

## 1 How to Create a Musical: The Case of *Wicked*

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The creation of a Broadway musical is one of the most collaborative processes that one will find in the commercial arts, requiring creative experts in a wide variety of fields. The typical focus for the audience, and scholars who write about the musical theatre, tends to fall on the composer, lyricist, book writer, director and choreographer. Sometimes one person individually covers two or more of these tasks, such as composer/lyricists or director/choreographer. With the addition of stars such as Ethel Merman and Julie Andrews and a few famous producers such as David Merrick, composers, lyricists, book writers, directors and choreographers have produced most of the prominent names in the history of the American musical theatre. Our case study of the creation of *Wicked* involves composer/lyricist Stephen Schwartz, book writer Winnie Holzman, director Joe Mantello and choreographer Wayne Cilento. This famous show, however, cannot be imagined without its memorable set, impressive lighting or unique costumes and makeup. This chapter is a consideration of the creation of *Wicked*, the biggest Broadway hit of the early twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> The show passed 5,600 performances on Broadway in spring 2017; has been running at the Apollo Victoria Theatre in London's West End since September 2006; has toured the United States since 2005 (a second touring company was launched in 2009); has played in sit-down productions in such major American cities as Los Angeles, Chicago and San Francisco; toured in Australia, Asia, the United Kingdom and Ireland; and has played in major cities in Germany, Japan, Australia, The Netherlands, Finland and Mexico.

The creation of *Wicked* began when Stephen Schwartz encountered Gregory Maguire's fascinating retelling of *The Wizard of Oz* from the Wicked Witch of the West's viewpoint.<sup>2</sup> A friend told Schwartz about the novel while they were on a snorkelling trip in Hawaii.<sup>3</sup> The composer hears a bell when he encounters a good concept for a musical, and he reports 'that bell went off as soon as I heard the title.'<sup>4</sup> Back in Los Angeles, he asked his lawyer to investigate who owned the rights to *Wicked*. They followed a winding path that ended with Marc Platt, head of Universal

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Pictures. His company had acquired the film rights and Platt awaited the second draft of a screenplay.

Schwartz hoped to convince Platt that *Wicked* would make a better stage musical than a film. He recalls: 'I really believed I knew how to do it and wanted it very much.' After meetings with lower-level executives, Schwartz finally made his case to Platt personally about a year later.<sup>5</sup> He feels fortunate to have dealt with Platt, who liked musical theatre and had appeared in Schwartz's *Pippin* while in college. He asked for time to consider it and gave the composer/lyricist permission for the project in 1997 or 1998.

An important source on *Wicked*'s creation is a detailed schedule consulted in Schwartz's office, hereafter called the 'office schedule', which states that Winnie Holzman was first mentioned as a possible book writer for *Wicked* on 20 January 1998.<sup>6</sup> The composer was drawn to her because she wrote convincingly for a young woman in the 1995 television series *My So-Called Life*, starring Claire Danes.<sup>7</sup> Holzman was immediately interested. Schwartz wrote the first scenario for the show, completing it in September 1998.<sup>8</sup> Schwartz, Holzman and Platt collaborated for about a year, completing another scenario on 21 November 1999.<sup>9</sup> Platt recalls that they worked with major plot points on note cards and pinned them to a bulletin board in his office, trying to make sure that they had the 'show scene by scene, character by character' with 'a beginning, middle and end'.<sup>10</sup> One of Holzman's major contributions was the love triangle between Elphaba, Glinda and Fiyero, and they discussed extensively making events in Act 1 effectively prepare Act 2.<sup>11</sup> She also invented a humorous, Ozian version of English that included different endings to various known word roots, such as 'confusifying' and 'horrendible'.<sup>12</sup> After Platt, Schwartz and Holzman finished framing the story, the real writing began, and Schwartz had started some songs. Also, Schwartz had approached Gregory Maguire in November 1998 to convince him that *Wicked* needed to be a stage musical; the author agreed and granted the rights to adapt his novel. Holzman spoke candidly about the novel's role in their creative process: 'I didn't worry about the story told in the book that much. We had the rights to the book and the book became a resource. You can take whatever you need out of it. It wasn't pushing you around – you're in charge of it ... We were going to recreate our own story.'<sup>13</sup> They pursued the show's development through a series of workshops in New York and Los Angeles between 2000 and 2003. Schwartz, a veteran of many such events, is a strong believer in seeing how an audience responds to material. Holzman feared the readings, calling them 'horrifying', but she learned from Schwartz how to make them useful. By inviting 'certain core people',<sup>14</sup> Schwartz and Holzman received knowledgeable

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feedback, in addition to reactions from other agents and actors who attended. Holzman concluded that the readings were crucial: 'That's how we made the show work, by doing these things and getting the feedback and analyzing what the feedback was and moving to the next stage.'

After Schwartz, Holzman and Platt had worked out a satisfactory plot, finishing in November 1999, Holzman and Schwartz retreated to their opposite coasts to write in preparation for an initial reading at Universal Studios. The reading either took place on 23 January 2000 or in the spring.<sup>15</sup> Winnie Holzman narrated and it included three songs that Schwartz had written: 'No One Mourns The Wicked', 'Making Good' and 'As Long As You're Mine'. The reading had its desired effect and the writers were told they had a viable project. Intensive work continued through the remainder of 2000, including Schwartz's 'writer hibernation' from 31 July to 30 August, during which he wrote a number of songs. The next reading was of the first act at the Coronet Theatre in West Hollywood, lasting more than two hours.

Schwartz and Holzman finished a draft of the second act on 12 February 2001. A reading of the entire show occurred at Universal Studios in Los Angeles on 23 February with a further presentation, after changes, on 2 March. Schwartz has reported that he and Holzman received useful suggestions from many who attended the first reading, allowing them to make a number of improvements before the next reading.<sup>16</sup> These readings were the first where Kristin Chenoweth appeared as Glinda. She remained in the role and changed her character's perception; suddenly the show was about two witches instead of one.<sup>17</sup> Holzman realised 'you wanted more of her and we expanded the part.' Holzman added: 'I felt so strongly about her as an actress . . . some people just inspire you . . . you start hearing their voice in your head.' Schwartz remembers that Chenoweth 'found so many moments for us'. For example, when Glinda arrests Madame Morrible at the end, she speaks to her slowly, imitating how Madame Morrible first dealt with her. Chenoweth started to use American Sign Language as she spelled 'captivity', finding a huge, unexpected laugh.<sup>18</sup>

The relationship between Elphaba and Glinda became *Wicked's* focal point; Holzman recalls that they repeated 'It's the girls, stupid' whenever the show started to move away from these characters. Schwartz reports that Chenoweth influenced the way he composed her music. When she came on board, he had already written 'Popular', designed to demonstrate 'the shallowness of the character with music that implied bubblegum pop'. It is belted, the way that Schwartz heard the character. Chenoweth also wanted to sing in her soprano register, but Schwartz told her 'you can't really sing in two different voices and be two different people.' He then realised,

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however, that Galinda is, in some ways, two distinct characters: the real woman who is friendly but insecure and superficial and the ‘posed’ Galinda who is the beautiful ‘good witch’. Thus, as the ‘real’ Galinda, Chenoweth belted; as the public persona, she soared into her upper register. “Late in her last duet with Elphaba, ‘For Good’, Chenoweth soars into her soprano register, merging her two sides.

The lyricist and composer constantly gave each other ideas, with lines of dialogue becoming a song or a song turning into a more efficient, brief scene. Holzman notes that if she had not been providing lines that turned into a song, she would not have been doing her job. For example, the opening of ‘What Is This Feeling?’ rose out of dialogue.<sup>19</sup> Holzman conceived the idea of Elphaba derisively describing Galinda in a letter to her father as a ‘blonde’. Schwartz inserted the word ‘respond’ in an earlier line as a rhyme. Holzman also conceived the title ‘For Good’ for Galinda’s and Elphaba’s final duet, word-play that conveys the show’s moral ambiguity.<sup>20</sup>

The team began to search for a director in winter 2001. Schwartz started to contact candidates shortly after the first of the year. Harold Prince, Matthew Bourne, Michael Blakemore, Trevor Nunn, Susan Stroman and Greg Doran turned them down. David Stone, a New York producer who joined the *Wicked* creative team that winter, suggested Joe Mantello. He had produced shows that Mantello directed, and Schwartz had seen Mantello’s production of Terrence McNally’s *Corpus Christi*, stating, ‘It looked like a musical staging to me.’<sup>21</sup> Mantello had later directed the San Francisco Opera premiere of *Dead Man Walking* (by McNally and Jake Heggie) and the musical *A Man of No Importance* at Lincoln Center in 2002.<sup>22</sup> His name first appears on the office schedule on 3 April 2001, and they chose him as director of *Wicked* on 17 July. Schwartz reports that the director ‘responded immediately, passionately, and enthusiastically’.<sup>23</sup>

The office schedule documents an intensive period of work between Schwartz and Holzman from 11 to 21 September 2001, just after the World Trade Center attacks. Auditions for Elphaba were to take place on 12 September, but they were cancelled and rescheduled for 20 September.<sup>24</sup> As Mantello and Idina Menzel memorably recounted, she was the first to sing, coming in with green eye shadow and lipstick.<sup>25</sup> She received the music for ‘Defying Gravity’ to prepare for callbacks.<sup>26</sup> The office schedule indicates that callbacks were scheduled for 22 October, probably the date that Menzel memorably sang the first act finale but also cracked on a note and swore in the middle of the song. She had, however, made an impression, and she won the role in time to prepare for readings on 7 and 14 December. According to Carol de Giere, Menzel also suggested during

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this period that she sing the last verse of ‘Defying Gravity’ up an octave, after she had started to work on her songs with music director Stephen Oremus.<sup>27</sup> Holzman found Menzel a big contrast to Chenoweth: ‘She [Menzel] has such a different way of working. She doesn’t come out with her performance for a while. She’s very private . . . It takes a while to see what she’s actually going to do, whereas Kristin is very polished and presentational at the beginning and you see the whole performance right away’. Schwartz had written several of Elphaba’s songs before Menzel came aboard, including ‘Defying Gravity’ and ‘I’m Not That Girl’. For the latter, Menzel worked extensively on her lower range, meaning that the song was not set in a key for the singer, which often happens in Broadway productions.<sup>28</sup> The composer had written something like the flourish with which Menzel ends ‘Defying Gravity’, but she made it her own. Schwartz composed ‘The Wizard and I’ specifically for Menzel, replacing two versions of the song ‘Making Good’.<sup>29</sup>

The audience at the 14 December reading included novelist Gregory Maguire, who, according to de Giere, enjoyed the show along with the remainder of the audience.<sup>30</sup> Following further work by Schwartz and Holzman, they went to California for a private presentation in front of Universal Studio executives on 17 January 2002. The result of this reading was that Universal agreed to supply most of the show’s budget of \$14 million.

The next major project was a detailed reworking of Act 1, which required the most work. These revisions included changes to every song and two new numbers.<sup>31</sup> The office schedule for March lists script meetings between Schwartz, Holzman and Mantello, in addition to work sessions just for the writers. On 20 March, Schwartz and Holzman showed the script to Arthur Laurents, the writer of *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*, who had reservations about *Wicked*, and it helped the writers learn what needed revision.<sup>32</sup> Then on 21 March, Schwartz and Holzman met with Stephen Oremus and Kristin Chenoweth, presumably about Glinda’s music. More work between the two writers in late March helped prepare for the reading of the new version of Act 1 on 5 April. Few details about this reading are available, but Schwartz did state on Carol de Giere’s website at the time that it ‘went spectacularly well’, and he also noted that Joe Mantello had started to make useful suggestions about the script.<sup>33</sup>

Details on the collaboration to create *Wicked* are sketchy for the summer of 2002, but design work progressed and delays on the script pushed the show’s New York premiere past spring 2003. Decisions on casting also continued.<sup>34</sup> The office schedule provides some information. Schwartz met with Oremus and Menzel on 2 July about Elphaba’s songs,

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and then a period of intensive work for the writers began on 8 July in preparation for a full 'private reading' in New York City on 29 July.<sup>35</sup> This was apparently the last full reading; rehearsals were from 22 to 26 July. The office schedule is bare for August and September except for time in the recording studio on 13 September for the second set of *Wicked* demonstration recordings, necessary for those working on various aspects of the show.

Mantello has described how Maguire's novel served as a resource for designing the show. The map of Oz that hangs as a curtain came 'directly from the novel'.<sup>36</sup> He also cited the Clock of the Time Dragon over the stage as a design element from Maguire.<sup>37</sup> Important in the novel but seldom alluded to in the show, the clock inspired the prominent dragon jutting out above the proscenium and the main stage setting that makes it appear that the show takes place within the clock, with the backwards face of a clock sometimes on the backdrop and at times projected on the floor as a shadow. The set also includes many gears and other pieces of machinery that give the feeling of a large clockwork. In the novel, the clock illustrates scenes from the past, as it does for Elphaba by showing her mother copulating with the Wizard.<sup>38</sup> The show begins after Elphaba's 'death', and then Glinda commences the flashback that is the greater part of the musical. It would be easy for readers of the novel to imagine that the Clock of the Time Dragon provides that flashback, but many in the audience would miss this detail.

Eugene Lee, the set designer, and an assistant made a model of the clock that he showed to Mantello, who liked it but offered reservations, and then Lee presented it to the writers and producers. He estimates that perhaps three-quarters of the original model remained in the final version of the set.<sup>39</sup> Lee's other influence, besides Maguire's novel, included W. W. Denslow's illustrations for Baum's original book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. He derived no inspiration from the MGM film.<sup>40</sup> Glinda's famous bubble on stage resembles the clock's pendulum; Lee believes that Mantello conceived the notion of having bubbles emanating from the platform on which Glinda descends.<sup>41</sup> Lee also notes the most difficult part of any musical is the scene transitions, which in *Wicked* are immediate. His solution was 'to deal with the space as simply as possible'.<sup>42</sup>

Cote includes brief statements from lighting designer Kenneth Posner, sound designer Tony Meola, costume designer Susan Hilferty, makeup designer Joseph Dulude II and wig designer Tom Watson. Each describes a few major challenges, and the section is richly illustrated. Posner worked with 800 lighting units to provide lighting and ambience to the show's 54 scenes and locations, finding the Emerald City the 'most challenging'.<sup>43</sup>

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The lighting for ‘Defying Gravity’ at the end of Act 1 includes green fractured crystals behind Elphaba to help provide the illusion of flight.<sup>44</sup> One of Meola’s biggest headaches was finding places for all of the speakers because he usually places a cluster above the proscenium, blocked for *Wicked* by the dragon.<sup>45</sup> Hilferty explained the costuming look that she developed for the two main characters and several scenes, noting, for example, that she used remnants of animals on costumes for the citizens of Emerald City, showing how the city’s population accepts the Wizard’s persecution of the animals.<sup>46</sup> This is just part of a carefully conceived plan for the show that she recounted here. Mantello cited W. W. Denslow’s illustrations for Baum’s original novel and British fashion designer John Galliano as influences on Hilferty’s costumes.<sup>47</sup> Dulude primarily described the makeup for Elphaba and Madame Morrible.<sup>48</sup> The look of each character is also dependent on the 70 wigs that Watson designed, all but one made by hand from human hair.<sup>49</sup> Producer David Stone described the size of the production in a video interview when he stated that there were more than thirty members in the backstage crew as opposed to twenty-eight cast members.<sup>50</sup>

Entries in the office schedule for the remainder of 2002 show how *Wicked* headed towards production. There was a meeting about the set on 2 October, the day before the writers finished another draft. At two major meetings of the creative staff on 7–8 October, they presumably looked over every aspect of the show. A casting meeting on 25 October preceded a dance workshop with choreographer Wayne Cilento on the 30th. Auditions for dancers took place in November. The office schedule includes no entries for December 2002, but a production schedule from Schwartz’s office compiled on 29 October 2002 states that 2–14 December was a lab for director and choreographer.

Choreographer Wayne Cilento was a protégé of Michael Bennett, appearing in his *Seesaw* and *A Chorus Line* in the 1970s. He went on to choreograph such shows as *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1982).<sup>51</sup> *Wicked* is not a major dancing show, but Cilento insisted that ‘there’s dancing nonstop’.<sup>52</sup> Much of this is imaginative stage movement, not necessarily what an audience would identify as dancing. Cilento worked closely with Mantello, striving for a point where ‘you don’t know where the direction starts and the choreography ends’.<sup>53</sup> Cilento stated that he ‘would lay down the movement road map’, consult with Mantello and then the choreographer ‘would physicalize it with the actors’.<sup>54</sup> Cilento also described his movement styles for Elphaba, Glinda and Fiyero. In a video interview, Cilento acknowledged that his choreography had to be part of the show’s Ozian world: ‘I knew that everything I did would have to be a little bit strange.’<sup>55</sup>

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The show's creators had animated discussions about how to bring *Wicked* to Broadway before deciding upon a full-blown try-out run in San Francisco in June. Schwartz argued for an intimate out-of-town production to see if story and music were satisfactory. Mantello countered that *Wicked* was not a small show, and he needed to see a complete rendering. Schwartz accepted Mantello's demand on the condition that they shut the show down for revisions in July and August.<sup>56</sup> Both Schwartz and Holzman have insisted that the hiatus is one of the main reasons that *Wicked* has been so successful, but it was expensive, costing about \$1.5 million to keep everyone under contract for the summer.<sup>57</sup>

For Schwartz, 2003 started with serious attention to the score. William David Brohn, an experienced Broadway orchestrator, came aboard. There was a scenic presentation on 8 January, and then sessions concerning the music on 10, 14 and 17 January. The three meetings involved at various times music director Stephen Oremus, Mantello, Cilento, Brohn, dance arranger James Lynn Abbott, arranger Alex Lacamoire and percussionist Gary Seligson. Rehearsals for San Francisco began on 31 March. The piano/vocal score needed to be finished during the first few months of the year so that Brohn could start the orchestrations for the try-out run. Later Oremus and Lacamoire prepared the arrangements for the rock instruments at the core of the New York pit orchestra, and then Brohn orchestrated for the other instruments, a different version than that for San Francisco.

Schwartz and Holzman had another meeting with Arthur Laurents on 25 February, but no details of it have emerged. A production pre-schedule from 29 October 2002 states that 17–28 March were pre-production dance weeks. After a rehearsal on 27 March, the cast began a full rehearsal schedule for San Francisco on 31 March at a New York studio.<sup>58</sup> The show's first run-through was on 2 April. A battle fought behind the scenes concerned changes in the script required by lawyers from Universal Studios who did not want their employer exposed to possible lawsuits for the use of images and lines on which others held the copyright. It was difficult for Schwartz and Holzman, who saw some of their work thrown out by lawyers not directly involved in the show. One point of contention was whether or not the famous slippers, worn by Nessarose in *Wicked*, could be red. The lawyers allowed the projection of a red light on the footwear.<sup>59</sup> Major plot points still being negotiated even as late as the San Francisco run included how to handle the Wizard's persecution of talking animals and whether or not that should be Elphaba's great cause.<sup>60</sup>

The San Francisco try-out was in the Curran Theatre. Technical rehearsals started on 15 May and previews on 28 May. Opening night



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was 10 June, with the run lasting until 29 June. De Giere reported on the battle between creators in San Francisco. Producers had told Schwartz and Holzman to save their notes until after the first preview, and they had much to say. It was the first of a number of major skirmishes between the writers and Mantello that continued until *Wicked* opened on Broadway. Schwartz and Holzman were not even content with their changes after the première; revisions to script and music continued until as much as three years after the show opened. The two writers were supportive of each other; as Schwartz described his work with Holzman: ‘We really respected one another, we listened to one another; we stood firm as an authorial unit at times when there was great pressure for us not to.’<sup>61</sup>

Joe Mantello described ‘tweaks’ in San Francisco involving scenes in Act 1 and their attempts to give Elphaba’s characterisation more ‘fire and irony’.<sup>62</sup> Schwartz noted how shocking he found seeing set, costumes and lighting plots on stage for the first time, apparently always a difficult moment for him in preparing a show.<sup>63</sup> Idina Menzel reported that actors needed to learn new lines some mornings for that night’s show, and that songs got moved around during the try-out.<sup>64</sup> Several figures described how successful *Wicked* was in San Francisco, despite the fact that the show was too long and had some problems.

Carol de Giere has described the contentious summer of rewrites that preceded the Broadway opening.<sup>65</sup> Schwartz and Holzman wanted to work on the rewrites alone, which upset Mantello.<sup>66</sup> Schwartz and Holzman have both described the surgery performed on Elphaba’s role, but they do not agree on how much was actually done. Schwartz stated: ‘She was the difficult character to solve . . . I seemed to know how to write her musically. It took quite a while for Winnie to get the tone for her in terms of dialog . . . and storytelling.’ Schwartz believes that they changed 80 per cent of Elphaba’s lines during the summer shutdown,<sup>67</sup> but Holzman does not describe the changes as so drastic, offering: ‘It was really more delicate than that. We would change a line here, a line there.’ A study of various drafts of scripts suggests that Holzman is closer to the truth here than Schwartz.

Mantello’s role in finalising book and score must be considered. He has commented penetratingly on the writing process, noting that the ‘book writing has to be the most accommodating . . . because it is the glue that holds everything together’.<sup>68</sup> He gives the example that extra lines might be needed so that an actor can move to another position to make an entrance, and there are also adjustments made in the book because of musical needs. Schwartz has mentioned Mantello’s musical contributions. For example, Schwartz reports that Holzman had the idea for a ‘falling into hate’ song for Galinda and Elphaba, sung after they meet. Schwartz had already written

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and rejected three songs for that spot when he composed ‘What Is This Feeling?’ as a ‘Richard Rodgersesque’ waltz, akin to ‘Ten Minutes Ago I Saw You’ from *Cinderella*. Mantello did not like the song. After seeing *Hairspray* and being impressed with its energetic first half, he told Schwartz that he thought it was too early in the show for the lower-energy waltz, and the next reading confirmed those suspicions. Schwartz took the same lyrics and wrote new music for ‘What Is This Feeling?’ in about two days.

Both Schwartz and Holzman noted the ‘enormously insightful contributions’<sup>69</sup> that Mantello and Platt made to define Elphaba’s concern for the rights of talking animals. This issue arouses her passion and drives her away from the Wizard.<sup>70</sup> They needed to give Elphaba a reason to care so deeply about the talking animals. Holzman said it was Mantello who suggested that they show Doctor Dillamond literally losing his ability to speak, representing what was happening to talking animals throughout Oz. Holzman and Schwartz started with Doctor Dillamond as a scientist, as in the novel, with scenes and a song in his lab, but then they made him a Shiz history professor.<sup>71</sup> In the song ‘Something Bad’, Doctor Dillamond is already beginning to bleat, and the goat reappears in the second act, unable to speak, setting the plot’s final events in motion.

The office schedule provides a list of events that leads to the Broadway opening.<sup>72</sup> There was a meeting between Schwartz, Holzman, Platt and Mantello on 19 June 2003, perhaps one where the rewriting controversy became clear. The composer/lyricist knew at that point that Fiyero needed a new song of introduction, and he worked on lyrics to ‘Dancing Through Life’ on 21 June while flying from San Francisco to Denver. Another important part of July and August was assembling the Broadway cast, such as Joel Grey replacing Robert Morse as the Wizard,<sup>73</sup> a substitution that caused rewriting. Holzman finished the rehearsal script on 14 August. The first read-through with the cast took place on 25 August, starting the New York rehearsals. The reading for the new score and orchestrations was on 26 September, and after 25 previews, *Wicked* opened on 30 October at the Gershwin Theatre. On 10 November 2003, Schwartz began to record the original cast album with cast and orchestra.<sup>74</sup>

Reviews for *Wicked* following the New York premiere were mixed.<sup>75</sup> Hardly the sort of critical reception that one might expect to have greeted a show that has been so successful on Broadway, on tour and in the international market, leading one to search for reasons for its popularity. The show’s tie-in with *The Wizard of Oz*, the premier American fantasy, is surely one reason, and another is its appeal to young women because of its two young female leads.<sup>76</sup> Another explanation for its popularity would