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Marriage Made In Heaven As Season Opens at Ogunquit Playhouse

By George L. Tibbetts Jr.

Bob Martin, The Drowsy Chaperone and The National Alliance of Musical Theatre (NAMT)

The Drowsy Chaperone's origins are the makings of modern musical legend. It all started when Second City, (Toronto based sketch comedy and improv company) performers Bob Martin and Janet Van De Graaff fell in love, got engaged and asked their songwriter friend Lisa Lambert to be a best man at their wedding. Instead of the traditional stripper-laden bachelor party Lampert enlisted Don McKellar, Greg Morrison and a team of theatrically-minded colleagues to create and perform a 40-minute original musical called The Drowsy Chaperone and named the lead characters "Bob Martin" and "Janet Van De Graaff" (the show's bride and groom). After the presentation, Bob joined his cast of friends on stage and, now famously, quipped: "What a wonderful show. I have some notes." Those notes would be the beginnings of the "Man in Chair," the character who sets the framework for, The Drowsy Chaperone.

With no source material for their story-within-a-story to provide a template for them, except for the early Marx Brothers or Fred and Ginger movies that they loved, the four writers developed their totally original "musical within a comedy" at the Toronto Fringe Festival. It was an instant hit. When New York producer Roy Miller saw it, he immediately secured the rights. However, when he tried to share the script with his colleagues, no one would read it because of the title. So, Miller decided to present a staged reading in New York at NAMT (National Alliance for Musical Theatre).

The National Alliance for Musical Theatre, is a national organization dedicated to advancing musical theatre by nurturing the creation, development, production and presentation of new musicals. The Ogunquit Playhouse is among the 150 members that include some of the leading producers of musical theatre throughout 34 states and abroad. Once a year, these industry leaders come together in New York to shape the future of musical theatre - part of this process is the Festival of New Musicals. Among the many musicals launched by the annual Festival are Thoroughly Modern Millie, Children of Eden, Honk!, Songs for a New World, I Love You Because, Vanities and of course, The Drowsy Chaperone.

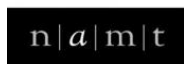
Miller invited Kevin McCollum and other colleagues to the NAMT Festival of New Musicals to witness Bob Martin's show. It sold them! Later that night Miller and McCollum were having dinner with Martin, Don McKellar, Greg Morrison and Lisa Lambert to talk about the hilarious show with the terrible title. For the next several months, they searched for a directors. McCollum suggested Casey Nicholaw, whom he had worked with before and who was busy choreographing

Spamalot. Once Spamalot opened on Broadway, Nicholaw joined the team with a completely fresh and newly energized take on the show.

The material was really entertaining, said Nicholaw. But we all realized it was about fleshing out the show-within-a-show a little bit more. We knew that Man In Chair's material was strong, but we needed to work out the numbers and make the show dance more. We wanted the show to seem less like a sketch and more like a full-blown musical to bring to Broadway.

The show opened on Broadway on 1 May, 2006 at the Marquis Theatre and went on to win the most Tony Awards of any musical that year!

According to McCollum, "A musical should start on the earth and end in the heavens." With *The Drowsy Chaperone*, it does exactly that. A show that began as a celebration of love, that in turn celebrates the love of musical theatre – it's no surprise that audiences are laughing, cheering and, in the end, being moved as well.



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