
groundbreaking *La Cage aux Folles* in 1983 would be the first mainstream Broadway musical to feature homosexuals as the lead characters, and the subject of their homosexuality as the main plot point (it should be noted that it was adapted from a 1979 French film).

La Cage wasn't the first show to feature an openly gay character as such; that honor belongs to the 1969 musical *Coco*, in which Rene Auberjonois played a gay caricature (and won a Tony for his efforts). A few years later, in 1973, *The Faggot* was produced at New York City's Judson Memorial Church, while across the pond in London, a bizarre concoction called *The Rocky Horror Show* hit the stages featuring a stunning "sweet transvestite from transsexual Transylvania" who voraciously seduced both Brad and Janet and created his own male plaything. Other shows began to feature token gay or lesbian characters, or characters whose sexuality seemed fluid, like the emcee in *Cabaret* (1966), or characters in *A Chorus Line* (1974).

Through the 1970s and 1980s, as the public became more aware of gay rights issues, many musical creators began to be more open about their lives, creating mostly off-Broadway musicals that showcased their world; most of them remain historical curiosities, time capsules of a world that was. William Finn's "Falsettos Trilogy" consisting of *In Trousers*, *March of the Falsettos*, and *Falsettoland* is one of the most enduring from that period, though their songs were too plot-specific to become cabaret or radio hits.

Beginning largely in 1982 and into the 1990s, the specter of HIV and AIDS haunted the theatrical stages of Broadway and elsewhere. Hundreds of performers died of complications from the disease, and the shows being written began to reflect that loss. The afore-mentioned *Falsettoland*, *All That He Was*, *Most Men Are*, the film musical *Zero Patience*, and the concert hit *Elegies: For Angels, Punks, and Raging Queens* were among those that addressed the AIDS epidemic head-on. Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS was created in 1988, raising over \$250 million to date for people with AIDS or HIV.

1993 saw the release of the most famous AIDS-themed musical, *Rent*, created and written by Jonathan Larson. With a multicultural cast that also shared diverse sexualities, and complex music and lyrics, *Rent* was a smash hit, winning not only multiple Tony Awards, but also a Pulitzer Prize! Still, the show was not without its critics, who found it galling that the gay male character died, while the straight woman with AIDS lived.

Separating from the theme of AIDS, other musicals took up the baton of gay activism, including Tom Wilson Winberg's *Get Used To It!* and *Ten Percent Revue*, as well as *The Ballad of Mikey*, and the hit Kander & Ebb musical *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

Opposite grief and anger came laughter, as musicals also began to finally have some fun again with gay characters. Nowhere was this more evident than the shows of Howard Crabtree, including *Whoop-Dee-Do!* and *When Pigs Fly*, which featured high camp, adult humor, and outrageous costumes. Some shows went completely without costumes, such as 1999's *Naked Boys Singing*, while others sided more with the camp element, such as 1998's *The Boy From Oz*, about the life of gay songwriter Peter Allen (it would be another five years before that show came to Broadway with mega-star Hugh Jackman high-kicking in the title role).

Following the gender-bending antics of *Victor/Victoria* in 1995, the 1998 off-Broadway show *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* became one of the most astonishing successes of queer musical theatre. The rock-and-roll show about a "genderqueer" glam rocker was created by John Cameron Mitchell and Stephen Trask, and was later made into a successful film. *Hedwig* has recently been a smash with revivals on Broadway and world stages.

Film director/writer/producer Mel Brooks would create Broadway gold in 2001 with a musical version of his 1968 film *The Producers*. In it, two unscrupulous accountants attempt to create a Broadway flop by combining over-the-top gay antics and actors with the life of Adolf Hitler; just as in the musical, real audiences were horrified and amused at the same time at the audacity of the conceit.

By the 2000s, hardly a show was mounted on the stages if it did not feature at least one GLBT character. *The Full Monty* and *Monty Python's Spamalot* were among those that featured gay leads, often casting openly queer actors in the roles (though unlike Hollywood, Broadway producers have no problem casting openly queer actors in straight roles either). Other shows began to tackle previously taboo subject like gay youth, including 2006's *Spring Awakening* and 2000's *Bare: A Pop Opera*.