
GLITTER AND BE GAY

A HISTORY OF GAY MUSICALS

Icons of the music world began flocking to the stage as well. Although Elton John's chief queer musical was 2005's flop adaptation *Lestat*, his songs for Disney screen and stage musicals were enduring hits. Boy George loosely adapted his own life in the "New Romantic" pre-punk era of London in *Taboo*, and more recently, Cyndi Lauper teamed up with gay theatre godfather/writer/actor Harvey Fierstein to create the popular and award-winning *Kinky Boots*.

Other notable musicals with queer content included: 2003's *Avenue Q*, a show that combined puppets, porn, and pint-size child star Gary Coleman; 2005's *The Color Purple*, which portrayed Sapphic love better than the non-musical movie version did; 2011's *The Book of Mormon*, which showed gay missionaries learning to "Turn It Off" when fantasizing about other men; the gender-bending murderous camp characters of 2012's *A Gentleman's Guide To Love and Murder*; and 2014's lesbian graphic novel memoir *Fun Home*, which won five Tony Awards. The inclusiveness of GLBT characters trend has even become an in-joke: At the 2011 Tony Awards, openly gay actor Neil Patrick Harris crooned an opening number titled "Broadway, It's Not Just For Gays Any More!"

Today, few Broadway actors, writer, composers, or directors have any fear of being open about who they are, no matter what their sexual orientation is, and their creations for the musical stage reflect that. In 1934, Cole Porter wrote, "In olden days, a glimpse of stocking was looked on as something shocking, but now God knows, anything goes!" The line was prescient then; Porter and his peers could perhaps never have imagined *this* future.

The members of the BROADWAY BEARS hope that you will enjoy this evening, which they are presenting, as always, without regard to stage conventions, which often require actors to shave, starve themselves, or portray only one gender. When you leave tonight, we hope you are inspired to search out some more about musical theatre in music stores, at the library, online, and most importantly, on the stage!

— *Andy Mangels, founder of BROADWAY BEARS*

P.S. A great resource about gay musicals can be found online at www.musicals101.com/ourlove.htm

Since the founding of the BROADWAY BEARS in 2011, the subject of doing a special concert featuring gay composers and gay musicals has been in constant discussion. When brought up with others in the community, most would joke, "Aren't *all* musicals gay?" Indeed, many of us have clapped our hands to show we believed in fairies, twirled around while singing "The Sound of Music," and done the "Time Warp" countless times with the cast of *Rocky Horror*, to say nothing of taking countless trips "Over the Rainbow" with Dorothy Gale. However, while the GLBT community has certainly had an affinity for the stage, the theatrical world hasn't always been any more welcoming than the "real world."

In Act One of tonight's concert, we concentrate on medleys of work by gay composers throughout the 20th century. Cole Porter, Noel Coward, Lorenz Hart, and Lionel Bart, weren't the only gay composers for the stage, but their work is some of the most enduring. For many of them, "coming out" was hardly an option given the era they lived in, though some, especially Noel Coward, barely hid their flamboyance.

The songs they produced for the musical stage — many of which became much-loved "standards" — often featured barely coded messages about love, sex, and the feeling of being denied the ability to be true to one's own nature. When sung by a female protagonist onstage, "Mad About the Boy" or "My Heart Belongs To Daddy" were romantic or funny; sung by their composers, or male performers, they tell an entirely different story. Other songs talked about the scandalous goings-on of society and the murky morals that the "elite" shared; "Anything Goes" and "Well Did You Evah?" and "Let's Misbehave" were full of near-ribald lyrics.

By the 1950s, when Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim began working together, social change was in the air, but much of it had to do with racial equality and class struggles. Their astonishing collaboration with 1957's *West Side Story* was a revelation on the stage and on film, and while nothing in the play was expressly gay, the two men's private hidden lives definitely bled into their work.

Like others who preceded them, neither Bernstein nor Sondheim was open about their identity (Sondheim has only recently come out, in his eighties!). One of the earliest "out" Broadway creators was Jerry Herman, whose