

Chapter 6: Professional Foundations

Theory Becomes Practice

I moved to New York and started a new life in a very strange city. Chappell Music secured an apartment for me in the London Terrace complex in Chelsea near the Hudson River. It was a monumental architectural structure with an indoor swimming pool, underground garage, and an observation deck on the roof overlooking the river. All of my energy was focused on getting *Elizabeth I* (Foster & Spangler, 1972) written and up and running off-Broadway by spring. When I was not working on the show, I went to theatre events and performances and tried to network with recent graduates of CMU seeking their fame and fortune in New York City.

Elizabeth I (Foster & Spangler, 1972) was scheduled to open off-Broadway at the Sheridan Square Theatre the end of March. However, the production already running in that venue was extended, and suddenly this off-Broadway theatre for which our production was designed was not available. The backers came to a rehearsal and decided the show was so promising that we would take it directly to Broadway where the Lyceum Theatre was available. We opened for previews on March 28, 1972, and the pressure was on. The set and staging as designed for the thrust (three quarter in the round) stage at the intimate Sheridan Square was no longer feasible. How were we to fit that production into a large proscenium situation? We rehearsed long and hard to bring back the intimacy lost in the transfer. I was not responding well to the stress. My mother journeyed from Kansas for the opening into an extremely tense situation. The show closed on April 8, 1972, after a 2-week run and a part of me died that night. I may be better off without that part, but nonetheless, it hurt deeply at the time and for years to come.

I laughingly referred to myself as a “has-been” at 22. Sadly, I *felt* like a has-been

at 22. Working so hard and frantically for so many years to get to this point, then seeing it all disappear so quickly was too much. Tired and empty, I did not even know how to assess the damage. So I did what any neurotic young artist would do--I went into denial.

The music had been well received, but there was some limiting element of the interdisciplinary mix that I did not understand from the perspective of the critics and the audience. The director and playwright seemed to be confident and in control until immediately after the opening. I worried about how the closure would affect my publishing contract, my self-esteem, and my future in New York. I was most concerned that I felt that nothing I could have done with the music in that situation would have had any effect on the success of the show. That feeling of helplessness was part of what motivated me to strive for more creative control over all of my projects. I have never been sorry that I made that decision. It is also part of what has transferred into the Lovewell philosophy of always striving to give maximum ownership and artistic control to the participants who create the Lovewell productions.

Because my stipend from Chappell Music was not enough to live on, I was soon hunting for a job along with Ann, my girlfriend from college, who had accompanied me to New York. I preferred writing to performing but, as any starving artist knows, you take what you can get. Soon I had a role in the premier of the decidedly interdisciplinary production of *Mass: A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players, and Dancers* (Bernstein, Schwartz, & Bernstein, 1971). Stephen Schwartz was commissioned to write some of the lyrics with Leonard Bernstein and helped me get an audition for the upcoming production. I was hired as a soloist so the pay was good and the experience was priceless. We opened on June 5, 1972, at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.

I had one memorable encounter with Leonard Bernstein that contributed to my ongoing examination of style versus content. He stopped a full dress rehearsal at the Kennedy Center (nearly 150 people onstage plus a full-pit orchestra) to ask me if I was playing the exact piano notes that he had composed. During my vocal solo in the "Confiteor" section of the Mass, I accompanied myself on an onstage piano. Because of the theatrical staging, we were not permitted to have copies of the music. I replied to the Maestro that I had taken some liberties because Stephen Schwartz told me that the music in this section was to sound like authentic rock and pop (which was true). I quickly added that I would happily and respectfully return to the practice room and learn each note exactly as he had written it if he preferred. I waited an eternity for his response. Finally, out of the dark depths of

the new Kennedy Center Opera House his voice boomed, “That’s fine. Keep doing it like you’re doing it” (L. Bernstein, personal communication, June 4, 1972). Later, in the hallway, his press secretary commended me on the way I “handled the Maestro.”

I had not handled anything. I had always felt musically inadequate and Bernstein’s music was difficult. The quality of musicianship surrounding that project would intimidate any musician. Now I simply felt that I was getting away with something even though I knew that I would have learned the notes if Bernstein had requested it. Had my sense of self-worth been permanently damaged in childhood, or was I simply living and learning in the world of professional arts?

Fragile self-esteem and low levels of confidence are common conditions with many young artists in Lovewell programs. Examining what I needed as a young insecure artist to get through these rough spots has helped inform the Lovewell Method about the importance of nurturing and empowering the nascent creative artists.

The same company of actors, singers, and musicians went on to perform limited engagements of Bernstein’s (1971) *Mass: A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players, and Dancers* (1971) at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia and The Metropolitan Opera at Lincoln Center in New York. Meanwhile, my agent was negotiating an option on *Festival--A Rock Myth* (Spangler & Pirolo, 1971) with a Broadway producer, and I was in the process of switching publishers from Chappell to Tommy Valando Music. The producer was Ed Padula. He arranged to have me play the score of *Festival--A Rock Myth* for Michael Bennett, a brilliant director/choreographer and a rising creative star on Broadway. He had choreographed *Promises, Promises* (Bacharach, David, & Simon, 1968) and *A Little Night Music* (Sondheim & Wheeler, 1973) and codirected *Follies* (Sondheim & Goldman, 1971) with Hal Prince. In 2 more years, he would revolutionize the musical theatre world with his production of *A Chorus Line* (Bennett, Hamlisch, Kleban, Kirkwood, & Dante, 1975). This production proved Michael Bennett to be a world-class master conceptualist of interdisciplinary arts.

Michael Bennett liked my music but did not connect with the myth of Orpheus. Mr. Bennett was interested in other projects I was writing and wanted to keep in touch. I was soon on my way to Detroit to compose the dance arrangements for his production of *Seesaw* (Bennett, Coleman & Fields, 1973) in out-of-town tryouts at the gigantic Fisher Theatre. This was truly the big league. The original book was by Michael Stewart, who did *Hello, Dolly!* (Stewart & Herman, 1964); the music was by Cy Coleman, who did *Sweet Charity* (Coleman, Fields, & Simon, 1966); and the lyrics were by Dorothy Fields, who did *Annie Get Your Gun* (Fields, Fields, & Berlin, 1946). The cast included Michelle Lee, Tommy Tune, Ken Howard, and Anita Morris. *Seesaw* opened on Broadway at the Uris Theatre on March 8, 1973, and had a respectable run of nearly 3 years, followed by a national tour. It was a good opportunity to get to know and work with these icons of American musical theatre.

In May of 1973, I began composing the score for *Houdini* (Rukeyser & Spangler, 1973) with book and lyrics by the international award-winning poet, Muriel Rukeyser. It was directed and choreographed by another interdisciplinary master, Grover Dale, and starred Christopher Walken, Anita Morris, Richard Cox, and Neva Small. It opened July 5, 1973, at the Lenox Art Center in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. Once more, good reviews and a promising start, as reflected in the following review by Bass (1973):

There comes a time in every poet's life when she can't stand working alone another second and needs collaborative assurance. Miss Rukeyser is fortunate in having fallen in with composer David Spangler and director Grover Dale rather than the usual assortment of theatrical thieves, and they have fashioned a musical allegory that verges on breaking the locks that so inspired and infuriated Houdini

himself. (p. 7)

Norman Mailer lived nearby and invited several of us to a memorable dinner at his home after seeing the show. Spending an evening with him was another step in demystifying celebrity artists.

In New York, I started piano lessons with a master teacher named Sanford Gold. My agent, Flora Roberts, seemed to have lost interest in moving the *Festival--A Rock Myth* (Spangler & Pirolo, 1971) project along, so I switched over to the literary agent, Shirley Bernstein (Leonard's sister). Grover Dale and Muriel Rukeyser were at odds over the rewrites of *Houdini* (Rukeyser & Spangler, 1973), and it appeared that the project was falling apart. Meanwhile, a trip to Denver to visit my brother and friends, and to Kansas to visit my mother, was a welcome relief from the relentless uncertainties of New York. On arriving back in New York, I discovered that my girlfriend had been featured in a national Burger King commercial and had left me to move in with the Burger King account executive.

In November, I went to London with a friend who was coproducing Noel Coward's (1972) *Design for Living* in the West End starring Vanessa Redgrave. It was my first trip to England and a wonderful introduction to European culture. We had Thanksgiving Dinner with Miss Redgrave, toured the National Gallery, the Tate, the Victoria and Albert Museum, St. Paul's Cathedral, and saw many plays and musicals in London's West End. The most notable productions that provided my first impressions of the culmination of 400 years of theatrical tradition were the original *Rocky Horror Show* (O'Brien, 1973), *Gypsy* (Sondheim, Laurents, & Styne, 1973), *Coriolanus* (Shakespeare, 1936), and *Absurd Person Singular* (Ayckbourn, 1973).

As part of my first journey to Europe, I was determined to make a pilgrimage to

Richard Wagner's home of Bayreuth, in the Bavarian region of Germany. Wagner's music intrigued me and his concept of Gesamtkunstwerk (universal artwork) is extremely appealing to me as an interdisciplinary artist (Gutman, 1968). Gesamtkunstwerk is the idea of combining all art forms including literature, music, dance, drama, and design into one grand theatre of sensory experience. The concept was inspiring and provocative. How could learning through storytelling not occur in such a persuasive atmosphere? As stated by Gutman, "these arts had the power to transport auditors into an ecstatic state in which inquiries were no longer made and all answers given" (p. 291).

This is the earliest historical reference I have found that describes the concept of interdisciplinarity in the arts. This concept was to become an important aspect of Lovewell Institute's philosophy. I had studied Wagner's life and artistic accomplishments in college, and by observing landmark productions of his operas, now it was time to see his home, grave, museum, and theatre in the Bavarian countryside. I took a ferry from England across the Channel to Hamburg, then a train to Nuremberg. Bayreuth was like a dream. There was the house and theatre that King Ludwig had built for Wagner. The unheated museum was locked, but I talked the administrative staff into letting me walk through the exhibition since I had traveled so far to learn more about this controversial artist. I found that Wagner was working on an opera based on the life of Jesus Christ and was also writing an essay on equality for women when he died.

I had read some very disparaging things about Wagner regarding his alleged anti-Semitism and emotional excesses (Gutman, 1968). I wondered how could that sublime music come from such an ogre? I wanted to somehow reconcile the imperfect person with the inspired music and theatre that he created. I visited his grave in the snow and contemplated the soul of this great artist. I concluded that an artist's most exquisite work might more often reflect the person the artist endeavors to be rather than the person that he or she is capable of being.

Back on New York's Madison Avenue, I wrote and produced jingles and musical campaigns for the advertising industry. This was compelling at first, working in New York's best studios and with New York's best musicians; utilizing my skills as a composer, lyricist, arranger, and salesman; and getting to know how Madison Avenue operated. At the same time, I worked as the musical director for *The Magic Show*

(Schwartz, Dale, Randall, & Spangler, 1974) headed for Broadway. Grover Dale was directing and choreographing, and Doug Henning and Anita Morris were starring in this offbeat new musical. Coming off the success of *Godspell* (Tebelak & Schwarz, 1971) and *Pippin* (Schwarz et al., 1972), Stephen Schwartz wrote the score. I did not particularly like the role of music director. As the rehearsals progressed, I received an offer from AC&R Advertising (a division of Ted Bates Inc.) to go to Italy and record a series of TV jingles I had written for the International Wool Bureau. There was just enough time for me to compose the dance arrangements before I left for Italy, but Paul Schaffer would have to be hired to take my place as the musical director. *The Magic Show* opened and ran for several years on Broadway. The small but steady royalties were very welcome over the next few years.

Rome was impressive. All the beauty and history of that ancient city came alive to me as I walked through the Forum and the Coliseum. I intuitively was drawn to the people, the architecture, and the food by an inexplicable familiarity. The advertising agency was producing this series of TV commercials in Italy to avoid the prohibitive union rates for musicians and actors in America. This was common practice in the advertising industry. The recording sessions in Rome were a pleasure and I observed that the recording engineers and musicians were particularly sensitive to the artistic process, even if it was only TV commercials. The union rules were more relaxed than in New York and the whole endeavor was artistically fulfilling and culturally enlightening. I even appeared in one of the commercials when they could not find enough actors who looked American. When our work was finished, Jo Cuccaro flew over from Pittsburgh and joined me for several weeks of touring the other great destinations in Italy. We went to Venice and Spoleto (during Menotti's Festival) and on to Genoa, Capri, and southern

Italy. As I mentioned earlier, Jo was the first member of her family to visit the “old country” and her Italian relatives since her father left there as a young man. It was a warm and lasting reconciliation and a rare chance to catch a glimpse of Italian culture from the insider’s point of view. This kind of interface with a foreign culture would serve me well when Lovewell started developing international cultural exchange programs. After 5 weeks in Italy, I was renewed, refreshed, and seeing the world in a different light.

The next few years of my life resembled a Forrest Gump-like farce (Zemeckis, Roth, & Groom, 1994) with overtones of Woody Allen’s (1983) *Zelig*.

As I look over my appointment books and field notes for those years, I can hardly believe the parade of extraordinary characters and events that passed through my life. Experiences such as going to the movies with Gayla and Salvador Dali, rehearsing a TV special with Shirley MacLaine and another with Shelly Winters, producing a TV jingle featuring Ethel Merman, helping Katherine Hepburn load her luggage into her car, having dinner at Stephen Sondheim’s house, and acting in a commercial with Margaret Hamilton, the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz* (Baum et al., 1939) kept my head spinning and my phone ringing.

This was heady stuff for a kid from Kansas who grew up thinking these were legends, not people. How could I tell these true stories to my friends without being labeled a name-dropper? I fell into a literary crowd that included Arthur Laurents, Terrence McNally, Jimmy Kirkwood, Fred Ebb, and Larry Kramer. We had dinner parties, cocktail parties, and opening night parties where friendships developed and creative ideas and feelings were exchanged. These were highly intelligent, enormously talented writers who were forging new directions and new paradigms in theatre, musicals, and movies. Of course, at that time, I did not realize the full extent of their impact on our culture. I did know that I was witnessing first-hand information regarding the inner workings of the business and the craft from the experts. These were lessons that would prove invaluable to the development of the Lovewell Institute. I listened and learned from these consummate professionals and occasionally played them a song I had written.

Longing to get closer to nature, I rented a little house in the potato fields of eastern Long Island. The quiet house in rural Wainscott was a welcome relief from the persistent din of the city. Just a 3-hour drive on the Long Island Expressway and I could relax in a cottage with a yard, a fireplace, and a big sky with real stars (not Broadway

stars or Hollywood stars). All of this atmosphere reminiscent of my roots was only 2 miles from the Hampton beaches. It was a perfect place to concentrate and write. I was a little lonely and still searching for spiritual answers. I took some courses in Scientology, studied The Course in Miracles, looked into Maxwell Maltz's psycho-cybernetics, and consulted a leading astrologer named D. J. Sullivan and a well-known clairvoyant named Frank Andrews. I also explored Yoga and eastern philosophies. Renting this peaceful little house for a year was such a powerfully positive experience that I soon bought a similar house in the nearby village of Sag Harbor. I was finally able to take a little time for reflection.

I took on two new musicals during the mid-1970s. One must deeply trust the content, the motivations, and the collaborators before making any commitment to such a complex and intense process as cocreating a musical theatre piece. Untold amounts of time, effort, and money are put into developing new musicals before they ever get to the production stage with still no guarantee of success. Yet, some of us continue to take these risks because we love the creative process and we love the art form.

Christopher Gore was a young playwright and lyricist who had also recently experienced the quick closure of his much-heralded musical on Broadway. We commiserated on the fate of his *Via Galactica* (Gore, MacDermot, & Hall, 1972) and my *Elizabeth I* (Foster & Spangler, 1972). We were both looking for another project and agreed to start work on the story of Nefertiti and Akhenaten, the two young leaders who revolutionized art and politics in Egypt's 18th dynasty in the 14th century BC. Christopher wrote a first draft of the play, and I liked the romance and passion of his Camelot-in-Egypt story. In less than a year, I wrote the music and directed a production of *Brothers* (Spangler & Gore, 1976) at the La MaMa E.T.C. Theatre off-Broadway. That

production opened on April 29, 1976, and was just the beginning of my “Nefertiti” saga.

Meanwhile, I wrote the score for a musical adaptation of Carlo Goldoni’s (1752) *La Locandiera* by the distinguished playwright Ira Wallach who had written the successful play, *The Absence of a Cello* (Wallach, 1964). *Sweet Mistress* (Wallach, Spangler, & Dias, 1976) opened on September 8, 1976, at the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia. Once again, the customary rewriting battles began to occur. The director and the playwright fired Susan Dias, the lyricist, and Ira Wallach attempted to take over those duties. Susan Dias was a good friend of mine and this subsequently placed me in another very difficult situation. Things got ugly between the director and my collaborator just as they had with *Houdini* (Rukeyser & Spangler, 1973) a few years earlier.

Ego battles between members of the creative team had once again destroyed a perfectly good project that was extremely close to producing a viable product. I watched these disputes occur and saw both sides of the argument but was powerless to do anything other than choose sides or withdraw from the projects. Out of this atmosphere of ego-driven catastrophes and untold waste of money and resources came a resolve to create a cultural family or community wherein differences could be resolved in a less destructive way. These were the real-life experiences that inspired me to look for some kind of acceptable ethic that would establish a benign and nurturing creative environment in which to develop new works of interdisciplinary art. The Lovewell Affirmations (now called the Learning Meditations) were born out of this desire. The significance and application of the Lovewell Learning Meditations will be examined in detail in chapter 9.

Working on a new musical is always a big gamble. Getting a musical written and produced is a monumental undertaking and there is still such a slim chance of real success. We all know the ever-changing but always dismal statistics of the failure rate of new musicals, but there are those who do it successfully. How much is skill? How much is marketing? How much is luck? We will never know. Faith is the only weapon against all of the resisting forces. If nothing else, this next period of my life was about testing my faith--in myself and in the self I did not yet know.

Measuring my life in terms of opening nights had made me well aware of the sacrifices involved in pursuing this field of endeavor. One could say that it had become an obsession. On a daily basis, I witnessed so many talented, ambitious

artists working on countless projects with uncanny skills in music, writing, directing, designing, and performing. Why were there no skills in collaboration? What school taught anything about getting along with your cocreator? Where was a course on the ego-free pursuit of a common vision with equal components of respect, encouragement, synthesis, and compassion? I did not know it yet, but these thoughts were forming part of the fundamental philosophy that would become the Lovewell Method.

There was one project that was particularly outstanding in its lesson to this aspiring artist. Shirley MacLaine was an inspiration to me since I had seen her in the movie of Cole Porter's *Can Can* (Porter & Burrows, 1960). Due to my work on *Seesaw* (Bennett et al., 1973), Cy Coleman asked me to work on the Shirley MacLaine TV special. Cy was a famous Broadway composer and why he would ask me to musical direct this special was beyond me. I was intimidated by Cy and terrified of making any mistakes in front of my childhood legendary heartthrob Shirley MacLaine. It was the perfect set up for a real self-esteem disaster. Sure enough, one day Cy announced at rehearsal that he had an appointment with his "shrink" and had to leave. We had just decided on a medley of his tunes in various keys (still up for grabs), and Shirley was feeling very insecure about her singing. When Cy left, I was there alone in this difficult position. In true star fashion she wanted to try every song in the medley in every key with intricate dance transitions. When I told her it would take me a few moments to work out the keys, she was annoyed. She had every right to be. Cy could play any song he had ever written in any key, and I just could not do it. I was so mortified by this experience that I quit my job as musical director, but not without playing Shirley a song I had written about a relationship of mine that had recently ended. I wanted to believe her when she said she wished she could feel that way about somebody (Shirley MacLaine, personal communication, May 29, 1976).

To make a living wage, I started working regular hours at AC&R Advertising as

an assistant television producer and music director. This was my first “real job” where I was required to be in the office all day from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The upside was that I received a regular paycheck. It was a shock and a whole other world of responsibility, security, and life style. I had written jingles independently but never had I been responsible for how the music was actually used in the commercial. This was a new adventure and most decidedly a plunge into an examination of the corporate power structure of Madison Avenue and how the situation could give me some control over how my music was being used. Being the artist *and* producer had distinct advantages.

Something occurred on June 16, 1976, that altered the way I perceive reality. I had never dreamed about my Grandmother Spangler. She appeared to me that morning in a dream wearing a bright red dress and looking like Angela Lansbury in a Broadway musical. She seemed to be saying (singing) everything was all right. Later that morning, I got a call at work that she died a few hours earlier. My Grandmother Forman had appeared to me a few years earlier on the day she died, but her death was so traumatic that I virtually shut it out.

These dream experiences were more than mere coincidence and gave me greater faith in the functional existence of unseen realities. They represented a kind of practical “faith” and power of intention that was going to keep me sustained during some of the future dark days of Lovewell Institute--just because people could not see or comprehend the potential in the Lovewell Method did not mean that it did not exist.

The creative process requires any serious artist to maintain vigilant faith in an abstract reality that has not yet been manifested. I have observed that creative artists often become quite adept at developing the type of faith that assures them that their visions, concepts, and ideas will one day be realized. This is bigger than just faith in oneself. That is part of it, but the type of faith I’m speaking about includes an intense interaction with the unseen (quantum) universe. Perhaps creative process is an oasis at which science and art can meet and mutually replenish. The concept in any observation, even scientific observation, that the data being observed are always affected by the observer is no longer a concept exclusive to physics (Chopra, 1993, 2003). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) also

examined quantum theory as it applies to various other domains:

An intellectual problem is not restricted to a particular domain. Indeed, some of the most creative breakthroughs occur when an idea that works well in one domain gets grafted to another and revitalizes it. This is certainly the case with widespread applications of physics' quantum theory to neighboring disciplines like chemistry and astronomy. Creative people are ever alert to what colleagues across the fence are doing. Manfred Eigen, whose recent work involves the attempt to replicate inorganic evolution in the laboratory, is bringing together concepts and experimental procedures from physics, chemistry and biology. (p. 88)

Aspects of quantum theory can and should be applied to creative process. One application is deceptively simple. The creative artist has a vision or concept of something new, original, and yet unrealized. The artist then reaches into the unseen universe to coax and craft the abstraction into manifestation. The artist elicits all possible resources from the visible *and* invisible realms in order to bring his or her idea into reality. We, as artists, learn that the data we gather and depend upon for our creations (whether it is waves or particles) are clearly affected by the artist-observer who is gathering the data. The artist (researcher) will become a cocreator of the outcome (results) during the process of manifesting the concept (product). This is the basis on which my creative process functions and the basis on which the Lovewell Method approaches creativity. The period of my personal history described in this chapter attests to one of the most productive and enlightening creative outpourings in my life. Reflecting on it now gives me a deeper comprehension of the confluence of forces and development of awareness that contribute to the creative process.

On January 1, 1977, I moved into my co-op brownstone apartment on the upper West Side. I was beginning to make some steady money for the first time (at least enough to get another mortgage). Grey Advertising, a much larger company than AC&R, offered me the position of Associate Music Director. This included a substantial pay raise and an opportunity to get included on more union contracts that would mean continuing royalties over and above the salary. I accepted the job and moved up to the next rung of the commercial music ladder. My boss was Michael Cohen, a gifted composer, who had written some musicals but seemed resigned to a career as an advertising musical director on Madison Avenue.

One of the greatest joys during this period of my life was having the opportunity

to travel and work in so many diverse locations. In June of 1976, I went to Mexico to produce the Spanish language version of *The Bugs Bunny Follies* (Hess, Spangler, & Dias, 1976) for Warner Brothers. I wrote the title song and produced a recording of some of the greatest stars of Mexican television as they overdubbed the voices of the Warner Brothers cartoon characters into Spanish. On my day off, I went to the Aztec Pyramids outside of Mexico City. That night I had vivid and dramatic dreams of walking down the Camino Real and witnessing an ancient Aztec ritual. Similar feelings and dreams had arisen in Italy after visiting the Forum and the Coliseum.

In August of 1977, rehearsals began for *Nefertiti* (Spangler & Gore, 1977). This was an outgrowth of the production I had composed and directed of *Brothers* (Spangler & Gore, 1976) at La MaMa ETC Theatre the previous year. The 1977 version was produced by Sherwin Goldman and directed by Jack O'Brien, the team who had recently brought the stunning production of *Porgy and Bess* (Gershwin, Heyward, & Nash, 1935) to Broadway. *Nefertiti* (1977) was a large-scale first-class production on its way to Broadway. The talented cast included Andrea Marcovicci, Michael Nouri, Marilyn Cooper, Robert Lupone, and Jane White. This was the first time I heard my music played by a full professional orchestra, and it proved to be an indescribable thrill. The production opened on September 20, 1977, at the Blackstone Theatre in Chicago to mixed reviews. Once again, the rewriting began and the creative team started to fracture. Family and friends flocked to Chicago to see the show. By this time, my father had actually stopped drinking and we experienced true reconciliation. The emotions of this period are disturbing to revisit. It felt like being on another sinking ship, and there was nothing I could do to save it. This time I knew there was something wrong with the show. The focus all went to rewriting the book. Christopher was suddenly turning over his duties to

Albert Innurato, then to Joe Masteroff who long ago had great success with *Cabaret* (Masteroff, Kander, Ebb, & Prince, 1966). We closed down the show on October 29, 1977, to rewrite. The following year we recorded the album in New York with the original cast.

In November, I resumed my old job at Grey Advertising and threw myself into creating a club act performing my original songs with a live band and back-up singers. It occurred to me that I was not supposed to write for the theatre. There were records and movie scores and television. I enjoyed working directly with singers and musicians. We had engagements at Tramps, Reno Sweeney, The Copacabana, and a few other New York showcases. It was a unique experience but exhausting combined with a day job.

It was difficult living in two different professional worlds simultaneously. Sometimes the choices were overwhelming. I was approaching 30 and felt that I still had so much I wanted to do and express. This was an era in American history that encouraged us to “do it all *and* have it all.” That idea was not working for me as well as it had in college. If I was going to live in New York City, I wanted some roots and access to nature. Until now, New York City was a place where I worked, made money, did deals, and occasionally played, but it was not the place I *lived*. Sag Harbor had now become my home even if was just on weekends and holidays. There was something missing in my life, and I was determined to find out what it was.

In 1978, Cynthia Adler and I married at St. John the Divine in New York City. It was a big wedding with peacocks, celebrities, several groups of live musicians, and a penthouse reception. We were both busy working at good jobs and decided to take our honeymoon in segments when we could get mutual time off. Whether traveling to Italy, Japan, Quebec, Thailand, or Los Angeles, we both enjoyed absorbing different cultures.

In January of 1979, I went to work on the supply side of Madison Avenue. MZH Music was a music production house with two beautiful state-of-the-art recording studios. My job as the new in-house writer and producer was to put together music packages for

advertising agencies that wished to outsource their creative music projects. In retrospect, I see what a unique environment this provided for me to learn some major lessons about the persuasive power of the arts and also about the perversion of these powers in the interest of consumerism. However, the creative tasks such as conceiving the lyrics and music based on the storyboards, composing the musical arrangements, hiring the artists, and recording with high-caliber professional studio singers and musicians were real challenges and extremely educational. The business transactions, contracts, and finances were handled by other individuals in our small company. Being free of these tasks, I managed to express more creative individuality with fewer artistic and time restrictions at MZH Music than in the larger more corporate bureaucratic structure of Grey Advertising. The creative freedom was exhilarating; but it was, at the end of the day, still advertising.

An idea for a new musical was presented to me that I could not resist. I enjoyed working with Ronn Robinson and found some resonance in our personal parallel journeys from small rural communities to the theatrical bright lights of the big city. So I took the plunge and made a commitment to collaborate on *Play It By Heart* (Spangler & Robinson, 1979) and entered creatively and legally into a new project.

Working passionately on a new work of art was a way to offset the feeling of futility that I began to develop about writing jingles. I never intended to write music for the purpose of selling products to people who probably did not need them. The money was good and the creative atmosphere was stimulating but where was it all leading? With this new show I could at least put my ideas and dreams into characters that had souls. These decisions helped me clarify some of the issues in my eternal struggle for balancing art, education, and the commercial marketplace. This sense of balance became an important issue as I began to develop the Lovewell Method.

Always drawn toward a certain area of research that integrated anthropology and archeology into a theory of creation and connection to a spiritual source, I read many books explaining relationships between the human and the divine. One such book was

Secret Places of the Lion by Williamson (1977). His words rang so true that I wrote him a letter and soon found myself meeting with him in Los Angeles to plan a trip to Peru to search out the Brotherhood of the Seven Rays at a monastery high in the Andes. George was too ill to travel but gave me a letter of introduction that connected me to some very impressive resources in the ancient Incan culture and its relationship to extraterrestrial activity in the Andes. As an anthro-archeologist, George spent his professional life studying and writing about historical patterns and spiritual connections not widely accepted by much of the scientific community. From the Amazon River to Machu Picchu, I observed evidence of what he had told me. Flying over the Lines of Nazca in Western Peru, and contemplating their origin, seemed to alter my consciousness in that I could actually feel it expanding. I never found the monastery but I learned much from well-informed Peruvians about the ancient Peruvian cultures, and I discovered a source of inspiration and connection to South America that is still with me to this day.

Back in New York, the marriage with Cynthia did not work out but the friendship did. I have continued to benefit from our lasting and enriching friendship. The commercial advertising business continued to be lucrative, and I was deeply involved in recording demos of all the new songs Ronn and I had written for *Play It By Heart* (Spangler & Robinson, 1979). A few big projects appeared on my radar screen. First, Tommy Valando, my new publisher, set up meetings for me with Alan Jay Lerner, who was searching for a composer for a new musical he was writing. I was very impressed with his dialogue and lyrics for *My Fair Lady* (Lerner & Loewe, 1956) and *Camelot* (Lerner & Loewe, 1960) and eager to see if we could work together. After meeting with Alan several times in New York and London, he finally told me that the producer insisted that it would be easier to raise investment capital for the show if Charles Strouse wrote

the music (A. J. Lerner, personal communication, December 12, 1980). Charles Strouse had written the music for the very successful musical, *Annie* (Strouse, Charnin, & Meehan, 1977). Lerner and Strouse's (1983) new musical, *Dance A Little Closer*, was not a success. It was Alan's last musical. I have fond memories of him and our discussions of where the American musical was headed.

So Fine was a film written and directed by Andrew Bergman (1981) starring Ryan O'Neal and Jack Warden. Grover Dale was doing the choreography for the film and asked me to write the music for a TV commercial within the film. Grover and I came up with a catchy little tune that was recorded and filmed as a production number as part of the plot. The producers liked it. Warner Brothers flew me out to Hollywood to produce and record an extended version of the jingle as the title song of the film. I was still working full-time at MZH Music and the owners were thrilled with the notoriety and visibility this brought to their company. Another opportunity materialized that took me completely by surprise and dominated my professional career for the following decade.

Stepping out of the subway on 57th Street, I bumped into Stan Catron, an artist-relations executive at BMI who still remembered me from winning the varsity show competition at CMU. *Romper Room & Friends* (Claster & Claster, 1981), the syndicated children's television show, had just been purchased by Hasbro Incorporated and they were searching for a songwriter to write and produce an entirely new music package. There was a short interview and the executives listened to my reel of song demos. Soon, I was signing papers and meeting with Sally Claster Bell. She had hosted the popular children's TV show and was the daughter of the originator, Bertram Claster. My assignment was to write, arrange, produce, and record 30 new children's songs over the next 3 months. They all needed to be approved not only by Sally and her brother John

(the executive producers) but also by a child psychologist who would determine what was age-appropriate and suitable for their target audience. The fact that I had never written a children's song did not deter me for a moment. I assembled a team of talented young writers that I had worked with in the studio. As head writer, I laid out plans for the lyrics and music for all 30 songs and a strategy on how to get them recorded on time and on budget. MZH Music was a very good support system, especially Jack Zimmerman, one of the partners. He wrote out the arrangements from tapes of me performing piano/vocal demos of the completed and approved versions of the songs. Once again, an infrastructure was in place and it worked like a charm. I wrote and supervised the creative elements; Jack handled the details of arranging and copying the music and scheduling the studio; and the other partners (Morris Mammorsky, Tommy Hamm, and David Forest) handled the payroll, contracts, and business affairs. It was a smooth running machine and one of the most rewarding creative (and financial) endeavors of my life.

This whole episode helped me formulate a very important piece of the foundation for the Lovewell Method. I hired children to sing the vocals on some of the songs. A top talent agent in New York who specialized in children recommended some very bright and capable young singers. My friend Jo Cuccaro took an interest in this project and arranged for Joey Lawrence to be featured on two albums I was producing for *Romper Room & Friends*. He was a rising star on television and Jo had been impressed with his recent performance on the Johnny Carson show.

I felt that young people should be directly involved in creating the programming aimed at their market. I believed that given the time and resources, I could work with imaginative young people and create songs and stories that would speak to them in their own language. During the writing process, I was careful to avoid "kiddy" clichés and "talking down" to the children. We experimented with new ways to communicate with a young audience. I had always loved kids but had few opportunities to interact with them in my New York lifestyle and career-driven circle of friends.

It was while working in the studio with these talented kids that the idea for a creative arts-based methodology occurred to me. This was how it was going to happen--a group of kids who loved the arts together in a studio with an artist who wanted to help them tell their story. The Lovewell Method would evolve from

that seed.

The financial independence that I experienced when the new *Romper Room & Friends* (Claster & Claster, 1981) hit the airwaves was a curse and a blessing. Suddenly, I could go anywhere, do anything I wanted to do, and schedule my time to better suit my interests and passions. This was a liberating and dangerous situation. The unfortunate miscalculation made at this time is that my mind no longer connected my daily activities with making money (or the need to make money). Those royalty checks just regularly appeared in my mailbox and all I wanted to do was create interdisciplinary artworks and share the joys of the creative process with anyone who had a passion for it.

There were several things I had wanted to do for a long time. I longed to once again experience the liberating and mystical feelings I had felt in Mexico and South America and, at the same time, I wanted to escape the bitter cold New York winter. Taking a leave of absence from MZH Music, I rented a villa in Acapulco for the winter. This was the perfect place to regroup and go deeper into identifying my life purpose and mission. I knew it was not writing jingles.

In March of 1982, I returned to New York and went back to work at MZH Music, wrote and produced more TV jingles, and composed the incidental music for two off-Broadway plays, *Booth* (Morse, 1982) and *Looking Glass* (Sutton & Mandelberg, 1982). The house in Sag Harbor was still my safe haven. I built a deck on the back and remodeled a bit. The cottage was back in the woods on a lake, and the sheer beauty and solitude were always rejuvenating and creatively inspiring.

The *Romper Room & Friends* songs were now being released as records and tapes on the Caedmon Record label. MZH Music was becoming concerned that I was not spending enough time in the office. But there was something else I had intended to do for

a long time, drive across America in my Volkswagen camper bus. On December 9, 1982, I drove west out of New York City headed for California with no set plans except to meet my friend John Hart in Los Angeles for Christmas. I will never regret making this journey. I was still young enough to enjoy the once-in-a-lifetime adventure with minimal responsibilities and yet old enough to appreciate it. I visited family and friends, stayed in unusual places like the Hopi Reservation, went to theatre events, made some new friends, and explored an America I had never seen.

Back in New York, there were more jingles to produce, more meetings, and more offers of theatrical projects. While I was gone I had won another award for a musical campaign from the New York Market Radio Broadcasters Association (the Big Apple Radio Awards). I returned to New York with a new perspective. I was now prepared to turn down offers for projects with which I did not resonate. In 1983, Ronn Robinson and I signed an option on *Play It By Heart* (Spangler & Robinson, 1979) with Warner Brothers Theatre Division. It was to be directed by Joe Layton and produced by John Hart, Mr. Layton, and Warner Brothers. This was destined to become another ongoing saga.

The First Lovewell Pilot Programs

Meanwhile, in the interest of developing a methodology around learner-centered, arts-based creative process, I persuaded a kindergarten-Grade 8 private school near my home in Sag Harbor to let me experiment with a project allowing the students create their own show. The headmaster, Kevin Brennan, a graduate of Bank Street College of Education in New York, had some very progressive ideas about arts education and jumped at the opportunity, especially because I offered to spend 5 weeks with no pay working with the teachers and students. *The Haunted Zoo* (Spangler & Students of

Hampton Day School, 1984) opened at The Hampton Day School in Bridgehampton, New York, on October 26, 1984. It was an unqualified success for the students, for the school, and for my theory that the Lovewell Method could be effective educationally, socially, and therapeutically,

The leading role was played by an eighth-grade boy who had a wonderful sense of humor and a rambunctious demeanor. His teacher cautioned me that he was a problem in class, did not test well, and that the other students often ridiculed him. The teacher felt that the boy was highly intelligent but she had no way to prove it. Standardized tests were totally misleading in indicating this boy's high intelligence. She did not tell me he was dyslexic until much later. The boy worked very hard and was brilliant in the role he devised as the zookeeper. As we were developing his role, I encouraged him to use his slapstick instincts to create a character who could physically relate to his zoo animals. On his own time, he worked out comedy routines that contributed to the narrative content of the play as well as to his character portrayal. His performance won him respect and admiration from his peers and teachers. Until his teacher and peers saw his performance, he had been perceived as an underachiever, a troublemaker and class "cut-up"--now he was a school hero based on a significant and legitimate achievement. Based on the success of this program, the school sponsored a summer workshop centered on the same concept. The summer workshop produced *The Deadly Joke* (Spangler and Students of Hampton Day School, 1985), which was also a success.

Kevin Brennan and I tried to initiate a teacher training course at Bank Street College of Education but we did not have enough proof that this method of arts education was valid and effective. This was my first encounter with not having the proper credentials to enter the arena of professional education. My bachelor of fine arts degree

from CMU was valueless in this environment, and I had not completed my master's thesis at the University of Pittsburgh partly because I had not planned on teaching in any traditional educational institution, and partly because I already had a promising future in New York. I thought perhaps my Broadway musical could have been my thesis, but the University of Pittsburgh Music Department was not open to that possibility.

Kevin was willing to team-teach with me at Bank Street College because he believed so strongly in what we were doing. His son had been actively involved in both of my Lovewell pilot programs at Hampton Day School and Kevin saw the benefits from the perspectives of both an educator and a parent. He applied for grants to finance the continuation of the program at his school, but they were rejected because panelists failed to see how just “putting on a show” had any real impact on education. This was a rude awakening for all of us who had witnessed the power of this program to inform young minds, motivate young divergent thinkers, and transform young lives. We had experimented with a method of addressing alternative learning styles that seemed to work. The methodology was still primitive and unrefined, but the two pilot programs had proven what a tremendously positive effect it had on students and the morale of the school.

Kevin resigned from the Hampton Day School and entered the New York City Public School System as principal of one of their Magnet Schools. I returned to New York City to work on recording some new *Romper Room* albums, writing some new songs, and creating a children's musical out of the 35 songs we had written, *Two Left Feet* (Spangler, Elliot, & Arts School of Philadelphia, 1985). Marc Elliot (one of the cowriters of the songs), Jo Cuccaro, and I worked out characters and a rough storyline utilizing many of the existing songs. Soon, through a social connection, we were planning

a production of *Two Left Feet* at the Performing Arts School of Philadelphia. Dr. Carlton Lake, headmaster of the Philadelphia school, sponsored an all-school assembly to assess student interest in doing a workshop of the musical that would give the teenagers input into the story and character development. The students were enthusiastic about the idea. Dr. Lake gave me access to the facility, the students, the rehearsal spaces, the performance space, and the technical resources.

During this project at the Performing Arts School of Philadelphia, I observed limitless imagination and endless untapped creativity swirling around the hearts and minds of these young focused artists. Talking with their teachers and administrators, I discovered that many of the students had not fared well in standard academic settings. At the Performing Arts School of Philadelphia, the creative atmosphere and incentives to participate in the artistic activities appeared to motivate them towards higher achievement in their academic subjects. How had this important resource of effective pedagogy gone undetected for so long in the academic community? Why had no one devised a system to harness and channel this boundless creative energy into some sort of widely accepted educational strategy or methodology? It occurred to me in Philadelphia that this might eventually become part of my job description.

In 1985, while in the Florida Keys recuperating from a mild case of pneumonia, I met a man determined to create a musical about the true untold life of Mary Baker Eddy (founder of the Christian Science religion). He thought I should write the songs. I thought this was the worst idea I had ever heard. Then we had our first meeting. He was a retired lawyer with all the facts and figures one could possibly assemble concerning this controversial woman. Her long and turbulent life was a triumph of spirit and perseverance no matter how skeptical one was of her theology. Something in me resonated with the purpose and passion with which she lived. Soon I was writing a new musical with Hugh Key and his brother-in-law, Jerry Taylor, a Nashville songwriter and record producer.

Fully recuperated and back in New York City, I met a musician at the new

Romper Room recording sessions who had an unexpected effect on me. Her name was Martha Obrecht and she was from Iowa. On July 19, 1986 (about 10 months later), we were married on the front porch of her parents' home in Iowa City. Her father is Eldon Obrecht, a composer, music professor, and bass instructor at the University of Iowa. Her mother, Maxine, was a voice teacher and choir director. Martha and I lived for the next year in New York City, Sag Harbor, and Sugarloaf Key, Florida. I continued meeting with the Papermill Playhouse about developing three of my musicals: the Mary Baker Eddy musical, *MotherEddy* (Spangler, Taylor, & St. Germain, 1986), *Nefertiti* (Spangler & Gore, 1977), and *Play It By Heart* (Spangler & Robinson, 1979). We recorded fine demos of the new songs Jerry Taylor and I had written using Martha's rock band as the musicians. The arranger was Godfrey Nelson, also the leader of the band and the friend who had first introduced me to Martha.

Soon after settling into our rental house in Sugarloaf Key (17 miles from Key West), I got a call from Mrs. Rhea, a friend in Kansas who was now the Executive Director of the Salina Arts and Humanities Commission. Her organization and the Salina Public Schools were sponsoring an arts education program that commissioned a professional artist to compose an opera or musical that would involve the participation of interested students in area middle schools and high schools. Would I be interested? My challenge was to convince the local steering committee of the educational benefits of their students writing this large-scale musical theatre piece with my guidance, instead of me writing it for them. If they accepted the idea, this would be the first large-scale multischool Lovewell pilot program.

The proposal was accepted. I made several trips to Kansas including a final 5-week residency during which the massive production was actually staged and

performed. There were over 150 students participating in the writing and production of this show. It was an invaluable experience working with these young Kansas artists engaging in creative activities I only dreamed of when I was a teenager growing up in the same town. *Showdown at Haunted High* (Spangler & Students of Salina School District, 1987) opened on March 12, 1987, to unprecedented enthusiasm and community spirit. The Arts and Humanities Commission and the Salina School District realized that they had done something very important for their community even though they did not know quite how it had happened.

This 5-week residency was the last time I saw my mother. It seemed oddly appropriate that this was the last production of mine that she ever saw. She had struggled as a single mom in this same Kansas town to afford me every opportunity to realize my dreams in the arts. Her sacrifice had, in a very significant way, made this community arts project possible. She told me she loved the production. I was back in Salina just 2 months later for her funeral.