The Life Of Andrew Lloyd Webber And His The Phantom Of The Opera

It is believed that musical theatre started with the ancient Greeks about 2,500 years ago. The ancient Greeks staged comedies and tragedies that included music and dance in open-air amphitheaters. The first musical theater performance to come to America happened in 1735, this happened way before America was even technically a country. (Jenna Conan, par. 1 & 5) Andrew Lloyd Webber, a man who has created some of the most famous and recognizable broadway music of all time. From Cats and Evita to The Phantom of the Opera. While some people don't like his combination of Rock with Classical music he has brought us a lot of all time favorite musicals, we dive into what made him such an award-winning man. Although he is laying low now there is still a lot to come in the future.

Throughout his career he has collected numerous honors; including knighthood, one Oscar for best original song, one Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song, seven Tony Awards for best music, seven Olivier Awards, three Grammy Awards for best production, fourteen Ivor Novello Awards, was on the American Songwriters' Hall of Fame, won a Richard Rodgers Award for excellence in Musical Theatre, won a London Critics' Circle Award, a Kennedy Center Honor, two Emmy Awards, and an Evening Standard Award (andrewlloyedwebber.com, about section) Andrew has also formed the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation and his theater production company; it's one of the largest operating in London today. (Biography.com Editors, par. 1)

Before Andrew was an award winning man with fame he came from a musical family, he was born on March 22, 1948 in South Kensington. Andrew's father was the director of the London College of Music, his mother was a piano teacher and his younger brother Julian, is a renowned cellist. Andrew was a prodigy of sorts, he played the piano, violin at the age of three and the french horn, and began writing his own music at the age of six. (Biography.com Editors, par. 1) It was very evident from a young age that Andrew would go on to do great things in life, given all the potential he showed at such a young age. However at a young age Andrew's dream was to become Britain's chief inspector of ancient monuments. (Encyclopedia of World Biography, par. 2)

He went off to college to pursue those dreams, however other childhood pastimes of Andrew surfaced in his works and his approach to their staging. He had an ability to envision a fully-mounted production, this comes from the experience he had as an eleven year old working with his elaborate toy theatre that was built to scale. (Encyclopedia of World Biography par. 2) Webber's first musical was "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" in 1967. Andrew along with lyricist Tim Rice, produced this musical about the Old Testament story of joseph and his brothers. Two of Joseph's songs from the musical became big hit singles, "Any Dream Will Do" and "Close Every Door". (Pbs.org, par. 3)

Andrew went on to collaborate with Rice, their second work being called "Jesus Christ Superstar" in 1971. A stage version soon emerged of this, the story being of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as seen through the eyes of Pontius Pilate. This garnered seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical and Best Score. Mary Magdalen's song "I Don't Know How to Love

him” became a pop standard. (Pbs.org par. 4)

According to the New York Film Academy, Andrew Lloyd Webber the six top best musical that he has composed go as follows; Starting off with

Cats. This musical was based off of the book the Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats by T.S Elliot. The show itself is about a group of cats called the Jellicles, during the evening the cats introduce themselves hoping to be selected and be reborn to a new Jellicle life. The show opened in 1981 and is the fourth longest-running show in Broadway history (Jen Craine, par. 3)

Andrew’s second best musical composition goes to Evita. Evita is about Eva Peron (May 1919-July 1952) who was an Argentine political leader. The musical focuses on her life, rise to power, good deeds and her death. It opened at London's West End in 1978 and then on Broadway in 1979. Evita earned three Tony Awards. (Jen Craine, par. 4)

The third one goes to Sunset Blvd, it is based on 1950’s American Film noir. A story about Norma Desmond, who is a washed up silent screen star. She comes across a young screenwriter named Joe Gillis and sees him as an opportunity to make a come back in the movie world. The show opened in London in 1993, and on Broadway in 1994. (Jen Craine, par. 5)

Fourth is Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. As explained before this story is about Joseph and the “coat of many colors” from the book of Genesis in the Bible. This show contains little dialogue and is mostly sung. This musical later became a Tony-nominated, and later opened in 1982 on Broadway. (Jen Craine par. 6)

The fifth one is one we’ve already touched on which is Jesus Christ Superstar. This was the first musical that Webber and Rice produced for the stage. It was very unique because it featured pop music in a classical form. The show was condemned by some religious groups for how it depicted the characters. From this musical Webber was awarded Most Promising Composer for this production by the Drama Desk in 1972. (Jen Craine par. 7)

Last but not least is my absolute favorite, the Phantom of the Opera. The Phantom of the Opera is the longest running show in Broadway history. (Jen Craine par. 8) It’s based on the novel Le Fantome de l’Opera by Gaston Leroux. According to Broadway World, the Phantom of the Opera is about the story of a masked figure who lurks beneath the catacombs of the Paris Opera House, exercising a reign of terror over all who inhabit it. He falls madly in love with an innocent young soprano, Christine. He devotes himself to creating a new star by nurturing her extraordinary talents by employing all of the devious methods at his command. (BWW News Desk, par. 5) Thanks to the Phantom of the Opera Webber has earned multiple awards and honors including an Oscar, Tony’s, Olivier’s, a Kennedy Center Honors Awards, and he was knighted in 1992. (Jen Craine, par. 8)

However even though Andrew has won numerous awards he has a reputation of the guy who dragged the Broadway musical from its vitality and idiomatic urgency back to its melodramatic roots in European operetta while also degrading rock music to a mere rhythm track. A lot of people

back in the day just couldn’t understand why he would mix classical music with rock music it

seemed a little off to them. So they were left with the question if Andrew Lloyd Webber ruined the musical or rescue it. From a young age Andrew loved to listen to Elvis in particular “Jailhouse Rock”, but aside from having a love for rock and roll he was very fond of Englishness. His dad was a very famous composer out in London, because of the connection in his family he got a unique attitude embedded in him. He always believed that old things could be nice things. (Adam Gopnik, par. 6)

Whether you believe that his combination of rock and classical music worked or didn’t work it is definitely something that will go down in history as something unique and interesting. As Andrew Lloyd Webber was approaching his 70th birthday the thing he wanted the most was to know that he has found another subject, all he wanted to know was that he was writing (Mark Kennedy, par. 3) Now 71 years old he is still very active in the theatre and musical world. He currently is working on a modern Cinderella Musical. He is collaborating with Tom MacRae and Emerald Fennell. (Andrew Gans, playbill)

As Webber reflects on his career he shares a little bit of insight with us some struggles he faced with each one of his productions as well as good things that have come his way. Webber admits that the most difficult show to write was Evita, he recalls that he had a difficult time connecting with the characters that was so morally bankrupt but in the end he went along with it and he later on went and wrote the Phantom of the Opera as an antidote of the toxicity of Argentine politics. Lastly his best advice for an aspiring musical theatre writer is to put your work up. He says that it doesn’t matter where it is set, his first-ever staging of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat was at a school, at three o’clock on a Friday afternoon. Just put your work up there and you’ll be fine. (Ruthie Fierberg, Playbill)