Background Information on the Creators of Hair

JAMES RADO, (1932-Present) Book and Lyrics
Rado was born in 1932. He pursued an acting career that brought him to New York in the 1960’s where he originated the role of Richard Lionheart on Broadway in James Goldman’s play The Lion in Winter. He met Hair co-creator Ragni when both were cast in the off-Broadway production of Hang Your Head Down and Die. He not only created Hair but also starred in the original Broadway cast as Claude, opposite Ragni’s Berger. He went on to originate the role for the Los Angeles run. He subsequently served as Hair’s director for the national tour.

GEROME RAGNI, (1935-1991) Book and Lyrics
Ragni was born in Pennsylvania in 1935. He attended Georgetown University and began pursuing acting in the Washington D.C area. He met Rado when he was cast in the off-Broadway production of Hang Your Head Down and Die.

GALT MACDERMOT, (1928-Present) Composer
MacDermot was born in Quebec, Canada. He started studying piano and composition in his early childhood. His academic career lead him to Upper Canada College as well as the Bishop’s University in Quebec. He also studied music in South Africa where his father was employed as High Commissioner to the Canadian Government. He was introduced to Ragni and Rado through a prominent jazz critic who learned of his interest in composing for musical theatre. MacDermot composed Hair’s entire score in just three weeks.

The Age of Aquarius: The Time Period of Hair
Hair takes place in the late 1960’s during the Vietnam War. According to www.vietNMwar.com:

“The Vietnam War was the longest military conflict in U.S. history. The hostilities in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia claimed the lives of more than 58,000 Americans. Another 304,000 were wounded. The Vietnam War was a military struggle fought in Vietnam from 1959 to 1975, involving the North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front (NLF) in conflict with United States forces and the South Vietnamese army. From 1946 until 1954, the Vietnamese had struggled for their independence from France during the First Indochina War. At the end of this war, the country was temporarily divided into North and South Vietnam. North Vietnam came under the control of the Vietnamese Communists who had opposed France and who aimed for a unified Vietnam under Communist rule. The South was controlled by Vietnamese who had collaborated with the French. In 1965 the United States sent in troops to prevent the South Vietnamese government from collapsing. Ultimately, however, the United States failed to
achieve its goal, and in 1975 Vietnam was reunified under Communist control; in 1976 it officially became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. During the conflict, approximately 3 to 4 million Vietnamese on both sides were killed, in addition to another 1.5 to 2 million Lao and Cambodians who were drawn into the war.”

The time period was defined by those who were for the war and fought in it, and those who opposed it passionately and vehemently. In 1985 Richard Nixon said on the Vietnam War, “No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It was misreported then, and it is misremembered now.”

The hippie movement started as a youth subculture originating in the early 1960’s. The term “hippie” is derived from the term “hipster”, a common word used to describe the youth subculture of San Francisco, California, particularly Haight-Ashbury district. The hippies created a youth community revolving around psychedelic rock, psychedelic drugs, and sex to explore higher states of experiential awareness. This enclave of like-minded youth also embraced the essence of peace and vehemently protested the war in Vietnam.

The first protest march against the war in Vietnam was held in the form of a march on Washington in December of 1964. Americans against the war were particularly opposed to the use of chemical warfare such as napalm and Agent Orange.

*Hair* Production History

*Hair* opened on Broadway on April 29th, 1968 at the Biltmore Theatre. It opened to splendid reviews by theatre critics, one such critic, Clive Barnes, of the New York Times states, “What is so likable about *Hair*, that tribal rock musical that last night completed its trek from downtown, via a discotheque, and landed, positively panting with love and smelling of sweat and flowers, at the Biltmore Theater? I think it is simply that it is so likable. So new, so fresh, and so unassuming, even in its pretensions.” Six months later a production opened in Los Angeles at the appropriately named Aquarius Theatre. *Hair* opened on London’s West End at the Shaftsbury Theatre in September of the same year. *Hair* closed on Broadway on July 1, 1972, after 1,750 performances. The original Broadway production was nominated for two Tony Award, one for Best Direction of a Musical, and one for Best Musical. The production won the Drama Desk Award for Best Music, composed by Galt MacDermot. Many productions of *Hair* have been produced recently. *Hair* returned to the West Coast in Los Angeles in 2001 by the Reprise! Theatre Company, starring Sam Harris and Steven Weber. The Actors Fund in New York City staged a production as a benefit for one night only at the New Amsterdam Theatre. Most recently the Public Theatre in New York has staged a production that opened on July 22nd, 2008. The limited run had been extended three times before closing on September 14th, 2008. In an article in *Time* Magazine regarding the Public Theatre’s production, Richard Zoglin states, "*Hair* has not just been revived; it has been reinvigorated and reclaimed as one of the great milestones in musical-theatre history.... Today *Hair* seems, if anything, more daring than ever."
Themes
The most important theme for audiences to understand in Hair is the theme of the empowerment of youth. Hair encapsulates an era fueled by the unbridled energy, passion and love of a generation coming together to unite in peace. The subtitle, “Tribal Love-Rock Musical” indicates the themes as well. The theme of tribal community coming together for peace and the theme of love against war and hate suggest where we, as Americans, should be at this time.

Why is Hair Still Important to See Now?
Hair was an important piece of theatre when it was first produced, and it remains an important piece of theatre today. Not only is it considered as one of the first rock musicals, it is also considered one of the first concept musicals. Both of these traits are important to musical theatre history. Hair became the pioneer of a new genre of musical theatre that reached out to a younger generation of theatre-goers. Its music alone gave musical theatre a breath of new life and brought in an audience that otherwise might not have gone to the theatre. Music aside, what makes Hair timeless is its raw passion and energy. It was formed out of the love and passion its creators had for their country and their need to bring a message of peace to an audience harrowed by a hopeless war. Hair took the turmoil and passion of the ‘60’s and put it on stage to mirror its belief in youthful empowerment to its audiences. Hair is important at this moment because America is again in an “unpopular war.” There are no flower children now. There are few peace rallies. If the anger of the youth of today is ever-present, perhaps this show will incite its audiences to have a voice, to believe in that voice, and take an active part in the politics and the world around them.

Interview with Director Joanne Gordon

Describe the relevance of your first experience with Hair and why it is important still today.

It is the fortieth anniversary of the Broadway production of Hair and there is an important time sequence involved. The year 1968 was an extraordinary in terms of my life in South Africa and here in America, a year filled with turmoil. It was a year filled with an enormous kind of empowerment of youth. To a large extent over the forty years between 1968 and 2008 I think there has been a diminishment of that sense of empowerment. And so for me, the brackets of ’68 and ’08 are very important on a number of levels. They are important because at both times we were involved in very unpopular wars. They’re important because young people between eighteen and thirty are dying in an unpopular war. At the center of this production is a quotation, “How do you ask someone to be the last American soldier to die for a mistake?” That’s John Kerry in 1971. And the fact is that we haven’t learned anything. If theatre has any function it is to remind us of our mistakes so that we don’t keep repeating them. Hair has been iconic for those of us who were young in the 60s. I was in the middle of my college career in ’67 and the war broke out in Israel and I threw up college and went to work on a
Kibbutz for six months. For me that period of history was a period in which we were activists, activists in all kinds of ways. Whether you were against apartheid in South Africa, struggling with the identity of Israel, whether you were anti the Vietnam War. In Paris where the students took to the streets. It was a time of incredible turmoil. With this particular election (*Hair* opens a month before the election), I think that it is absolutely critical that the young people of this country take the power. They have to take the power because if not…

We begin our production of *Hair* with a projection of the names of the children who died in Vietnam, and I call them children because to me they are, and we end the production with names of the children who are dying in Iraq. That’s the reality. In between we dip into the “Age of Aquarius”, an era filled with youth, power, with love, innocence, with hope, with naïveté. Whether the play is set in 1968 or 2008 the longing for those kinds of values is timeless.

*How will your production of Hair, which opens a month before the presidential election, make young people want to have an opinion in the political future of America?*

The result of not taking a stand is in the subtext of the show.

*Why, in lieu of the younger generation’s parallel to that of the generation growing up in the 1960’s, has there not been another uprising like that of Hair?*

I grew up in an evil society, a repressed society; we defined ourselves as artists by opposing that society. I haven’t stopped doing that. I feel as much political fervor now as I did when I was eighteen. I’ve got forty-two kids in my cast who are imbued with passion, individual useful passion through doing this show.

*If theatre holds the mirror to society, how are the characters in this show related to the generation of today?*

One of the things that is either a liability or an asset in *Hair* is that unlike Shakespearian characters, these characters aren’t really complex and three dimensional. They come out of creative egos and libidos. The narrative structure in *Hair* is very simple: Claude is called up. Will he go to war? Yes, he does. And he dies. It is very simple. The characters are simple and the narrative is simple. *Hair* is not about character and narrative, it is about engendering the sense of joy. Youthful joy and passion.

*Hair represents a very clear voice of the era in which it was written. How, conceptually, do you plan to convey its timelessness to your audiences?*
By stating very clearly these are the students of Cal State Long Beach here and now performing *Hair* in the Studio Theatre, having no pretense that it is set in the sixties. They know it’s in the sixties the music tells you, the vocabulary tells. We are students of CSULB doing *Hair*.

*Galt MacDermot studied music in South Africa for some time, which is your homeland, do you hear any of those influences in his composition of his score?*

It is a very rhythmic piece. When we first heard *Hair* in the 1968 we thought it was a rock musical. Now when we hear *Hair* it is almost like easy listening. And in fact many of the songs have become standards of the easy listening repertoire. It isn’t like the aggressiveness of atonal music. It is very melodic. It is very specific to its time.

*Some material in this musical can be considered offensive. How are you handling the projection of this material on a general audience?*

That’s their problem, not mine. I consider cruelty offensive. I consider murder offensive. If I were to be filming many of the contemporary films that splatter blood all over the place and show contempt for human life, I would have some kind of moral issue. I have no issue with colorful language and people taking their clothes off.

*You tend to choose pieces of musical theatre that invite the audience to think. How will your production of Hair make your audience think?*

When they built the Vietnam memorial there was a lot of criticism because it wasn’t grand enough, and it was designed by an Asian woman. When people go to the memorial now it is the most compelling testament to those who died. I think that the reference to those names and other images, the number of those who died that reoccurs with those who died in Iraq, you can’t help but provoke questions.

*You said at the first rehearsal that the most important part of this show is the tribe. Can you elaborate on that?*

*Hair* isn’t a piece about narrative, and it isn’t a piece about character. It is a piece about a group of people sharing, caring, and exploding with hope and joy contained within the reference of where that hope and joy went.

*Why is it important for young audiences to see this show at this time?*

Because they must vote.
Prompts

1) One of the themes of Hair is the empowerment of youth. Write an organized and thoughtful essay on how Hair demonstrates this theme, and whether or not you feel that youth today is as empowered. Use examples from history, media, etc, to back up your statements.

2) Hair was first produced forty years ago. Describe in detail the similarities and differences between the impact Hair had on society in 1968, and whether or not it still has the same impact on audiences forty years later.

3) Hair is told through a series of vignettes and musical numbers that all have a point and move the plot of the musical forward. In an organized essay please discuss why you thought the story line was done this certain way, and whether or not you thought it was effective for this piece.

Discussion Questions

1) Hair promotes a societal return to tribal living. How is this depicted in the musical? What purpose does tribal living serve in regards to Hair’s theme of pacifism?

2) What is the more “American” thing to do, burn your draft card or go to war?

3) Do the youth of 2008, coping with the war in Iraq, parallel the lives of those in Hair, 1968, coping with the Vietnam War? Has there been a response in the arts by contemporary youth to the present situation?

Glossary

Abie: Abraham Lincoln, president of the United States during the Civil War.

Acid: A hallucinogenic drug that creates a euphoric state of being.

A&P: A super market chain.

APC: An armored vehicle used to transport military personnel.

Aquarius: The eleventh astrological sign of the Zodiac. The constellation of the same name represents the water bearer.

Benzedrine: An amphetamine inhaled and used as an upper creating a stimulated and euphoric effect. One of the first stimulants used for recreational purposes as opposed to medicinal purposes.
BLT: A bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich.

Burton-Taylor: A studio theatre at the Oxford Playhouse at Oxford University ran by the student artists. Also, a reference to Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency, a branch of federal bureau installed to oversee intelligence and counterintelligence activities outside the United States.

Cocaine: A bitter crystalline powder derived from the coca plant used as a stimulant drug to recreationally produce a euphoric feeling.

Colored spade: An offensive term for a person of African American descent.

Constellation: An arrangement of the stars.

Cunnilingus: The act of stimulating a woman’s vulva with one’s tongue. From the Latin, Cunnus, meaning vulva, and lingere, meaning tongue.

Derisions: Use of ridicule or scorn to show contempt.

Dexedrine: A stimulant drug, used recreationally.

DMT: Acronym for dimethyltryptamine, a hallucinogenic drug.

Draft Card: Request to enroll in the military.

Emancipation Proclamation: An ordinance declared in 1862 bringing an end to slavery in the United States of America. Part of the proclamation states, "all persons held as slaves within any States, or designated part of the State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

Evolving: To undergo change.

FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation. A bureau under the U.S Department of Justice that investigates and handles issues revolving around national security, interstate crime and crimes against the government.

Fellatio: Oral stimulation of the penis.

Flaxen: Pale yellow or gray.

Grass: A term for the hallucinogenic drug marijuana.

Groovy: Akin to the popular usage of “cool.”
Hashish: The resin produced from female hemp plants that is either smoked or ingested to promote an intoxicating effect.

Heroin: An addicting narcotic used for its euphoric effects.

Jungle Bunny: An offensive term for a person of African American descent.

Kama Sutra: An Indian text on human sexual behavior.


LSD: A hallucinogenic drug used to induce extreme sensory distortion.

Lincoln: Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States during the Civil War who ended slavery in the U.S with the Emancipation Proclamation.

Lucifer: Satan’s archangelic state before his fall to hell.

Masturbation: Erotic stimulation of one’s own sexual organs.

Methedrine: Methamphetamine, a drug abused as a stimulant.

Mirth: Happiness or enjoyment.

Napalm: A highly flammable jelly produced by mixing a thickening agent with gasoline used in flamethrowers and firebombs.

Opium: An addictive narcotic drug derived from the poppy.

Orgy: A sexual encounter involving many people.

Paragon: The best example of a certain object.

Pederasty: One who engages in anal intercourse with a young boy.

Peyote: A hallucinogenic drug from the cactus flower used to induce a euphoric state used by Native Americans in religious ceremonies.

Polacks: People of Polish descent, an offensive term.

Psychedelic: Relating to the dream-like state induced by LSD.

Reincarnated: To come back to life from being dead.
Revelation: An act of revealing or communicating divine truth.

Seventh House: An astrological reference to the moon’s location in the sky.

Sex: The act of being physically male or female, or having male or female anatomy. Also, the act of penetration of a vagina by a penis.

Sodomy: anal or oral copulation with a member of the same or opposite sex; also copulation with an animal

STP: A hallucinogenic drug.

Timothy Leary: An advocate for psychedelic drug research.

Uncle Tom: A slang term for an African American man who is servile to a Caucasian man, based on a character from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Life Among the Lowly.

Urchin: A youngster of markedly poor social status.

Virgin: A person who has not engaged in sexual intercourse.

Youse: Used to address more than one person, slang for the plural of you.

www.miriamwebster.com

Rado, James, www.hairthemusical.com

www.urbandictionary.com

www.vietnamwar.com