

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by - KRIS STEWART - 2001 Churchill Fellow

The 2001 Gilbert Spottiswood Churchill Fellowship
to study international practices in the development of New Musical Theatre

I understand that the Churchill Trust may publish this Report, either in hard copy or on the internet or both, and consent to such publication.

I indemnify the Churchill Trust against any loss, costs or damages it may suffer arising out of any claim or proceedings made against the Trust in respect of or arising out of the publication of any Report submitted to the Trust and which the Trust places on a website for access over the internet.

I also warrant that my Final Report is original and does not infringe the copyright of any person, or contain anything which is, or the incorporation of which into the Final Report is, actionable for defamation, a breach of any privacy law or obligation, breach of confidence, contempt of court, passing-off or contravention of any other private right or of any law.

Signed

Dated

INDEX

Cover Page	Error! Bookmark not defined.
INDEX	2
INTRODUCTION and EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
Name	2
Address	2
Position/Occupation	2
Telephone	2
Project Description	2
PROGRAMME	3
MY EXPERIENCES WHILE ON MY 2001 CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP	4
* <i>To explore different models for Not-for-profit Musical Theatre Companies</i>	4
* <i>Examine the leading American writer development programs and New Works Prizes</i>	4
* <i>Begin relationships with a series of working Musical Theatre practitioners.</i>	6
CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	7
<i>BRINGING THE ARTISTS HERE</i>	7
<i>SHOWCASING AUSTRALIAN WORKS IN THE US</i>	7

INTRODUCTION and EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Name	KRIS STEWART
Address	37 MOSTYN CRESENT, SALISBURY EAST, SA 5109
Position/Occupation	THEATRE DIRECTOR
Telephone	08 8258 6212

Project Description

My intention was to examine one of the great mysteries of Australian Performing Arts: why, when we undoubtedly have some of the world's finest actors, directors, designers and producers has there been so few successful new Australian Musicals?

I believed that I needed to examine the structures of developing new works in the US and the UK and getting them on to the stage. This was to allow me to meet such artists as Stephen Sondheim, Stephen Schwartz and Ann Reinking, and companies like The Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Public Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Playwrights Horizons, Schuberts and the Lincoln Center. As a Churchill Fellow, I participated in the National Music Theater Network's Broadway USA series, ASCAP's new musicals development program, the BMI/Lehman Engel workshop and represented Australian Musical Theatre at the National Alliance for Musical Theatre's 2001 Conference in San Diego.

PROGRAMME

Through my Churchill Fellowship, I hoped to explore three key goals while overseas. Those goals were:

- 1. To explore different models for Not-for-profit Musical Theatre Companies, examining each company's strengths and establishing the possibility of future cross-cultural exchanges.*
- 2. Examine the leading American writer development programs to determine which would best serve Australian composers and lyricists and establish the possibility of these programs coming to Australia or Australians taking part in NY. Also, establish connections with various American-based New Works Prizes to explore possibility of Australian works being considered.*
- 3. Begin relationships with a series of working Musical Theatre practitioners (writers, performers, producers) to discuss the current environment for new musicals.*

I had hoped to achieve these goals by approaching and meeting with organizations such as **the National Alliance for Musical Theatre** and their **National Musical Theatre Conference** and **National Festival of New Musicals** (through Executive Director Trudi Biggs);

The Brooklyn Academy of Music;

The American Arts and Business Council;

Playwright's Horizons;

North Shore Music Theatre;

Signature Theatre;

Second Stage Theatre;

The York Theatre;

The National Musical Theatre Network (and their President Tim Jerome);

The Association of Canadian Librettists, Composers and Lyricists;

ASCAP the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers;

New York University's post-graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program;

Musical Theatre Works;

The Hal Prince Musical Theatre Director's Program (at the Directors' Company);

the Public Theatre;

Manhattan Theatre Club;

the Lincoln Center;

and the BMI/Lehman Engel workshop

- and individuals like **Stephen Schwartz,**

Stephen Sondheim,

Hal Prince,

Eric Krebs,

Gerald Schoenfeld (at the Shubert Organisation),

David Campbell,

Kathleen Marshall

and Ann Reinking.

MY EXPERIENCES WHILE ON MY 2001 CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP.

In short, I believe my experiences while fortunate enough to be in the US on the Gilbert Spottiswood Churchill Fellowship will be of great future assistance to the Musical Theatre industry in our country. The following are some of my results while exploring the goals I previously outlined.

* *To explore different models for Not-for-profit Musical Theatre Companies*

Perhaps the most pleasantly surprising element of my trip to the US was exactly how eager the companies were to both meet me and, in the future, establish some kind of dialogue and relationship. I began my trip at the **National Alliance for Musical Theatre** (which is the collective organization representing over 120 not-for profit companies, professional producers and foundations across the US and, more recently, Canada and the United Kingdom) and closed it at the **National Musical Theatre Conference** in San Diego, which was a tremendous place to finish as I was able to introduce myself to representatives of every company in the Alliance, who were at the conference to discuss future commissions, resource sharing and co-productions. The Artistic Director of NAMT, **Trudi Biggs** offered a number of resources and publications (as well as presenting me to all their member companies) and, most excitingly, secured the possibility of an Australian presence at the **2002 National Festival of New Musicals**, which takes place in September and presents new works to those producers and regional theatre companies who have the ability to mount full productions (over 50% of those shows presented at the Festival have proceeded onto full productions).

If the main purpose of my trip was to accrue information, then perhaps the greatest success was the number of internal company documents I was able to collect. This included such documentation as **The Brooklyn Academy of Music's** Future Strategy Program (BAM is a world leading theatre/opera company, with a \$20m turnover and is the industry standard in corporate/arts relationships, and this document outlines their marketing, fundraising and programming strategic plans) and the **American Arts and Business Council's** guide to business sponsorship. In addition there were the board and/or annual reports from a number of companies: **Playwright's Horizons** (probably the largest and most respected company focussed on new works in the US), **North Shore Music Theatre** (America's largest not-for-profit musical theatre company in the US), **Signature Theatre** (incredibly interesting company in Washington DC, which runs full scale musicals out of a 200 seater space), **Second Stage Theatre** (recently produced the NY debut of Sondheim's *Saturday Night* and has a large scale new musicals commissioning program) and **York Theatre** (who run five shows a year out of an Off-Broadway sized space in downtown New York). Interestingly, all of these companies were very interested in Australian musicals and being kept abreast of the industry here, and, on a personal level, offered invitations for me to return for a longer period to observe their companies.

* *Examine the leading American writer development programs and New Works Prizes.*

The **National Musical Theatre Network** presents, promotes and helps distribute new musicals, with their *Broadway Dozen* (which presents New York readings of twelve musicals a year) and *BroadwayUSA*, which takes un-produced musicals and gives them

staged readings in 25 cities through the US. **Tim Jerome**, who runs NMTN as well as being a well-respected NY performer (having appeared in over 25 Broadway shows, as well as a number of Woody Allen's films). I had a number of discussions with Tim, as well as **Chris Grady** (who runs the **Vivian Ellis Prize** for New Musicals in London) and representatives from the **Association of Canadian Librettists, Composers and Lyricists** (ACLCL). All three were very interested in beginning some kind of international association between the leading new works companies in Australia, the UK, the US and Canada, which could lead to the best un-produced works in each country being exposed to audiences and producers outside their boundaries. In addition, each association passed on to me a great deal of information about how they evaluate, develop and promote works, and manage their companies.

ASCAP is the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, a membership association of over 80,000 composers, songwriters, lyricists and music publishers. ASCAP's function is to protect the rights of its members by licensing and paying royalties for the public performances of their copyrighted works. The ASCAP Musical Theatre Workshop is one of the services ASCAP provides to the industry, with a workshop panel headed by **Stephen Schwartz** (the multiple Oscar and Tony Award winning composer and lyricist) and including a who's-who of the Musical Theatre Industry – **Stephen Sondheim, Hal Prince, Jerry Herman, Cy Coleman**, etc. Works are selected for the program and presented to the panel over a series of weeks, where they are finetuned before a public presentation at the Kennedy Centre for producers and presenting networks. I was fortunate enough to meet many of these leading composers (more on that later), as well as having a dinner with Mr. Schwartz and **Michael Kerker**, where we discussed the idea of bringing the ASCAP program to Australia. They seemed very excited about the possibility – Mr. Kerker suggested bringing two composers to Australia (he mentioned, as an example, Stephen Schwartz and Jerry Herman) and perhaps one Broadway performer (his example was the star of *Ragtime* and *Kiss Me Kate*, **Brian Stokes Mitchell**). We in Australia would only have to cover the cost of airfares and accommodation (it was stated that they would do it for no fee) – and in addition to running the ASCAP program for our own writers here in Australia, they could also run master classes or speak at public forums, and would be more than willing to do a concert presentation with Australian artists to raise funds for this and other programs. Imagine a concert that has Stephen Schwartz at the piano with David Campbell and other younger stars for its first act, and a second act with Jerry Herman at the piano, singing with Jill Perryman, all hosted by Brian Stokes Mitchell, who can sing selections as duets with any number of our stars. It could be fantastically exciting, a wonderful event to bring focus to what we would be trying to achieve with new writers here in Australia, beneficial on so many levels.

I established relationships with a number of other programs – these included the **New York University's post-graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program** (the only one of its type in the world); **Musical Theatre Works** (an initiative where promising Musical Theatre Writers are given studio and administrative space to develop their works and collaborate with other artists); **The Hal Prince Musical Theatre Director's Program**, run by the **Directors' Company** (a program that I've personally monitored for several years, where promising directors and new works are brought together under Mr. Prince's watchful eye); as well as a number of US foundations for new musicals, including **The Richard Rogers Awards, The Edward Kleban Awards, the Jonathon Larson Awards, the Rogers and Hammerstein Foundation** and the **David Merrick Foundation**. These all have different rules about their availability to international authors, but all were willing to meet me and pass on all available information.

* *Begin relationships with a series of working Musical Theatre practitioners.*

It was important to me to not only meet with people currently working on the top level on Broadway, but those working further down the ladder. I believe it meant I was able to get a wider view of the current environment for musical theatre in the US. It was interesting meeting producers who ranged from **Eric Krebs** (who received Tony nominations last season for both best new play and best musical, and runs a number of off-Broadway theatres) and **Scott Perrin** (who has transferred shows to Broadway from off-off Broadway houses, and toured new works through the US) in addition to people like **Gerald Schoenfeld**, who runs the Shubert Organisation – Broadway's largest. It was also fantastically interesting, say, catching up with ex-pats like **David Campbell** (who I've worked with in the past and who generously gave me his apartment to stay in), or discussing with **Stephen Sondheim** the productions of his work that have taken place recently in Australia, or discussing our own *Encores* series with **Kathleen Marshall**, who runs the *Encores* series in New York, and **Ann Reinking**, who was the creative force behind one of *Encores* greatest successes, *Chicago*, as all of these had such a direct connection to our own industry back home.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Having trod this path and brought back a thick collection of information, where does this leave us? There seemed a true and honest interest in the United States with what was happening with new musicals in Australia, and it's an interest that hopefully we can continue to foster, as I believe we're heading into an age where there will be a whole new generation of writers progressing through. The response was incredible - a tremendous interest in what was happening here and creating partnerships for the future.

I have received a number of commitments from Americans to further partnerships and associations to assist the development of Australian Musicals. They include:

BRINGING THE ARTISTS HERE. Writers such as Stephen Sondheim, Stephen Schwartz, Jerry Herman and John Sparks (head of America's largest new musicals company) to come to Australia to work with our writers, and establish versions of the ASCAP and BMI writer development programs, which have been responsible for the creation of many Broadway and Off-Broadway smashes;

SHOWCASING AUSTRALIAN WORKS IN THE US. The National Alliance for Musical Theatre represents almost 200 companies in the US that present, produce or tour new musical works. There is a clear interest in featuring an Australian work at a future National Musical Theatre Festival in New York, where our musicals could be showcased to those organizations. In the past, this has led to literally dozens of productions across the United States;

I was surprised by how much interest there is in what is happening here. New York is really very un-jingoistic: the only thing they really care about is what is the 'next' thing. If it comes from England, if it comes from Australia, if it comes from Mars, it doesn't necessarily matter. Once you match that natural curiosity with an already heightened interest in Australian creativity, manifested through our successful films and actors, and you have a public (and therefore producers) willing to give the Australian musical a go – as can be seen by the New York productions of *Boy from Oz* and *Prodigal*.

CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING WORKS HERE. But the problem is developing work here that can feed international markets like New York. There are a number of barriers to writers coming through. One is that we've always had an import-driven culture for musical theatre. The second is that musical theatre is probably more respected in the US. Almost every subsidised company in NY and other major cities will have "new musical theatre development" as one part of their mantra – whether it be giving workshops to specific writers or investing in new works.

Also, there is a clear difference in Australia's stark division between commercial and subsidised theatre sectors, a great brick wall that just doesn't exist overseas. There's no middle ground here, while in the US the "off-Broadway" and larger city venues are co-inhabited part of the year by subsidised companies and part of the year by more commercial producers, and artists and writers cross-over from one sector to the other. There's no sharp line.

Also, while there are certainly more funds available in the US, the funds are also more diverse – with eight or ten sources is not unheard of for any one project. This helps lower risk as you are not so dependant on government support and the policy of the moment. An event like the collapse of the Victoria State Opera (VSO) simply wouldn't happen in

any US city the size of Melbourne, because the elimination or reduction of direct government funding would not have that great an impact on any company's funding base.

An example is Mill Mountain Theatre in Colorado. Based in a city of 200, 000 people, they have a venue for their symphony orchestra, a resident music theatre company which shared its facilities with another theatre company, and an opera company. The individuals within the city took great pride in Mill Mountain's existence. This is stunning, considering that Melbourne - which even by US standards is a large city – ultimately has only two larger theatre companies.

And that, perhaps, is what is stifling us: the few major theatre companies we have cannot (and should not have to) carry the burden of all the development work needed in musical theatre, argues Stewart, but the middle-sized theatre companies – who could pick up the slack and develop niche markets – simply do not exist.

Of course, finally it is about shifting in people's minds what a musical can be. The largest battle is to reposition musical theatre itself, and to break down that feeling of the "two camps" (of "subsidised" and "commercial" theatre). Musical works are so inclusive of audience members and so opening to people who potentially may not enter your space otherwise. Musical theatre is one of the ultimate democratic and inclusive artforms, and efforts must be made to campaign for the support of institutions and pre-existing companies, as well as the creation of new initiatives.

And this is a good time for that change. The combination of new talent demanding to be heard, the rising costs of overseas productions as the Australian dollar loses value internationally, and the feeling 'that we really can't do the *Wizard of Oz* again' is slowly coming to a 'meeting point', at which it will become clear that something must be done to develop new, high-quality local musicals. That day is has been long coming, and our culture will be for the better when it arrives.

More information about my Churchill experiences can be found at my website – specifically the media and interviews section, which is <http://www.krisstewart.net/Media.htm>.