

Coterie Theatre's Lab for New Family Musicals

Incubator program attracts top Broadway composers and writers

The **Coterie Lab for New Family Musicals** was created in 2004 by Coterie Artistic Director Jeff Church to help accomplished Broadway composers find their way into the field of theatre for young audiences (TYA). Family musicals performed under the Equity TYA contract must be 90 minutes or less in length, and are often performed with a cast much smaller than the Broadway musical. Church has discovered that the creators of Broadway musicals are willing to creatively adapt to these unique demands, and delight in bringing their work to youth and family audiences.

Family musicals undertaken by the Coterie for this developmental series include:

- ***Seussical*** The premiere of the TYA version by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty. Scaled to meet the needs of Equity theatres for young audiences (11 adult actors and one child, 75 minutes), the musical is now the most produced title for and by American schools, according to Music Theatre International. Only a year after the Coterie premiere, the TYA version of *Seussical* made *American Theatre* magazine's top ten list of most produced plays in the '05-06 season. **2003-04 Season**
- ***The Dinosaur Musical*** Willie & Rob Reale, creators of *A Year with Frog and Toad*, in residence at the Coterie to expand and mount production. **2004-05 Season**
- ***Disney's Geppetto & Son*** Stephen Schwartz and David I. Stern, in residence at the Coterie to premiere and mount this production. **2005-06 Season**
- ***Twice Upon a Time: The Lorax & The Emperor's New Clothes Dr. Seuss & Hans Christian Anderson (Dr. Seuss & Hans Christian Anderson)***: a premiere double bill by Ahrens and Flaherty. **2006-07 Season**
- ***The Happy Elf*** . Harry Connick, Jr. and bookwriter Andrew Fishman in residence at the Coterie to mount this world premiere. **2007-08 Season**
- ***Once on the This Island*** The world premiere TYA version of this award-winning musical by the team of Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty. **2007-08 Season**
- ***U: BUG: ME*** Jeremiah Clay Neal in residence for this world premiere live rock musical. **2008-09 Season**
- ***Life on the Mississippi***, world premiere from up-and-coming composer/writer team, Douglas Parker and Denver Casado based on the Mark Twain autobiography. **2009-10 Season**
- ***Lucky Duck*** Musical theatre team of Henry Krieger and Bill Russell with Jeffrey Hatcher, in residence to premiere this TYA version of a show biz version of *The Ugly Duckling*. **2009-10 Season, transferred to the New Victory Theatre March 2012.**
- ***Once Upon a Mattress*** Working with Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization and Mary Rodgers to premiere the TYA version. **2011-12 Season**
- ***Shrek the Musical*** David Lindsay-Abaire and Jeanine Tesori worked closely with Artistic Director Jeff Church on the acclaimed TYA premiere. **2012-13 Season**

- ***Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*** With special permission of Music Theatre International to create the world premiere TYA version. **2013-14 Season**

The Coterie assists in the creation of musicals for family audiences by creating a hospitable environment with a production company that can be quickly reactive to rewrites/adjustments/changes. This happens in the form of a workshop prior to production, plus a week of previews with rehearsals following each day's performance.

“Should a musical need a workshop reading before rehearsals begin, it's less expensive for us to organize it here at the Coterie,” Church said. “If the draft changes significantly, the Coterie is small enough and personal enough to make changes in the production's design rather swiftly.

The Coterie Lab for New Family Musicals aims to host musical theatre writers of the highest caliber to actively write for our audience. The goal is to impact the TYA field with musical theatre stories of tremendous appeal.

Besides the TYA version of *Suessical* being a nationwide success, other Coterie premieres have had continued life: *The Dinosaur Musical* at Arden Theatre, *U: BUG: ME* at First Stage Milwaukee, and *Life on the Mississippi* at American Folklore Theatre to name a few. *Geppetto and Son* is now called *My Son Pinocchio* and represented by Disney Theatricals. *Lucky Duck* in its new TYA form is nationally licensed by Theatrical Rights, Inc. *Shrek the Musical* in its TYA form is now licensed by major regional theatres across the country.

All productions align with the Coterie's mission to provide classic and contemporary theatre that challenges the audience and the artist. Our mission also asks us to break down barriers and open lines of communication between races, sexes and generations.

What Others are Saying About The Coterie's Lab for New Family Musicals

“The Coterie is important on many levels,” said “Artistic Director Jeff Church has single-handedly promoted Seussical within the TYA (theater for young audiences) network, making a very positive impact.”

- Tim McDonald director of creative development for MTI
(now CEO of iTheatrics)

“The Coterie's notable production of Seussical formalized the idea of bringing a different caliber of shows and writers to family musicals. Until recently, theatres which specialized in work for young audiences have had little access to Broadway writers. The Coterie has changed that. They deserve to be encouraged, not only for the exceptionally high quality and innovation of their work, but also for their dedication to provide the very best theatre for young audiences.”

- Lynn Ahrens, Broadway lyricist

"This is a very good place to work on a show for young audiences. They have a very clever and talented artistic director named Jeff Church, who directed this show. We've done quite a good deal of work in terms of revisions and cuts and changes. We knew this would be a good place to do it. It's one of the top children's theatres in the country, they're accustomed to doing new works, they understand the process of development and trying new things and cutting things."

- Stephen Schwartz, composer, in *Playbill*

"What's great about Jeff and his enthusiasm for the art form is that it closes the circle. New York is not the end-all be-all. It's a way our work can be seen and heard. ... So it's a wonderful opportunity. It was looking at it as another form, which is just as viable as the long form."

-Jeanine Tesori, composer, to the *Kansas City Star*

"We traded ideas back and forth. Jeff came in with his initial take on the script and what he thought should stay and maybe go. I just wanted to make sure we didn't lose significant dramatic events that charted the characters' journey through the piece. Jeff was amazing because he was doing the bulk of the work himself. I rewrote a few scenes, but he did most of the heavy lifting."

-David Lindsay-Abaire, playwright, to the *Kansas City Star*