained in writing songs for a dramatic or comedic or stage context, the translation to film isn't a huge one," he says. "A lot of the writers that we represent in our catalog from the earlier part of the century would bounce back and forth from stage to film frequently. So I'm hoping that can happen more frequently now."