

AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER

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PRESENTS

WORDS ^{on} PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

Urinetown, The Musical

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY MARK HOLLMANN

BOOK AND LYRICS BY GREG KOTIS

DIRECTED BY JOHN RANDO

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GEARY THEATER

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CHARACTERS AND SYNOPSIS OF *URINETOWN*, *THE MUSICAL*

Urinetown was first performed at the Theater of the Apes as part of the New York International Fringe Festival in August 1999.

CHARACTERS

URINE GOOD CO. (UGC) STAFF

Caldwell B. Cladwell, *president and owner of UGC*

Hope Cladwell, *Cladwell's daughter; she's new in town*

Penelope Pennywise, *chief custodian at Public Amenity Number Nine, the poorest, filthiest urinal in town*

Mr. McQueen, *Cladwell's right-hand man*

Senator Fipp, *a public servant*

Mrs. Millennium, *a UGC executive*

Dr. Billeaux, *a UGC executive, head of research*

Cladwell's Secretary, *a valued UGC employee*

UGC Executives

THE AUTHORITIES

Officer Lockstock, *a policeman; also the narrator*

Officer Barrel, *Lockstock's partner*

Cops—*and lots of them*

THE POOR

Little Sally, *a little girl*

Bobby Strong, *assistant custodian at the poorest, filthiest urinal in town*

Old Man Strong, *Bobby's father, also known as Joseph Strong*

Josephine Strong, *Bobby's mother, also known as Old Ma Strong*

Hot Blades Harry

Soupy Sue

Tiny Tom

Little Becky Two Shoes

Robbie the Stockfish

Billy Boy Bill

PLACE AND TIME

Urinetown takes place in a Gotham-like city, sometime after the Stink Years.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I. SCENE I. It is early morning at Public Amenity Number Nine, the poorest, filthiest urinal in town. The Poor lie sprawled across the ground, sleeping and waiting for the public toilet to open. Officer Lockstock enters and welcomes the audience to *Urinetown*, “the musical.” He explains that *Urinetown* “the place” is a mythical place, a bad place, which won’t be seen until Act II. As The Poor begin to rise, Bobby Strong and Penelope Pennywise set up their workstation at the entrance to the “amenity.” Little Sally joins Lockstock, and together they describe how, many years ago, a terrible drought caused a water shortage so awful that private toilets became “unthinkable.” Public urination and defecation have been outlawed, and everyone is now required to use “public” facilities owned and operated by the privately owned Urine Good Company (UGC)—for a fee. Admission is high, and peeing in the bushes is illegal, so if you’re poor, you have to use the poorest, filthiest urinals in town. Those who violate the peeing laws are exiled to the mysterious *Urinetown*. Thus, while most children save up to buy candy, Little Sally is saving up to use the amenities; she’s just a few pennies away from having the necessary amount.

Hope Cladwell, who has just finished college and arrived in town, enters and asks Bobby for directions to UGC headquarters. Bobby points out the company’s gleaming tower in the distance. Hope thanks him and runs off.

In the morning rush, The Poor line up and Little Sally counts her pennies. Old Man Strong pleads with Pennywise to let him put his fee on his tab. She refuses; she gave him credit last week and has yet to see a cent in repayment. Bobby tries to convince Pennywise to grant his father this favor. Pennywise insists that no one pees for free. But Old Man Strong can’t take it anymore—he defiantly begins to pee on a nearby wall. Officers Lockstock and Barrel arrest him for violating the Public Health Act. They drag him away to *Urinetown*; after witnessing Old Man Strong’s fate, everyone else lines up, ready to pay to pee.

SCENE 2. At UGC’s executive offices, company president and owner Caldwell B. Cladwell, his right-hand man, Mr. McQueen, and their political crony Senator Fipp discuss new fee hikes they expect to be approved by the legislature. Fipp plans to await the results of the legislative vote in Rio (while on a “fact-finding mission” financed by kickbacks from UGC)—he fears backlash to the fee hikes from a population already fed up with the high cost of peeing.

Hope, who is Cladwell's daughter and ugc's newest fax/copy girl, arrives for her first day on the job. Fipp leaves, assuring Cladwell that the fee hike will be approved if Cladwell comes through with the cash he's promised Fipp.

Cladwell introduces Hope to the staff of ugc. Twenty years ago, Cladwell reminisces, he promised the people of Urinetown to "keep the pee off the street and the water in the ground"—so long as the community didn't question how he fulfilled the bargain. Hope has come to help in that mission and, as a Cladwell, is likely to step into her father's company shoes one day. Yet Hope feels conflicted. Her father points out that he sent her to The Most Expensive University in the World to learn how to manipulate great masses of people, not to feel conflicted, and sends her off to start faxing and copying.

SCENE 3. It is night and Little Sally stands on a street corner, once again counting her pennies. Officer Lockstock finds her and, feeling generous, throws her a coin.

Barrel enters with a mop; he has been cleaning up after Old Man Strong. He tells Lockstock that the old man screamed all the way down to Urinetown. Barrel asks Lockstock whether he's made plans yet for his own upcoming trip to Rio. Lockstock tells Barrel that he had to apply more pressure than usual to get their monthly bribes from Cladwell.

Hope appears and the officers question her late-night venture—it seems to them like a "late-night-behind-the-bushes-to-relieve-yourself-for-free kind of walk." She explains that she had to work late because of the big vote at the legislature. Lockstock cautions Hope to be careful—people are desperate. Hope explains that she's not afraid of people, because she knows that everyone has a heart, even criminals.

Bobby arrives suddenly, and the officers are suspicious of his late-night activity, as well. Bobby explains that he has no need to relieve himself behind bushes now that he works for Pennywise; he was actually helping with the late-night rush at the public amenity. Lockstock and Barrel warn Bobby not to end up like his father; they leave.

Left alone with Hope, Bobby tells her that his heart feels awfully cold and empty; he regrets that he didn't stand up for his father that morning. Hope suggests that Bobby's sadness about letting his father down is nature's way of telling him that it's time to lift someone else up. She tells him to follow his heart. Taking turns listening to each other's hearts, they fall in love and dream of a future filled with peace and joy and laughter. They kiss, and Hope asks when she can see Bobby again. He tells her to meet him at Amenity Number Nine the next day.

Little Sally and Officer Lockstock return. Sally asks Lockstock what Urinetown is like. Lockstock says he can't tell her; it's a secret, and its power depends on its mystery, a mystery that can only be revealed in an all-cast showstopper somewhere in Act II. He can't just blurt out, "There is no Urinetown! We just kill people!"

SCENE 4. The next morning at Amenity Number Nine, McQueen announces the new fee hikes. He tells the crowd that the money raised with higher fees is needed to fund research into long-term solutions for the drought (although he knows that ugc executives and their cronies actually intend to use the windfall to pay for vacations in Rio).

After he leaves, the crowd protests the fee hikes. Tiny Tom argues that the increases will eventually force everyone to Urinetown. Pennywise is unsympathetic, pointing out that if she doesn't enforce the law, she will be off to Urinetown herself. Bobby runs in, late for work; he's been up all night thinking about a beautiful, better world gleaming on the horizon. Pennywise tells him to get his head out of the clouds and prepares for the first customer of the day, Bobby's mother. Pennywise asks her for the increased fee, but Old Ma Strong doesn't have enough money. Bobby tells his mother to hold on to her money—it's time for a new law, one that comes from the heart, not a legislative vote. He declares that everyone shall be allowed to pee for free. Distraught, Pennywise exclaims, "Oh, Bobby, what's to become of you? What's to become of us all?" and leaves.

SCENE 5. Back at ugc's offices, Cladwell and Fipp are discussing their profits and upcoming trip to Rio, when Hope comes in with the morning faxes. Hope starts to tell her father about her new love for Bobby, but McQueen interrupts with news of a riot at Public Amenity Number Nine. Cladwell wants to crack down on the troublemakers, and Hope is upset by her father's animosity toward the people. He explains that people are helpless bunnies, easy prey for those with power. He warns her: "Don't be the bunny!" Cladwell and his cronies head out to bag some rabbits.

SCENE 6. Back at Amenity Number Nine, Bobby, undeterred by the increasing spillage, is making sure that everyone gets a chance to pee for free. The police and ugc executives arrive to put down the rebellion. Hope arrives, too, and is surprised to see Bobby at the head of a mob; he in turn is surprised to find out she is the daughter of a tyrant. Bobby stands up to Cladwell, declaring that a new era of hope and happiness, of human dignity and freedom, has begun. Cladwell orders the police to respond with brutality, despite Hope's pleas for understanding and a peaceful response. Bobby decides to move the rebels inside the amenity, where he believes they will be safer. Hope is torn: she can't fight against her father, but Bobby can't back down now. He asks that she join the rebellion or stand aside. Mistakenly assuming that Bobby is holding Hope against her will, Cladwell demands her release. Haunted by memories of his father and his own inaction, and realizing that Cladwell will not let the revolutionaries go, Bobby takes Hope hostage and orders his followers to run. Pennywise pleads with Bobby to release Hope, and Cladwell orders his men to seize the rebels. General mayhem ensues as The Poor escape with Hope. Officer Lockstock announces intermission.

ACT II. SCENE I. Lockstock welcomes the audience to Act II. In their secret hideout somewhere in the underground sewers, the rebel Poor imagine what Urinetown is like while waiting for Bobby, Old Ma Strong, and Little Sally to return. Meanwhile, Cladwell rants that he wants his daughter found and Bobby punished, and looks forward to sending everyone to Urinetown.

Elsewhere in the city, Bobby and his mother try to avoid the police while distributing memos to the other amenity custodians, hoping to convince them to join the rebel movement. Lockstock nabs Sally and tries to get her to tell him where her cohorts are hiding. She refuses and tells him that she believes that everyone is already in Urinetown, which she believes is a metaphysical place of fear, not an actual place. She manages to slip away.

SCENE 2. Back at the hideout, Hot Blades Harry, Tiny Tom, Little Becky Two Shoes, Soupy Sue, and Robby the Stockfish want to kill Hope to take revenge on her father—besides, it will make them feel powerful for a moment. Little Sally, who has just returned from spying on a meeting at UGC, stops them: she tells them that killing people is wrong, and if they kill Hope, they are no better than their enemies.

Bobby and his mother arrive and try to calm the bloodthirsty rebels. They argue that it would be foolish to kill Hope—as long as they have her, Cladwell will not harm them. Little Sally thinks Bobby is only protecting Hope because he's in love with her. Bobby admits that he does love Hope, but, more importantly, they are fighting a noble fight for freedom and equality, and he has made a vow that no person in need shall be ignored by anyone with the means to help. Although they are scared, he says, and many of them may not survive the battle, when the time comes they must fight the police and keep fighting until freedom is won for all the people of the land.

Unseen by the rebels, Pennywise slips into the hideout. Cladwell has sent her to ask Bobby to meet with him to discuss the situation and develop a peaceful solution. Bobby agrees to go, even though it might be a trap, but the rebels shall keep Hope as security. His mother tells Pennywise that if anything happens to Bobby, the same will happen to Hope. Hope is upset and reminds Bobby that kidnapping is wrong. Bobby says he is sorry for dragging her into the fight, but their love cannot flourish until freedom, not fear, rules the people. He leaves, and she bids him a tearful farewell.

SCENE 3. Bobby and Pennywise arrive at UGC headquarters. Cladwell, his staff, and Senator Fipp are there to greet him. Lockstock and Barrel arrive to inform Cladwell that the uprising is spreading to other amenities. Cladwell reminds Bobby of the Stink Years after the drought began, a terrible time of riots and looting and hoarding. Cladwell defends his actions as necessary to maintain peace and order and ensure the people's survival. He offers Bobby cash, and amnesty for all the rebels, if Bobby will persuade them to abandon

the revolution and acquiesce to the increased fees. Bobby has no interest in money, however, only in free access to the amenities, which Cladwell declares is impossible. As Bobby turns to leave, Cladwell orders Lockstock and Barrel to seize him and take him to Urinetown. He doesn't care what the rebels might do to his daughter in retaliation.

Pennywise is dragged off, as well. Cladwell tells Fipp to convene the legislature; he wants full authority to crack down on the rebellion. Fipp doesn't want to dirty his hands, but Cladwell reminds him that his hands are already filthy. Cladwell leaves.

Bobby is dragged to the roof of the ugc building by Lockstock and Barrel. When his blindfold is removed, Bobby quickly realizes that Urinetown is merely a drop away—Urinetown is, in fact, death. Simultaneously, the others wonder why they ever listened—Pennywise and Fipp to Cladwell, Hope (still tied to her chair in the hideout) to her father and to Bobby, and Bobby to his heart. Lockstock and Barrel throw Bobby over the edge of the roof. Lockstock tells Barrel to get a shovel and mop.

SCENE 4. Back in the hideout, Little Sally tells the rebels what happened to Bobby. As she shares Bobby's last words, Bobby's ghost joins her, telling Hope that he loves her, that no one is innocent, and that they must continue to fight for what is right.

Lost without their leader, the rebels wonder what to do next. They decide that they must fulfill their vow—they must do to Hope what her father ordered done to Bobby. Pennywise appears and begs them to take her instead of Hope. She explains that she is Hope's mother; she was Cladwell's lover during the Stink Years and promised him never to reveal her identity.

Hope convinces the rebels to make her their leader to carry on Bobby's fight. She offers to use her insider knowledge—and Pennywise's key—to gain access to the "nerve center" of her father's company, where they will question her father. The rebels agree, surmising that if Bobby loved Hope and she loved Bobby, she must be trustworthy.

SCENE 5. Hope, Pennywise, and The Poor move out to seize ugc headquarters. Lockstock prepares to go back down into the sewers, leaving Barrel to guard the streets. Lockstock admits to Barrel that he sometimes has doubts about what they've been doing, but he believes that Cladwell's statutes may be the only hope for the community he loves. Barrel declares his own love for Lockstock, just before Hope and her companions pounce and kill him.

Fipp prepares to escape on the last flight to Rio. Mrs. Millennium asks whether she can go with him, just before Hope and her companions pounce and kill them.

In ugc's executive offices, Cladwell declares that he's not sorry for what he's done, but hopes that Hope, who he presumes is now dead, will forgive him when they meet in heaven. Hope appears and tells her father that he is on his way to Urinetown. She has

joined the revolution and realized that all the people need is freedom and love. Cladwell says that he once believed that to be true, but later realized that food, water, shelter—and cash—are more important than love. He may have been a bad father and a cruel man, but he “kept the pee off the street and the water in the ground,” as promised; he has no regrets. The rebels throw him off the roof. Everyone turns to Hope, now the new leader of the revolution and of UGC, who declares the beginning of a new age of freedom, compassion, equality, and, yes, of hope.

Time passes. Sometime in the future, Lockstock explains to Little Sally—and to the audience—that Hope did go on to institute a series of reforms that gave all people unrestricted access to public bathrooms, where they could pee for free whenever, with whomever, and for as long as they liked. Urine Good Company was renamed the Bobby Strong Memorial Toilet Authority and operated as a public trust for the public benefit.

Without Cladwell’s tyrannical control, however, the water did eventually dry up. Love and freedom were indeed not enough to sustain the people’s way of life. Hope finally joined her father “in a manner not quite so gentle,” and the people were forced to recognize their town for what it really was, “What it was always waiting to be”: Urinetown!

WHAT KIND OF MUSICAL IS THIS?

BY ELIZABETH BRODERSEN

You our humble
Audience,
You have come to
See
What it's like when
People can't pee
Free.

—The Ensemble in *Urinetown, The Musical*

It's the oldest story—
Masses are oppressed,
Faces, clothes, and bladders
All distressed.
Rich folks get the good life,
Poor folks get the woe.
In the end, it's nothing you don't know.

—Officer Lockstock in *Urinetown, The Musical*

Corruption, we know, has quite a future, and Lord knows, what a past!
—Lotte Lenya

8 **A**s protesters marched their way down Market Street recently, it seemed fitting to be looking ahead to the final production of A.C.T.'s 2002–03 season, *Urinetown, The Musical*. A wickedly witty, subversively satirical tribute to the political music-theater of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, *Urinetown* defies the conventions of the musical genre to provide an unabashedly irreverent exposé of tyranny, capitalism, and greed. *Urinetown* also champions the inviolable right to pee for free. That's right: to pee. For free.

With its offbeat plot, quirky tunes, wall-to-wall dancing, and unlikely title, *Urinetown* has charmed the pants off audiences and critics throughout its journey from the fringe of New York theater all the way to Broadway and (soon) beyond. As the postapocalyptic story begins, a 20-year drought has dried up the nation's reservoirs and caused a water shortage

so severe that private toilets are unflushable and peeing without permission has been made illegal. The law says you must pay to pee, and the public bathrooms are all owned and operated by a greedy fiend named Caldwell B. Cladwell. A love story develops between Cladwell's naive daughter and the idealistic young revolutionary who leads the townspeople in a revolt against the corporate machine that controls the facilities.

AN IMPROBABLE HIT

The idea for *Urinetown, The Musical* first came to Kotis during a 1995 trip to Europe: After finishing an engagement with the experimental theater company the Neo-Futurists, Kotis decided to extend an overnight layover in Paris, with the romantic notion of backpacking around western Europe for two additional weeks. Optimistically allotting himself just \$300 for the trip, he quickly ran out of money and was forced to spend the rest of his vacation looking for cheap but satisfying meals, sleeping in train stations, and—once he discovered that public restrooms in Europe are pay-per-use—“avoiding going to the bathroom as much as possible.” As he wandered the streets of European cities, the notion of a place like *Urinetown* began to take form in his mind. In the introduction to the published version of the musical, Kotis writes about the genesis of the show:

It would be a grand, ridiculous reflection of the world as we know it to be, complete with rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, a government controlled by industry and an industry that exists apart from and above us all. And driving it all would be a musical—yes, a very big musical, and it would be called *Urinetown*. It might not be performed, perhaps should not be performed, but it would be called *Urinetown*, and it would take place in a town where everybody had to pee. Such is the thinking that comes from being too homesick, too broke, and too full of belly-filling foods, while inhibiting the natural bodily functions for too long.

Upon his return to the United States, Kotis—who at that point had never seen a Broadway musical—approached fellow Neo-Futurist Mark Hollmann. Both active members of Chicago's lively and political improv-comedy scene since the late 1980s, Hollmann and Kotis (with their fellow ensemble members) had already written, acted in, directed, and produced five full-length plays and two full-length musicals as actor/playwrights in the improvisational Cardiff Giant Theater Company. Much to Kotis's surprise, Hollmann loved the idea of *Urinetown*. “It wasn't merely a musical centered on peeing,” writes Hollmann. “The project [Greg] proposed to me had all the elements of a great musical: a love story set against the backdrop of social upheaval, a protagonist who would

fight to the death for what he wanted, and a colorful cast of supporting characters. It also had the potential for comic social commentary.”

Kotis and Hollmann met frequently over the next three years (after services at the church where Hollmann played the organ), collaborating on a show they never really dared hope would make it to the stage. The outrageousness of Kotis’s original idea took on a life of its own, eventually becoming a kind of grand challenge: Kotis and Hollmann decided to write a show so deliberately, charmingly bad that no one would possibly want to produce it. “It was a freak-show of a musical, a Frankenstein’s Monster best kept in the basement,” writes Kotis. “We wrote it as if we didn’t expect anyone but maybe a few friends to see it, because at first we really didn’t expect anyone to see it. . . .

“And yet, at the same time, the madness of the thing felt strangely joyful and free. Since it was unproducibile, we allowed ourselves complete liberty in imagining the play, making choices that were not just bad for the sake of being bad but reckless for the sake of seeing where a story goes when it goes where it probably shouldn’t.”

The result was a refreshingly original, zany comedy of a musical with a slightly macabre twist, as well as a title so unappealing it seemed guaranteed to deflect any expectations of high-brow success. “We thought that with a name like ‘Urinetown’ there’d be no chance of having to show it to our family and friends,” Kotis has said.

For more than a year after their improbable musical was completed, Kotis and Hollmann shopped the project around, hoping to garner financial backing for a production. In 1999—more than 100 rejection letters later—the project was accepted by the New York International Fringe Festival. An intrepid cast (which included current third-year A.C.T. Master of Fine Arts Program student Allison Schubert) presented a “raw and rebellious production” in a stiflingly hot converted garage to cheering audiences and critical raves.

Among the show’s early fans were the members of the Araca Group, up-and-coming young producers who saw the potential in the iconoclastic show. Araca added to the creative mix director John Rando, as well as new cast members, who presented a professional reading in January 2000 to influential industry representatives, including Michael David and Lauren Mitchell of Dodger Theatricals. Among the biggest players on Broadway, known for producing a string of Tony-nominated and/or -winning hits (including *42nd Street*, *Into the Woods*, *The Music Man*, *Blast*, *Footloose*, *Tommy*, and *Titanic*, among many others), as well as for championing literate, unusual material (including *Wrong Mountain*, *High Society*, and *Frank Loesser’s Hans Christian Andersen*, all coproduced for Broadway with A.C.T.), David and Mitchell fell in love with *Urinetown*. The commercial off-Broadway production opened in April 2001; its sold-out run was extended

and eventually earned 11 Drama Desk nominations, two OBIE awards, and inclusion in that season's "Best Plays" anthology.

Emboldened by their off-Broadway success, the producers transferred the show to Broadway's Henry Miller Theatre, where *Urinetown, The Musical* opened on September 20, 2001, again to spectacular reviews from the nation's toughest critics. The production received ten Tony nominations and later won the rare Tony "triple crown"—awards for best book, score, and direction. Kotis and Hollmann's little "unproducible" musical is now about to embark on a national tour; several international productions are in the works (including in Seoul, Tokyo, and London); a film version has even been mentioned.

UNCONVENTIONALLY CLASSICAL

A classically structured musical that honors the conventional rules while turning them on their heads, *Urinetown* pays homage to archetypes from a wide range of musicals, from *West Side Story*, *Guys and Dolls*, and *Fiddler on the Roof* to *Stop the World—I Want to Get Off*, *Cabaret*, and *Les Miz*. Russian folk songs, gospel anthems, rock tunes, and Rodgers and Hammerstein-like showstoppers all make an appearance. The show's imaginative dance numbers, staged by choreographer John Carrafa, include tributes to Broadway masters including Jerome Robbins and Bob Fosse.

The first *Urinetown* song to flow from composer Hollmann's pen was Penelope Pennywise's Weillian march "It's a Privilege to Pee." "I was thinking about Weill a lot at the beginning," Hollmann has said, "because the idea that Greg presented seemed so much like *The Threepenny Opera* to me. As we went on writing the score, that palette was a little limiting. I started to reach into the way I learned to write musicals, which was by watching Rodgers and Hammerstein and Lerner and Loewe, so a lot of that influence started creeping in as we proceeded to musicalize the dramatic moments."

Hollmann particularly admires Rodgers and Hammerstein's attitude toward the role of music in theater, a role too often forgotten by contemporary Broadway composers. "[Rodgers's] scores were so well integrated with the book," he has said. "The songs flowed out of, and then back into, the script. The melodies that he would write for a character were so appropriate for the character in that particular situation."

"Rodgers was simply the greatest melodist of the American theater. Music has to be the servant of the story. If composers remember that, they're already ahead of the game."

SERIOUSLY UNSERIOUS

In tune with the "push-and-pull between tradition and insurgence" that Hollmann says characterizes their unique collaboration, the show's creators also hoped to communicate

with *Urinetown* an ecological message of warning, their “creeping sense of dread that we’re in the process of doing ourselves in” with unchecked corporate greed and destruction of the environment. *Urinetown* joins a long and distinguished theatrical tradition that includes Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera* and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, as well as Marc Blitzstein’s political operas *The Cradle Will Rock* and *No for an Answer*, using humor and music to get across a fundamentally political, as well as thoroughly entertaining message.

“For us,” Kotis said in an interview published in June 2002, “there is a political point [in *Urinetown*], and I guess we strive to do both: We wanted to be funny and be true to how we see things. The Brecht connection is that Brecht strove to break down the barrier between the actors and the audience, and that’s what we tried to do, too. Our device is lighter, it’s not quite so confrontational, but still we try to remind the audience that we know that they know they’re seeing a show. The connection to the substance of the play is that we’re trying to reveal things we think we know [about] organizations, consumption—and that we live in a time of peril whether we know it or not. Now it seems more obvious because of the year we’ve lived, but there are other perils that are bubbling beneath the surface. This is a show that tries to deal with that anxiety and that fear of those perils on the horizon.”

For Hollmann and Kotis, however, their primary goal is to entertain. “We come from a comedy background,” continues Kotis, “and an improv comedy background at that, where the only measure of how you’re doing is whether they’re laughing or not. It builds in you a real requirement that what you’re putting in front of an audience is funny and they like it. That’s the number one priority.” ■

This article draws from Greg Kotis and Mark Hollmann’s introductions to the book *Urinetown, The Musical*, recently published by Faber and Faber, and interviews with Kotis and Hollmann originally published in *Playbill On-line* (www.playbill.com), the *New York Times*, and *Variety*.

MARK HOLLMANN ON THE MUSIC OF *URINETOWN*

KENNETH JONES: THERE ARE NO STRINGS IN THE ORCHESTRA ARE THERE?

MARK HOLLMANN: No.

THE ORCHESTRA HAS A LOT OF BRASS, A TINNY SOUND THAT SOUNDS LEAN AND HUNGRY, A LITTLE LIKE THE CHARACTERS. WAS THE LACK OF STRINGS ON PURPOSE?

Well, yes, purposefully because we couldn't afford strings. The producers knew this show might be a hard sell and they had to keep the economics real tight. So they said to us off Broadway, "You get four instruments." When we got to Broadway they said, "We'll let you have one more." I'm wrong when I say there are no strings. We do have an upright bass. That's a string instrument, but it's not a violin or viola.

IT'S NOT A SWEET STRING. THE BRASS SERVES THE COLD FEELING OF THE SHOW'S WORLD.

[Orchestrator] Bruce Coughlin understood that perfectly and said, "No synthesizers, we're gonna stay with all acoustic instruments," which was a great decision.

THERE'S A NUMBER IN ACT II CALLED "SNUFF THAT GIRL" THAT UNEXPECTEDLY EXPLODES INTO A SPOOF OF JEROME ROBBINS'S STAGING OF "COOL," FROM *WEST SIDE STORY*. DID YOU KNOW IT WOULD BE THAT WHEN YOU WROTE IT?

No, we did not know that. I think it was John Rando's idea that he wanted some sort of up-tempo jazzy number at the top of the second act. [Choreographer John] Carrafa signed on months later than Rando, so it was Carrafa taking a look at that and saying, "Y'know, this is a lot like the situation in 'Cool' in *West Side Story*," and of course he draws from other choreographers, too. It has such an effect on the second act. We were afraid of putting that back-to-back with "Run, Freedom, Run," originally, because we thought "Run, Freedom, Run," was our big showstopper: We can't interfere with its momentum. How can we put "Snuff That Girl" leading up to it? It will ruin the impact it has! It only magnifies the impact, in my opinion, because "Snuff That Girl" is so dark—it's funny, but it's dark. "Run, Freedom, Run" is so up and light and cheery that it gives this great boost of energy that propels us to the end of the show, I feel.

Excerpted from "A Brief Encounter with Greg Kotis and Mark Hollmann," by Kenneth Jones, *Playbill On-line*, 4 June 2002, www.playbill.com/features/article/76813.html. Reprinted with permission.

THE MAKING OF *URINETOWN*

MODERATED BY GREGORY BOSSLER

Urinetown marked the Broadway debut of its creators, Mark Hollmann and Greg Kotis. In February 2002, Hollmann and Kotis participated in a seminar hosted in New York by the Dramatists Guild of America with actor Hunter Foster, who played leading man Bobby Strong in the off-Broadway and Broadway productions of the show, to talk about Urinetown's development. This transcript originally appeared in the May/June 2002 issue of the guild's magazine, *The Dramatist*.

GREGORY BOSSLER: WELCOME TO URINETOWN. NOT THE PLACE, OF COURSE. NOT THE MUSICAL, EITHER, BUT URINETOWN, THE SEMINAR. [LAUGHTER]

BY NOW YOU MUST HAVE HEARD SOMETHING ABOUT THE LEGENDARY HISTORY OF THE SHOW. NUMEROUS STORIES HAVE CHRONICLED ITS TRAVELS FROM THE NEW YORK FRINGE FESTIVAL TO ITS OFF-BROADWAY PRODUCTION TO ITS BROADWAY OPENING. ITS FRINGE PRODUCTION WON AN OFF-OFF-BROADWAY REVIEW (OOBR) AWARD, ITS OFF-BROADWAY PRODUCTION WON AN OBIE AWARD, AND ITS BROADWAY PRODUCTION SO FAR HAS MADE THE TEN-BEST LISTS OF *TIME OUT*, *THE NEW YORK POST*, *NEWSDAY*, AND *TIME* MAGAZINE, AS WELL AS BEING NAMED *ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY*'S "IT" SHOW, WHATEVER THAT MEANS. [LAUGHTER] *THE NEW YORK TIMES* CALLED IT "SIMPLY THE MOST GRIPPING AND GALVANIZING THEATER EXPERIENCE IN TOWN." . . . WOW! [LAUGHTER]

HOWEVER, AS [OFFICER LOCKSTOCK] SAYS IN *URINETOWN*, "NOTHING CAN KILL A SHOW LIKE TOO MUCH EXPOSITION"—AND I SUSPECT A SEMINAR AS WELL. . . . I WANT TO START NOT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SHOW'S HISTORY BUT A LITTLE BIT BEFORE THAT. MARK AND GREG, YOU BOTH ATTENDED THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, THOUGH YOU DIDN'T WORK TOGETHER UNTIL CARDIFF GIANT [THEATER COMPANY], AN IMPROV GROUP WHOSE AESTHETIC LIES AT THE HEART OF *URINETOWN*.

GREG KOTIS: Cardiff Giant was a small company that was part of the off-off-Loop theater scene in the late '80s. Chicago's very much a small-theater town, where groups of friends band together to put on shows. The most visible are Steppenwolf and Second City, though there are other companies. Cardiff Giant had a very raw, broad, almost vaudevillian sensibility as well as old-fashioned notions about comedy and slapstick and an

orthodox sense against topical humor and bad words. All those elements were married in Cardiff Giant, which also had the anarchy of an improv company, where anything can happen and you follow storylines wherever they go. So, the broad characters and the extreme stakes of *Urinetown* retain that sensibility.

IN A SENSE, CARDIFF GIANT WAS WHERE YOU BOTH CUT YOUR TEETH WRITING, THOUGH MARK, YOU DIDN'T DO AS MUCH WRITING AS YOU DID ACTING AND DIRECTING WITH THEM.

MARK HOLLMANN: I was a writer in the sense that I was improvising with the other actors, but even for the musical that Cardiff Giant did, I didn't write the music, because I was directing and was too nervous about that. A couple of years later, I joined the Making Tuners workshop, so I was nursing my musical writing alongside my improv acting, but I didn't let them commingle.

THE MORE IMMEDIATE IMPULSE FOR THE SHOW, THOUGH, CAME FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE, GREG, WITH ANOTHER GROUP, THE NEO-FUTURISTS, AND THEIR TOUR IN EASTERN EUROPE.

GK: We got this unexpected invitation to a theater festival in Romania, in a small Transylvanian town called Sibiu. They said, "If you can get yourself here, we'll put you up and you can do your shows." We had developed an experimental program of 30 short pieces to be performed in an hour. Many of the pieces weren't text based, so it didn't matter if the audience spoke English or not. We felt adventurous, so we decided to go. On the way back, I decided to take a layover in Paris, two weeks to bum around western Europe and to decide whether or not I would propose to my girlfriend—now my wife. I thought \$300 would do the trick, but I ran out of money quickly and became stranded.

THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS FOR TWO WEEKS IN EUROPE? [LAUGHTER]

GK: I had traveled in Asia, where you can live for \$5 a day and where \$300 is a lot of money. For some reason, I expected the economy of Paris to be like the economy of India. I thought, I can make it work. [*laughter*]

YOU COULDN'T MAKE IT WORK, THOUGH, AND THE STORY GOES THAT YOU WERE IN THE LUXEMBOURG GARDENS AND DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO USE THE PUBLIC FACILITY.

GK: It was an ongoing problem for me.

URINATION OR FINDING A PUBLIC FACILITY?

GK: Both! [laughter] When I stayed at youth hostels, I was locked out during the day. When I slept in parks, my choices were either the bushes, but I was too timid for that, or a café, but I'd have to buy a coffee and that was expensive. I could have barged in, but I felt Parisians were mean—and as I said, I was too timid. So I had to use the outdoor pay-per-use amenities, which cost the equivalent of 70 cents. For me, that was a lot. That was 30 percent of my daily budget, so I would try to go once or twice a day at most. [laughter] In the process of this budgetary scheme, the idea of the show popped into my head.

I FIND IT CURIOUS THAT, AS YOU'RE CROSSING YOUR LEGS, YOU'RE THINKING, I CAN WRITE A MUSICAL ABOUT THIS. [LAUGHTER] I ALSO FIND IT CURIOUS THAT, WHEN YOU MENTIONED YOUR IDEA TO MARK, HE SAID, "YES, I CAN SEE HOW THAT WOULD BE A MUSICAL." [LAUGHTER] SO, THE FIRST SONG YOU WROTE FOR THE SHOW IS "IT'S A PRIVILEGE TO PEE."

MH: That was an early indication to me that Greg and I were thinking about the same kind of show. When he brought the idea to me and suggested it was a musical, I thought, This reminds me of *The Threepenny Opera*. This reminds me of *The Cradle Will Rock*, and "It's a Privilege to Pee" is the most self-consciously Brechtian—or Brecht-Weillian—song in the score. This matron of a public urinal is telling it like it is in very harsh fashion to this bum, to a martial, Weillian beat.

YOU WROTE THAT SONG, BUT IT TOOK A WHILE TO GET YOUR SCHEDULES TOGETHER AND START ASSEMBLING THE SHOW.

MH: By the summer of 1998, we had the first draft of a script and a demo tape, which we recorded in the church where I'm organist. We used a four-track machine and got people to sing for free. Then I went to the *Dramatist Sourcebook* and Dramatist Guild newsletters for theaters to send our script. I told Greg, "We need to either find a producer or satisfy ourselves that no one's willing to produce it." We sent a query letter or synopsis or whatever each theater would take. We sent to 50 theaters across the country and 50 agents, hoping that somebody would bite. Three or four theaters asked to see the script.

GK: They looked at the script but they didn't bite. We got letters saying, "This looks promising. It looks funny. However, we have a subscription base and what you're proposing is more than likely beyond the pale of what we can risk in front of our audience—but good luck." [laughter] So, that was that. It was very encouraging, but it was also a reminder that many options may be closed to you, based on what you choose to write. That was our lot.

MANY WRITERS WOULD HAVE QUIT BEFORE THE 100TH REJECTION, BUT YOU SHOWED AMAZING TENACITY.

GK: We had a very strange relationship with the material. We were excited about it, but we also understood that it was unproducibile. Originally, we had some 36 characters. We said, "What can we put into this show that will make it really unproducibile?" [laughter] The idea that it was unproducibile egged us on all the more. It was a perverse obsession.

ONCE YOU WERE SATISFIED THAT NO ONE WAS WILLING TO PRODUCE IT, YOU DECIDED TO PRODUCE IT YOURSELVES?

GK: More or less. The Neo-Futurists in Chicago had expressed interest in producing it, and the aesthetic of the show is very much due to them. We tailored the script to their requirements—which are deconstructionist and Brechtian, to show the audience what you're doing as you're doing it. After they decided not to produce the show, we were on the ropes a little bit and I told my wife—who had suffered through all these trials and tribulations with me—that we were going to walk away from it. She convinced me not to, saying, "You've done too much work. Try it at the Fringe Festival. Allow yourself to see it in front of an audience." Luckily, the Fringe Festival said, "You've come to the right place." [laughter]

SO, YOU ENTERED THE NEW YORK FRINGE FESTIVAL WITH A SHOW CALLED URINETOWN THAT YOU WERE PRODUCING YOURSELF. FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND THOUGH, MARK, YOU WERE A LITTLE HESITANT NOT ONLY ABOUT SELF-PRODUCING BUT ALSO ABOUT CALLING THE SHOW URINETOWN. WEREN'T YOU LOBBYING GREG TO CHANGE THE SHOW'S TITLE?

MH: To answer the self-producing part of your question, it's not that we were strangers to it, because we had done it for many years in Chicago with our improv shows, but I had just turned 35 and was beginning to wonder if I could do it again. It is wearying, and I wasn't looking forward to wearing that many hats again for a production.

GK: The New York Fringe Festival also takes place in August, which is the worst month to do theater in New York City, because it's hot and miserable and everybody's out of town.

MH: Then, as we began planning the Fringe production, our director, Joe McDonnell, approached Greg and me and said, "I love your show, but maybe we should change the title to something more innocuous." When I was talking about this with Greg, I thought we could title it *You're in Town* and during the show pull down some banner to reveal the real title of the show. [laughter]

THE AUDIENCE WOULD COME EXPECTING *ONTHE TOWN*, BUT END UP SEEING *URINETOWN*. [LAUGHTER]

MH: Greg is very open. He's a great collaborator, and he'll listen to any idea, no matter how bad. [laughter]

THAT'S THE ESSENCE OF A GOOD COLLABORATOR.

MH: We went to John Clancy, the director of the festival, about what to do with the title. He said, "You guys can't change that. I'm getting calls about that title." Sure enough, when the pre-festival publicity started coming out, the newspapers usually cited the most outrageously titled shows and we would almost always be on that short list.

GK: At the Fringe Festival, we also had a lot of good luck, one bit of which was that we were right next to where they sold tickets, so the ticket sellers could hear us rehearsing. Also, most productions in the festival are one-person shows, but we were bringing in this fully realized musical. By defying the conventional genre, it became the most outrageous thing in the festival, in spite of itself, and people wanted to see it. This was a real musical. That got people in the door, and full houses are infectious, then it started rolling from there.

ANOTHER BIT OF LUCK IS THE FACT THAT ONE OF YOUR COLLEGE FRIENDS IS DAVID AUBURN [PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR OF *PROOF*], WHO ASKED SOME PRODUCERS TO SEE YOUR SHOW, AND THEY LOVED IT, DID A WORKSHOP FOR YOU, AND BROUGHT THE DODGERS ONBOARD, WHO SAID, "HEY, KIDS, DO YOU THINK THIS COULD BE A BROADWAY SHOW?" YOU DIDN'T EVEN THINK IT COULD BE A SHOW! [LAUGHTER]

GK: The producers were excited about the material. They were excited about the challenge of doing it. There's a gambler's heart in every producer, and this 80-to-1 shot was too juicy to pass up. It also had an irreverent spirit that they liked.

My expectation was that we might have a respectable off-Broadway run. I thought that was the best-case scenario, but I don't know what they were thinking when they first saw it. I don't know if they were thinking about Broadway.

IN FACT, THEY OPENED IT OFF BROADWAY. IN ADDITION TO THE SEARCH FOR THAT THEATER, THE SEARCH FOR THE CAST WAS AN IMPORTANT DECISION. YOU DIDN'T WANT PEOPLE WHO WOULD MIND BEING IN A SHOW CALLED *URINETOWN*.

HUNTER, YOU WERE BROUGHT IN FOR THE OFF-BROADWAY PRODUCTION. WHEN YOU WERE TOLD ABOUT THE SHOW, DID YOUR AGENT GIVE YOU ANY

WARNING ABOUT THIS FRINGE FESTIVAL PRODUCTION CALLED URINETOWN?

WHAT DID YOU THINK WHEN YOU FIRST HEARD ABOUT THE SHOW?

HUNTER FOSTER: I went to school with Matt Rego, one of the Araca Group that's producing *Urinetown*. He had just finished producing a movie, and I asked, "What's your next project?" He said, "*Urinetown*." I said, "What was that?" "*Urinetown*." "As in pee?" "Yes." I thought, A musical about pee? I made fun of him every time I saw him. [laughter] Then I heard the workshop went well, and they were going to move it [off Broadway] with the workshop cast, but the guy doing Bobby Strong couldn't do it. When they had auditions for that part, my agent said, "There's a show—you don't have to go in if you don't want to." I asked, "What is it?" He said, "We haven't read it, but it sounds terrible. It's *Urinetown*." [laughter] I said, "My friend's producing that. Of course I'll audition." When I got the script, my wife said, "You're not doing *Urinetown*. That's the worst title I've ever heard." [laughter]

NOW, BOTH YOU AND YOUR WIFE, JEN CODY, ARE IN THE SHOW.

HF: Yes. [laughter] When I read it, I found it interesting and I enjoyed the music. I called up Matt and said, "This isn't as bad as I thought it was going to be." [laughter] There's a lot in the script. It's well written.

THE NEWYORKTIMES SAID THERE'S SIMPLY NO SHOW THEY'D EVER SEEN THAT GIVES OFF SUCH A SENSE OF THE CREATORS AND THE PERFORMERS ALWAYS BEING ON THE SAME PAGE. I SUSPECT THAT A NUMBER OF PERFORMERS WOULD HAVE HAD THE SAME INITIAL REACTION AS YOU, HUNTER. HOW DID YOU PERFORMERS GET ON THE SAME PAGE WITH THE CREATORS? WHAT WAS THAT PROCESS?

HF: *Urinetown* was different from any show I've been involved with, in that we had no preconceived notions. Usually, you have expectations if it's a Sondheim show or a Rodgers and Hammerstein revival. We had no idea what we were going into. It was as if we were kids given cool toys to play with, to see what we could create. There was almost no pressure.

The director, John Rando, was fantastic. He allowed us to be creative and to offer whatever we wanted. It was interesting to see all of us, performers making their debuts and Broadway veterans like John Cullum, come into rehearsals with an openness to explore. That atmosphere got us all on the same page. It was the most creative process I've been involved with.

WAS THE REHEARSAL PROCESS PRIMARILY A WAY FOR THE ACTORS TO MEET THE WRITERS ON THE SAME PAGE OR DID WATCHING THE ACTORS PLAY WITH JOHN HELP YOU TWO WRITERS MEET THE ACTORS ON THE SAME PAGE?

GK: It was both. The tone of the show is a delicate balance. It needs to be almost humorless, to be played almost as a tragedy. We honed in on that through the development process, but it began in auditions, when we saw actors like Hunter who were able to be straight-faced and serious about the ridiculous thing they were saying. Playing it straight is the way to do this, because when it gets too broad, it starts to collapse.

COMING FROM AN IMPROV BACKGROUND, WAS THAT A PRIMARY TOOL IN HOW YOU WROTE THE SHOW? CERTAINLY, YOU BEGIN SETTING THE SHOW AT SOME POINT, BUT BY THE TIME HUNTER WAS ONBOARD FOR THE OFF-BROADWAY PRODUCTION, HAD MOST OF IT BEEN SET?

GK: It was set by then. When we began writing, we did try different things, though more or less, the process was that I first wrote out the book as a full-length play, and where I thought there would be a song, I wrote a long monologue, a tiresome monologue for a character. Then, I gave the script to Mark, we went through it scene by scene, and Mark would identify where the song would start in each scene.

The script was about 80 percent done by the time we went into commercial development. After then, the rest of the writing included expanding a few songs and trimming the ending. The biggest change was replacing a number. We gave John Cullum a different song for his character [Cladwell].

MANY PEOPLE HAVE CALLED THIS SHOW A SATIRE ON MUSICALS. HOWEVER, I WONDER HOW MUCH OF THAT WAS ADDED BY THE DIRECTOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER DURING REHEARSALS. HUNTER, WAS THAT SOMETHING TO DEVELOP THROUGH YOUR PLAY WITH JOHN? DID SOMEONE HAVE THE IDEA, WE CAN DO A BIT OF *WEST SIDE STORY* HERE OR *LES MIZ* THERE?

HF: I wasn't there for the *West Side* moment, but when we were rehearsing the end of the first act and trying to figure out what I would do with the song—which begins with me saying, "If the people pee for free, the people are free"—we noticed that the music had a *Les Miz* or *Evita* feel to it, it had that revolutionary feel. I turned to John Rando and said, "I should go up on the table like Enjolras does in *Les Miz* when he sings 'Red and Black' and throw my hands up in the air, sending paper flying everywhere." John said, "Yes!" It was moments like that, and it was a very creative dialogue between the director and us.

YOU'D ALSO BEEN IN *LES MIZ* ON BROADWAY.

HF: Yes, and that moment was my favorite part of the show. That's also why I wanted to do it. [*laughter*] Though, John didn't keep the falling paper.

GREG, IF IT WASN'T YOUR INTENTION TO SATIRIZE MUSICALS, YOU MUST HAVE INTENDED THE BRECHTIAN TONE.

GK: We started with this ridiculous metaphor: Can you do a show where having to go to the bathroom is the primary motivation? That hadn't been done before—for good reason. [*laughter*] To say, We're going to bring all our off-off-off-Broadway powers to this metaphor and see what comes of it, that was the obsession. In other words, Is it possible to create a show with this rottenness at its core? Can you build enough layers around it to make a pearl? That's what drove us, even more than the classic musicals, though we looked to them as guideposts in construction.

MH: They seemed like the port in the storm to cling to. There are so many good models of songs and musical scenes to draw on. I was trying to apply all the lessons from the great teachers in the workshops I attended at New Tuners in Chicago and at BMI in New York.

YOU WERE TRYING TO APPLY TRADITIONAL FORMS TO THE MOST UNTRADITIONAL MUSICAL THAT YOU COULD WRITE—TO A SHOW WITH THIS ROTTENNESS AT ITS CORE?

MH: Yes. [*laughter*]

HUNTER, WHILE YOU WERE REHEARSING *URINETOWN*, YOU WERE FINISHING THE BOOK AND PREPARING TO OPEN YOUR OWN MUSICAL, *SUMMER OF '42*. THEY'RE TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT SHOWS, BUT DID YOU GAIN ANY INSIGHT OR FIND ANY INSPIRATION FROM YOUR INSIDE VIEW AT OTHER WRITERS CREATING THEIR MUSICAL?

HF: They're an inspiration by showing that anything can be done. Well, I don't want to say "anything," but shows can rise from such humble beginnings to find their way to a commercial audience. One reason I did *Summer of '42* was that I wanted to write a musical—and I thought I had to do a show that people had heard of or no one would produce it. I took the exact opposite approach than Greg and Mark. What's great about *Urinetown* is that it's finally opened a door for writers to do something not based on a movie or not something you'd automatically think would be great. That's the biggest influence they've had on me as a writer. A reporter asked me, "You've done *Summer of '42*, based on the movie, but don't you want to write something original like Mark and Greg?" I said, "Yes, but that's the hardest thing in the world to do." To take an original idea and have it go this far is an inspiration to everyone.

I ALSO WANT TO TOUCH ON THE FACT THAT YOUR BROADWAY OPENING WAS ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER 13, BUT WAS POSTPONED A WEEK. AUDIENCES COMING TO YOUR SHOW HAD VIVID IMAGES OF 9/11. DID THAT AFFECT ANY CHANGES IN THE SHOW? HOW DID THAT AFFECT THE PERFORMERS?

GK: There were maybe two lines that referred to Bobby's death by being thrown off a building. We first chose that manner because it seemed so ridiculous. Obviously after 9/11 there's nothing ridiculous about it. That grim aspect of the show became more apparent, and some language about that part of the story was removed, but it's still a grim part of the show.

I don't know how that affected the performances, but what was meant to be subtle no longer seems subtle anymore because of the events that we're all living through.

HF: The first night back, I hadn't thought about what lines in the show would be affected. One of my first lines is about "the shining tower on the hill." That hit us. Also, there's a song called "Look at the Sky," about the dawn breaking and the sky being full of hope and promise. I thought, "Now I know what the song means." It was a hard song to do that first night back. People in the audience were a little teary-eyed after that song.

In fact, the whole show felt different, more important. People came up to us afterward saying, "Thank you for going on." "Thank you for doing this show." "This show has so much relevance and importance now." And, "Thank you for making us laugh, because we haven't laughed in three weeks." It was moving that people said they felt that it was important and that it was entertaining at the same time.

IT ALSO MUST HAVE BEEN NERVE-WRACKING. WHILE YOU WERE WAITING FOR YOUR POSTPONED OPENING ON THE 20TH, SIX SHOWS CLOSED ON BROADWAY. THERE WAS A QUESTION OF WHETHER PEOPLE WOULD COME BACK TO THE THEATER OR EVEN BACK TO NEW YORK. YET, PEOPLE SEEMED DRAWN TO *URINETOWN*. DO YOU FEEL THAT'S BECAUSE YOU WERE TRYING TO WRITE A SHOW THAT ADDRESSED SOME SERIOUS ISSUES AND WASN'T LIGHT COMMERCIAL FARE?

GK: It definitely was my ambition to create a portrait of the world as we saw it in 1998, to deal with the collusion between big business and government, the world divided into haves and have-nots, the people in power who run the show, the people who seize power and make things worse—all of that. Maybe it piqued people's interest that there was a political point of view to this show, at a time when life is more political than it's been in I don't know how long.

I came to see the show the first Thursday after we reopened. Walking through Times Square, I felt it was a dangerous place to be and I saw that look of trepidation on everybody else's faces. When I went into the theater, I felt it would be a leap of faith to stay through the show in this place where people gather in Times Square in New York, which didn't feel safe anymore. Then, to see the actors—who were in the same situation as we all were—come onstage and do the show, it was amazing. In every theater in this city—Broadway and off-Broadway, all of them—other audiences probably felt the way I did, that it was an incredible act of courage for the actors to walk onstage and perform.

AS SOON AS THE DUST CLEARS—BE IT IN KABUL, SARAJEVO, OR NEW YORK—ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS PEOPLE DO IS GO TO THE THEATER. THEY BEGIN TO TELL THEIR STORIES. EVERYONE COMES TOGETHER AND SHARES THEIR HUMANITY, THEIR COMMON EXPERIENCE.

GK: New York has enjoyed such wonderful goodwill from the rest of the country. We couldn't have survived without it. There's a wonderful defiance about the survival of theater in New York. . . .

WE HAVE A COUPLE OF MINUTES LEFT, SO ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE?

Q: You talked briefly about your experience with improvisation. Would you speak more about how that background may have influenced your development as a writer?

MH: If you don't know, that's Jeffrey Sweet, of course. I'm so glad you asked that, because your oral history *Something Wonderful Right Aways: An Oral History of The Second City and The Compass Players* was a big influence on many of us in Cardiff Giant. The interviews in that book were such an inspiration to us and made us think that we could do something creative with our U[niversity] of C[hicago] educations and no theater major—particularly the story about The Compass Players walking down to Lake Michigan after a bad show and jumping in because they wanted to cleanse themselves of the bad performance they had given. [*laughter*]

We don't work with improv techniques anymore. Greg is really a musical book writer. He writes the script. I write the music, and we collaborate on the lyrics. Yet, though the script isn't improvised, we do retain an improvisation sensibility. That is, we retain our aesthetic about political situations and self-contained worlds without topical references. Our improvisation was a reaction against Second City, against that two-act evening full of jokes about [Chicago's] Mayor Daley. We wanted to get back to the roots—or what we thought were the roots—of The Compass Players.

GK: Also, in the mechanics of improv storytelling, you pursue your character's wants no matter what. Everything you do is a matter of pursuing one very singular want. That background was extremely helpful in figuring out the characters in *Urinetown* and telling the difference between plot choices that were convenient and those that were true to the character.

For example, Bobby [Strong] leads a revolution, and the evil capitalist [Cladwell] tries to buy him off. There was a version where Bobby took the money, because it was convenient to other scenes that had already been written. I thought, He has to take the money, because I wrote these scenes, and I'm not going to write them again. [laughter] However, Bobby's "improv want" demanded another choice be made.

Q: Could you break down how much it cost you to mount the fringe production yourself?

MH: If we added up what we spent recording the demo tape, duplicating the scripts, and mailing the scripts and letters, it would be about \$1,200, which was a lot of money to us.

Q: Was the demo tape made in a studio?

MH: No, it was made in the church where I'm the organist, so we had the space for free. We also had the performers for free, but we paid our technician \$100 to record and mix it. The other \$1,100 was for copies, postage, and envelopes—if I'm remembering right.

GK: A lot of copying was courtesy of our employers—who didn't necessarily know about their courtesy.

NOW THEY DO. [LAUGHTER]

MH: I served as rehearsal pianist and musical director. We tried to do as much in-house and free as possible. We spent about \$4,000 on the Fringe production, which we made back, because it was such a hit.

GK: No, we still lost money, once you added up all the development and production costs, even though the production itself made money.

YOU'VE MADE BACK YOUR MONEY BY NOW, THOUGH?

GK: Yes. [laughter]

Q: You said that by the time you went into commercial production, 80 percent of the show was set. What prompted the changes in the other 20 percent?

MH: One motivator was a producer saying, "This song is not up to your standards. Rewrite it." I mention that first because it was one of the most confounding experiences for me in the development process. The Dodgers and Araca definitely wanted to do our show, but

they wanted to see some changes. They're great creative producers, and this production on Broadway is the fruit of their extraordinary vision.

A year before we started off-Broadway rehearsals, they pointed out a song that had been such a hit in the Fringe—a Latin number called “Rio”—and said, “This is like any other Latin number from a '50s musical. Write something better.” During the next few months, Greg and I tried to figure out what to do instead of this number we felt was so successful. I kept grouching, “Why can't they be more articulate about what they don't like? Can't they give us a constructive criticism?”

We ended up writing a song that serves the show well, but I thought that when I got to the point where my show was getting a professional production, the producers would come in like God and say, “I know exactly what's wrong with this song. You need to do X, Y, and Z to rewrite it.” These producers were simply saying, “Change it,” nothing helpful. That showed me that you're alone out there, that you have to depend on your smarts and your sense of what's going to play onstage, because no one else is going to help. You have to fend for yourself.

IF THE PRODUCERS WEREN'T AS INTIMATE AS YOU WANTED, WAS THE CAST, ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY LIVE WITH THEIR ROLES AND HAVE VERY STRONG OPINIONS ABOUT THEIR “IMPROV WANT”? FOR EXAMPLE, HUNTER, DID YOU EVER OFFER A SUGGESTION OF, “WHAT IF BOBBY WERE DOING THIS”?

HF: No, because I felt that my character was straightforward. John did spend a lot of time with Jeff [McCarthy], who plays Officer Lockstock, not because Jeff asked him but because Officer Lockstock is the narrator, the character with the immediate relationship to the audience, and John wasn't exactly sure how he should relate to the audience. They tried different stuff. They tried him as a showman, waving his arms instead of playing it straight. They tried playing it straight with a joking smile. They tried many different little things with that character but not with the other characters.

Q: You mentioned there was one new song for John Cullum. What was that?

MH: “Mr. Cladwell.” We wrote three or four songs in that place, none of which satisfied us. Then, about ten days before we started rehearsals off Broadway, we learned that John Cullum had been cast as Cladwell. Knowing that we were writing the song for John Cullum was such a kick in the pants—a good kick in the pants. It gave me a specific idea what kind of song it could be. ■

SO WHAT WOULD YOU CALL IT? TOILETTOWN?

BY PETER MARKS

Every night, just after 8 in Henry Miller's Theatre, Jeff McCarthy senses the resistance. Taking his place onstage, he gazes into the audience and, disconcertingly, can feel an undercurrent of antipathy from the crowd.

"You see people's faces," the veteran Broadway actor said. "I go down the aisle and people are scowling at us."

The iciness doesn't alarm him. He has come to understand, he says, that the mood will pass, that by the end of Act 1 most of the scowls will have melted away. He has figured out that it is not the show, exactly, that people are initially reacting to. It's the show's title.

"When you see them start smiling, it's great," he said. "But the obstacle is getting them in the building."

Mr. McCarthy is a member of the [Broadway] cast of a musical that has excellent notices, strong word of mouth—and one of the least appealing names in theater history: *Urinetown*. It is a title so unsavory that its creators say they chose it long ago as a kind of inoculation against high expectations, as a means of deflecting any pressure that might be brought on them to make it a success. "We thought that with a name like *Urinetown* there'd be no chance of having to show it to our family and friends," said Greg Kotis, the author of the book and lyrics.

Even so, *Urinetown* has been a success at every turn, from its earliest incarnations in tiny downtown haunts to its current status as a big Broadway show. . . . Yet with its surprising rise has come one of the weirdest public relations challenges on Broadway: overcoming the unappetizing images its name conjures.

Having run for eight months on West 43rd Street, *Urinetown*, like its competitors up and down Broadway, finds it ever more essential to reach out to a broader audience to fill seats. . . . The musical's producers say that *Urinetown* appeals to the same wide spectrum as other shows, but they acknowledge that the title puts off some potential customers, especially older and more conservative theatergoers.

Which goes a long way to explain the musical's latest marketing strategy. In a playful commercial that began running in the New York area two weeks ago, theatergoers contribute testimonials on the production and unvarnished views on its title. A silver-haired gentleman in a festive sweater faces the camera with a look of pained disapproval. "When I first saw the name, I figured, 'Oy,'" he says, slapping his cheek. "And then my wife said, you know, I heard from Gloria that it's terrific."

When a show is called *She Loves Me* or *Sweet Charity* or *The Sound of Music*, it's hard to imagine a commercial having to invoke a plaintive Yiddishism. Then again, the producers of *Urinetown* point out, theirs was not the first show with a moniker that tested the boundaries of taste. "Would *Darn Yankees* have sold?" asked Michael Rego of the Araca Group, a producer of *Urinetown* since its commercial debut off Broadway. "Or how about, *The Best Little House of Ill Repute in Texas*? We've tried to let the show speak for itself, in the way that we have tried to embrace the title and not shy away from it."

CBS will apparently not shy away, either. On the Tony Awards telecast tomorrow night, the title will be treated like any other. "The determination of taste falls within our minds," said Gary Smith, the executive producer of the broadcast. "I will agree and admit that the first time you heard there's a show coming in called *Urinetown*, you went, 'Oh my goodness.' But you know what happens with titles, they become part of our vocabulary.

"By now, it's part of our lexicon."

The daring title was not selected at random. The subversive show, a sendup of genre musicals from *The Threepenny Opera* to *West Side Story*, takes place in a mythical city where water is such a scarce commodity that the public urinals, run by a corrupt corporation, charge exorbitant fees. Not that the name stuck instantly. Just before the show's debut in 1999 at the New York International Fringe Festival, Mr. Kotis and the composer, Mark Hollmann, began to get cold feet.

"The odd thing is, it's really not a bad word—it's just not appealing in any way," Mr. Kotis said. "People were telling us, 'Don't go with it, change it,' and we were convinced we were headed for this huge embarrassment." The authors asked the festival organizers to consider a title substitution. But they would not hear of it: the programs had already gone out, and the musical was proving to be quite the draw in the iconoclastic precincts of downtown theater. Mr. Kotis says one of the producers told him, "I have 150 shows in this festival, and I'm getting more calls about this show than any other."

So it was to be *Urinetown* then and forever, a kind of combination badge of honor and thumb in the eye. "The truth is, they wanted to shock people," said John Cullum, the Tony-winning actor who is nominated for a Tony again, for his role as the venal corporate honcho in *Urinetown*. "The kind of people who wouldn't be shocked, they would love it. Now, the other people are trying to figure out why they should go and see it."

Of course, Mr. Cullum said, there could be a potential audience in those who buy before they grasp the title's meaning. After all, he added, it sounds so much like "You're in Town."

“DON'T BE PRACTICAL ABOUT YOUR DREAMS”

An Interview with Allison Schubert, Member of the A.C.T. Master of Fine Arts Program Class of 2003

BY STEPHANIE WOO

When Urinetown, The Musical premiered at the New York International Fringe Festival in 1999, the cast included Allison Schubert, a young actor who would soon travel to San Francisco to pursue her dramatic studies as a member of A.C.T.'s three-year Master of Fine Arts Program. In April 2003, as A.C.T. began to gear up for the arrival of the national Urinetown company, and just a few weeks before her own graduation from A.C.T., Schubert took a moment to reflect on her start in theater, her education, and her experiences during Urinetown's early days.

STEPHANIE WOO: WHAT MADE YOU REALIZE YOU WANTED TO ACT?

ALLISON SCHUBERT: I was brought up a Midwestern girl, in Michigan. There is this play called *Cool in the Furnace*, based on a Bible story. My brother played the narrator, which was the leading role. I was maybe five or six years old, and I was watching my brother and the audience's reaction to him—how much he made them laugh and how he drew them into the story. And, all the attention he got! I thought, I want that attention! So I started.

HOW DID YOU BEGIN YOUR CAREER?

I lived in New York for a year, which is where I did *Urinetown*, and I did summer stock and children's theater tours—you know, all the stuff you do when you graduate from college and you don't know what else to do and you're not professional just yet, so you do things where you get paid 300 dollars a week or so. I just did audition after audition after audition. There was a teacher in college who had told me: "You're allowed to do 100 auditions, and after the 100th audition you can give it a break. You can just give up if you want." But I didn't even make it to 100 auditions. I think I did maybe 75 or something, but it was still a lot. I remember pounding the pavement trying to get an agent, which was so difficult; the reason I decided to go to graduate school was to get an agent, ultimately. That took a year, 75 auditions.

YOU'VE MENTIONED THAT YOUR TIME AT A.C.T. MADE YOU REALIZE THERE ARE MORE REASONS TO BE AN ACTOR THAN THE DESIRE FOR ATTENTION AND SELF-GRATIFICATION. WHAT ARE SOME OF THOSE REASONS?

I came to A.C.T. because I wanted to get an agent, but then I realized that I needed everything that A.C.T. had to give me. I needed a deeper reason to pursue acting, because before it was for self-acknowledgment, for someone to say, “Good job, good girl,” and I already knew I could do it and I had the talent, but I needed something more. I was actually thinking about dropping out of school after my first year, but then I realized that actors get to do so much onstage that you don’t get to do in real life.

I remember [A.C.T. Artistic Director] Carey Perloff saying in our first-year meeting that theater is transformation, and that theater is doing its job when it sticks with you for a while. I saw a Japanese *butoh* piece the other day, and the images are still in my head. In the beginning of the play, they were playing the song “Country Road,” by John Denver, and there was a man, simply gazing up at the clouds. That image sticks with me . . . I’ve always wanted to change someone’s mind, but I’ve never had the words to do it. Theater gives me an opportunity to make people see things in a different way. When we [the third-year class of the A.C.T. M.F.A. Program] did *The Ramayana* [at Zeum Theater in March], [A.C.T. Director of Student Affairs] Maureen McKibben told us that there were some jocky kids in the back row of the audience, and at the end of the play, one of the kids said to the other, “I think I want to be an actor.” Having the power to transform people and change their minds is wonderful. One of my goals in life is to establish respect as a talented actor and as someone who can really give and transform and express—but I also want to let kids, teenagers, know there’s another way of expressing yourself besides playing sports, or being part of a gang.

HOW DID YOU BECOME PART OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION OF URINETOWN?

I went to the Lutheran church, that famous church, where we rehearsed, and I auditioned—right in front of the altar. It was appropriate, because that’s what made me want to start theater in the first place, seeing a play performed in front of an altar, where my brother did that show. I guess what happened is that the woman they originally thought was going to do my part [Hidalgo Jane] dropped out, so they called me up.

[I] didn’t know anything about it . . . I was doing anything I could get my hands on. I didn’t care anymore. But when we showed up for the first rehearsal and we all read through the script, I thought, Oooh, this is funny. This is really good.

Actors in New York will do anything they can get their hands on as long as it’s a good script, so there really weren’t any prejudgments about the material. It’s just so wacky.

HAVE YOU SEEN ANY OF THE LATER PRODUCTIONS OF URINETOWN?

I haven’t because I’ve been here [in San Francisco attending A.C.T.]. I’m so excited to see how it’s being done here.

WHICH CHARACTER DID YOU PLAY?

I was reading over the script last night and, of course, it has changed since I did the show. I played Hidalgo Jane, who was kind of a female version of Yosemite Sam, really a kind of butch cowgirl—as the run progressed, my mustache kept getting darker. It was so much fun to play something completely wild. I remember the director told me that [*Urinetown* creators] Greg [Kotis] and Mark [Hollmann] had been a little concerned about me being in the cast because the show is so grungy and grotesque; they said, “Well, here is this beautiful ingenue. I’m not so sure she’s going to fit in.” But the director said, “No, no, no. Trust me, trust me.” He saw a spark or something that I could do it, and I think Greg and Mark were really pleased with the results. The lines I had are now divided among the rest of the women in the cast, because now a man plays what would have been my part, I guess. There’s Soupy Sue—our Soupy Sue had a lisp and was always kind of drippy, you know?—and then Tiny Tom was this big guy who had a really small voice, and Little Becky Two Shoes was this short girl, like an old Jewish woman, sort of a girl clown. My lines are split between Soupy Sue and Little Becky Two Shoes now. And one of my solos is sung by Josephine Strong, who is Bobby’s mother. So a lot of things have been moved around.

ARE THERE OTHER CHANGES IN THE SHOW YOU’RE AWARE OF?

There was this song in the beginning, in the first scene with Cladwell, where they sing about how they’re going to make all this money off the amenities and head down to Rio. It was a great number! “We’ll go to Rio, ooo-wah, doo-wah.” It was one of my favorite numbers, and I realized, Oh! It’s not in here anymore! The song helps establish the bad guy in the beginning. Maybe they wanted a darker quality for that scene.

DO YOU HAVE ANY INTERESTING STORIES ABOUT URINETOWN’S FRINGE FESTIVAL RUN?

In New York, the summers are hot. We rehearsed and performed in this garage, and it was like an oven in there. I think probably my most vivid memory is of the facilities, because we all had to use the same dressing room. We all dressed together. It was kind of ironic, too, because we had one toilet in the back that barely flushed. Tech[nical rehearsal] was the most intimate tech I have ever had with a cast, because it was so hot and we had fans going everywhere and we were doing all of this physical comedy. We were crawling over each other. At the end of the first act, when Bobby was trying to get us all excited, we would imitate *Les Misérables*, the “Do you hear the people sing?” moment, and I remember that we would all crawl over each other. Instead, we were sliding over each other because everyone was sweating so much.

I also remember we did a performance on my birthday. It was raining and it was sold out and I still needed to get my boyfriend and my friend into the show. I talked to the T[echnical] D[irector] about it, and begged, "Please, it's my birthday. Let them in." They ended up sitting in the balcony next to the lights. You know, we were lucky we didn't get in trouble because we broke a lot of rules just to get everyone in to see the event.

But I could tell that it was something special. I had a really strong feeling the show was going to play off Broadway because it's so good, it's so funny, but I never— When I first saw in the *New York Times* that it was going to Broadway, I jumped up and down in my house, telling my roommates, "Listen to this!" You know, that's the pinnacle. The best I had hoped for was that the show would be like *The Fantasticks*, with a really nice, long, off-Broadway run. Because its style was meant to be grungy and gross, it wasn't exactly meant for the Great White Way. But that made its success even more ironic. I haven't seen the theater where it's being produced, but I'm sure it's this huge, 600-seat Broadway theater, and when we did it we were lucky that we had maybe a hundred.

I invited so many friends to come see the show and no one really came. Now they're probably thinking, Oh, I wish I had seen it back in the day.

There was a lot of laughter. You know what? Right now, thinking about it, I remember there was more laughter than I thought there was going to be.

WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON THE POLITICAL MESSAGE OF URINETOWN?

You know, we [the creators and the original cast] never talked about the political message. Maybe because it's so obvious. Have you seen *The Cradle Will Rock*? Or *Waiting for Lefty*? Those are great examples of theater being used as a vehicle to get people excited or to rise up, to motivate people. *Urinetown*, I guess, is an awakening, as well, because the hero doesn't prevail in the end. That's what's so interesting about it. I think, especially in musicals, we're so used to having a happy ending—you know, deus ex machina, let's tie all these loose ends together—that it's a moment of awakening to realize that's not how it really is, that this is the truth, the biting truth. And then you realize that there is hope, after all—"I See a River." It starts with yourself, coming together and starting over.

DO YOU THINK MUSICALS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT FROM STRAIGHT PLAYS?

A musical is more heightened. For the TV/ADD generation, things are always changing—the lights are constantly changing, people are changing clothes. Whereas in theater, you have to listen very closely and intently, and the pace is usually slower. *The Ramayana* for me was more like a musical. The scenes happened quicker, and [director/creator] Ruben [Polendo] would say, "Okay, this is when he would have his aria," or "This is where they'd

have their love song.” I used to say, “There can never be true theater without music and dance, or true dance without music and theater, or music without theater and dance. I think they are all intertwined.” In dance, you need to have an expression on your face to tell the story. A musician needs the expression and the dance, and an actor needs the dance and the rhythm. I think it all intertwines so nicely, and I think a musical is a more distinct example of that. I think a musical offers more variety, and it makes things a little more profound, as well. Music is very therapeutic. You leave a musical, if it’s a good one, humming the songs, and I think that’s something that can last longer than a quote from a play.

ANY FINAL THOUGHTS?

You know, a parallel thing happened with my life and this show. I’m about to go into this crazy world, and we’re learning how to tell agents, “I’m gonna make you a lot of money.” At the same time, I’m looking at this sign in front of A.C.T. advertising *Urinetown, The Musical*. It says to me, Look how something can grow! It really is amazing proof that, if you really set your hopes and dreams up high, you can get there. We worked with this woman, Caryn West, who said, “Don’t be practical about your goals.” I think that’s really important. One of my undergraduate professors once showed me that she was in the original cast of a play called *The Good Times Are Killing Me*. I thought, That’s what I want. I want to be in the original cast of something. And here it is! It’s right here in this book. [*She holds up the published edition of Urinetown, The Musical.*] I’ve been showing everyone and telling everyone that if you just set your goals high enough, they will happen.

I think that’s so beautiful: Just do it, don’t think about it. Do it! That’s how you’re going to achieve your potential, to express yourself by doing the great things we read about.

Mark and Greg have so much heart. Usually you can see that in a project. People think that in acting you have to play the business, but these guys didn’t know anything about producing Broadway musicals. They got a lot of advice from a lot of people and worked their way up to sign with Dodger Theatricals. That’s funny, too, because I interviewed to be a receptionist there. It’s just all a circle.

[Hollmann’s introduction to the published edition of *Urinetown*] made me cry. [*She reads:*] “I will never forget the sound, at the first Broadway preview, of 600 people laughing at one of Greg’s lines at the start of Act 1. Since Chicago storefront theaters typically seat only 60 or 70 people, neither of us had ever heard that large an audience appreciating our writing. It was a thrilling vindication of Greg’s vision. It was also the first overwhelming sign that, if polled, even Broadway was willing to say a resounding YES to *Urinetown*.”

I think that’s something we all strive for. ■

THEATRICAL OBSERVATIONS

It was in the middle years of the 1920s that Brecht began the theoretical speculations that led him to the formulation of “epic theater.” Brecht’s theory was not nearly as new as he believed nor as complex as some of his theorizing would suggest. For Brecht, epic style was episodic as well as spacious. In sharp contrast to the well-made play, with its tight construction and linear sequential action, he advocated a loose and flexible ordering of scenes, each episode constituting a complete narrative unit. In fact, the element of narrative is far more significant in Brecht’s drama than in the older anecdotal plot. The stage itself is the narrator, commenting on the action through such devices as screens, captions, slides, film projections, the chorus, the off-stage narrator, or the actor stepping in and out of his role. The result is an anti-illusionist theater wherein the onlooker is constantly reminded that he is the spectator of a play. All of these devices are for Brecht ways of preventing simple identification between audience and character. The theater is a means of scientific and analytical demonstration: “Plays must be convincing like court pleas; the main thing is to teach the spectator to reach a verdict.” This rational didacticism necessitates the process Brecht calls distancing or alienation, which is indispensable if the theatrical situation is to be understood and evaluated.

Brecht’s dramatic theory offers interesting and provocative insights into his conscious aims, but its importance as a description of his practice has undoubtedly been exaggerated. He may have succeeded in reducing the element of emotional involvement, but it is never wholly eliminated, and it is often a prominent and indeed decisive element in the reaction of his audience.

Masters of Modern Drama, edited by Haskell M. Block
and Robert G. Shedd (McGraw Hill, 1962)

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**WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION, ACCOUNTED FOR THE SUCCESS OF
DIE DREIGROSCHENOPER?**

I’m afraid it was everything that didn’t matter to me: the romantic plot, the love story, the music . . .

AND WHAT WOULD HAVE MATTERED TO YOU?

The critique of society.

An interview by Bertolt Brecht with himself (c. 1933)

Just who decides, please, that Ravel's "Bolero" is an "experience" and may therefore join the anointed in Carnegie Hall, while Cole Porter's "Begin the Beguine" must not crash the gate, being merely "entertainment"? Which category contains Rossini? How about "Carmen"? Offenbach? The waltzes of Strauss? Negro spirituals? And should we take symphonic and operatic concerts off the air, since the radio is apparently the province of "entertainment"?

This is a generalization based upon the old Puritan notion that if a piece is serious it ought not give too much pleasure; and, per contra, if it does give pleasure, or even fun, it cannot be much good.

Marc Blitzstein

GWEN IFILL: IF [KURT WEILL] HAD LIVED . . . WHAT KIND OF WORK WOULD HE BE DOING?

JOHN MAUCERI: Oh, he would have written a musical about the rainforest in Brazil, about AIDS, about [over]population, about political corruption. He would be writing everything that you report on in the NewsHour, he'd be writing a musical to try and make people better, because fundamentally Kurt Weill believed that music could make people better. This is what Beethoven believed, this is what Verdi believed [about] music theater, and Oscar Hammerstein certainly believed that if you could show a situation—a dramatic situation—and give it great music, you could actually teach the audience to behave better. And this is at the fundamental issue with Kurt Weill—also Leonard Bernstein's world. That's what *West Side Story* is about. If you show people something and give them beautiful music, they leave the theater saying, "I don't want to ever be like that. I don't want to be a racist. I don't want to be this way." And I do believe that composers like this are so important to us because they actually can change the world for [the] better.

"A Conversation on Kurt Weill," by Gwen Ifill
with conductor Robert Mauceri, *NewsHour Online*, 30 March 2000,
www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/jan-june00/weill_3-30.html

By the 1990s, new megamusicals were no longer winning the public, and costs were so high that even long-running hits (*Crazy for You*, *Sunset Boulevard*) were unable to turn a profit on Broadway. New stage musicals now required the backing of multimillion-dollar corporations to develop and succeed—a trend proven by Disney's *Lion King*, and Livent's *Ragtime*. Even *Rent* and *Titanic* were fostered by smaller, Broadway-based corporate entities.

As the 20th century ended, the musical theater was in an uncertain state, relying on rehashed numbers (*Fosse*) and stage versions of old movies (*Footloose*, *Saturday Night Fever*), as well as the still-running megamusicals of the previous decade. But starting in the year 2000, a new resurgence of American musical comedies took Broadway by surprise. *The Producers*, *Urinetown*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Hairspray*—funny, melodic, and inventively staged, these hit shows offered new hope for the genre.

What lies ahead in the future? It's hard to say, but there will most assuredly be new musicals. The musical may go places some of its fans will not want to follow, but the form will live on so long as people like a story told with songs.

“Musicals on Stage: A Capsule History,” by John Kenrick,
Musicals101.com, www.musicals101.com/stagecap.htm

The real work of art is composed inevitably of elements which contain both good and bad taste, the application of these latter terms changing as eras come and pass.

Marc Blitzstein

Fools are my theme, let satire be my song.

George Gordon Noel Byron

SAN FRANCISCO: “URINETOWN,” NOT THE MUSICAL

BY KEVIN FAGAN

For more than a decade, the stench and spectacle of urine in the streets of San Francisco has constituted an embarrassing crisis that just won't go away, no matter how politicians, activists, and cops tried to attack it.

Leaders ranging from former Supervisor Bill Maher to Mayor Willie Brown thumped lecterns and devised cleanup plans. Police cracked down and made arrests. City Hall launched a fleet of sidewalk-sweeping Green Machines. Homeless advocates cried for more compassion. And still the defilement of San Francisco spread, like an ugly tide, year after year.

It all came to a new head [in July 2002] when the Board of Supervisors—after a lot of vicious battling—finally passed a law outlawing public urination, punishable by a \$50 to \$500 fine. The ordinance is due to go into effect next month. It's the first time city code has specifically prohibited such activity.

This should do the trick, at least in the short run, promises the law's author, Supervisor Tony Hall. It sends the firm message, he says, that in San Francisco, “we live in a civilized society.”

Nice try. It won't work.

The new prohibition is a fine only, like a jaywalking ticket, with no jail time or even misdemeanor classification included. And it is essentially just a rewrite of an existing state law which already makes it illegal to relieve oneself outside, dishing up a \$76 fine.

Sure, clever defense lawyers sometimes managed to get the old infractions dismissed since they officially prohibit dumping “waste” instead of the specific result of bodily functions (which the city code now bans). But that's not the point. When you're talking about people who have to panhandle for a hamburger, the fine might as well be \$1 million for all the good it does, those who live with the problem say.

The awful truth? Interviews on the streets of San Francisco, where even the billboards now scream for reform, show that this latest attempt to fix the problem is doomed for this simple reason:

The penniless who turn the outdoors into a restroom do so as a statement—a cry of rage that has everything to do with helplessness and frustration, and not much to do with any shortage of urinals or threat of punishment.

At its core, the crisis of human byproduct dotting the wildland that is downtown San Francisco can only be dried up by moving its creators away to mental homes, halfway

houses—any place that actually tries to cure the underlying social tragedies. And that’s probably not going to happen; even Supervisor Gavin Newsom’s “Care Not Cash” plan wouldn’t go far enough. So you can count out the obvious solution and count on the problem continuing.

Just listen to the voices of the asphalt, where the speeches and oh-so-fought-over proposals of City Hall and its political armies barely reach.

“It’s like this,” George Whitaker, 42, says as he relieves himself on a minivan tire in Stevenson Street, an alley just off Sixth Street. “This is the great outdoors, man. I go into a store, I have to ask permission. Out here, I do whatever I want.” He finishes, and grins as he wipes his hands on jeans so grimy it’s hard to tell if they had once been blue.

“After all the hassles I go through out on the street, you gonna tell me I can’t do the most basic thing a man has to do—where I want and when I want?” Whitaker says. “I don’t think so.”

A block away, in the same alley, Bill Photis spits on the ground in disgust as he watches a woman finish behind a debris box. He and his pal Mike Mannix, gesticulating wildly, had just shooed the woman away from their Conestoga wagon train line of four brimming shopping carts.

“What are you, an animal?” Photis yells. The woman staggers off in the other direction. He purses his lips. “So many of these ladies, these men—they just don’t care about themselves any more,” Photis grumbles. “They’re just looking for their next load of dope, their next needle.

“They don’t care where they do what they do, or what mess they make.”

Unlike Photis and Mannix. Or others like them, and there are quite a few. If you’re living outside and you want to find a restroom, you can, they say. Or at least use a bucket.

“There’s the library, restaurants, those public toilets on the street (the city’s coin-operated JCDecaux models),” says Frank Otto, 57, sitting in U.N. Plaza gripping a paper-bagged beer at noon. “There are places to go if you want. It’s all how you present yourself. You look like you try to stay clean, you’re not hostile, and it works out.”

But his is a voice belied by the continuous contamination around him.

Like a herd of bears marking territory, the worst offenders leave their opinion on the cement every day along Market Street from Sixth Street to City Hall and in the surrounding alleys and smaller streets spreading into the Tenderloin and SoMa. For the hard-core homeless past caring, this is more than just taking care of business. It’s in-your-face freedom.

When you stumble through life outside, you don’t have much control over anything, even over where you stash your blanket. But there are some elemental instincts even the

police can't control—so when it comes time to relieve yourself, by God, you're going to do it when and where you want.

Beat cops throw their hands in the air.

"I bet I could fill my whole ticket book every day and then some if I wrote up everyone I saw doing this," says San Francisco Police Officer Dave Maron, taking a breather in the Tenderloin after breaking up a street fight. "But all the tickets in the world aren't going to solve this. Locking them all up won't, either."

The evidence is strongest at dawn, when the dark lumps of blankets dotting the heart of downtown stir awake. The homeless rise to find food, friends, or just to start the day's wandering. By the time the first store opens many doorways are marked with urine. Or worse.

"Every door that has an awning over it, there's a high probability of human feces being there," Robert Newt says, stopping to adjust the broom bristles on his Green Machine motorized sweeper on Market Street. "As for every doorway, period, I see piss that I have to clean up—every day, every hour."

Newt, 36, drives his thrumming machine up and down Market five days a week, laying down a trail of disinfectant. As he rumbles along, drawing taunts from sidewalk dwellers in his path, he leaves clean concrete—and when he rolls back an hour later, the foulness has reappeared.

"They don't have to do this, it's just laziness," Newt says bitterly, grinding his brushes through a puddle while the six men who just created it laugh nearby.

"It's inhumanity," he says. "Inconsideration. Unnecessary. The bottom line is: Why do they do it right out in the open? Because they can, that's why."

The one thing his machine can't get to, and which he refuses to clean up, is the latest trend in outdoor bathroom behavior: Feces on walls and windows.

"I watch them do it sometimes, backing up against the glass and letting go, and I think they do it just because they know our machines can't get at it," Newt says.

The problem is as convoluted and messy as homelessness itself. And as sad. But sometimes inspiring.

Take Photis and Mannix—the guardians of alleyway propriety—for example.

Photis is mentally ill and Mannix has uncontrollable epilepsy, and they sleep every night on the cement sidewalks of Market Street. But they describe themselves not as lost, but luckless, men who try to maintain self-respect. For any who ask, they pull out a paper signed by the manager of Pearl Art and Craft Supplies, authorizing them for the past five years to sleep in the store doorway to guard against those who would stain its threshold.

“Guards, that’s what we are, and we take our job very seriously,” says Mannix. “We might get into fights when other guys try to steal our spot, but we stay put and make sure that store is safe.”

When the sun goes down, Photis and Mannix arrange their shopping carts like a barricade in the doorway, and the cops have learned to leave them alone. When nature calls, they use a bucket, which they pour down a drain the next day and clean with bleach.

“Those two guys are so nice, real lifesavers,” Pearl clerk Christina Barry says in a respite between customers. “Our doorway used to get pretty nasty, with the pee coming into the store overnight so bad you’d find a big puddle inside every morning. But not since Bill and Mike started camping here.”

She stares through the store’s front window and winces.

“It’s just so sad that everyone on the street can’t have that same conscience,” Barry says, turning back to the cash register. ■

This article originally appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 July 2002. © 2003 *San Francisco Chronicle*. Reprinted with permission.

POP-UP TOILET CREATED FOR REVELERS

BY BUTCH MIZEJEWSKI

LONDON—By day it may resemble a manhole. But when the sun goes down, out pops UriLift, a reveler's best friend.

It's the latest contraption designed to solve that chronic problem in entertainment districts worldwide—how do drinkers and clubbers relieve themselves after a long night out?

In Britain, police officers spend much time nabbing those who just can't wait, and shopkeepers are often forced to hose down their doorways in the morning. Now a newly arrived Dutch invention could change all that.

The UriLift, a stainless steel cylinder that rises from the ground in two minutes and disappears just as quickly, already has been well received in one English town and will be arriving at two London hotspots later this month.

Dutch inventor Marco Schimmel came up with the idea three years ago in order to “provide a unique solution for indiscriminate urination,” the company Web site states.

Installed four feet under the street, passersby see only a manhole, not an unsightly urinal. Concrete manhole covers are available in any color and design.

When the nightlife arrives, an officer standing within a few feet of the UriLift can activate the hydraulic motor via remote control. There is room for three men to use the sleek device at the same time, and it is lighted, though there are no doors.

There's no need to worry about smell because the UriLift, with its automatic flushing, is connected to sewage mains for disposal of urine and flush water. No one has to empty those temporary plastic urinals that some towns employ outside bars.

And best of all, according to a spokeswoman for the UK's UriLift distributor, the semi-permanent urinal is pretty much invincible when challenged by the party animal who's had one too many.

“The beauty of UriLift is that it is so simple that there is nothing they can break off of it,” said spokeswoman Lisa Parish, noting that hooligans can hit it or kick it all they like.

For the time being, women must hold it in a little longer. A prototype for females is not yet ready.

UriLifts, costing about \$30,000 a piece and endorsed by the British Toilet Association, have been popping up at night in two locations around Reading, a town west of London.

At an April 25 ceremony in Reading Town Centre, Schimmel activated the first UriLift by remote as Richard Strauss's “Also Sprach Zarathustra,” the title music from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, rang out. A second one began operating in May.

London, which last month celebrated the 150th birthday of the city's first public toilet, is getting two UriLifts in the Westminster section. One will be installed outside a subway station and the other outside the Palace Theatre, where *Les Misérables* is playing. . . .

Still, changing people's habits may prove to be a daunting of a challenge.

"I guess it's accepted that after a late night if you want to pee you can just go ahead and have one anywhere," said Neeraj, a 27-year-old Londoner.

His friend Roger added: "I don't see the point. It's more fun going . . . in the middle of the street. It's almost traditional, like having a kebab after you've drank too much and are stumbling home."

This article originally appeared on the Fox News Channel, 13 September 2002, www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,63048,00.html.

PUBLIC TOILETS: EFFORTS AROUND THE WORLD

The following are excerpted from a preliminary report prepared for The Privy Council, 18 July 2000, available at www.theprivycouncil.com/WorldReport (last updated 7 August 2000).

WARSAW, POLAND: Existing public restrooms have been transformed into businesses, leased to business owners at nominal rents on the condition they renovate them and allow the public to use the toilets freely. By law, a public toilet sign must remain above the door. Public restrooms are now luncheonettes, bars, Chinese restaurants, a veterinary clinic. Of 42 public bathrooms, 28 are now dealt with in the manner stated above.

Advantage: Public restrooms maintained at no cost to the public or the city.

Drawback: Restrooms are not as easily recognized as such by the public. They tend to be seen as restaurants and may not be found in time of need, in spite of the sign above the door.

Finn, Peter. "In Warsaw's Public Restrooms, Capitalism Is the Bottom Line." *The Washington Post*, 5 December 1999.

Pasek, Beata. Associated Press. "Good Business Is Found in Old Toilets." *Detroit Free Press*, 19 August 1999. www.freep.com/news/nw/qbars19.htm.

SUWON, SOUTH KOREA: Toilet Cultural Division, a six-person office at city hall, founded to fix up public restrooms for the upcoming Soccer World Cup.

Spent three years, \$3.8 million renovating 587 restrooms, building 16 new ones.²

Passed out questionnaires, held symposiums to get public feedback on how to improve restrooms.¹

Visited public toilets in Japan, Germany, France, Switzerland, the U.K.

Sponsors "best bathroom competition": effort to get the private sector involved. A team of artists, architects, environmentalists, and designers evaluates the city's public restrooms each

month and nominates its favorites. The Toilet Cultural Division picks the winner, which receives a plaque from city hall and is posted on the city's Web site and in travel literature.

Public restrooms made into tourist attractions—include flowers, paintings, music, automatic faucets, sliding stall doors for the disabled, heated toilet seats, solar-powered heat.

¹Schuman, Michael, and Hae Won Choi. "Suwon's Restrooms, Once the Pits, Are Flush with Tourists: Public Toilets Sport Bouquets, Heated Seats; Soccer Fans Will Find Nice Places to Go." *The Wall Street Journal*. 26 November 1999.

²Torchia, Christopher. Associated Press. "South Korean City Turning Its Toilets into High Art." *JS Online: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. www.fortatkinsonnews.com/dd/destnat/apr00/trv--travel-042100.asp.

JAPAN: The Japan Toilet Association, seeing as its basic mission the improvement of the toilet environment, acts as a networking and consulting body for many national and international groups, organizations, and companies involved in the public toilet issue. It has been involved in research of the public toilet situation at home and abroad and has hosted an annual toilet symposium on 10 November (declared by the association as "Toilet Day") since its founding in 1985. The most recent was the Asia Pacific Toilet Symposium in Kitakyushu, Japan, on 9–11 November 1999, of which the main theme was "The Toilet and Human Environment in the 21st Century." Topics included universal design and toilets, toilets and health, resource conservation—the environment and toilets, etc. Events included an international toilet equipment exhibition and the "Good Toilets 10" contest awards. Web site: www.toilet.or.jp (in Japanese).

THE U.K.: The British Toilet Association, a nonprofit company, seeks both legislation and the involvement of the private sector for the improvement of public toilets. It holds a national competition called "Loo of the Year." [Nominations are now being accepted for the 2003 awards at www.loo.co.uk.] Approximately 400 businesses, historical sites, etc. apply each year and are judged by the association. The best 50 are published in a book to be used by people interested in building toilets.¹ (See Web site: www.britloos.co.uk.)

Ray Fowler of the BTA: "I didn't want a Millennium Dome, but a brand new millennium toilet in every town—attractive, welcoming, and clean. You could buy tea or coffee there, have it decorated with flowers, and make it a real central meeting place."²

¹Telephone interview with Ray Fowler, 18 July 2000.

²Welford, Heather. "Social Change: Urinals for All? We Don't Take Our Public Toilets Seriously Enough." *The Guardian* (Manchester, U.K.), 21 October 1998.

THE WATER WARS

Water Privatization Has Been a Failure All Over the World—but Companies Like Bechtel Haven't Given Up.

BY SAVANNAH BLACKWELL

The people of Ghana are in trouble. During the rainy season, cholera cases reach epidemic proportions in Accra, the nation's capital. Nearly half of the recorded visits to health facilities in 2000 were related to malaria. And the number of people infected by guinea worm is rising to the point where entire communities face economic devastation.

All of these diseases are attributable to the same fundamental problem: lack of access to clean, drinkable water. And the reason the rates of illness are increasing, activists say, is because many people, mostly the poor, have been cut off from water supplies in the country's move toward privatizing its entire water system.

In 1998 officials at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund told Ghanaian government officials that if they wanted \$400 million in loans to rebuild the publicly owned and controlled water system, they had to make some changes that would, in effect, prime the system for takeover by politically powerful, private water companies: The government had to end its practice of making wealthy and industrial customers subsidize the cost of providing water to poor communities. In addition, water had to be sold at full market rates.

While the people of Ghana suffer, guess who stands to benefit? None other than San Francisco's own Bechtel Corp., which, along with the French companies Vivendi, Saur, and Suez and the U.K.'s Biwater, is vying to take over Ghana's system at a potentially handsome profit.

Indeed, the World Bank and the IMF are granting low-interest loans of a mere \$70 million each (the real cost of Ghana's water infrastructure needs is more like \$1.2 billion) to the two corporations that win the deal to pay for some improvements—in exchange for claiming the country's market.

"This is quite vicious and blatant," Rudolf Amenga-Etego, the national campaign coordinator of Ghana's National Coalition against the Privatization of Water, told us in a recent interview. He was in town promoting the fight against water privatization.

"The World Bank has among its goals the eradication of poverty," Amenga-Etego said. "But its policies create poverty by excluding a significant population from water. You can-

not produce a prosperous society that way. They seem to be working for corporations and not the peoples of the world.”

FROM GHANA TO STOCKTON

In 1998, the year after the Ghana government stopped water subsidies for poor people, the incidence of guinea worm jumped from 5,473 to 8,965, according to an August 2002 report by a special fact-finding mission to Ghana, which included representatives from such organizations as the Washington, D.C.-based Public Citizen (a consumer and good-government group founded by Ralph Nader) and the Center for Policy Analysis on Trade and Health, a San Francisco-based, nonprofit public health research and advocacy group, and a host of experts on issues from labor rights to health care. Taps were turned off, and people couldn't afford to turn them back on. Rates have shot up 200 percent over the past three years, and currently 78 percent of Ghana's poor don't have access to piped water. Thus people are digging wells by hand, which are often contaminated with sewage and pollution—causing high rates of disease.

Unfortunately, while the problems associated with the move toward [privatization] in Ghana are severe, they aren't unusual. Privatization pressure is rampant all over the world, including in the United States. And the privatization efforts that are approved often have disastrous results. The fact-finding mission reviewed 40 IMF loans from 2000 and found that loans to 12 countries had conditions similar to those in Ghana.

Even though researchers, including those at Public Citizen and the nonpartisan, Oakland-based Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security, have found that privatization often leads to skyrocketing rates, environmental damage, poor maintenance, economic inequity, and decreased accountability, the administration of President George W. Bush backs the IMF and the World Bank's policies.

In fact, Bush is pushing the policy domestically by supporting a proposed law that would require any U.S. community that wants federal money for improving its water system to consider privatization. And the European Union, where the world's largest private water corporations are headquartered, is trying to pressure the United States into opening up its water markets to private companies. (Currently, only 15 percent of the U.S. population gets its water from private entities). From New Orleans to Stockton, officials have been toying with handing over water systems to private corporations that will reap huge profits at the expense of customers.

Amenga-Etego, who was honored by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and has gotten the attention of Rep. Barbara Lee, is part of global efforts to fight the privatization push. On 28 October, 14 protesters chained themselves together in Bechtel's San Francisco

lobby to raise awareness of the corporation's insistence on suing the Bolivian government. Bolivia kicked out a Bechtel subsidiary (the same one that wants to take over in Ghana) after its privatization of the country's water system resulted in soaring rates and widespread civil unrest. San Francisco officials, for their part, forced Bechtel out of a contract to manage the restoration of the regional drinking-water system last spring.

Officials in Lee County, Florida, decided two years ago to regain control of the water and sewer systems after an audit found that private contractors had failed to properly maintain the system. In Pekin, Illinois, after private operators spiked rates by more than 200 percent over an 18-year period, city officials started talks to reclaim public control, according to Public Citizen. And in Atlanta, Georgia, reports of problems with city drinking water, such as a brownish tint and flecks of debris, have made officials decide to audit the private contractors running the system.

But 15 October in Stockton, the city council ignored the pleas of 18,000 residents who signed a petition asking for the right to vote on any privatization move and decided to start negotiating with a partnership called OMI-Thames Water to take over its water and sanitation systems.

DIRTY WATER, DIRTY POLITICSS

OMI-Thames has long raised the ire of environmentalists. Since 1999 the British corporation has been convicted of violating health and environmental laws 24 times, according to a study by Public Citizen. OMI-Thames has been purchased by the German-based RWE Aktiengesellschaft, which is also acquiring American Water Works, the largest private water company in the United States, with business in 29 states, including California. The move into Stockton is part of a trend toward consolidation in the industry and privatization in the country.

"The giant water corporations see the United States' public water utilities as their next market and are trying to get their foot in the door to control profits and potentially the public's supplies in the future," said Juliette Beck, an organizer with Public Citizen. "It's alarming because these companies have a track record of raising rates, laying off experienced employees, and slashing their [investment] costs in the systems—not to mention environmental accidents."

Some public officials are getting the message. Unlike their Stockton counterparts, officials in New Orleans heeded public concern and 16 October turned down what would have been the largest privatization deal of a water system in the United States. And Santa Cruz County officials are asking the California Public Utilities Commission to deny a request to raise rates in Felton by 57 percent so RWE can pay off the cost of purchasing

American Water Works. Other California communities that have been served by the California division of American Water, such as the city of Thousand Oaks, are protesting the merger.

“Communities are usually shocked when they find out that their local utility has been bought by some multinational corporation,” Beck said. “It’s a classic problem of globalization. But people are taking steps to do everything possible to reclaim public control and accountability for their most precious resource—water.”

This article originally appeared in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, 6 November 2002.

WATER WORLD

Universal access to water is technologically possible in the 21st century. The failure to provide universal access, and the remaining prevalence of morbidity and mortality to water-related diseases, are public health crises of the first order.

Sixteen percent of the world’s population, approximately 1.1 billion people, are still without some form of improved water supply. Close to 40 percent, or 2.4 billion, live without adequate sanitation. The lowest rates of availability are in Asia and Africa.

Over five million people a year die from illnesses linked to unsafe drinking water, unclean domestic environments, and improper sanitation, mostly children under age five. At any time over half the population in the developing world suffers from one or more of six diseases associated with water supply and sanitation. . . .

The minimum requirement for health is 20–40 liters of water per person per day located within a reasonable distance from the household, according to the World Health Organization. An expert estimate of sufficient water is 100 liters per capita per day, or 3,000 liters a month, the equivalent of three cubic meters.

The average cost to provide water supplies in urban areas is \$105 per person, and \$50 in rural areas. Sanitation costs average \$145 in urban areas and \$30 in rural. One expert estimates investment costs to install a water system at \$500 per person in urban areas.

In the 1980s, efforts extended water to 1.2 billion people, and sanitation to 770 million people worldwide. Two-thirds of the funds for water improvement were from national sources, a third from external organizations. However, this work failed to keep pace with population growth, uneven investment between water and sanitation, and urban-rural disparities.

Excerpted from the *Report on the International Fact-Finding Mission on Water Sector Reform in Ghana*, August 2002, www.cpath.org/CPATH_programs.html#Universal.

“HAIL MALTHUS! / HAIL MALTHUS!”

At the end of *Urinetown, The Musical*, Officer Lockstock and company sing the praises of British economist and demographer **Thomas Robert Malthus** (1766–1834). Malthus is best known for his theory that population growth will always tend to outrun the food supply, and that betterment of humankind is impossible without stern limits on reproduction. He published his theory, known as Malthusianism, in *An Essay on the Principle of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society, with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers* (1798).

In the early 19th century, many theorists optimistically believed that a continuing increase in the human population would stimulate sufficient economic progress to support the growth. Malthus, however, observed that food supplies generally increase at a slower rate than does population. And when a substantial increase in food production does take place, he noted, instead of providing sufficient nourishment for those without, the increase in food supply triggers yet another population surge, creating even more mouths to feed. According to Malthus, if the rate of population growth surpasses the rate at which food production increases, famine, disease, and war usually readjust the balance between population and food supply. He believed that the perfection of a human society free of coercive restraints was impossible, because the threat of population growth would always be present. He therefore called for a provocative public policy that would encourage delayed marriage and birth control.

Malthus's theory, although quite controversial and poorly supported by empirical evidence, proved to be quite influential. His arguments were frequently wielded in the fight to improve the living conditions of the poor and in fact led to important reforms in the English Poor Laws. His ideas inspired the first demographic studies and influenced such economic doctrines as David Ricardo's "iron law of wages" and theory of wealth distribution, as well as the ideas of the evolutionary biologists, led by Charles Darwin.

The reference to Malthus near the end of *Urinetown* implies that the drought, which returns after the repeal of Urine Good Company's water-conserving regulations—like Malthus's famine, disease, and war—is nature's way of reducing the size of the world's population. Malthus would likely agree that, unless humanity curbs its profligate consumption of the planet's resources, eventually everyone will end up in *Urinetown*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does the structure of *Urinetown* differ from that of a nonmusical play? After listening to the show's lyrics and music, what strikes you about the combination? In each particular scene, why do you think the creators chose the type of music they did to go with the lyrics? How many different types of music do you recognize, and what are they? Do the songs drive the story along or impede it? How do you think your experience of the show would change if the songs were spoken as dialogue instead of sung?
2. Were the plot and content of *Urinetown* what you expected? Why or why not?
3. What and where is Urinetown? How do the characters describe Urinetown throughout the show? How does their understanding of the nature of Urinetown change as the story unfolds? How does your understanding of the nature of Urinetown change by the end of the show?
4. Officer Lockstock tells Little Sally that "nothing can kill a show like too much exposition." Yet he and Little Sally address comments explaining and telling the story directly to the audience throughout much of the show. What does he mean by that statement? Do you agree with him? What purpose does exposition serve in *Urinetown, The Musical*?
5. Many of Urinetown's inhabitants are based on "stock" characters, archetypal figures who have become familiar throughout centuries of theatrical history. Typical stock characters include the scheming villain, the cheap old miser, the overbearing father, the corrupt politician, the beautiful heroine, the young lover, and the inept doctor. Often described as "flat" characters, these figures are usually two-dimensional and change little over the course of a story. "Round" characters, on the other hand, are more complex and individualized and undergo development and change as a result of their experiences. (See *Aspects of the Novel* [1927], by E. M. Forster). Do you recognize any stock characters in *Urinetown*? Are any of them "rounded" by the events of the story? How?
6. How is *Urinetown* like other musicals you've seen? How is it different? Do any of the show's plot elements, songs, or characters remind you of other musicals, stories, movies, television shows, or plays? Which ones, and how? How does your previous experience as a theatergoer affect your interpretation of *Urinetown*?

7. Why do you think the character of Little Sally is played by an adult woman instead of a child? How does the age of the actor affect her characterization?

8. Do you think Cladwell really loves his daughter? Does it matter? Why is he willing to sacrifice her?

9. Do you find *Urinetown* in any way realistic? Why or why not? Do the political, environmental, and social issues raised in *Urinetown* remind you of any real-life situations? How?

10. *Urinetown* is one of the most successful musicals to come along in recent years. What do you think makes the show so entertaining, despite its apparently cynical outlook on life? Is the show's purpose to be a political statement or entertainment or both? At which is it more successful?

11. In the end, who do you believe is right, Bobby or Cladwell? Whose actions are more justifiable? Why? While the "good guys" win in the end, their reforms fail to bring the world true peace or security or to resolve the world's ecological crisis. In hindsight, do you think the right "team" won? Does Lockstock's final exposition at the end of the show change your opinion of the characters and what happens in *Urinetown*?

12. What is the "moral" of *Urinetown*'s story? Does *Urinetown* tell a story of hope or of doom? What does *Urinetown* say about humanity's condition on earth and our ability to survive? In light of the show's conclusion, do you think it is possible to have faith in the message of hope that is expressed throughout the play? Is it wise to do so?

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