

the academy for new musical theatre's
process for developing a musical

two case studies



1. Imelda

developing a musical from single-sentence to production

2. Bonnie & Clyde

developing an already-existing musical



Overview of Our Process - Case Study #1

Developing a musical from scratch

1. IDEA

- The producer generates or approves an idea
- The creative team creates a paragraph-sized version, or perhaps several different approaches
- Producer approves the approach
- Creative team develops a 4-6 page outline of the storyline
- Creative team writes a 15-minute first cut (generally a scene and two songs).
- The Academy presents that 15-minute cut for the producer.

At this point, the producer either shuts down the project, or greenlights the writing of a full first draft and agrees to produce a public reading of that draft.

2. DRAFT

For those works which receive a greenlight from the producer for first draft:

- The Academy supports table readings and workshops of the work, nurturing it through first draft.

3. FEEDBACK

- At every step along the way, ANMT staff offers feedback and suggestions, with the producer as involved as he or she wants to be

4. PRESENTATION

- The producer presents a public reading of the first draft of the work at his expense.

After the producer has fulfilled his obligation by presenting the reading, he is under no obligation for a production of the musical; but if he does produce the musical, the Academy expects he will do so under terms approved by the Dramatists Guild.



Case Study #1

Imelda

developing a musical from single-sentence to production

1. IDEA

The producer generated an idea

Tim Dang from East West Players approached the Academy for New Musical Theatre saying, “We need to reach out to our Filipino audience...we need a big Filipino musical. We need *Imelda Marcos: the Musical!*”

The creative team created several different approaches

ANMT staff worked with bookwriters to create three different approaches to an *Imelda Marcos* musical: a goofy one, a serious/operative one, and a bio-musical modeled after *Evita*.

Producer approved the approach



Tim Dang
Artistic Director, East West Players

Tim Dang approved the bio-musical approach, but cautioned that the musical needs to present both sides of Imelda Marcos’ controversial public figure: again, probably following the *Evita* model.

Creative team developed a 4-6 page outline of the storyline

ANMT staff assembled a creative team around the *Imelda* bookwriter, Sachi Oyama, honoring East West Players’ selection of composer, Nathan Wang, and proffering East West Players a half-dozen options for lyricist.

Lyricist Aaron Coleman was selected and added to the team.

The bookwriter drafted an outline of the storyline.

ANMT staff provided feedback on the outline, which was revised several times. It is not unusual for an outline to be revised 4-6 times before the writers receive a greenlight to proceed further.

Creative team wrote a “pitch”



*Imelda Composer
Nathan Wang*

At this point in the development process, the Academy usually consults with the writers to identify a representative 15-minute section of the show to be written as a “pitch” to the producer. Generally, but not always, this pitch is 15 contiguous minutes of the show, often beginning with Scene Two, right *after* an opening number.

Typically, the 15-minute pitch is a scene and two songs, but might be two scenes and three songs. The goal is to explore the main character and his/her goals, and to begin to play around with tone, both in script and score.

The Academy has deep resources of actors, music directors, directors, stage managers, dramaturgs and rehearsal space, and provides the team with appropriate levels of workshop opportunities to test out songs, dialogue and structure.

Imelda was atypical in that the first “pitch” was an entire act’s worth of material, including an opening number.

The Academy presented the 15-minute cut for the producer.

The Academy prepares the 15-minute pitch on behalf of the writer. Pitches are not staged; they’re not costumed. Pitches are presented at music stands, with no blocking or choreography. We have found this approach keeps the focus on the *writing* and not on the presentation.

In the case of *Imelda*, ANMT staged a concert version of the entire first act. We have subsequently discovered that 15-minutes is sufficient for a producer to make up his mind if he is interested in proceeding further with the show.

We usually utilize the same members of the Academy Repertory Company for all our pitches and presentations for producers, rather than try to cast the show as though it were going into production next week. Again, our goal is to keep the focus on the *writing* and not on casting.

The producer agreed to produce a public reading of the work.

In the case of *Imelda*, Tim Dang saw that the writing team was able to write quickly and well, and greenlit the show all the way to *production*, scheduling an opening night in the following season.

“We would never have attempted it on our own, but ANMT's incredible creativity, energy and artistic quality of musical development drove us all the way to production. The process is astonishing. We can't imagine how we would produce an original musical again without ANMT.”

*Tim Dang
East West Players*

We do not require that the producer commit to production after seeing the pitch; we require only that the producer either shut down the project or agree to produce a public reading of the first draft. Tim Dang's courage and trust in the writing team and the Academy's dramaturgy proved to be well-founded, and the resulting production went on to become East West Players' second-highest-grossing production in its 40-year history.

A producer also has the option to request a change in the creative team: a new lyricist, for example, or a different composer. It is the Academy's role in the development process to accept the task of delivering the news to a writer who has been replaced. The writers know from the onset that replacement is a possibility. The most important part of this stage is finding the right team for the show.

2. DRAFT

The Academy supported table readings and workshops of the work, nurturing it through first draft.

It is the Academy's responsibility to ensure that writers stay on schedule of rigid deadlines; writers understand that if they cannot stay on schedule they will be removed the project.

The Writers' Workshop at the Academy has been nurturing new musicals for 40 years, and has over the years developed multiple ways for writers to explore their work: private sessions, table readings, workshops with directors, etc. Developing *Imelda* was a unique combination of table readings with the staff at the Academy, and sessions with the Academy Repertory Company, where writers heard their work lightly-rehearsed and presented at music stands.

The Academy has a vast website and is able to upload an unlimited number of documents for any particular project, allowing the producer and his staff the ability to view the progress of the work at any time from anywhere in the world.



Dramaturgical Feedback

"I couldn't be more impressed with the folks at ANMT. They are dramaturgs, coaches, and teachers of the greatest, highest caliber. The feedback they'll offer you on your work is astonishingly insightful and detailed. You can take or leave, of course, anything they say, but when they critiqued a project I wrote there, I found 90% of their feedback right on the money and incredibly helpful, and the project I was working on there grew by leaps and bounds because of their input. I highly, highly recommend getting their input on your new musical projects. Their teeth are sharp as sharks', but they don't bite. "

- Jeff Marx, Tony award-winning co-creator of *Avenue Q*

3. FEEDBACK

At every step along the way, ANMT staff offers feedback and suggestions, with the producer as involved as he or she wants to be

In the case of *Imelda*, there were many many dramaturgical meetings (monthly, sometimes more often), and private table readings of single songs or scenes.

After the table readings with Academy staff and workshops with the Academy Repertory Company, East West Players then took a more active role in suggesting actors in several key roles.

Feedback usually takes the form of table discussions with the writers and producers in consultation with ANMT staff, but occasionally other options are useful:

- exploratory staging
- active workshop; exploration with actors
- exploratory casting (different character types)
- music arrangement exploration (a music director experimenting with different tempos, grooves, musical styles, etc.)

4. PRESENTATION

The producer produced a public reading at his expense.



Public presentation

Once the first draft is completed, the producer's public reading can be a very simple affair: music stands and no blocking in a small black box, or even rehearsal room. Or the producer can use the reading to make a bigger statement to an audience, on a theatre stage, perhaps with lighting and preliminary staging.

The size of the public reading is the producer's choice.

For *Imelda*, the public reading was a major event in the evolution of the musical: several hundred people attended a pair of public presentations at a Filipino Cultural Community Center (mainly to gauge whether both controversial aspects of Imelda Marcos' public life were being represented -- did the audience get so enraged they wanted to walk out?, or would they be engaged by this complex public personality?).

After the reading

After the producer has fulfilled his obligation by producing the reading of the first draft, he is under no obligation for a subsequent production; but if he does produce the musical, the Academy expects the producer to do so under terms approved by the Dramatists Guild.

RESULT for *Imelda*:

Imelda was the second-highest-grossing production in East-West Players' 40-year history.

Overview of Our Process - Case History #2

Developing a pre-existing musical

1. IDEA

- Writer or producer creates a promising musical.
- The Academy strategizes appropriate developmental steps

2. DRAFT

- The Academy supports table readings and workshops of the work, nurturing it through first draft.

3. FEEDBACK

- At every step along the way, ANMT staff offers feedback and suggestions, with the producer as involved as he or she wants to be

4. PRESENTATION

- A public reading of the work is presented, either by the producer, or by the Academy.



Case Study #2

Bonnie & Clyde

developing a pre-existing musical

1. IDEA

Writers created the beginnings of a promising musical



Hunter Foster and Rick Crom

Hunter Foster and Rick Crom wrote drafts of *Bonnie and Clyde* shortly after starring in the Tony-Award-winning musical *Urinetown*, but their early drafts were not optioned by producers. *Bonnie and Clyde* was a semi-finalist several times at the festival produced by the National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT), but never made it into the festival itself.

The Academy for New Musical Theatre's Executive Director, Scott Guy, heard a single song from the show (*Immortality*) in NAMT's Songwriters' Showcase, and was so impressed by its potential that he contacted the writers and offered to nurture the musical through the Academy's developmental process.

The Academy strategized appropriate developmental steps

Not every musical needs full concert readings, and wherever possible, we steer the producer and writer towards the most efficient, inexpensive option: straightforward *dramaturgy* (guided feedback of script, story, structure, and often lyric and music). There is no need to spend money on actors and theatre rental just to fix the story. We offer a tiered platform of developmental options: dramaturgy, table reading, workshop, concert reading, staged reading.

For *Bonnie and Clyde*, the Academy offered a workshop/feedback process with the writers, as well as networking/recommendations to other musical theatre producers who might be interested in the work.

2. DRAFT

The Academy supported table readings and workshops of the work, nurturing it through revised draft.

The Academy rehearsed and presented a private unstaged reading of *Bonnie and Clyde* at its facility in North Hollywood. The *Bonnie and Clyde* authors live in New York, and the Academy's workshop facilities are in California, but the Academy was able to set up a videofeeds for the writers to watch the California work sessions.

The Academy has a vast website and is able to upload an unlimited number of documents for any particular project, allowing the producer and his staff the ability to view the progress of the work at any time from anywhere in the world.

3. FEEDBACK

At every step along the way, ANMT staff offered feedback and suggestions, sometimes in consultation with several producers.

In the case of *Bonnie and Clyde*, most dramaturgical meetings took place via email and telephone, but during the annual conference held in New York City, two members of the ANMT staff were able to meet in person with the composer for a long work-session. ANMT staff had numerous conversations with national and regional producers who had expressed interest in the work, with an eye towards readying a final draft for production.

After the concert presentation, ANMT staff provided the writers with extensive feedback, again via videofeed, posted on a secure portion of the Academy's website. The feedback concentrated initially on an *overview* of the music, book and lyrics, but was then followed by an extremely detailed focus on specific measures, syllables, and even rhymes. ANMT staff provided over five hours of commentary on the draft.

Five hours of feedback after a particular workshop or presentation is fairly typical for Academy staff. Generally the *overview* takes the better part of an hour, followed by specific comments going measure-by-measure and line-by-line if appropriate.



*The Academy Repertory Company
in concert*

A second revision was followed by additional feedback, mainly by email and telephone, and a date was set for a second concert presentation (see below).

4. PRESENTATION

A public concert reading of the work by the Academy.

The Academy can present private presentations in its own workshop space, or, when the project warrants it, can occasionally produce concert presentations in theatres.

"I recently had the pleasure of working with The Academy for New Musical Theatre on a reading of The Grouch's Daughter, my new musical co-written with Jack Helbig. ANMT staff member Elise Dewsberry served as both dramaturg and director, and in our years of working on this show, no one person has been as helpful to us as she was. Prior to the reading, we received a set of notes that were as thoughtful as they were thorough. ANMT's suggestions led to a rewrite that greatly helped us shape the show and refine its style. I'm deeply impressed with the care and intelligence of their creative input, and would not hesitate to work with ANMT again."

*Mark Hollmann,
Tony award-winning composer
Urinetown*

RESULT for *Bonnie and Clyde*:

In the case of *Bonnie and Clyde*, the Academy was able to include the musical as part of the Academy's Concert Series at the Colony Theatre in Burbank, and provide the authors with a second five-hour-long feedback session.

The subsequent draft went on to win "The Best of Fest" at the New York Musical Theatre Festival in 2008, and there are current plans for productions in Los Angeles, followed by a New York opening. The Academy was also able to obtain a developmental grant for the work through ASCAP/NAMT (The Irving Caesar Award), affording a final workshop with the writers in residence.

We like to think that it is in major part due to the Academy's dramaturgy and feedback that the work is receiving its critical praise and production trajectory.

We have developed other projects via this same process, including *King of the Road: The Roger Miller Story*, now in development with Cort Casady Entertainment, Inc., *Romancing the Throne* (now in production at the Village Theatre), *Fairystories* (productions in Germany and Chicago), and a host of other works.

Development Options

- Not every musical needs full concert readings, and wherever possible, we steer the producer and writer towards the most efficient, inexpensive option: straightforward *dramaturgy* (guided feedback on story, structure, characters and often lyric and music). There is no need to spend money on actors and theatre rental just to fix the story.
- We offer a tiered platform of developmental options: dramaturgy, table reading, workshop, concert reading, staged reading.
- We can often offer some matchmaking options options: recommending composers, lyricists or bookwriters
- We might also be in a position to recommend producers or financial partners to you, depending on your circumstances, and our response to the show
- Lastly, as you can see, there is no rigid single way to approach the development of a musical. Some shows need only a little help; some need more. Some shows need new lyricists; some need producers; some need audiences; most need dramaturgical help. Give us a call and let's talk about what's best for your show.