



## Interview with Wayne Kirkpatrick, *Something Rotten!* Music & Lyrics

Q . You and Karey [Kirkpatrick, Wayne's brother] had this initial idea 20 years ago. Can you remember how it surfaced?

A . We wish we could. It was such an organic process. We were in musical theater in high school and have always had a love of it. And both of us being writers, we'd always talked about one day wanting to write a musical. I also have a deep love of history and love things with historical characters in them. So we assume that somewhere along the way we were talking about historical characters.

Two writers who were trying to get a hit in the shadow of Shakespeare, and everything he wrote was an instant hit. It would be little snippets of 'oh yeah, that would be funny.'

We would each on our own think of that idea, or when we'd be talking on the phone we'd say, 'Oh, I thought of another idea for that Shakespeare thing. What if he went to a soothsayer? Oh yeah, that would be funny, we should write that someday.' It was really a lot of that for about 15 years.

Somewhere along the way it was, like, 'hey, what if the two writers were brothers? What if the soothsayer's name was Nostradamus, but he wasn't THE Nostradamus? What if he was a senile, bad soothsayer, his nephew.' Eventually it was, 'we're going to do this, we should really get serious about it.'

Q . Karey said around 2010, he thought if he was going to be taken seriously as a guy who wanted to write a musical, he'd better write a musical.

A . A lot of people can talk about writing a musical, but are we actually gonna do it? We each had our own careers, me in the music business and Karey in the movie business and directing. So we really had to make a concentrated effort, saying OK, we're really going to devote time to this and treat it as part of our careers. We really had to start scheduling time to get together, as if it was part of our calendar.

Q . Having achieved the level of success that you have as a musician, did you ever worry about jumping headlong into this new world and taking this risk?

A -- Oh yeah. Worried about it all the time. It's one thing to write songs, and after you've been doing it for a while, I know how to write a song, so you bring those skills into that new world. But there are so many different layers, so many different elements in writing songs for musicals. Some of it you understand going in, and some of it you have no idea how complicated or how different it is.

There was a learning curve. It took us 4 ½ years from the time we started writing this musical until it opened on Broadway. I think we all felt we went to musical theater college after those 4 years.

The things we learned in our first year vs. our fourth year, there was a lot of on-the-job training, learning as we go. You come in with a lot of tools in your toolbox, but when you get there, you realize oh, I need more tools. There were just things I learned along the way. In commercial songwriting, you come in with the subject matter, and you have your basic structure: verse/chorus, verse/chorus, bridge. You try to stay within the same thing.

With musical theater, you can't really do that. You don't want to repeat yourself. You want to move the story forward, in a way where the song doesn't feel like it's sitting and spinning in the same space. When the song is over, you want to feel like you've moved somewhere.

Q . Who helped you in acquiring this new skill? Did Casey Nicholaw [director & choreographer] play a part in that?

W . Definitely. He guided us, not only within the structures of the song; sometimes, his comment might be, "This song is only one note. We get what you're saying, and now you need to say something else."

We educated ourselves in musical theater by watching it through the years. So it's not like it was completely foreign. But Casey also thinks visually. So it took a while to shift gears. I came out of producing records, and that experience is strictly a listening experience. Musical theater is a visual experience, and listening is part of it, but it's only half of it. So it's not enough to have something come out of the speakers and be satisfying. You have to think how is that going to translate onto the live stage?

Q . Were there any songs that were just painful for you to cut, because on their own they were songs you were really proud of?

W . Yeah, there were a few. There was one that we had written early on, a duet between the two female characters, and by the end the two male characters join and it becomes a quartet. It was this nice, soaring number, one of those flex your songwriting muscles numbers. It was in previews for three weeks. Everybody loved the song but it just didn't work in the show.

C . Was it fun to write music in the Queen style for Shakespeare?

W . Yeah. Once we landed on the notion of treating Shakespeare as a rock star, the contemporary thing started making more sense. There was always the desire to have an excuse to bring that stuff into it. We had songs like "A Musical," "Bottom's Gonna Be on Top" that are more musical theater type songs. But then we could do songs like "Hard To Be the Bard" or "Will Power" that have influences from Queen to the Beatles. And have both styles be able to live in the same musical. It was fun to use Shakespeare as the excuse for doing that.

Q . How did you choose the musical theater moments that you wanted to quote in song?

A . We were conscious of not wanting to be so inside that you could only get it if you had seen the most obscure musicals. We really went broad, purposely. Not only with the musicals that inspired us but also musicals people would know even if they hadn't seen them. So you reference *The Sound of Music*, *Music Man* or *Oklahoma!*, shows a lot of people would know because they've seen the movie.

The same with the Shakespeare stuff. Everybody knows some Shakespeare lines. There are a lot of what we refer to as his hits, lines that everybody is going to know.

Q . How was working with John [O'Farrell, book]?

A . The beauty of our team is that everybody complemented everyone. Had strengths and weaknesses that the other didn't have.

We'd joke that the extent of John's musical references were *Oliver!* and maybe one other show. But when we were referencing something, if HE got it, we'd know the general public would probably get it.

Q . I guess this was a fulfilling enough experience that you're willing to try it again, right?

W . Definitely. Try it again and again. I've been in the music business for over 30 years, and for me, this was a nice alternative. I was walking through Times Square with Karey, and I said, "You know what's great about all of this? You can't download it." To experience live theater, you have to buy a ticket and go inside. Sure, you can record it and put it up on YouTube, but that's not the same experience.

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