

Lincoln Center Theater's Platform series presents conversations with artists working at LCT before an audience of interested theatergoers. Admission is free and open to all. Platforms are held in the lobby of the Vivian Beaumont Theater. The following is a transcript, edited for clarity, of the March 29, 2006 Platform with Michael John LaChiusa:

Ira Weitzman Welcome to Lincoln Center Theater. Thank you for coming on what seems like the first day of spring. We are very grateful that you came indoors. I'm Ira Weitzman and our guest today wrote the words and the music, and very often the book, for *Hello Again*, *Marie Christine*, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *Bernarda Alba*, all which were produced here at Lincoln Center Theater. *Bernarda Alba* is running currently in the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater. Also, the words and music to the *First Lady Suite*, *The Wild Party*, *Little Fish*, *The Highest Yellow*, *See What I Wanna See*, and many other musicals. He also just finished an opera called, *Send (who are you? I love you)*, which was written for Audra McDonald which just completed a run in Houston Grand Opera. So, please welcome Michael John LaChiusa

MJL I have to apologize. I have been editing the cast album for *Bernarda Alba*, so I'm in my editing garb. I generally don't dress this slovenly for folks. So I apologize for my wrinkleness.

IW And we thought you were just a poor starving artist.

MJL Well, yeah right. I am that, too, but I am also slovenly, which is not something you do when you are poor. You should always try to look nice.

IW But tell me, how and when did you decide to become a musical theater writer?

MJL Well, I think it was very early on in kindergarten. Actually my mother started me off. She has a stack of albums and we would listen to all the show tunes.

IW What were your favorites?

MJL *South Pacific*. That was mom's favorite musical.

IW We're doing a revival in a couple of years

MJL I'm very, very excited about that and yeah, it is still my favorite musical today for other reasons. I understand what my mom's fetish was for this piece but I remember dancing around to, "I'm in Love, I'm In Love, I'm In Love With A Wonderful Guy," which ultimately became the bane of her existence.

We had a player piano too. Do you know the player piano? Some of you young folks might not know what a player piano is. It was a strange mechanism where you pump like crazy and these rolls would go over, and through aerodynamics music came out. I would learn all the tunes from the teens, 20's and 30's and stuff and that was one of the reasons. But also too, I am very dramatic. I come from an Italian family so, obviously, the drama was already there.

IW At what age did you actually write your first musical?

MJL It was in fourth grade with Mrs. Hammer. Mrs. Hammer asked me to write a little musical for the class and I love that name, Mrs. Hammer. She is still going at it, too. She is still Mrs. Hammer. She knew I was musically inclined and was writing songs in class. She said, why don't you write a musical for the class to do? So I wrote some strange musical. I don't know what it was. Afterwards she said, when you grow up, you should write musicals. But when Mrs. Hammer said that to you, you were going to do that. So that was it. Of course in 1980, when I finally moved to New York to write musicals it was quite a shock. I realized that was a harder thing to do than what Mrs. Hammer had implied.

IW Were you always an avid reader? I ask because many of the musicals that you have written are derived from literary sources and fine literary sources at that.

MJL I'm painting a funny picture of my mother, but she did hand me *Fathers and Sons* when I was 14. She did give me *Bernarda Alba* to read when I was 13.

IW Seriously?

MJL Yes, which is happening downstairs right now.

IW So do you continue to read with adaptation in mind when you read books?

MJL It is impossible for me to read anything, hear anything, or take a trip on a subway without wanting to turn something into a musical. I don't know what that is. I hear people talking in a corner of some bar or I see a fight on a subway or you see someone gesturing in the lobby angrily at her spouse. I say to myself, "How would that be sung?" It's one of those inevitable things. It is just like, what would that sound like set to music?

IW Well, there is something else you do, as well, which is to not only find a musical in your source material or in life around you, but I think you delve deeply into the psyche of your characters. It seems like a trademark of yours to go below the surface.

MJL Well, I think, unfortunately, in musicals our audiences expect a certain amount of simplicity from the characters that are presented to them on stage. But I haven't grown up spinning *South Pacific* on the disk. I mean, anybody remember albums here? Some of us remember albums. Those were very complex characters that Rodgers and Hammerstein were writing. They were like onion peels, where you peel one layer away and it would reveal something else. That, to me, always intrigued me about the potential of theater. We are ambiguous as human beings. There is a good side to all of us and there is a really bad side as well. That is what I respond to in a lot of the material and a lot of the characters that I want to do. Now one would never think of *Bernarda Alba* as a musical. I mean that is just, you know, one part that is ludicrous to do. But at the same time, the challenge of it and the musicality therein, and the conflict, because conflict I think creates great song. I think the best songs I have ever heard in my life are those that are sung in moments of conflict. One of the funniest songs, I still laugh whenever I hear it, is Ado Annie's song, "I Cain't Say No." It's so funny and it is so relevant and forever and ever and ever and ever it is going to be one of the most funniest songs because who doesn't know, I don't know what I'm doing wrong but I kind of like it. It is sensational and that is very intricate. I mean it is so intricate and complicated and when I want to do work or adapt a character, I want to go to a place that reveals that.

IW As you said, you hear a conversation on the subway or you read a book and you are inspired. How do you know that they should sing?

MJL That's a really, really great question. You told me these were all going to be easy questions. Well, I'll tell you, it might take awhile. I don't think it is always instantaneous. Let me put it that way. There are certain books, books of painting or ballet scripts or 101 things on my To-Do shelf that I want to get to and I want to write, but I'm not responding to it musically yet. Music always comes first. If you are going to work on a musical, you are going to be living in it for a really long time. You have to go back to that world every single day at 8:00 in the morning and play that music again. So it might take awhile. Sometimes, like in the case of *The Wild Party*, it took almost 4 years for me to say, hum, that is interesting. *Medea*, which we adapted as *Maria Christine* for Audra McDonald, sat on my shelf until there was a confluence of things. First I met the remarkable Audra McDonald, then my brother was down in New Orleans and sent me a book of folk tales set in Creole times, turn-of-the-century America. With that confluence of things, suddenly there was music. So it really, really depends on what is feeding the fire for it. Again if music doesn't come first, it goes up on the shelf and it stays up there until something sings about it to me.

IW Do you noodle at the piano? Do you hear it in your head?

MJL Yes, you have to find some colors. You have to find a scale. You have to find a rhythm. You have to find something that tingles your fancy. In my case it makes me cry. If I feel moved or something, I know that's the color. That something is right. But there has to be someone I'm writing for or a character or a situation. I started off as a percussionist. People sometimes say, "You don't write melodies," but I do write rhythm and rhythm is . . .

IW Well, you write melodies too.

MJL Yes, but not today. The rhythm comes first to me because that's like the character's heartbeat. The thing that you hear. What is the character feeling first and foremost? Sometimes that, to me, is my entrance into where the character is in a particular point of time and the drama in their life.

IW Well, you speak about Audra McDonald, who you have written two pieces for, and who we have been very blessed to have worked with here many times. I've noticed you often have a breakthrough once we're finished casting.

MJL Yes, always.

IW And it seems like writing for specific people motivates you.

MJL Without our actors, without that beautiful person known as an actor, you are nothing as a writer. You're nothing if you just write in a void. It is like sitting in a closet. First and foremost, no one wants to hear me sing. Also, when it is in another human's body and they're singing, you go, oh my gosh. That person has that note. That person has that way of doing a note. That person has a way of phrasing something. And then it just totally changes your world. It changes the way of the song. It changes the heartbeat because they are going to have their own thing going on. If they are really great, they want to embrace it and make it their own. They're also the filter for music. Like I say, we cannot live without our actors. They are to be cherished, particularly the good ones.

IW So, in terms of *Bernarda Alba*, you spoke a little bit about the difficulty of this piece or why you thought to do this. Let's follow that up. Why *Bernarda Alba*?

MJL Well, people have expectations of what *Bernarda Alba* is suppose to be. It is about a woman who is a monster. Well, we know how we paint women, not only in our culture, but in other cultures where they may be treated even more severely, that women are either monsters or Madonnas. Well, how do they become monsters? You have to read into Lorca's script very carefully. You have to go back to Spanish and you have to look at the white space, not necessarily the words. You have to say, you know what? This woman is a product of something here. What would make a woman be this way? Women are not born this way. No human being is born the way that *Bernarda* is. She is a product of something and, therefore, she creates a situation. I mean, that is the classic thing about Hitler. Evil is mediocre. I'm paraphrasing the sense of that because it is really, really true. We're human! The character is human. That's what makes it even more evil, more dangerous, more horrifying. Any tragic character that you see in a play, the great characters, Hedda Gabbler, Medea is a great example. Every step of the way they have choices yet they choose not to take them. That makes it so heart-wrenching and such a beautiful tragedy. That's why it remains classic. She has choices every step of the way.

IW Just to go even further with the idea of writing, I think you have an affinity for female characters and you've written so many really vivid ones. *Bernarda Alba* is, in fact, an all women cast. First Lady Suite, almost all women.

MJL Women are fascinating.

IW What fascinates you about them?

MJL My mother, my grandmother, my grandmother's mother. Please. It's one of those things that you are attracted to. Without women we can't live. Although, I learned working on *Bernarda Alba*, I understand now why we have war.

IW And please tell us, for lord's sake.

MJL Well, I have to think a stupid male, kind of idea. Why do we have war when there are women in the world? I mean, women are the reason that we have the world. Women are one of the reasons why the world is protected. Women, I learned through working on *Bernarda Alba*, are very territorial, are extremely, you know, aggressive in terms of protecting that territory. It's interesting what feminism, the old feminism, new feminism, whatever you want to say, what has been created, the new biology, you know.

IW Do you see *Bernarda Alba* as a feminist musical?

MJL No, I don't. I don't think it is a feminist musical. I think it is a ridiculous assertion, too. It was never meant to be a feminist musical. I have to say though that in terms of the character of Adela, you could interpret her as a new feminist. In other words, a new feminist can have the right to do what she chooses with her body.

I also feel that *Bernarda* is about art. *Bernarda Alba* was Lorca's last play. It is an unfinished play and he never saw it in his lifetime. I think he knew what was coming as an artist in a fascist culture. He knew what was going to happen to him, that he had the right to choose what he wanted to do with his art, i.e. body. He said, "Even I will choose death for my body, death for art, than be oppressed by it." I think that that is a

remarkable thing. So if you want to take it, Adela is an artist, the young girl in it, the little girl who ends her life. That, in and of itself, is a work of art.

IW By the way, who has seen *Bernarda Alba* here? Okay, good. So we're not spoiling too much for too many people.

MJL I'm sorry. The young girl dies at the end.

IW Thank you very much.

MJL Sorry, sorry, sorry. But you know what? That's part of the beauty, part of it all, that you know this is going to happen. But the drama. . .

IW There is an inevitability to the tragedy, yeah.

MJL It is so inevitable. It's incredibly Latin theater in a lot of respects. So, you know, it's really, really something.

IW Do you all have any questions for Michael John? Yes.

Q I first thought of *The House of Bernarda Alba* as a musical and I questioned whether I could come. I decided to buy a ticket and was validated in my enjoyment of the piece. But I would like to know how you decided on the title?

MJL I chose *Bernarda Alba* over *The House of Bernarda Alba* because I feel like the play is the play, *The House of Bernarda Alba*. However, *Bernarda Alba* for me became an idea, the danger of what we could become if we do not make our right choices. If we choose to oppress. If we choose to lie. If we choose to send our children to die. If we choose to do these things. It's a really, really remarkable idea that Lorca was striving for with that name. Alba, in Spanish, means dawn. It's a horrifying play on the word. I loved the name, *Bernarda Alba*. It was the best way to encompass it. I don't know what else to call it in terms of that. Because I think, as a whole, it is that. True, it is "The House of," because we really explored "The House of," and ultimately it's fall. But *Bernarda Alba*, as an idea, was even grander than the idea of "The House of," to me. So I thought that would be a good musical title for it.

Q I noticed there is "A Musical" under the title in the production art. Why didn't you put "A Musical Tragedy?"

MJL It is a tragedy. Maybe we shouldn't have put, "A Musical," under it. Instead "A Musical Play" perhaps. I think it goes beyond the expectation of a musical; I have to say, because Graciela Daniele and I have worked many, many years on things. Hello Again is a great example. It just opened in Australia. I remember working on that piece and always calling it a ballet.

IW We should let people know that *Hello Again* was based on Schnitzler's play, *La Ronde*.

MJL In so many ways, it's not what we think of as a musical. It is a ballet. If you've ever seen Carlos Sauras movie version of *Blood Wedding*, you'll know where we're going with this piece. I strongly recommend that you look at it because it's told through movement and it's told through music. It's much different than having dialogue. There's a lot of dialogue that we use from the book. The script was willfully translated. It's a different thing. It's musical theater. Maybe not a musical as per your expectations of it. I believe that musicals can be tragedies. The ambiguity of tragedy is fascinating to me. I always think of the ending of *The King and I*, which I'm always so moved by and the tragedy of Anna at the end. What will become of Anna at the end of *The King and I*? I find it so sad that she didn't reach out when she got the chance and he died. The end, the end. Cable dies in *South Pacific*. These horribly tragic things are so moving. We call them musicals now. But for some reason, when we invoke them in today's modern musical, we're not allowed to have them. So I don't know what the dichotomy is? It's very bizarre.

IW You're an interesting writer in terms of all these labels because you write opera, opera as defined by the venue. It's called an opera because it's done in an opera house. In a sense, we call it a musical because it's done in the theater. We're kind of pinned down by these labels.

MJL I think it's true. I think you're right. I think a lot of what we go to in theater and most certainly in TV today, and in the films, is very complete. We go see a standard Broadway hit right now, and it's very complete. We don't have to fill in any of the blanks. It's exactly what we want to hear, and particularly with

the sound which throws itself in your lap and overwhelms you, it's very, very complete. I've noticed that Critics have written that my work is incomplete. Something wasn't right. But, I think, the incomplete part is you. You have to bring it to the theater. Why do theater if you're not the incomplete part.

Q Do you think it is the audience's responsibility to be objective?

MJL Why would you come and be objective in a show? You're not supposed to be objective. You're supposed to be totally subjective. You have to give your heart and your mind and your soul and your tears or your sweat or your boredom or your whatever. All those things are relative. That's what subjectivity is. A honed subjectivity means years of going to ballet and museums. Then you have a honed sense of substance. A lot of critics and a lot of audiences now have become very objective. They want to sit and have it thrown in their laps. They take it and put it in their home and then they forget about it in the morning. Objectivity is a very dangerous thing for a culture to embrace. Objectivity means we let people go to war. We let people tax us out of our minds. We let business pay us poorly. Objectivity is a very dangerous thing. Subjectivity gives us power. Subjectivity gives us strength. Subjectivity gives us a name as a culture. It's something that we really, really have to hang on to tight or we will lose it.

IW Who else has a question? Yes, right here.

Q When you're writing a musical piece, how do you determine which part should be sung, which part should be spoken?

MJL Oh my. It depends on how many martinis I've had.

IW No, come on.

MJL I'm just joking, please. It's something that's just spontaneous. Some things, though, I will always experiment with a lot. Generally, I'll try to musicalize something that shouldn't be. It's one of the first places I go to because if it shouldn't be done, I'm going to know that immediately. Some things on the other hand are so obvious; I will avoid setting them until the very last minute. I think that the harder nooks and crannies have to be explored first and foremost, that's the honest to God's truth about it.

IW Can you give an example of that from your work?

MJL Well, *Bernarda Alba* is a good example. There is a terrible, terrible ending in Act II. I won't spoil it for people, but there is a really gruesome thing that happens in the town. That was one of the first things I went to. I said, well, let's just see how do I depict that on stage? How do you write that on stage? How do you write music for something like that? How do you make people sing these words? These words are horrifying to sing. So that's the first place that I went. I said if I can find my way in there, I can find my way in through the rest of the piece because the hard places are the places that you have to explore first before you can go to the simple places.

IW The gentleman in the blue, you had a question.

Q I have observed that Mr. LaChiusa is a writer who writes from his subconscious. My question is, do you think all writers utilize their subconscious in writing?

MJL Oh, gosh, yeah. I'm sure that they do and more than that, I think, in other cases. Other people's subconscious I think you tap into. Yeah, I think that's a very important part of it all. You have to be conscious, obviously, of your feelings and know what you want to say about something. I think that you're asking about what inspiration is. That's always a hard, kind of corny thing to talk about sometimes because it's makes it sound so arty farty. Or worse, pretentious if you talk about it. I have a tendency to sound a little pretentious and slovenly I'm really not pretentious. I think that you're talking about inspiration, what inspires you. I think that theater writing should never be a way of therapy. You should never work out things when you're writing. Go pay someone to listen to you talk. Do not make an audience pay to hear you discuss your problems. That's always been my philosophy.

IW I'm sorry to interrupt you, Michael John. The gentleman's first comment was an observation about *Bernarda Alba* having lost her husband and, therefore, her way of living. His interpretation of the role was that she had to become like a man in order to keep her house together which was an interesting observation of the piece as we presented it.

MJL I think that that's a really great point. Actually that's a really good thing that you took that because you had empathy. Not sympathy. You shouldn't condone Bernarda's behavior. But you must have empathy for this character because why should a woman be like a man? Why should she subjugate herself to those qualities, if you will. I use the word, subjugate, because my ladies downstairs would not be pleased. But I think that that is a real thing. Why should any woman have to be like a man? But society demands that and I tell you that's world-wide. That is culturally a given that a woman must act like a man if she's on her own and that's utterly ridiculous. What is a man?

IW Any questions over here? Yes?

Q Can Mr. LaChiusa discuss how he writes for specific performers or for specific spaces, theater spaces that the piece might ultimately be done in?

MJL You can never be assured of any space these days where to do your work. It's a real trick. Once you're in the house, you realize that there are certain things that you must do. The practical things make themselves very obvious to yourself. You've written a piece of music to get people on and off stage. Well, all of a sudden, you're on a stage that is the size of this bottle. Well, you know that you're going to have to trim that music because people walk from here and they're off. You don't need this long stretch of music to get them off. That's a simple thing. The Mitzi Newhouse, for instance, it's a very, very peculiar space. It's one of my favorite places in town to perform in. I love the arena, I love the community feeling of that space. I love the aspect of the space. However, it wasn't designed for musicals. There is no classic pit there. I think that there is only one Broadway house right now that has pit extant. An actual pit. I think it's the Virginia, although they might have ruined that one now, too. All your Broadway pits now are shoved under the stage.

IW As opposed to placed in front of the stage.

MJL Where an orchestra is exposed, in the old days, in front of the singers, in front of the lip of the proscenium. You never had to use microphones. And you had smart orchestrators, like Robert Russell Bennett there, who would write these orchestrations. So, therefore, Mary Martin would come out without a microphone and you heard every friggin word. But we don't have that anymore because of the advent of amplification and because of greedy producers who like to shove more seats into the theater and shove that orchestra almost out of sight. Or in the cases of a lot of these musicals right now on Broadway, on a sixth floor of some office building, six blocks away. No, I'm not joking. They're pumping their stuff into a building. A lot of this stuff that you're seeing on Broadway, people are sitting in a little room, some other building, maybe 15 blocks away, pumping it in, watching the monitor. Right? It's modern technology now. But I don't want to have that in the show. The Mitzi is tricky because you could put them behind a glass or put them off-stage or in the corner. For some of my shows like *The Highest Yellow*, that we do down in DC, in the Signature, or *See What I Wanna See* at the Public Theater, I created a space above, in the back that exposes the orchestra and they're live and you get to watch them in the show. Guess what? They're not miked. There's no miking. The guitar has a little amplifier and that's the only thing that's miked. So, therefore, we can bring the vocalist down to almost nothing. So that's a wonderful thing to learn about that space. That indeed you can have an acoustic show or nearly acoustic show in that space. It's a wonderful revelation to me because I never thought that the Mitzi would provide it. But sure enough, it worked in the Mitzi. Best sound I've ever heard in the Mitzi for a musical is *Bernarda Alba*. I'm very excited by that exploration. So the space allowed me to experiment one more time with where to place the orchestra? So that's a wonderful thing that you learn to adapt to. Now audiences have changed about amplification now. Not only do we have an older group coming to the theater, which is 60+, who do have problems with hearing, But now we have 20-year-olds coming to the theater. Guess what? They have problems with their hearing. It's a whole new dilemma to deal with. The 20-year-olds that I meet, because their hearing is gone, will need hearing aids just as much as the 60-year-old pluses that I get in the shows. So that's a whole new dilemma to deal with. Do we do amplification? What do we do? How are we going to make our shows feel like theater and not some disco record playing in the background?

IW Yes, right here.

Q How did you break into the musical theater in New York? What was your "in"?

MJL Well, I waited tables at Brew Burger, the midnight shift with the transvestites. So I had material after that. One of the major things that I did, I began playing piano. Everybody starts off as a piano player and music director. I began doing that work. But then I joined the BMI workshop which was a remarkable networking system. I met a great bunch of people through that. I began writing my own songs. It's a home/work environment. You work on a project, you bring it in. You learn from the people and the

professionals around you. Fortunately, in that group there were wonderful people like Alan Menckin, Ed Kleban and a wonderful woman named Ellen Fitzhugh who is probably THE best lyricist in America and no one knows her. She's a remarkable lyricist. She took me under her wing and she introduced me to Ira Weitzman when I was very, very young. So that is how, if it weren't for the chance that she was in that room that day, I'd probably still be waiting tables at Brew Burger and Burger King and all the joints that I worked at in my life. So it was a matter of being present at the right time is more than anything else. But you do have to do the whole route. You have to become an accompanist. You teach voice. You do some coaching. You do some teaching gigs. You music direct. You conduct. You do it through those channels.

IW Networking is always the way. It's the way everybody gets every job, always, in every field. I think that this was no different.

MJL And you hope that the work, for some reason or another, makes people perk up their ears. In that case, it was Ira Weitzman who went, oh, that's different.

IW Can I tell the story?

MJL Absolutely.

IW Ellen Fitzhugh, this wonderful lyricist, called me and said, would you meet my friend? And I said, sure. Michael John came in and had been writing some exercises for this BMI workshop based on the play and the novella, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, by Carson McCullers, which Edward Albee ended up adapting as a play. He said, "Here's some songs from my musical, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*." He played some songs and my ears perked up. I said, "Well, this is beautiful. It sounds like a folk opera." I thanked him and I asked him to please call me when he had some more music to play because I would love to hear it. I swear, maybe 3 weeks later at the most, my phone rings and Michael John says, I finished it. I said, what? He said, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. And you came and played it for me, and sure enough, he had finished a complete adaptation of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. I said, do you have the rights?

MJL Stupidly.

IW He said, what? And unfortunately, we were unable to produce that show since the rights to adapt it were not available, but it did lead to this very productive relationship that we've had for many years now.

MJL It was a fortuitous thing. I was very lucky, the change was beginning to happen in the mid-80's there, around '84-85, when I met Ira. The change was beginning. There were fewer venues. I used to be able to go out in the 80's, many cabarets, many clubs, comedy clubs, the folk city, there were all these venues where one could go and play a song. Or bring a singer and sing your song and do it and we don't have those any more. They're getting fewer and fewer and fewer because real estate is forcing these small little, well, we called them dives. They're forcing the dives out of business. But it's in the dives and the little holes in the walls, and the basements and the church basements and this and that, that you can really find some great things going on. Nowadays you can find them at NYU. Some interesting little things are going on here. Or still at Duplex, you can go down on Monday nights and hear some new songwriters and stuff. But it's getting rarer and it's a very sad thing to happen. I hope it doesn't die out completely, although I think talent will out. It will always find the way. It's like Jurassic Park. I just know that there will always be a place and a venue where you will be able to hear these wonderful new songwriters that are out there. Really, really great songwriters out there, young one's in their 20's and they're just making beautiful, beautiful sound and beautiful, beautiful words. It's so exciting to hear them. It gives me hope and it makes me feel better about myself as a writer.

IW There's time for one or two more questions. Yes, in the back.

Q To what extent are you involved in the rehearsal process? And because of the allusion to write basing much of your work on rhythm, how do the actors respond to that?

MJL I'm very involved in the rehearsal process. I'm there everyday. I like to be there every day. It's healthy for me and healthy for the actors for me to reference, because I write words and music and sometimes the book. When I arrive at home I turn into Sybil because there's three different hats that I am constantly putting on and I'm juggling the three roles. So it's sort of necessary for me to be there, either as a composer or a lyricist. There's some question that will always come up. So it's necessary for me to be there. As far as the actors' reaction to my work, it's usually horrified. I wish I had done a photo play of actors' faces when they first look at the music.

IW Lest you think that the actors might resent the difficulty of his work, I can assure you that within a couple of days, there's a full embrace and quite a satisfying one from most of the actors who have performed Michael John's work.

MJL But the beauty part about being a composer is that you give blind readings to actors. They must sing exactly what you wrote. You can't change that and that's the beauty part about being a composer is that you give them line readings. Some of them react to it. They say, "Yeah, but I would rather." And you say, "Sorry, that's the way the music is." It's kind of fun. But once they get into it, they realize that is what we do.

IW This was a wonderful, diverse group of people who came out today. Thank you so much. And thank you, Michael John LaChiusa.