

Falsettos

Music and Lyrics by William Finn

Book by William Finn and James Lapine

Directed by David Charles Goyette

Actor's Packet

Dramaturg Melissa Albers

October 8, 2017



Biographies

William Finn: Born in 1952, William Finn is a largely autobiographical composer and writer. Being both Jewish and gay, he often writes characters that reflect these aspects of himself. He also wrote about his traumatic experience dealing with a brain abnormality in the musical *A New Brain*. Finn attended Williams College and received a musical composition fellowship upon graduation. His first successful musical was *In Trousers*, the first of three one act musicals about the character Marvin. Finn currently lives with his life partner, Arthur, in New York City and Massachusetts.



James Lapine: Lapine was born in 1949. He moved around the country as a child and later as an adult to pursue his education. Originally a graphic designer and artist, Lapine eventually moved into the world of theatre as a director. He has worked most closely with William Finn and Stephen Sondheim, creating *March of the Falsettos* and *Saturday in the Park with George*, respectively. He is now married and has one daughter. He continues to work on scores and movies from time to time, like when his and Sondheim's show *Into the Woods* became a movie in 2014.

The One Acts of the “Marvin Trilogy”

William Finn first visited the lives of Marvin, Trina, and Jason in a one act musical titled *In Trousers* which opened in the year 1979. In this musical, Marvin analyzes his relationships with women throughout his life, including an elementary school teacher, his high school sweetheart, and his wife, unnamed in this musical. A majority of the musical is spent with Marvin questioning his sexuality, trying to decide if he is bisexual or homosexual. This show focuses much more on Marvin's inner thoughts and memories. In the end, he decides he only wants to be with men and chooses to pursue Whizzer.

The next musical to be released was called *March of the Falsettos*, and is the first act of the full show now called Falsettos. For this show, Finn enlisted the help of James Lapine as the director. Together, they opened the show in 1981, and introduced the new character of Mendel as well as actors for the previously unseen roles of Jason and Whizzer. This musical shows Marvin attempting to keep his family together and happy. In the end, his wife marries his psychiatrist, and his lover leaves him, leaving Marvin all alone. Even though the show opened in 1981, it still takes place where the last act left off in 1979.

Finally, in 1990, the final installment of Marvin's trilogy debuted, introducing Lapine as the writer of the book. This one act, entitled *Falsettoland*, takes place in 1981, two years after the last act. Jason is preparing for his Bar Mitzvah, Marvin and Whizzer get back together, and two new characters are introduced: the lesbians from next door. In the end, Whizzer is affected by a mysterious illness which had no name at the time, though the audience recognizes it as AIDS. This act is not only the conclusion of the three stand-alone musicals, but is also the second and final act of the musical Falsettos.

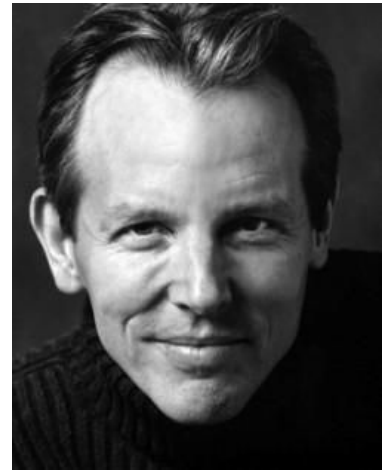
Production History of Falsettos

The show of Falsettos as it is known today wasn't first produced until 1992 as a synthesis of *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland*. Only minor adjustments were made to the original shows, and all of the plot was left intact. This decision

was largely made because theatres around the country were already producing both one act shows together as companion pieces; it simply made sense that the two should be combined into one show for ease of performance and marketing. The following Tony season, the musical won Best Book of a Musical and Best Original Score. The actors for Marvin, Whizzer, and Mendel were the same original cast from March of the Falsettos and Falsettoland.



Michael Rupert "Marvin"



Stephen Bogardus "Whizzer"

Chip Zein "Mendel"

Historical and Cultural Context

Gay Rights Movements

At this time in American history, the gay rights movement was still fairly young, and many Americans were unaware or unwilling to acknowledge the issues the LGBTQ+ community was dealing with. The first major demonstration for gay rights came in 1969 when police stormed a gay club named the Stonewall Inn in order to shut it down. Tired of being targeted by the police, the patrons of the club began to riot for gay rights and turned the incident into a three day event.

Four years later in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality as a mental disorder in the DSM-II (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). This is a great milestone in that homosexuality is seriously considered biological for the first time and not merely a psychological condition that can be fixed.

The first march on Washington D.C. for gay rights took place in 1979. This was one of the largest attended movements for LGBTQ+ rights in all of history with 75,000-120,000 people in attendance.



At this point in time, only a few characters outside of the heterosexual orientation were shown in films or television, and one or two public officials and authors were out as either gay or lesbian. There was a significant lack of representation, an issue we still see today.

AIDS in 1981

At this point in time, AIDS was not yet identified. Young, healthy, gay men from around the country were falling ill to rare diseases such as pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP) and an aggressive cancer called Kaposi's Sarcoma, indicating a deficiency in their immune systems. These cases lead to a nationwide investigation by the Center for Disease Control in order to identify the cause of the diseases. By the end of the year, 270 cases were reported, and of those, 121 gay men had died.

Jewish Culture

The Jewish culture is one of community based rituals and practices. Described as orthopraxi rather than orthodoxi, the Judaism can be difficult to understand for people more familiar with Christianity. In orthopraxi religion, it matters more what you do; you must have the "right practice" and follow the rituals and rules of the religion. This is opposed with religions like Christianity that have an orthodoxi approach which emphasizes the "right belief" of the doctrines of the church. Practices such as charity of money and good deeds are highly emphasized

in the Jewish community. And events that bring families and people of the community together, such as Bar Mitzvahs, are especially celebrated.

Bar Mitzvah

A Bar Mitzvah is a rite of passage in the Jewish community, like receiving your driver's license at age sixteen in American culture. The literal translation is "Son of the Commandment", referring to following both The Ten Commandments and the Mitzvot, which has 613 laws or rules. Of these, only half of the rules are still applicable to Jewish people today.

In the Jewish faith, children aren't required to follow the laws and commandments until they come of age. Therefore, the Bar (or Bat, for girls) Mitzvah is a commitment to follow the laws laid out by God for his people to follow.

Translations and Glossary

Translations

Pg. 11

No more tsouris

No more tribulations

Pg. 93

Baruch

Blessed

baruch atoh

Blessed are You

Baruch atoh adonai

Blessed are You, O Lord

Baruch atoh adonai elohenu

Blessed are You, O Lord our God,

Meluch haolum

King of the universe

This come from a traditional Jewish prayer.

Pg. 119

Jason

I am agitato grande

Very agitated (Italian)

Jason, I am muy disgutante

Very disgusted (Spanish)

And muy disappointe

Very disappointed (Spanish)

And muy nauseates

Very nauseated (Spanglish)

And me mitzraim

If he had brought us of Egypt (Hebrew)

hotzionoo

And had not carried out judgment

dayenu.

It would have been enough

Oh—

Day, dayenu.

It would have been enough

Day, dayenu.

It would have been enough

Day, dayenu.

It would have been enough

Mendel tries to speak in different languages with some success. He switches to a Passover song describing all the miracles that God accomplished in getting the Israelites (Jewish people) out of Egypt where they were enslaved and oppressed. It's a song to remind them to be thankful of all the things God did for them at Passover.

Pg. 151

Vie-eme-low yae-o-leh

But if the cloud

Heh-oh-non vi-low

Did not rise

Ah-yis-is-oooh ay-yis-ro-ale

They remained where they were

Ha-oooh low toe vo-o-meem aboh

Until it lifted, Father

This is from Exodus 40:37. It describes when the Israelites were wandering in the desert. God led them by a pillar of clouds during the day and a pillar of fire at night. If the clouds did not move, then they would not either.

*Pronunciation aides will be posted online as soon as possible. Many of the pronunciations on the soundtrack should work. Additionally, many thirteen year old boys would stumble over their Hebrew pronunciations as well.

Glossary

A priori: presumptive, without examination or analysis (pg. 17)

Acquiesce: to comply passively or tacitly (pg. 74)

Apoplexy: a stroke (pg. 54)

Biblical Brothers: the story of Cain and Abel. They were the sons of Adam and Eve, and Cain became jealous of how much favor Abel had with God. In rage, he killed his brother and was banished by God to wander the Earth. (pg. 60)

Break bread: to share a meal and sense of bond or brotherhood with someone (pg. 17)

Canadelach *kneidlach: another name for matzo ball soup (pg. 133)



Canasta: form of the card game rummy (pg. 79)

Copasetic: very satisfactory (pg. 101)

Chicken merengo *marengo: a chicken and pasta dish (pg. 56)



Convalescing: to gather strength gradually after weakness (pg. 34)

Croup: a bad cough (pg. 133)

Dreck: rubbish or trash (pg. 25)

Exorbitant: exceedingly intense (pg. 40)

French lapel: the folds of a suit coat jacket. A French lapel often has a much harder corner in the cut. (pg. 25)



Gefilte fish: balls or cakes of minced fish in a stock or tomato sauce (pg. 132)

“Get thee to a psychiatrist”: a reference to Hamlet where Hamlet yells at Cordelia, in a moment of rage and feigned insanity, to “get thee to a nunnery” for fear of her life and virtue (pg. 40)



Hank Greenberg: a Jewish baseball player who was very successful while playing with the Detroit Tigers (pg. 101)

Jung and Freud: Two well-known psychologists of the early 20th century who looked at the consciousness of human beings (pg. 62)

Kosher: sanctioned by Jewish law, fit for use (pg. 89)

Kitsch: tacky quality, lower taste (pg. 99)

Impetus: a driving force (pg. 81)

Morass: a situation that confuses or traps (pg. 133)

Neurotic: someone afflicted by a minor mental illness (pg. 13, 38)

Nouvelle: trendy or novel (pg. 97)

Prayer shawl/tallis: used in Jewish ceremonies (pg. 147)

Racquetball terms:

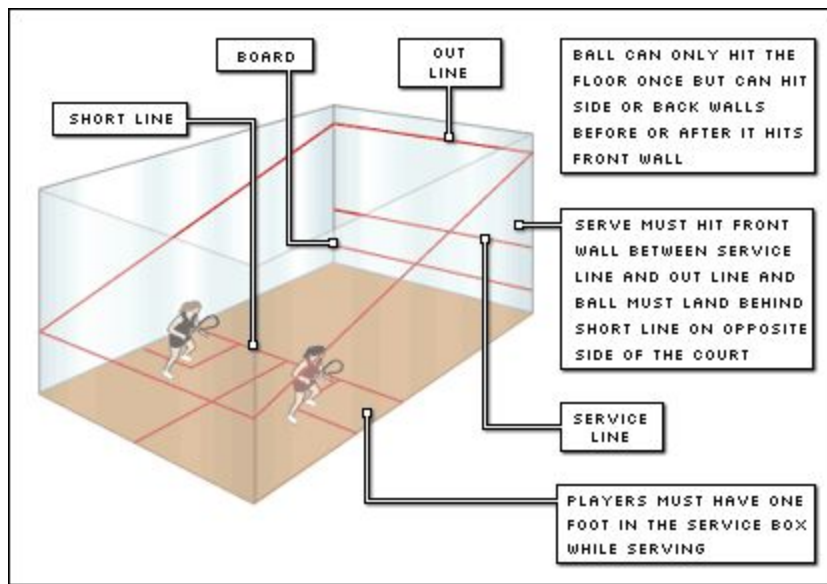
down the alley: a shot near a side wall that hits the front wall and bounces straight back parallel along the same wall.

high lob: a slow-moving 15 to 18 ft high serve to the Front Wall near to a side wall which rebounds in a Z-shaped pattern.

ceiling shot: when the ball hits the ceiling before it hits the front wall, it then hits the floor and takes a high bounce into the back court



diagram with basic rules:



Roundelay: a song or poem with a simple refrain (pg. 123)

Rugelach: a pastry baked around a filling (pg. 132)

Salt of the bourgeoisie: the best of the middle class (pg. 24)

Sandy Koufax: American Jewish baseball player for the LA/Brooklyn Dodgers (pg. 101)



Schpieling *spieling: to talk in excess (pg. 69)

Schmaltz: sentimentality (pg. 152)

“Slavery. Slavery. We crossed the desert running for our lives... No more *tsouris*”
 This small section of “Four Jews in a Room Bitching” refers to the first Passover. The Israelites had been enslaved by the Egyptians for hundreds of years, forced into manual labor and, near the end, were subjected to the deaths of many of their newborn sons. Having just escaped Egypt, the Pharaoh and a league of soldiers are chasing them down in the hopes of killing all the Israelites. God provides the miracle of splitting the Red Sea in order for them to cross but closes it again while the Egyptians are crossing, causing them all to drown. (pg. 10-11)

Smarmy: being smug or falsely earnest (pg. 31)

Trayf: food not satisfying the Jewish laws and rules (pg. 102)

Uncouth: strange or clumsy in appearance, lacking good manners or refinement (pg. 81)

Vis á vis: in relation to or compared with (pg. 51)

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www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/history/hiv-and-aids-timeline.

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