

TRANSCRIPT - Inside *Fancy: The Musical*

MARGOT ASTRACHAN: For me, I think that the public, whether they will admit it or not, if you scratch them, they all love country music because they are story songs. And this kind of thing has not been done on Broadway. So, while it's a risk, I think people have a love for it. When I found out that Garth Brooks had sold out Yankee Stadium for two nights running a year ago, I said, "You know, these are local people. This is not a stadium down south somewhere. There is something here." I also found out that the Grand Ole Opry is opening a restaurant and performance space in Times Square later this year. So, I felt that the climate was right because so much music that's being written now is for the sound, not the words.

DENIS JONES: When Margot brought it to me, and said that it was based on the song "Fancy", I was absolutely over the moon because it's one of the great American story songs of all time. It's one of those songs I feel like you remember the moment of the first time you heard it because it is such great story of perseverance and of forgiveness. The Reba McEntire recording immediately came to life for me when she mentioned the project. And then when she told me all of the other songs that were planning to be included, I knew every one of them. The songs that have crossed over in a way that I almost feel they have become great American songs. The opportunity to tell the story of "Fancy" using this catalogue of music, I immediately jumped at the chance. It's a great privilege and I could not be more excited about it.

SUSAN DILALLO: My co-writer, his name is Dan Wackerman, is a big country music fan. He and I had worked together. This was always something he had been thinking of in the back of his mind and I didn't know nearly as much about country music as he did. And we met and we chatted about it and I just fell in love. I mean, I've always been a great Garth Brooks fan, but you know it's so much more than that. We started talking about it as a genre and we realized it's probably the number 1 most popular genre of all. But you know, New Yorkers are jaded. I mean, I became a convert. I love the music; I love the storytelling of every song. We felt, why not try it? These kinds of musicals have been successful but nobody's ever done this kind of thing before.

WORKSHOP STEPS

DILALLO: We started two and a half years ago, we had a table reading two years ago. Then we had a staged reading last June. And then this is the lab. So, we've made great progress in a short amount of time.

JONES: And the lab, really, is an opportunity to get the actors on their feet, get them off-book, and actually stage the musical numbers with dance and use props and really sort of flesh out these scenes with the actors on their feet. I think that it's a very important step, an essential step in the creation of any new musical to actually put the scripts down and get away from music stands and start to put air in their lungs and rhythm in their toes. For us to really explore what the experience of *Fancy: The Musical* is. To put it in front of some audiences and see how they respond, it's an essential step.

JONES ON CHOREOGRAPHY: I've choreographed to a lot of different kinds of styles of music, and styles of shows. And half of these songs, you can't sit still for them. Sometimes I'm working with the actors on stage and I'll look out into the house and see the writers, and

Margot, and stage management clapping their hands and stomping their feet. It inspires movement. A lot of the sort of dance in this I hope is very character driven and feels very authentic to the time and the place where Fancy is located. Then there are certain dance styles that have kind of crept into it. One of the actors in our show, we found out, actually was a competitive clogger some years ago. So, we had her bring in her clogs and we did some work with her on that, and that inspired others to clog right along. And now there is a whole clogging sequence in the show. The beauty of getting together a group of actors of this caliber is that it allows the show to kind of reveal itself in front of your eyes.

Another really exciting component of our acting company here is that more than half of them are musicians in their own right. So, in addition to acting, and singing, and dancing in the show, they're playing guitar, and playing the banjo, and playing the fiddle, so we kind of augment our band also with the actors. All of that just kind of happened. We have a fantastic musical director on board, his name is Brad Simmons Essentially, he said, you all just bring in your instruments and let's figure it out together.

ACTORS BEING GAME FOR MATERIAL

JONES: I think they were wide open to it because all of them have such great affection for this music. We went through a pretty long audition process to find the right people for this, but you can tell when people come and audition if this is music that sort of fits well within them.

ASTRACHAN: Also, one of our leads, the second lead, is from that town. She's from Bogalusa and Slidell, the two towns in Louisiana where the show is set. So, she's from there, so she really understands.

JONES: We refer to her as authenticity police.

MUSICAL ARRANGEMENT

JONES: We are trying, and I believe succeeding, in keeping this music as authentically in its own genre as possible. We've taken some very, hopefully, carefully chosen liberties just to sort of musicalize sequences in a theatrical way. But we want the sounds to very true its origins.

RIGHTS CLEARAGE

ASTRACHAN: The rights were cleared by a rights clearance person, the same person that cleared the rights for Rock of Ages, which also used songs by different writers. It's very simple. They are cleared for non-exclusive use. Of course, all of those songs have been recorded and broadcast, and sung live, and all of that. So, it's a fairly simple thing, assuming that the publisher and the writers are willing to have the song in the show. And most of them are, because it's nothing but beneficial. So, the rights are cleared as they would be. We would not go into rehearsal using a song that had not been cleared.

COUNTRY AS STORY SONGS

ASTRACHAN: In musicals [songs] can't stop the action or stop the motion. They have to

move the story along. So, the writers, I think, did a brilliant job finding the right songs that do the musical theatre job, which is intricate and fascinating. They've done the jigsaw puzzle. Normally, your songwriters will give you a song that does that job. You don't have to hunt for it. They've done a masterful job.

By the way, the origins of this music are basically Scots-Irish-English, because that's who settled in that part of America. And that interested me because I grew up on that folk music. I was fascinated by the music of the Appalachia and the south. I love it. Or I wouldn't have done this show.

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