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Scott White – *The Giant’s Garden*

That Scott White! Really, who does he think he is?

The crafty lyrical storyteller keeps popping up every few years with musicals packed with such catchy numbers you’ll find yourself humming bars from the show months after the curtain drops. ‘It’s just not right,’ one unidentified playgoers told her therapist.

Those that have been fortunate enough to avoid the 12-Step Program will be happy to hear the song saviour makes another return in July for a remount of *The Giant’s Garden* at the 2011 Toronto Fringe Festival.

This one isn’t just for the adults, it’s for the whole family giving a younger generation what’s likely its first taste of Vaudeville.

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The presentation is described as an ‘all ages’ musical, inspired by Oscar Wilde’s *The Selfish Giant*. Why did Wilde’s story strike as one that could be modified to a family musical?

The desire to create the piece as a musical was initiated by my partner Peter Fenton who loved Oscar Wilde’s writing and wanted to work on a project where he could write whimsical dialogue and I could write songs for the characters in the piece.

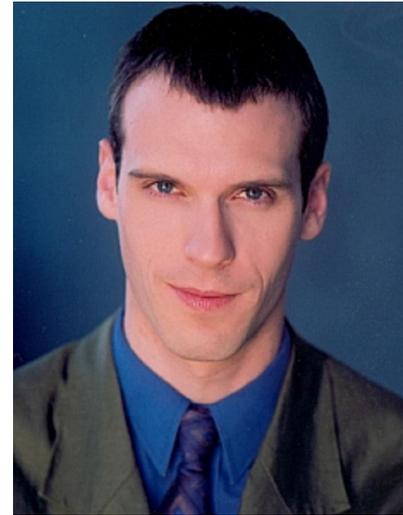
Oscar Wilde’s writing is filled with poetic imagery and the story has conflict, tension and ultimately a resolution that is based in an act of love. It seemed like a good fit for a musical that would have meaning for both children and adults.

We thought a musical about the consequences of selfish behaviour and the importance of sharing and love and friendship would perhaps be a great experience for children and parents to experience together.

How do you describe *The Giant’s Garden* which you’ve said is like a ‘musical dressed in children’s clothing’?

It is a piece that starts in a world of innocence with music that has a sing-song quality to it, but as the piece evolves, the music becomes more sophisticated, the tone becomes a little darker and the piece starts digging deeper into situations with real stakes for the characters.

What keeps it suitable for all ages and makes it of particular interest to children is that there is a lot of comedy and word play; Giant, Summer, Winter, Bird and Flower are fantastical creatures.



Music Man Scott White is all smiles over his large scale show with big heart and small ticket prices aimed at attracting family audiences to the 2011 Fringe Festival.

THE GIANT’S GARDEN

By Scott White and Peter Fenton

Jul. 6 – Jul. 16, 2011

The George Ignatieff Theatre

15 Devonshire Place, Toronto, ON

Tickets \$10.00 - \$11.00

416-966-1062

www.fringetoronto.com

Bravery, friendship, and the power of love find their thematic places in this story. As do elements of spirituality. How did this come to be?

When we first started adapting "The Selfish Giant" we discovered the piece was highly religious and we wanted to expand the world of the story and avoid too many literal images of Christianity in the piece.

The result is that the story took a much different direction. The resulting musical is "inspired by" as opposed to "adapted", because we have really changed the story quite a bit.

The other big challenge was trying to let the themes express themselves without bashing the audience over the head with dialogue that expressed the writer's point of view. The best theatre I have experienced allows the themes to present themselves through the actions of the characters and how they respond to situations which forward the plot.

What's the most valuable lesson you've learned about crafting musicals that you wished you knew when you started out?

The most important part of a musical is to tell a good story. Allow the music to move the action forward, or at very least tell us more about the characters in a way that effects their future actions or the actions of those around them.

In my earlier writing, I think I got caught up in a good song, without putting as much thought into how it helped to continue telling the story.

Lyricaly, I work much harder now to keep the lyrics in the voice of the character. In the song "I Wants To Visit The Ogre", the voice of Giant comes through clearly in every line thanks to the work of Peter's writing combined with my music and lyrics.

One of the more defining moments of the play comes the characters put aside their selfish behaviour and begin to express their love. But you weren't compelled to stop there, were you?

Not at all. There are actually several acts of love but the most defining moment is when a young boy Oscar sacrifices his life to try and protect the garden that will provide a home for his new-found friends.

Another one comes when Giant breaks the key that holds the magic that has locked the children out of the garden, and releases that magic to bring Oscar back to life. The result is that nobody can ever be locked out of the garden again, but the young boy can have his life back.

Harmony is restored in the garden and literal magic is replaced with humanity, love and caring.

It's been said that 'You and Me' is a stand-out song in this show for you. Lyrically what's going on in this moment?

It is in the middle of the show when Bird has to make the decision if he is going to stay with his best friend Flower and risk freezing with the others, or follow his "migratory imperative" and fly to warmer climes.

Flower wants him to go and starts an argument with his

friend, but Bird refuses to leave.

He sings of the good times they have had together and by the end of the song, Flower and Bird come up with a plan to try and search for Summer who has gone missing. It is about friendship in its truest sense.

There's a healthy dose of Vaudeville humour in the production which is ear candy for adults. Is crafting vaudeville as easy it looks?

Vaudeville routines are much harder to write than one would think. They are based in clearly defined characters (Bird and Flower are a vaudeville duo that provide much of the comic relief in the show), strong ideas for how the dialogue can be linked to song and physical comedy; and word play.

The rhythm of the text is so important to the comedy. Both Peter and I worked tirelessly on the syllable counts and line rhythms in the set-ups and pay-offs.

There is a timing connected to these scenes that requires not only good writing, but performers who understand how to deliver the material. We are very blessed on that count.

The Toronto Fringe Festival is an event where new works are showcased. The Giant's Garden made its debut in November 2007. Why did you feel a remount was due at The Fringe?

Getting a musical of any size onto the stage in Toronto is always a challenge and our piece has a cast of 13.

We had hoped to originate this piece at the Fringe but that was not to be. So we did some workshop activity and instead we were offered an unparalleled opportunity to do the world premiere at Theatre Orangeville.

Since then, we have been trying to find an affordable way to get the piece to audiences that would allow families to come and see it.

The Fringe made perfect sense and we answered the call in mid-March.

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