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THE MORNING LINE

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FROM: Michael Strassheim, Emily Meagher
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July 4, 2013

TKTS Booth to Reopen at South Street Seaport

Compiled by **PATRICIA COHEN**

The South Street Seaport is still closed because of the damage wrought by **Hurricane Sandy** in October, but there is one bright spot: The TKTS discount booth, where people can buy half-price tickets to Broadway and Off Broadway shows, is scheduled to reopen at 11 a.m. on Friday in a temporary location at the corner of Fulton and South Streets. “We felt that we owed it to the community to be back for them this summer,” said **Michael Naumann**, the managing director of the Theater Development Fund, the nonprofit group that runs the booths downtown, in Times Square and in Brooklyn at 1 MetroTech Center. TKTS offers same-day tickets for evening performances and next-day tickets for matinees.

The New York Times

JULY 5, 2013

A Western Detour for a Chinese Tale

By EDWARD WONG

WHEN Chen Shi-Zheng began rehearsals with the two actors he had chosen to play the lead in “Monkey: Journey to the West,” a pop-inflected international opera with a Chinese cast that opens the Lincoln Center Festival, he knew he had to break them of their past training.

The Monkey King, the mythical animal warrior in Chinese classical literature, is often portrayed as a prankster. But Mr. Chen, a veteran Chinese-born stage and film director living in New York, saw Monkey as a fighter who could be vicious and ill-tempered. That meant helping the actors understand the character’s motivations and mindset — something they had never done before when they played Monkey in more traditional Peking opera productions.

“The Chinese Monkey is very cute, even when he’s angry,” one of the actors, 32-year-old Wang Lu, said during a banquet after one of the final rehearsals in this city in eastern China. “This one has Western characteristics. He’s naughty. He’s a bad child. It took me a while to adjust.”

Bridging Chinese and Western artistic approaches is a continuing challenge for Mr. Chen, whose first appearance at the Lincoln Center Festival, in 1999, was after a major run-in with Shanghai officials who objected to his experimental approach to “The Peony Pavilion,” a kunqu opera, a traditional form of Chinese theater. Most recently his adventurous 2012 production of another well-known opera, “Farewell My Concubine,” had several previews in Beijing but never officially opened. (It included video, choreographed fight scenes and a live horse onstage.)

Many in the Peking opera establishment condemned his take on “Farewell,” and China Daily, an official English-language newspaper, ran a long article on the controversy with the headline “Innovation or Violation?”

“I still haven’t had anything produced for the public in China,” Mr. Chen said with a smile. “I



GILLES SABRIE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The director Chen Shi-Zheng in rehearsals with Yao Zhuoran for “Monkey: Journey to the West.”

hope one day that will change.”

Instead, his productions play the international festival circuit. After its 2007 debut at the Manchester International Festival and runs in Paris, London and at the Spoleto Festival U.S.A., “Monkey” begins performances at Lincoln Center on Saturday.

Mr. Chen collaborated on the music and design with Damon Albarn, the frontman for the bands Blur and Gorillaz, and Jamie Hewlett, the animator of Gorillaz. Mr. Chen wrote the lyrics, which are in Mandarin. With 27 performances at Lincoln Center, “Monkey” will get the longest festival run ever, a sign of faith and also a risk on the part of festival organizers.

The show takes as its starting point a Chinese fable based on the story of Xuanzang, the monk who made an epic overland journey to India to bring back venerated Buddhist texts. “Of all the Chinese classics, this is the funniest,” Mr. Chen said. “There’s a certain kind of freedom and exuberance.”

The 41-member cast is a mix of Chinese acrobats, martial artists

and Peking opera actors and singers. Only nine are returning from the show’s original run, and most of the acrobats are new. Twenty of them come from the Jiangsu Yancheng Acrobatic Company, based in the nearby city of Yancheng.

For centuries, this region was known for producing some of China’s most talented acrobats. But there is little money to be made these days doing acrobatics in China, so the tradition is dying, and circus companies have shrunk. Mr. Chen “was looking for an acrobatic troupe with influence and power for this performance,” said Wu Qikai, head of the Yancheng troupe, which was founded in 1954. “We have that reputation in China.”

In recasting principal roles, Mr. Chen was faced with finding performers flexible enough to shed aspects of their Chinese opera training, including the emphasis on emulating the styles of past great performances. After one run-through at an enormous new cultural center in this rural swath of Jiangsu Province, he gathered the main actors and delivered a short lecture in which

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY GILLES SABRIE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, the Jiangsu Yancheng Company, part of the 41-member cast, performing the spinning-plates trick.

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Wang Lu, center, as the Monkey King in "Monkey: Journey to the West."

he urged them to make their performances more natural.

Li Li, 25, who plays the monk, said in an interview that her Peking opera training had not taught her how to embrace the kind of acting that Mr. Chen sought.

In Peking opera, "I'm copying what the previous generation has left for us, she said. "The way I'm judged is by the standard set by previous performers. This time, the previous generation didn't help me." The work "took me out of my comfort zone," she added. "The director created a new language."

This new production of "Monkey" is the first work Mr. Chen has put together in China since the short-lived "Farewell My Concubine." He was hired in late 2011 to direct a version of that story as, in essence, dinner theater at an upscale Beijing hotel owned by the Reignwood Group. Yan Bin, the Thai-Chinese founder of Reignwood, is a fan of both Chinese and Western opera.

Looking past "Monkey," Mr. Chen already has another opera in the works that he is aiming for next year's Lincoln Center Festival — and it once again draws on a well-known Chinese tale, in this case "Legend of the White Snake." Mr. Chen plans to include video and other experimental elements. The main investors are Chinese this time, but there are still no plans for it to be produced in China.

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The New York Times

JULY 8, 2013

'Monkey' Missionaries Find Their Flocks

Lincoln Center Seeks New Public for Festival

By WILLIAM GRIMES

The New World Mall in Flushing, Queens, is a busy place. Customers pass through its chrome and glass doors in a steady stream that can swell to a torrent, then shop its dozens of boutiques or cruise the aisles at J-Mart, a huge supermarket that, like the businesses around it, caters primarily to Chinese-Americans from Flushing, Elmhurst and Long Island.

"This is a good place for us — lots of people," said Zoe Zhang, a vice president of China Express Agency, a marketing company that has promoted numerous Chinese cultural events in the United States. She was standing near the mall's escalators on a recent Saturday afternoon and directing a team of Mandarin speakers recruited from local universities as they pushed Lincoln Center Festival's centerpiece production, "Monkey: Journey to the West."

Meanwhile, in neighborhoods like Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Cornerstone, a music marketing and branding company, was busy pushing "Monkey" fliers on a completely different population: indie music enthusiasts.

Both companies were hired by the Lincoln Center Festival in an unusual multipronged campaign for "Monkey," a production based on a classic Chinese tale with music and visuals by the creators of the virtual band Gorillaz. Its 27 performances run the entire length of the festi-

val, through July 28, at the David H. Koch Theater.

The campaign is a departure for Lincoln Center, whose promotional efforts tend toward the tried and true, but

"Monkey" offers unusual opportunities. It takes as its source material a traditional story as familiar to the Chinese as "The Odyssey" is to Western audiences, but the director, Cheng Shi Zheng, has modernized it with a vengeance.

Working with Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett, the creators of Gorillaz, he has wrought a Chinese rock opera in Mandarin with rhythmic themes and a razzle-dazzle staging that incorporates animated sequences, kung-fu fighters, acrobats and contortionists. It has a little something for everybody, in other words, and the festival is selling it that way.

Ticket prices, for one thing, have a big spread, starting at a modest \$25 and topping out at \$250. At the moment, a spokeswoman for Lincoln Center said, ticket sales are "on track to make our goal." She declined to explain what the goal was, but expectations are high, since the show was a big hit in Paris and in England (London and Manchester) and at the 2008 Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, S.C.

To reach the Chinese media, here and abroad, Lincoln Center hired Wei Zhou, a publicist in Basking Ridge, N.J., to work local



ULI SEIT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Chinese newspapers, television and radio, and the main television networks and news agencies in China. In similar fashion, Cornerstone was hired to reach a younger, culturally adventurous audience, starting with the Gorillaz fan base, for whom this show is not necessarily an easy sell. "Musically it's totally different," said Jon Cohen, a partner with Rob Stone, the company's founder. "It takes place in a venue and a neighborhood that core fans do not know. They will have to have a reason to go to Lincoln

Center."

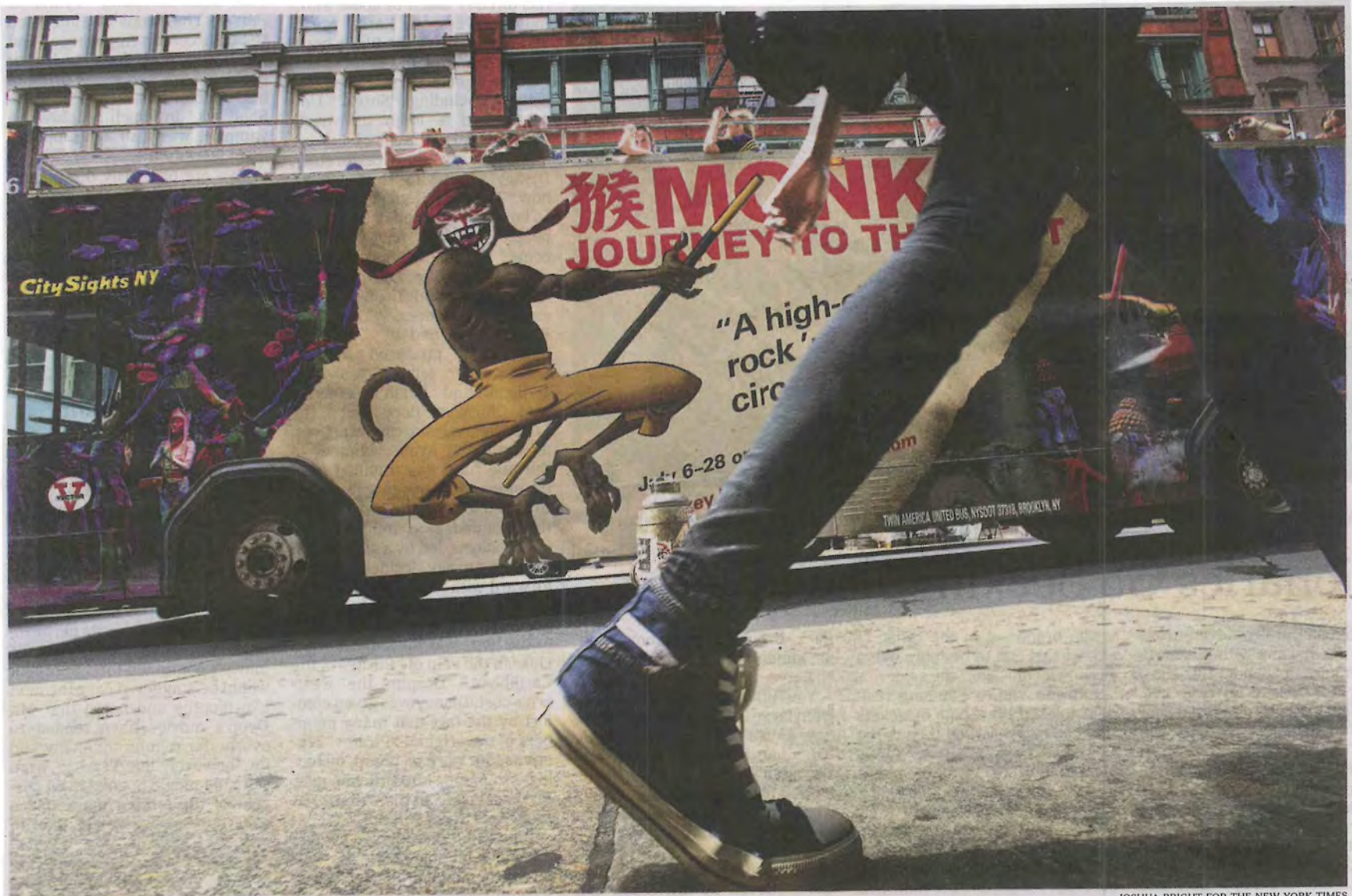
At the mall, Ms. Zhang's team passed out "Monkey" fliers and

Luring Chinese mall shoppers and indie fans to experience an ancient tale.

cardboard fans, talked up the show and directed traffic to an in-

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JOSHUA BRIGHT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Lincoln Center Festival is trying to reach both indie music fans and a Chinese audience in its marketing for "Monkey: Journey to the West."

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formation and ticketing table at the bottom of the down escalator. The canvassing was relentless. Before long, even babies in strollers were clutching promotional materials. Some shoppers, after quizzing the workers at the ticketing table, reached for their credit cards.

Lily Chow, buying tickets for her husband and two sons, said that she had seen many productions of "Journey to the West," starting with a famous television series that Chinese Central Television broadcast in the 1970s. "I expect this one to be more like a Broadway musical," she said.

Lapwah Yan, a Flushing resident, picked up a pair of tickets that she had reserved through the China Express Web site. "This combination of Western music and the Chinese story," she said. "I think that's interesting."

Ms. Zhang, a native of Shanghai who now lives in Elmhurst, has also brought the "Monkey" message far beyond the mall. She has given presentations at community centers, Chinese-owned businesses and dance schools. Since the martial-art style known as monkey kung fu, or monkey fist, takes its inspiration from the hero of "Journey to the West," Ms. Zhang has made appearances at kung-fu studios and plans to attend summer enrichment classes for Chinese students.

Ms. Zhou, the publicist, said: "Chinese parents would like their children to go. They want to encourage them to practice the language. Like my daughter. She doesn't speak to me in Chinese. Also for the grandparents, who do not speak English — finally they can relax and enjoy the whole thing."

While Ms. Zhang and her team were working the mall, Cornerstone's field workers were spreading out across neighbor-



YANA PASKOVA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jackie Arellano hands out fans for the genre-bending "Monkey" by the Four Knots indie music festival at South Street Seaport.

hoods identified as "retail and lifestyle sites." Earlier, they had hit Great GoogaMooga, the food and music festival in Prospect

Park, Brooklyn, and AnimeNext, an annual festival in Somerset, N.J.

YouTube, Twitter and Tumbler loom large in Cornerstone's strategy, as well as clued-in lifestyle blogs like Flavorpill, Bullett and Brooklyn Vegan. To rope in the indie-music crowd, they have

worked with Web sites like Oh My Rockness and Consequence of Sound, as well as The Fader, the indie-music and culture magazine started by Mr. Stone and Mr. Cohen.

On a sticky night in late June, a team from Cornerstone emerged from the subway at 68th Street and Lexington Avenue. The assignment: work the line waiting to get into a Comedy Central show, part of SummerStage in Central Park.

Unexpectedly, a swarm of high school students in caps and gowns began gathering for a graduation ceremony at Hunter College. Taking advantage of this bonanza, the team worked the crowd for a while, then headed to the park. The comedy audience, wilting in the heat, eagerly accepted "Monkey" fans and, with plenty of time on their hands, studied the fliers.

"Gorillaz?" said one young woman. "Sweet!"

A man reading over her shoulder said, "I would totally see that."

The woman looked more closely at the flyer. "It's, like, where the philharmonic is," she said. "It's legit."

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June 30, 2013

Donald Bevan, 93, Sardi's Artist and 'Stalag 17' Writer, Dies

By **BRUCE WEBER**

In 1942, as a young soldier in the Army Air Forces stationed in England, Donald Bevan, a budding cartoonist, put his artistic skills to good use, decorating the noses of B-17 Flying Fortress bombers and sketching portraits of his fellow airmen on the walls of the combat hut.

Walter Cronkite, then a war correspondent for the United Press news service, was struck by their quality and fed them to the wire. Thus did the man whose caricatures of theater stars would adorn the walls of Sardi's, the Broadway bistro, achieve his first wide audience.

Mr. Bevan, who was 93 when he died at his home in Studio City, Calif., on May 29, flew missions as a waist gunner until he was shot down over Bremen, Germany, on April 17, 1943. He spent two years in prisoner-of-war camps, ending up at Stalag 17B, near Krems, Austria. There, he and his fellow prisoner Edmund Trzcinski jerry-built a theater, wrote and staged revue sketches and, with scripts supplied by the Red Cross, put on plays for the detainees.

Mr. Bevan's prison camp experience produced professional theater as well: he and Mr. Trzcinski collaborated on "Stalag 17," a play they called a comic melodrama about American prisoners of war who are victimized by, and finally triumph over, a Nazi spy who has infiltrated their barracks.

The play — directed by José Ferrer, who won a Tony Award for his effort — opened in May 1951 and ran for well over a year. It was adapted by the director Billy Wilder for a [1953 film](#) that won a best-actor Oscar for William Holden.

"In both the writing and the acting, the search for the traitor is a taut and harrowing business," Brooks Atkinson wrote in *The New York Times*, characterizing himself as "one theatergoer who is still shaking from the excitement of the performance."

Donald Joseph Bevan was born on Jan. 16, 1920, in Holyoke, Mass., and grew up there and in Springfield, Mass. His father, Walter, was an engineer but lost his job during the Depression. After high school, young Don studied at the Grand Central School of Art in Manhattan and worked briefly for *The Daily News* before he was drafted.

In an interview with *The New York Daily Mirror* in 1951, Mr. Bevan said the event that provided the spur for "Stalag 17" was an episode in which a prisoner who had tried to escape and was about to be sent to a concentration camp was hidden by the other prisoners under straw mats in a latrine until he could be smuggled out of the camp.

"The Germans had us standing in the rain for whole days trying to make us tell where he was," Mr. Bevan recalled. "They found out he was tattooed and stripped us naked. When they did, we already had tattooed ourselves just as he was tattooed."

After the war, Mr. Bevan was an illustrator and poster artist for a film company. According to his son Mark, he met his wife, the actress Patricia Kirkland, when his friends set him up on a phony blind date. Mr. Bevan showed up at her apartment, only to learn that there was no date.

"But I guess she liked him anyway," Mark Bevan said.

In the early 1950s, Ms. Kirkland's father, the playwright Jack Kirkland, the author of "Tobacco Road," introduced Mr. Bevan to Vincent Sardi Jr., who was looking for a new caricaturist for his popular Midtown restaurant. Mr. Bevan began with drawings of Denholm Elliot and Maureen Stapleton, who didn't like hers and, according to Mr. Sardi's memoir (written with Thomas Edward West), "Off the Wall at Sardi's," stole it.

The third of only four caricaturists that Sardi's has employed since 1927 (the current artist is [Richard Baratz](#)), Mr. Bevan made hundreds of caricatures for the restaurant for more than 20 years, clean drawings displaying a keen eye for the prominent feature: Karl Malden's nose; Lucille Ball's red hair and blue eyes; the high cheekbones, elongated neck, angular chin and feline eyes of Lauren Bacall; the rotund face and sleepy-lidded eyes of a possibly inebriated Jackie Gleason (he's raising a martini glass); Zero Mostel with dark circles around his eyes and a threadbare comber; Carol Burnett with a toothy smile. He drew Laurence Olivier in profile, giving him a long nose, a jutting chin and distinguished graying hair at the temples.

"This is the happiest moment of my life," Olivier wrote as an inscription.

Mr. Bevan moved to California in the mid-1970s, but Sardi's current owner, V. Max Klimavicius, said Mr. Bevan drew Michael Douglas and his father, Kirk, in Los Angeles in the 1990s. The caricatures depict both Douglasses with matching oversized dimples that look like growths.

Ms. Kirkland died in 2000, and two sons, Michael and Scott, died before their father did. In addition to his son Mark, who confirmed his father's death (which was not widely reported at the time), Mr. Bevan is survived by a daughter, Nan; eight grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Mr. Sardi said that he often chose Mr. Bevan's caricature subjects, and that Mr. Bevan was generally amenable unless the subject was a critic. Mr. Bevan was, after all, a playwright as well as an artist. Alas, he never achieved another success to rival "Stalag 17" — his son remembers him working on a failed musical based on the comic strip "Alley Oop" — and though it's unlikely his artwork was to blame, he did provoke an ominous response from the critic Walter Kerr, whose caricature was actually rather kind, showing him to be heavysset but well groomed.

"Okay, Bevan," Mr. Kerr wrote above his signature on the caricature. "You'll write a play someday."

June 29, 2013

David Rogers, Stage Adapter of Offbeat Material, Dies at 85

By DANIEL E. SLOTNIK

“Flowers for Algernon,” Daniel Keyes’s novel about a mentally handicapped man who is temporarily transformed into a genius, has been read by millions and recreated in many forms, including the 1968 film “Charly” (playing the title role, Cliff Robertson won an Academy Award). But singing along with any version was impossible until David Rogers reinterpreted it as the musical “Charlie and Algernon.”

“Charlie and Algernon,” for which Mr. Rogers wrote the book and lyrics (Charles Strouse wrote the music), opened on Broadway in 1980 and was nominated for a Tony for best original score. It was Mr. Rogers’s best-known effort — but it was far from his only unlikely adaptation for the stage.

Mr. Rogers, who died on June 5 at 85, wrote plays based on Aldous Huxley’s “Brave New World” and the 1973 caper film “The Sting”; musical adaptations of “The Hobbit” (music by Allan Jay Friedman) and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (“[The Dream on Royal Street](#),” music by Alan Menken); and original work like “[Not for Keeps](#)” and “[Even the Shadows Dance](#).” The Broadway production of “Charlie and Algernon” starred P. J. Benjamin as Charlie, Sandy Faison as his teacher and love interest and an uncredited mouse as Algernon. Mr. Rogers had written “Flowers for Algernon” as a play, which was performed in high school and college theaters, years before he and Mr. Strouse worked on the musical.

The show opened to mixed reviews. In The New York Times, [Frank Rich](#) called it “a very ordinary and at times very irritating entertainment,” but [Mel Gussow](#) called it “a show with a heart about our minds.”

David Rogers was born in New York City on Dec. 15, 1927. He served in the Army Signal Corps during the Korean War before studying drama alongside Jack Lemmon and Lee Marvin at the .

The Broadway lyricist [Nancy Hamilton](#) became his mentor and helped get his material in “New Faces” revues. Mr. Rogers acted as well. He appeared on Broadway in “As You Like It” at 17 and was later seen in several iterations of “Law & Order” and in the 1987 revival of the 1926 drama “Broadway.” He also wrote five novels.

He is survived by his wife of 50 years, the former June L. Walker, who confirmed his death from cardiac arrest; two daughters, Dulcy Rogers Bader and Amanda Rogers; and four grandchildren. He lived in Westport, Conn.

This year Mr. Rogers completed the book to a musical adaptation of a beloved television show. “The Beverly Hillbillies: The Musical??!!” has yet to be produced.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

July 5, 2013



GREATER NEW YORK

Monkey's Journey

Chinese Opera Meets Anime **ARTS A18**

Eastern Tails Migrate West

Chinese Opera Plus Japanese Animation Equals 'Monkey'

By BARBARA CHAI

When "Monkey: Journey to the West" opens Saturday at the annual Lincoln Center Festival, the latest cycle of this 16th-century Chinese fable will fuse influences from some of its previous incarnations, including classic Chinese opera, Japanese anime, and a 1970s Japanese live-action TV show that aired in the U.K.

The production, helmed by the New York-based director Chen Shi-Zheng, combines elements of classic Chinese opera such as acrobatics, dancing and singing, with modern sounds and animation courtesy of musician Damon Albarn and artist Jamie Hewlett, founders of the British musical and visual collective Gorillaz. Mr. Albarn's pulsating score features electronic beats, Chinese folk instruments, and 1960s Chinese pop songs, and Mr. Hewlett's animated sequences are complemented by vivid costumes and larger-than-life sets, which he also designed.

"Monkey," which made its debut at the Manchester International Festival in 2007, features nine episodes from Wu Cheng'en's 100-chapter novel of 1592, "Journey to the West,"

about the monk Tripitaka's pilgrimage through China and into India in search of sacred Buddhist scriptures. Joining Tripitaka along the way is the mischievous Monkey, a gluttonous Pig monster, Sandy the river demon, and a Dragon Prince who becomes the monk's white horse.

"This is one of those books I always loved since childhood," said Mr. Chen, 50, who also directed the epic 20-hour opera "The Peony Pavilion" at Lincoln Center in 1999. "It's an allegory about temptations and how to overcome desires and difficult situations."

Working with a completely new cast of about 40 male and female performers, Mr. Chen has been "trying to get everybody on the same page," familiarizing the actors—many of whom are classically trained in Chinese opera, acrobatics and dance—with the show's unique martial-arts sequences, and training them to inhabit a range of characters, from gods to demons.

For his score, Mr. Albarn, best known as the frontman for the iconic Britpop group Blur, blended Western and Eastern instruments, including the zither, Chinese guitars, and a musical

saw whose sound resembles that of the Chinese erhu. For the "Monkey" score, he also used the Ondes Martenot and a glass harmonica, and built a klaxophone organ on which he and artist Gavin Turk attached car horns from different manufacturers—the sound simulating the traffic from China's congested streets.

"I always find traffic very musical," Mr. Albarn said. "Sometimes it's just bewildering how beautiful it all sounds as a piece if you take it all in."

On research trips to China with Messrs. Chen and Hewlett, he was struck by the "breathtaking human acceleration in progress" all around him. So he began recording a multitude of industrial sounds, like the hum and ding of elevator doors and the noise inside an airplane cabin, both of which can be heard in the show's Peach Banquet song.

At Lincoln Center, the music will largely remain the same as in previous productions (a soundtrack based on the opera was also released in 2008), though Mr. Albarn said he was able to make a few small revisions that he's pleased with: "I've hopefully allowed more interpretive aspects to it this time."



For the visuals, Mr. Hewlett, who designed the four cartoon characters of Gorillaz in the late 1990s, drew more than 70 new characters. "We use animation to tell some of the crazier parts of the story, when Monkey's flying on his cloud for instance," he said. "There are certain things you just can't do on an opera stage when you have five seconds to change the sets while the lights are off."

Going back to their trips to China, Mr. Hewlett said he was also fascinated by shadow-puppet theater, and tried to incorporate a similar feel into his animation by using flat fingers and

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(c-b) William Strauss: Lincoln Center



Clockwise from above, performers in an earlier production of 'Monkey: Journey to the West,' which begins previews Saturday at Lincoln Center; artist Jamie Hewlett, who designed animated sequences, costumes and sets for the show; and part of the cast, as drawn by Mr. Hewlett.

different layers.

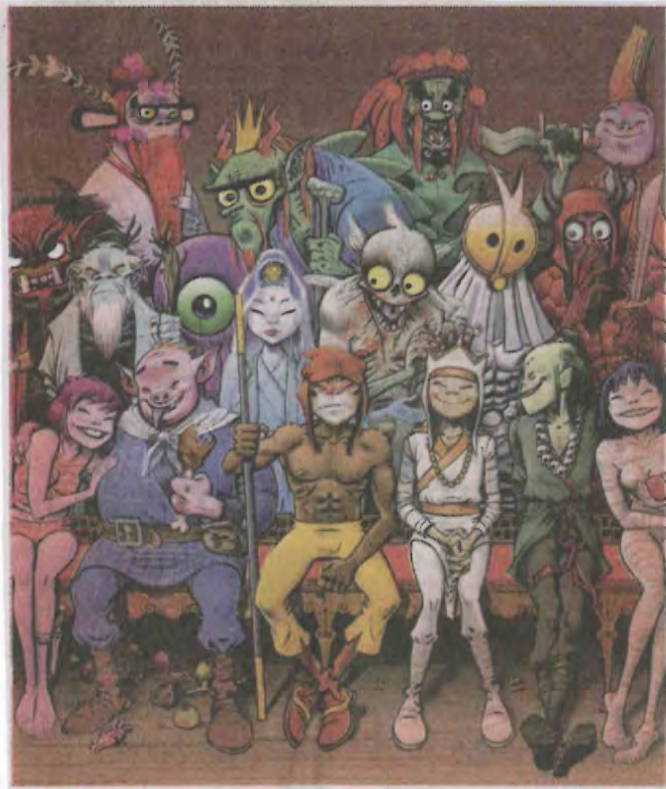
By what they said was a coincidence, Messrs. Hewlett and Mr. Albarn, both 45, used to watch a campy, live-action Japanese television version of "Monkey" as teenagers in Britain. The cult 1970s hit aired in Japan, Australia, the U.K. and New Zealand, but wasn't broadcast in the U.S.

"It was a huge hit in England. We used to rush home from school and watch 'Monkey' on TV and the next day you'd be talking about it because it was special," Mr. Hewlett said. He also watched a 1970s-era Japanese anime TV version of "Monkey" to prepare for the opera, which he called "very strange but really quite wonderful."

"The whole story of 'Monkey: Journey to the West' is connected to all of our lives," he added. "It's a story of a journey that can be a personal journey that we can all take to bettering ourselves, to enlightenment."

Despite their early fascination with the "Monkey" story, and the fact that they were both born in the Year of the Monkey (which inspired the band name Gorillaz), Messrs. Hewlett and Albarn insisted it's only a coincidence that they have now created a "Monkey" stage adaptation.

"I think we'll probably have to put a stop to simian-related projects and start doing other stuff," Mr. Hewlett said. "It wasn't planned."



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FUNKY 'MONKEY'

Classic Chinese folk tale updated by Gorillaz crew

BY FRANK SCHECK

It may not seem much of a stretch for the creators of the virtual band Gorillaz to collaborate on a show about a monkey.

But "Monkey: Journey to the West" is about no ordinary primate. This music-theater piece, based on a 16th-century Chinese folk tale, revolves around a mischievous Monkey King with supernatural powers. He helps a monk, Tripitaka, on his adventure-filled journey to India in search of Buddhist scriptures.

The show premiered in 2007 at England's Manchester International Arts Festival and traveled to Paris, London and Charleston's Spoleto Festival. It kicks off this year's Lincoln Center Festival, where it will be given 27 performances from Tuesday through July 28.

Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett, the musical and visual masterminds behind the hugely successful pop band Gorillaz, already knew the story when author and director Chen Shi-Zheng first approached them. The BBC had broadcast a Japanese television program based on the legend from 1978 to 1980, and they had both been fans.

They readily agreed to participate, but with one condition. "We said that they have to send us to China, for us to really get a feel for the culture," says Hewlett.

Accompanied by Chen, that's what they did, traveling to the country numerous times and going everywhere from its massive cities to its most remote regions.

"Shi-Zheng took us on some spectacular adventures," recalls Albarn. "I made the decision of keeping the opera all in Mandarin, because that was my experience of being in that vast country where I didn't understand anything, but I was having this visceral, sensual experience. I wanted to keep that sense of magic."

The score is certainly different from the rock music that garnered him millions of fans.

"I used a few very simple idiomatic themes

from the folk music I listened to," Albarn says. "I didn't really know what I was doing, genuinely. It was a completely instinctive thing."

Mixing orchestral, choral and electronic music, the score incorporates classical Chinese instruments as well as the exotic klaxophone, made up of car horns attached to a keyboard.

"One of the constants of my journey to China was the insane traffic in the big cities," says Albarn. "The klaxon machine was basically as many different car horns as I could put together in a harmonic sequence."



He doesn't expect his pop fans to necessarily take to the new sounds.

"It would be brilliant if I could bring my collective fan base around with me for all my projects," he muses. "It would mean that I could sell out Wembley Stadium for everything. It doesn't really work like that."

"But I think there must be some hard-core, inter-project fans who are as comfortable going to the opera as, I don't know, hanging out in a small club listening to Malian music," he adds, referring to yet another of his side projects. For Hewlett, it was a different challenge. The



Jamie Hewlett, the visual mastermind behind Gorillaz, turned to Japanese manga and 16th-century illustrations when creating the costumes for the king (left) and monk (right) in the opera "Monkey: Journey to the West."

artist, who first achieved renown with the comic book "Tank Girl" before joining Albarn in Gorillaz, was intent on "creating an East-meets-West collaboration of a very old Chinese story."

He based the show's visual concept, animation and costumes on everything from 16th-century illustrations to Japanese manga to every different incarnation of "Journey to the West" he could get his hands on.

"I did a lot of drawings that went into the dustbin," he says.

In his native China, Chen had grown up with Tripitaka and the Monkey King. He was also no stranger to elaborate theatrical pieces, having staged a 20-hour production of the 16th-century Chinese classic "The Peony Pavilion" for Lincoln Center in 1999.

"It's a story I've always loved," he says. "It's about a spiritual quest in a world of decadence, so I thought it was very relevant. And the fact that the protagonist is not even human, but a monkey, was fun and fantastical."

From the beginning, Chen conceived the piece as having the feel of a circus, incorporating martial artists and acrobats.

"It concerns demons, gods and supernatural beings," he explains. "So there's no other way to stage this type of show."

Also integral to the design, he feels, is Hewlett's animation.

"The characters go into the sea, into heaven," Chen says. "There's no way that stagecraft could illustrate that."

Hewlett and Albarn plan on seeing the show



© William Struhs(2)

during its NYC run, but at different times. Not because of their reputed falling out, but due to scheduling, says Albarn, who's touring with his other famous band, Blur.

"We still see each other socially," says Albarn of his longtime friend and collaborator. He says right now, there are currently no plans for more Gorillaz projects.

"I've always seen myself as a kind of crop rotator," he says. "Sometimes you have to leave land alone to replenish itself."

Once he's finished with the Blur tour, Albarn plans to release his first solo album.

"It's kind of strange to be doing your first solo record at the age of 45," he admits. "But I'm looking forward to playing it live."

He's also written another opera, "Dr. Dee," which premiered in Manchester in 2011, and is working on yet another, this one inspired by "Alice in Wonderland."

"I'm up to my third opera without actually knowing what I'm doing," he says with amazement. "I don't quite know when people are going to turn around and say, 'OK, the joke's over, Damon, just go back to your day job.' But I'm really inspired to write what I would consider a real opera."

What exactly does he consider a real opera? "I don't know," he laughs. "Real to me."

'CHOIR' HITS A HIGH NOTE

Grantham Coleman (standing) with Jeremy Pope; bottom, Pope and Chuck Cooper



PHOTOS BY JOAN MARCUS

Members of the elite vocal ensemble at an all-male black prep school blend their voices in tight harmonies – but outside the much-lauded glee club the students are at each other's throats.

In his stirring and stylishly told drama "Choir Boy," Tarell Alvin McCraney cannily uses that dividing line to explore race and sexuality and the graces and gravity of history.

Charting a year in the life of the academy, the play is about coming out and coming to terms. The fulcrum is the very bright and equally effeminate Pharus (Jeremy Pope), who has the voice of an angel and the walk of a Victoria's Secret model.

The teen's defiantly swishy behavior makes him a target for cocky Bobby (Wallace Smith), who's a year younger, but made bold by the fact that he's resolutely straight and that Headmaster Marrow (Chuck Cooper) is his uncle.

Other boys orbiting around them are AJ (Grantham



JOE DZIEMIANOWICZ
THEATER CRITIC

Coleman), Pharus' compassionate, true-blue roomie; Junior (Nicholas L. Ashe), Bobby's sidekick; and David (Kyle Beltran), who has a dream of being a pastor and a troubling truth he can't face.

The arrival of Mr. Pendleton (Austin Pendleton), a white professor who was on the front lines of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, cranks up the heat and turns the simmering tension into broiling conflict. Pendleton has been invited to teach a required course in creative thinking. That leads to Bobby and Pharus debating American spiritual songs and black history itself.

As in his Off-Broadway shows "Wig Out!" and "The Brother/Sister Plays," McCraney thinks big. "Choir Boy" is his crispest and most confident work. If the school's headmaster is too

wishy-washy and naive (and he is), McCraney has seen to it that Pharus is realistically complex. He is by turns manipulative, charming, infuriating and endearing – part underdog, part pitbull, and he embodies the traits of a survivor.

Trip Cullman directs the Manhattan Theatre Club production with a steady and sturdy hand. In his uniformly strong cast, newcomer Pope shimmers with charisma. Beltran expertly navigates

his character's dramatic shifts.

David Zinn's shapeshifting set goes from classroom to dorm room to shower to office and neatly underlines the

boys' compartmentalized but overlapping lives.

And Jason Michael Webb's arrangements for several a cappella gospel songs threading throughout the 90-minute work are, like the play itself, expertly tuned.

jdziemianowicz@nydailynews.com

'Choir Boy'
★★★★★
Manhattan Theatre Club,
151 W. 55th St. Through July 21. Tickets: \$30 and up; (212) 581-1212

Braff burnishes music chops for 'Bullets Over Broadway'

By Mark Kennedy
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Zach Braff will make his Broadway debut next year in a musical adaptation of Woody Allen's crime caper "Bullets Over Broadway." The only person who might be more excited than Braff is his dad.

"If my father loved two things most, it was Woody Allen movies and Broadway musicals," Braff said by phone from Los Angeles. "When I called my father, I said, 'Are you sitting down?'"

Written by Allen and Douglas McGrath, the story follows a struggling young playwright who is forced to cast a mobster's talentless girlfriend in his latest drama. Braff will play the hero, portrayed by John Cusack in the 1994 film.

"It's thrilling," Braff says. "I keep waking up, expecting it to be a dream."

Five-time Tony Award-winner Susan Stroman will direct and choreograph the show, which will start performances in March 2014 at the St. James Theatre. The show will feature a full orchestra playing music of the 1920s.

The musical sees Braff return to his acting roots: He played Allen's son in one scene when he was 18 in the film "Manhattan Murder Mystery" before going to Northwestern University to study film.

"If you would have asked me a couple months ago 'What are your dreams as an actor?' I would have said, 'I'd love to do a Broadway musical one day and I'd love to work with Woody Allen again.' When I got the call from Woody and Susan Stroman, my head sort of exploded."

The rest of the cast will be



2011 STAR-LEDGER FILE PHOTO

"I keep waking up, expecting it to be a dream," says Zach Braff, of starring in the upcoming "Bullets Over Broadway." The South Orange native makes his Broadway debut in March.

made up of Vincent Pastore ("The Sopranos"), Betsy Wolfe ("The Mystery of Edwin Drood"), Lenny Wolpe ("The Drowsy Chaperone") and Helene Yorke ("Grease").

Braff grew up in northern New Jersey and caught the performing bug from his father, a lawyer who did community theater for fun. Though he's never done musical theater professionally, Braff often sang as the daydreaming Dr. John "J.D." Dorian on "Scrubs" and he won a Grammy Award for best compilation sound track for "Garden State." He says he's already started working with a vocal coach.

After "Scrubs," Braff filmed the dark indie "High Cost of Living" and acted in the off-Broadway play "Trust," and had a part in Sam Raimi's "Oz the Great and Powerful."

Braff also penned a play of his own, "All New People," his first piece of original

writing since the 2004 film "Garden State," his sweet ode to disillusionment starring himself and Natalie Portman. "All New People" had a run off-Broadway in 2011 and was later mounted in London, with Braff starring.

Braff this spring turned to the crowd-funding site Kickstarter to raise \$2 million in three days to fund his film, "Wish I Was Here" — a follow-up to "Garden State." He says he'll work on the film for the rest of the year before hitting Broadway, and he hopes "Wish I Was Here," which he co-wrote with his brother Adam, will be out in the fall of 2014.

In the meantime, he has a date with Broadway. It's something his father might be interested in, too. "I said to Woody, 'He'll be there more than you.' I said, 'I might need a cot for my father between the matinees and the evening show.'"



Tom Hanks (l.) played intrepid Daily News reporter Mike McAlary in "Lucky Guy," which ended Broadway run. Play also starred Peter Scolari (r.) and host of A-listers (far l.)
GETTY IMAGES



'LUCKY' FOR US

Play had write stuff, ends run



MIKE LUPICA

This was between shows on Wednesday, the last day for a great big Broadway show called "Lucky Guy," the last great triumph for its gifted author, Nora Ephron. Tom Hanks and the rest of the cast had finished the matinee performance of the show and outside the Broadhurst Theater, Michael Gaston, who played columnist Jim Dwyer, was standing under the marquee, the place where it says, "A New York Play."

The truth about "Lucky Guy" is that it was a New York story and so much more. This was a love story from Nora Ephron, who started out at the old New York Post a thousand years ago, about newspapers.



Mike McAlary

Daily News

Total Daily Circulation - 530,924
Daily Online Circulation, 4,798,930

"This is why you act," Gaston, who has done such fine work on television in shows like "The Mentalist" and "Mad Men," said. "You come to work like this hoping that someday you'll be a part of an event like this."

He was with Danny Mastrogiorgio, a Knicks fan out of Mount Vernon, who grew up reading New York tabloids. Mastrogiorgio remembers reading the late columnist Mike McAlary, whom Tom Hanks brought back to life these past months, but says he was more of a Jimmy Breslin and Pete Hamill guy.

"I can't believe it's over," said Mastrogiorgio, who played Bob Drury.

Inside the Broadhurst Theater, the entire cast had been on the stage after the matinee, doing a Q&A with audience members. Gaston and Mastrogiorgio were there. So was Peter Scolari, who played Michael Daly, and Courtney Vance, who won a Tony for his performance as the late editor Hap Hairston; and Christopher McDonald, a streak of verbal light as lawyer Eddie Hayes.

Maura Tierney, who gave a beautiful portrayal of Mike McAlary's wife Alice, was there. So was Richard Masur, and Deirdre Lovejoy, and Brian Dykstra, who himself once worked at a sports paper, now gone, known as The National.

And Tom Hanks was there. He is this generation's Spencer Tracy in the movies, that kind of movie star. And somehow after the movie career he is having, came to New York and to Broadway and breathed this kind of life and talent into McAlary's life and death, and into Nora's words.

"If you are an actor," Tom Hanks said, "you dream about being in a company of actors like this. And being in New York in a play like this."

So we said goodbye to "Lucky Guy" this week. It was the life of McAlary, whom I met when he was 14, up on that stage. But it was Nora's life, too, and Dwyer's and Daly's and Drury's. And mine. It was the life of my editor, who came to the jazziness of tabloid newspapers in England,

and my sports editor's, and the people who write for this paper and edit it, even when they have to go to Jersey to do it after a disaster like Hurricane Sandy.

Eight times a week, "Lucky Guy" got it exactly right, even if not nearly enough Tony voters had the taste or judgment to reward Nora's writing, or Hanks' performance.

The actors all knew about "Lucky Guy," from the start. So did George Wolfe, the director, who began driving the thing to 44th St. with Nora Ephron long before she was gone.

"We think of ourselves as a couple of tough guys," Mike Gaston said on 44th St., nodding at Mastrogiorgio. "The first night both of us cried. Because we did know."

So they were the same as the people in the seats. Every night those people would cry, laugh their heads off, stand and finally stand and cheer. Talk about anything else on Broadway. Nora's New York story was the story of the year.

I watched the last matinee performance with Nora's long-time assistant J.J. Sacha, and with a great writer and reporter and gent named Nick Pileggi, a dear old friend who was married to

Nora Ephron for the last 25 years of her life.

Nick knows how hard and how long his wife worked to bring McAlary's story to Broadway, even when she was dying. On Wednesday he laughed at lines — lines he knew in his heart — along with everybody else, cried at the end as Tom Hanks stepped forward and talked about the last days of Mike McAlary's life, as Mike lay dying of cancer at Columbia-Presbyterian.

"There was no official commitment from the director or from the star when Nora died," Nick said. "It turned out we didn't need one, just because they were both committed to Nora."

"Lucky Guy" now stands with any work ever done on newspapers, "The Front Page" or Richard Brooks' "Deadline USA," or "Woman of the Year," or "All the President's Men," for which William Goldman won an Academy Award. It also stands with anything Nora Ephron ever wrote, and that is saying plenty after the amazing career she had.

Colin Callender, the executive producer of "Lucky Guy" was saying "1212" at the back of the theater Wednesday, referring to the capacity of the Broadhurst. Each of the 1,212 seats was filled every night.

"That was our magic number," he says.

The real magic came from Nora's words, from the performances, from a show about newspapers that made people cheer, and made you understand why newspapers still matter and always have and always will. New York story, love story. The one who wrote it, Nora Ephron, would have loved the way it turned out most of all.

BBB
BONEAU/BRYAN-BROWN

'Book of Mormon' creators discuss the musical

By Nelson Pressley



CLEVELAND — The box office miracles of "[The Book of Mormon](#)," chapter and verse:

The musical has played to over 100 percent capacity audiences on Broadway since opening more than two years ago. Thanks to demand, its average ticket costs nearly \$200. That's highest on the strip, as is its \$477 top ticket price.

The cheerful, naughty extravaganza by "South Park" masterminds Trey Parker and Matt Stone, with songs by Parker and "Avenue Q" composer Robert Lopez, was lavished with nine Tony Awards (best musical, book, score, etc.) and hosannas from the New York Times as "the best new musical (so far, anyway) of the 21st century." This spring the show got iffy reviews from British critics but set a single-day London

sales record anyway, with its top regular prices (72.50 pounds, or about \$110) and premium tickets (125 pounds/\$190) the highest in the West End

When "[Mormon](#)" tickets went on sale here last winter, the [Kennedy Center Web site](#) crashed, swamped by a wave of would-be buyers that was "beyond unprecedented," a Kennedy Center spokesman said. "Mormon's" six-week Opera House run starts Tuesday, and it's nearly sold out. Most remaining tickets are going for \$200-\$250.

So it's pretty big, this jolly show with foulmouthed singing and absurdly sunny dancing as young Mormon missionaries recruit in bloody Uganda. But why? Simply swaggering onto Broadway with the "South Park" brand can't explain it.

"I am mystified to a degree that people would like it at all," Lopez says from Brooklyn. "I didn't expect anything near this size. I never thought I'd get to replicate the success of 'Avenue Q.'"

"In a way, Bobby is the one with the Midas touch," Stone, on the phone from Los Angeles, says of the now two-time Tony winner Lopez. "And Trey knows musical theater pretty damn well. We expected 'South Park' fans, but we didn't expect traditional musical theater fans to embrace it so positively."

They have, wherever this unholy showbiz lampoon hath alighted. Take Cleveland, the tour stop immediately before Washington: in front of the Palace Theater on a recent weekday, about a hundred people sign up for a chance to snag a handful of \$20 front row seats that "Mormon" sets aside most nights. Names are drawn to cheers and groans as a mere 16 tickets get claimed by the lottery's winners. When a man named Tim wins, he buys only one ticket, not his allotted two.

"Tim should take me!" a woman says at full volume.

The Palace is part of a 10-stage complex in Cleveland's [Playhouse Square](#) district, which dates back to the turn of the 20th century. It's a true vaudeville-era palace, built by impresario Edward F. Albee (adoptive grandfather of the famous playwright). Think D.C.'s Warner Theatre, only 1,000 seats bigger: the Palace holds 2,800. When the Palace opened in 1922, it boasted the world's largest electric sign; its grand marble columns and glowing chandeliers are in first-rate shape.

On a sold-out Wednesday night, it feels as if there are more people in the lobby of the Palace than on the streets of Cleveland. They're all ages, skewing older, conservatively dressed. Tonight, this slice of Middle America doesn't bat an eye at the f-bombs, sex gags and doctrinal skepticism.

Word must be out about “South Park.”

“At first I thought: This is really mild for them,” a woman can be heard saying as she satisfied throng pours into the Ohio night. She’s talking about the show’s innocent opening moments, before the blasphemous knockoff of “Hakuna Matata” and the entrance of the rebel warlord with the filthy name.

This is what it’s like everywhere, according to Mark Evans and Christopher John O’Neill. Evans plays Elder Price (the tall, entitled young missionary) and O’Neill is Elder Cunningham (his plump, funny sidekick), and they’ve done the show in a dozen North American cities this year.

The variety of people embracing the musical “shows you how expansive America is,” says Evans, who is originally from Wales.

O’Neill, sitting with Evans in a coffee shop across from the theater before the performance, says “Mormon” draws everyone from teenagers to, as he puts it, “90-year-old subscribers. And they’re the first ones up dancing at the end.”

The mainstream appeal is partly due to how “Mormon” has been marketed, emphasizing the ebullient sweetness that redeems all the comic sin. But as the creators will tell you, there’s also something about how the musical was made.

“There is a misconception out there that Trey and I brought the funny and Bobby wrote the music,” Stone says. “It wasn’t like that. Trey can hold his own with melodies, and Bobby is funny as s---. I’m the lucky guy that gets to sit there and hang out with these two geniuses.”

“We all wrote the songs together,” Lopez attests. “We were all always in the room, making each other laugh.”

Parker briefly attended the famed Berklee College of Music, and songs have been part of the Parker-Stone arsenal since their very early “Cannibal! The Musical.” But set aside the taste-baiting content of “Mormon,” which not so long ago might have been regarded in the same light as “Springtime for Hitler.” The show’s form has all the comfortably familiar ingredients of – well, of a lot of popular American musicals.

For Lopez, the story always boiled down to “The Music Man.” (Like Professor Harold Hill in that show’s troubled River City, Elder Cunningham runs a bit of a con on the Ugandan natives — but, of course, his heart is in the right place.) “Hasa Diga Eebowai” baldly sends up “Hakuna Matata,” but Lopez cites plenty more influences, from “The Telephone Hour” in “Bye Bye Birdie” to Up With People and Disney composer Alan Menken’s “I want” anthems — songs in which the hero/heroine sing about his/her dream.

“We always worked from models,” Lopez says.

“Trey and I are totally unabashed about that,” says Stone, noting that they revisit cultural touchstones like “Star Wars” almost weekly.

Lopez adds that with material as dicey as “Mormon” — imagine an over-the-top “South Park” song and dance number set in hell, and you’ll get a feel for the irreverent extremes — “You don’t want to stray too far from the traditional look and feel of Broadway musicals.”

Not that these cutups slapped the show together from spare parts. The musical was almost seven years in the making, and often half a year would go by between writing sessions, since Parker and Stone were on the West Coast and Lopez was in New York. Trying to recall what they’d done, Stone says, “We would have to rehash it again, almost like an oral tradition.”

Their concept eventually went beyond religion and tapped into “class, race — there’s so much material to bounce off of,” Stone says. “You get to go really high-low with the whole thing. You get to talk about colonialism, and you get to talk about poo.”

Casey Nicholaw, choreographer of the Monty Python lark “Spamalot” and director-choreographer of “The Drowsy Chaperone,” was eventually brought in to co-direct with Parker and to add the often hilarious choreography that helps set the show’s tone. “He didn’t hold back at all,” Lopez says. “The show grew over many years, and the last stage was glitzing it up.”

The business angle of all this has something to do with the lore of the tight ticket. “Mormon” is playing in a comparatively small house for a Broadway musical, the 1,100-seat Eugene O’Neill, while “Lion King,” “Wicked” and “Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark” entertain 1,700, 1,800 and 1,900 a night, respectively, according to The Broadway League. “Mormon” seats are simply harder to come by.

Who knew the show would be in such high demand when they landed the cozy O’Neill? Lopez, in fact, monitored the online ticketing agency nightly during the run-up to opening. Scoring 20 tickets was discouragingly easy.

“I was worried,” Lopez says. (The sellouts began, he recalls, with preview performances and word-of-mouth.)

At the same time, “Mormon” has plainly cultivated a strategy of scarcity. Evans says you’ll find far fewer illicit YouTube peeks of “Mormon” than of “Wicked,” and in this online age little official video has been released. Lopez says that means fans wanting to experience the show again need to head back to the theater.

On tour, Stone acknowledges that they’ve been careful not to overstay the show’s popularity. “We didn’t want to limp out of any city,” he says.

Stone also believes in the effect of full houses on performers. “We want them to keep putting on a good show,” he says, contending that the buzz of a sellout keeps the actors’ energy up. “When the cast does the show well, whatever cast it is, it’s a great show.”

“That’s it,” Stone concludes. “That’s my revelation.”

The Book of Mormon - Book, music and lyrics by Trey Parker, Robert Lopez and Matt Stone. Tuesday through Aug. 18 at the Kennedy Center Opera House. Call 202-467-4600 or visit www.kennedy-center.org.

PARADE

JULY 7, 2013

WALTER SCOTT'S

Personality PARADE



Diana Ross Valisia LeKae

Q: Has Valisia LeKae, who plays Diana Ross in the Broadway hit *Motown: The Musical*, gotten feedback from the star herself? —Betsy W., Reno

A: Not in person, but you could say she's heard it through the grapevine. LeKae says, "Mr. Gordy [Berry Gordy Jr., the show's creator and the founder of Motown] said she was crying and laughing in the audience on opening night." The actress did get a quick hug from the legendary diva when Ross came onstage during the curtain call. "It was a moment of awe."

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Newsday

JULY 5, 2013

nycpicks »

theater

'MONKEY: JOURNEY TO THE WEST'

WHAT This unlikely hybrid of a spectacle — part classic Chinese epic, part pop animation — is one of the centerpieces of this year's ambitious Lincoln Center Festival.

WHEN | WHERE Tomorrow and Sunday at 2 and 8 p.m. Koch Theater, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts

INFO \$25-\$250, 212-721-6500; lincolncenterfestival.org



PHOTO BY WILLIAM STRUHS

"Monkey: Journey to the West"
— the hybrid hits Lincoln Center.

Newsday

Total Daily Circulation—397,973
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Newsday

JULY 7, 2013



THEATER

'MONKEY: JOURNEY TO THE WEST' The Lincoln Center Festival kicks off its month of international adventures tonight at the Koch Theater, Lincoln Center, with this unlikely musical epic that combines 16th century Chinese folk tale, pop music and pop animation by the people who created the virtual band **Gorillaz**. Tickets are \$25-\$250 for the show, which runs through July 28. For information on this and the many other attractions — including **John**

Malkovich's direction of "Les Liaisons Dangereuses" and "Shun-Kin," **Simon McBurney's** collaboration with Tokyo's Setagaya Public Theater — phone 212-721-6500 or visit lincolncenterfestival.org.

— LINDA WINER

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