

***The Bakers Wife* Notes for Directors and Performers**

The Baker's Wife is a musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, book by Joseph Stein, based on the film "La Femme de Boulangier" ("The Baker's Wife") by Marcel Pagnol and Jean Giono. The version currently licensed by Music Theatre International is a revised version, updated from the original 1976 production. This final version was produced at the Paper Mill Playhouse in 2005.

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Baker's Wife smaller cast?

Question:

I know that The Baker's wife went through several revisions. I remember a production at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park that was done soon after the show was written. The show now seems larger, with the entire village, but I remember seeing a production that was much more of a chamber piece. Is there a smaller version available? I am looking for "small" musicals to perform in our 100 seat black box theatre. I have always loved the score to Baker's Wife, but I can't fit a full-sized show (like the London version) in our space. Thank you for this great forum and for taking the time to answer the "little" people. I find your site to be refreshing.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Tom: Unfortunately there really isn't a smaller cast version of the show that Joe Stein and I feel is viable, at least as a fully staged presentation. If you want to do something with less performers, might a concert version work for you, either simply doing some of the songs, or with narration in between? I'm afraid that's the best suggestion I can come up with. Thanks for your enthusiasm for the show. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

The Baker's Wife: The role of Genevieve

Question:

I've been listening to the London CD and thinking about how I would direct the show, if I get the chance. Is it necessary for Genevieve to be SO emotional at the outset? Has anyone played her a bit more "surface" at first (like the French film)... selfish, doesn't quite "get it" yet? She is young and foolish and goes for the physical; she grows up during the show. I'm not sure if this would work, as I don't have the script yet.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

You pose an interesting question about the character of Genevieve. This is something that has given Joe Stein and myself much difficulty over the years and has proven very tricky; we feel we have finally struck a balance that works. If she seems too unsympathetic at the beginning, we have found that the audience doesn't like her and simply thinks the baker is an idiot for doting on her so much; by the time she is "redeemed" at the end, it's too late and we've lost the audience. On the other hand, if she seems too sunny and "likable" at the beginning, the audience wonders what the problem is and her running off seems arbitrary and unmotivated. Having finally arrived at a character whom we feel does grow and change, but is complex and sympathetic from the beginning, I would be very cautious about approaching her too differently. I especially have no question that the character as she is depicted in the film would not work at all for a contemporary audience; indeed, when I have seen the film screened, her behavior

usually gets derisive and unintended laughs.

I hope this response proves helpful to you, and that plans for your production continue to move ahead.
Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Male Meadowlark

Question:

Have you ever heard of a man singing "Meadowlark"? If so, what was changed as far as lyrics and such. I absolutely love that show and that song especially and would love to perform the song.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I actually have heard male renditions of "Meadowlark", but I have to tell you, there's something that seems to me inherently feminine about the emotion of the song, in the same way that I feel "Proud Lady" is inherently masculine and wouldn't really work for a girl to sing even with lyric changes. I have heard "Meadowlark" sung with such lyric changes as "my beautiful young girl and I" and so on, but it seemed emotionally fraudulent to me. That's not to say I haven't been told directly by a couple of gay friends of mine (one of whom is in a long-term relationship with an older man) that they identify with the song. But I think it's hard to change the lyrics so much that the genders are switched and still be believable, so I personally think the only way the song could maybe work for a male singer is if it were an overtly gay version. I don't know if that's what you have in mind or not, and you're certainly free to disagree, but that's my aesthetic take on it in any event. Thanks for your interest. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Baker's Wife: 26 Years to "Get it Right"

Question: [Question about how Baker's Wife was changed to make it work]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

I am very pleased to say that, somewhat to my surprise, I feel that as of this most recent production at Goodspeed-at-Chester, the show finally works!

I feel we had actually been gaining on it since Trevor's production. I think Trevor had the insight about how to re-focus the show (making it more about the Village and the way all the villagers are changed by the central incident). While, for various reasons, we weren't able to complete the journey for Trevor's production, the changes that Joe Stein and I made for it and for successive productions seemed to bring us consistently closer. I saw three productions last year that were quite successful both critically and from an audience standpoint, but still seemed to me to need further fine-tuning (being more real and less gaggy with the Village relationships and showing more sides of the title character in the first half of the first act, etc.) My son Scott, after attending a reading prior to the Goodspeed production, pointed out that we had cut a character, Hortense, who not only needed to be put back in but could serve to deepen the Village story, and he turned out to be very right about that. And some of the specific suggestions the director of the Goodspeed production, Gordon Greenberg, made about the title character also helped considerably. In any event, having seen the production at Goodspeed with the final changes included, I am pleased to say I feel the show is finally successfully completed. And it only took twenty-six years! Thanks for your interest, Stephen Schwartz

Endless Delights Cut from Baker's Wife (for good)

[Question about restoring Endless Delights]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

From time to time I get requests to re-instate "Endless Delights" into the show. With apologies, I must say no. Joe Stein and I labored many years to get the show into a form that finally works, and one of the tough decisions was the cutting of "Endless Delights". But having seen multiple productions of the show with the song in, including some by excellent directors such as Trevor Nunn, we have come to see that the song does not work in context, however well-performed it is and however much people might (and do) enjoy it out of context. Seeing subsequent successful productions without the song has only served to reinforce this opinion. Sometimes favorite songs have to go from a show, hence the phrase "murder your darlings". But thank you for your inquiry, my best regards to all working on the show, and my best wishes for a great success and a wonderful experience. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Complete history of *The Baker's Wife* with song details

"Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz, from Godspell to Wicked"

www.DefyingGravityTheBook.com

Cast albums, sheet music, information

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/the-bakers-wife.htm>

Synopsis with photos from the Paper Mill Playhouse production of 2005 where the new version was finalized

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/the-bakers-wife-papermill.htm>

Licensing

http://www.mtishows.com/show_detail.asp?showid=000010

Video

The New York City Library for the Performing Arts has a video recording of the Paper Mill Playhouse production. Directors may inquire about viewing this archived recording. It is not available outside the library.

<http://www.nypl.org/locations/lpa/theatre-film-and-tape-archive>