

CONTENTS

The Play
Meet the Creative Team
A New Version of the Musical
Swings on Stage
Based on a True Story
Writing Checks
Flying in the 1960s
Three Big Questions
Resources

THE PLAY

Frank Abagnale Jr. is a pilot, a doctor and a lawyer.

Or he is a liar and con man on the run from the FBI.

Just when **Agent Carl Hanratty** is about to catch him, Frank Jr. stops the action and demands to tell his story. He's going to make it a big 1960s television spectacular, live and in living color.

Through big song and dance numbers in a world that feels like a game show, we see Frank run away from home at 17 and start writing bad checks and fooling everyone he meets.

But how long can Frank run? And what is he running from?



CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

BASED ON THE DREAMWORKS MOTION PICTURE
BOOK BY **TERRENCE MCNALLY** | MUSIC BY **MARC SHAIMAN**
LYRICS BY **SCOTT WITTMAN** AND **MARC SHAIMAN**
DIRECTED BY **MOLLY SMITH** | CHOREOGRAPHED BY **PARKER ESSE**
MUSIC DIRECTION BY **LAURA BERGQUIST**
FICHANDLER STAGE | **MARCH 4 – APRIL 17, 2022**

“I want to tell my story as it really happened: a TV special to end all TV specials. My story’s way too big for the 6 o’clock news.”

— Frank Abagnale Jr., *Catch Me If You Can*

The music of *Catch Me If You Can* is generously sponsored by **Michele Toth** and **William Caldwell**.

Supporting Sponsorship for *Catch Me If You Can* is generously provided by **CLARK**, **Catherine and Chris Guttman-McCabe** and **Sheila Stampfli**.
Choreography is sponsored by **Virginia McGehee Friend**.

Arena Stage's community engagement efforts are generously sponsored by **Denie and Frank Weil**; **The Estate of Ms. Toni A. Ritzenberg**; **AT&T**; **Joanne Barker**; **Catherine and Chris Guttman-McCabe**; **Hattie M. Strong Foundation**; **Robert and Natalie Mandel Family Foundation**; **Floyd E. Davis Family Foundation**; **Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.**; **Alice Shaver Foundation**; **Theatre Forward**; **Collins Aerospace**; **England Family Foundation**; **Friends of Southwest D.C.**; **GEICO**; **JBG Smith**; **Wayne and Susan Jonas**; **Foley & Lardner LLP**; **Weissberg Foundation**; **Jean Schiro-Zavela and Vance Zavela**; **Actors' Equity Foundation**; and **Youth Activities Task Force (YATF) of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, Inc.**

MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM

COMPOSER AND CO-LYRICISTS: MARC SHAIMAN AND SCOTT WITTMAN

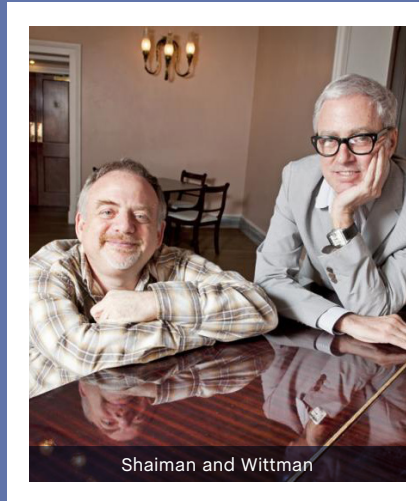
Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman met at a piano bar in Greenwich Village over 40 years ago. Shaiman was 16 and visiting New York City. He started to play the bar's piano. Wittman's theater group next door needed a pianist. The two were introduced and became a team, making performances in the basement of a Polish church, a space called Club 57.

When working on a musical, movie or TV show together, they co-write the lyrics (words), and Shaiman composes the music.

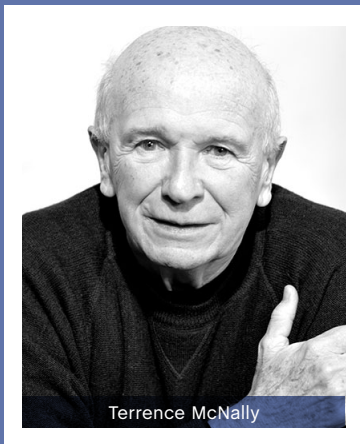
Their first original collaboration was a musical about Ken and Barbie called *Livin' Dolls*. Mattel, the maker of Barbie dolls, told the pair that "Barbie and Ken don't sing," and a bigger production of the show was canceled.

Together they have written the music and lyrics for *Hairspray*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Mary Poppins Returns* and the NBC show *Smash*, among others. They also wrote the song "Save This City" for Episode 1 of the Marvel TV show *Hawkeye*.

As a duo, they have received Tony and Grammy Awards for *Hairspray* and have been nominated for Oscar, Tony, Grammy, Golden Globe and Emmy Awards. Mattel has since asked them about that Ken and Barbie musical.



Shaiman and Wittman



Terrence McNally

LIBRETTIST: TERRENCE MCNALLY

"Theater changes hearts, that secret place where we all truly live. The world needs artists more than ever to remind us what truth and beauty and kindness really are."

Terrence McNally is the librettist for *Catch Me If You Can*. This means he wrote the text or "book" of the show. The Arena Stage production features a different book than the Broadway musical, one that McNally wrote that was never produced.

McNally's love of theater, opera and writing started early. "I had a wonderful high school English teacher, Mrs. McElroy," he said, "who loved theater, made me and a few others really appreciate the English language and the use of it, and she really got us into Shakespeare."

He attended Columbia University in New York City. On his first night in New York, he camped out overnight to buy theater tickets.

He went on to become one of the most produced playwrights in the U.S. He won Tony Awards for two musical librettos, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *Ragtime* and Tony Awards for two of his plays, *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and *Master Class*.

Other works include *Lips Together, Teeth Apart; The Full Monty; Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* and the musical adaptation of *Anastasia*.

Many of McNally's plays center on gay characters, and he was open about his sexuality at a time when many artists were not.

He died in 2020 at age 81 due to complications of COVID-19.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S NOTEBOOK



MOLLY SMITH

Molly Smith is the artistic director (the leader) of Arena Stage. Among her favorite shows to direct are big American musicals.

"This is a moment when I think we can bring a tremendous amount of joy and light and pleasure into our lives and the lives of our audience members. The beating heart of the story is the relationship between fathers and sons, both biographical and created."



Photo of Christian Thompson as Frank Jr. for *Catch Me If You Can* by Tony Powell.

A NEW VERSION OF THE MUSICAL

Usually, after a musical premieres on Broadway, the show is done. Every production must perform the script and songs exactly as written. No one can change a word. Arena Stage's production of *Catch Me If You Can* is unique because it features changes to the script and songs.

When the Arena Stage team started working on the show, they noticed a pattern: a character would explain what was about to happen, then the audience would see it. What if the audience could experience the story instead of being told? The team also saw potential in focusing on the theme of fathers and sons.

Molly Smith, the director, contacted the show's creators (see page 2) to see if they were interested in a new vision for the musical.

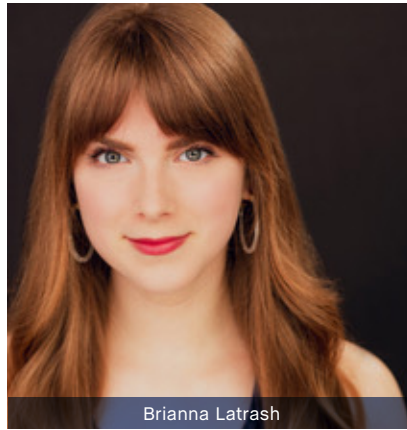
"I could hear the penny drop when I talked about the beating heart of the production as father and son relationships, both biological and created," Smith said. "It was clear that they were open and willing to look at potential changes."

The original creators agreed that cutting and reordering lines was fine, but no new lines could be written. Terrence McNally, the librettist, had died, so his husband, who manages his affairs, also had to approve the process. He shared a version of the script that had never been performed. Using this script, the Arena Stage team reshaped the musical. They eliminated a character, cut three songs and re-instated two songs, "Fifty Checks" and "Here I Am to Save the Day," which were not in the Broadway version. In all, they cut about 25 percent of the show. This involved significant changes to the music, especially the instrumental music that underscores (plays under) scenes and the transitions from one song to another. This huge undertaking was done by Laura Bergquist, the music director, and her team, Bill Yanesh and Leigh Delano.

Now, eleven years after it was on Broadway, audiences will see a new *Catch Me If You Can*.

SWINGS ON STAGE

"The show must go on" is a famous theater saying. What happens when an actor cannot perform? Performers called "swings" can step in. Brianna Latrash and Bryan Charles Moore are two of the swings for *Catch Me If You Can*.



Brianna Latrash

Q: What does a swing do?

Brianna: A swing is hired to understudy (or "cover") some or many different roles in a show. In *Catch Me If You Can*, I cover all the female ensemble and Carole Strong, which means I have to know what they all do at every moment of the show! I have to learn the soprano 1 line, the soprano 2 line, the alto line, any speaking lines the characters have, where they stand and what their dance moves are, what props they use, where they enter/exit, etc. It's crazy!

Q: What is exciting about being a swing?

Bryan: There is the potential of going on for any person at any moment. You could get notice days or even weeks in advance that someone is going to be out of the show for a performance, or you could be told hours before the show or even during the show itself.

Brianna: You get to learn the show in a way most people don't have to. It's also a rewarding job because you know that at the end of the day, you help "the show go on."

Q: What is challenging?

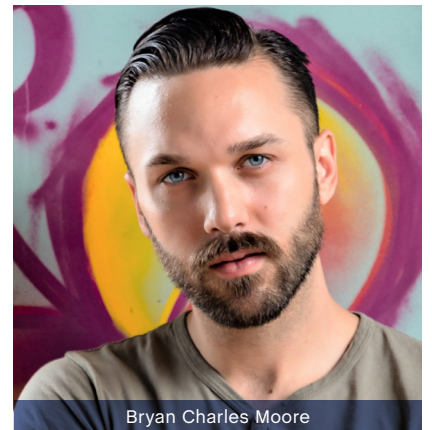
Brianna: Remembering everything and trusting that you know it! You can only prepare so much in a rehearsal room, because most of your job is done by watching and observing. This job is great for organized people.

Bryan: Remembering who you are when you're on stage, especially when you have five or more actors to cover, who all have similar but different blocking, lines, and especially with *Catch Me If You Can* — vocal parts. If you lose focus, it's easy to accidentally do something, say something or be somewhere you're not supposed to. Thankfully, everyone is incredibly supportive and kindly help us get back on track if that ever happens.

Q: Do you ever get scared/nervous?

Brianna: Always! But we have an amazing cast and crew that is full of smiles, support and guidance. That's what makes the job so special.

Bryan: Absolutely, but that's part of the fun. The times we grow the most are when we leave our comfort zones and try something that scares us. Sometimes you fail, but that's how you learn. And when you succeed, it's like magic.



Bryan Charles Moore

Swings and understudies have always been critical to productions. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic in particular they have made live theater possible. Shiloh Orr and Gillian Bozajian are also swings for the production.



Frank Abagnale Jr.

WRITING CHECKS

Checks are a way for people to pay for goods and services without exchanging money.

A check is a written authorization for the check writer's bank to transfer money to a payee's bank. When Frank Jr. writes a check for a hotel, the payee is the hotel. When an employer pays an employee, the payee is the employee. It is like an IOU.

After it is written, a check must travel from the payee's bank to the writer's bank. Today, this happens electronically, but in the 1960s, paper checks had to physically travel between banks. After receiving a check, the writer's bank determines that the check and signature are authentic and that the writer has enough money in their bank account. They authorize the money to be released from the writer's account and given to the payee's bank. Only then does the payee get their money.

If the check writer doesn't have sufficient funds in their account or the account is fake, this bad check "bounces" and is returned to the payee's bank without money. The payee does not get paid.

In the 1960s, some businesses only accepted checks from people who lived locally, so the check's authenticity could be verified quickly. Some banks would not cash checks from other banks. In the musical, Frank Jr. notices that a pilot was able to get around these rules because he was in uniform, and pilots were respected.

If someone does not realize their account balance is low and mistakenly writes a bad check, they are charged a fee. However, purposefully passing bad checks or using checks from non-existent accounts is fraud and illegal. This is why Frank Jr. is pursued by the FBI.



Checks typically have the writer's name, address, bank and account number written on them. The writer also signs the check, so their signature can also be used to prove or disprove authenticity.

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

Catch Me If You Can is based on a movie about the true story of Frank Abagnale Jr., who allegedly forged \$2.5 million in checks and posed as a pilot, doctor and lawyer — all before he was 22. The FBI agent in the musical, Carl Hanratty, is a composite of a few agents, but he most resembles Agent Joseph Shea. Shea caught Abagnale and shortened his prison sentence by arranging for Abagnale to teach FBI agents how to recognize fraud.



A costume rendering (drawing) for a Pan Am flight attendant by Costume Designer Alejo Vietti. The Arena Stage costume shop artisans will use this drawing to create costumes for the show.

FLYING IN THE 1960s: A GOLDEN AGE OF TRAVEL

Frank Abagnale Jr. impersonates a co-pilot to be part of the glamorous world of air travel in the 1960s. Dressed as a Pan Am pilot, he can travel the world and, because pilots commanded respect, more easily use his bogus checks.

Pan Am — or Pan American Airways — was the main international airline in the 1960s. The Beatles chose Pan Am for their first trip to the United States. Pan Am pilots wore double-breasted navy-blue jackets and hats that resembled military pilot uniforms because its first pilots were indeed naval officers.

Flying in the 1960s was expensive and a special occasion for which passengers dressed up. Men would wear suits and women might wear gloves. Smoking was allowed on board. Stewardesses would

pour wine from the bottle and dish up individual meals on real plates.

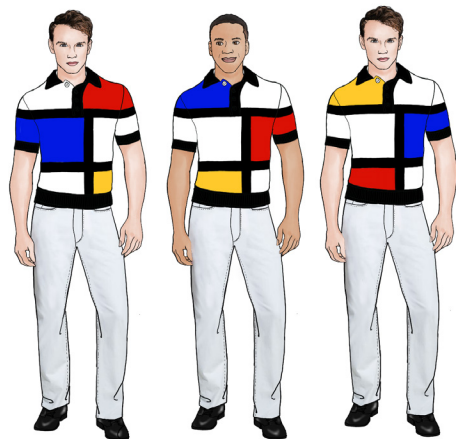
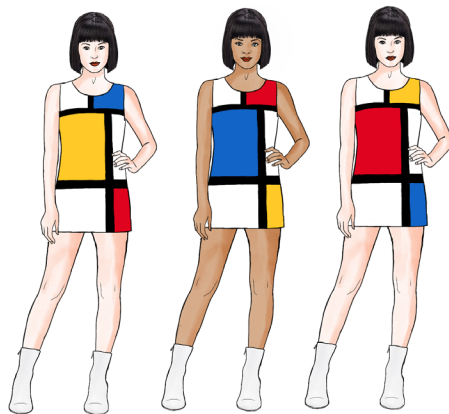
These stewardesses — today called flight attendants — had to adhere to strict guidelines for appearance, height and weight. Only women were stewardesses. Pan Am's stewardesses had to be young, unmarried and college educated, with symmetrical features and clear skin. They wore chic uniforms and had an almost celebrity appeal.

A former stewardess told *Vanity Fair*, "People admired us when we walked through the terminal. I remember our uniforms — they were all custom-fitted. They were just sculpted to your body, so everybody looked fabulous."

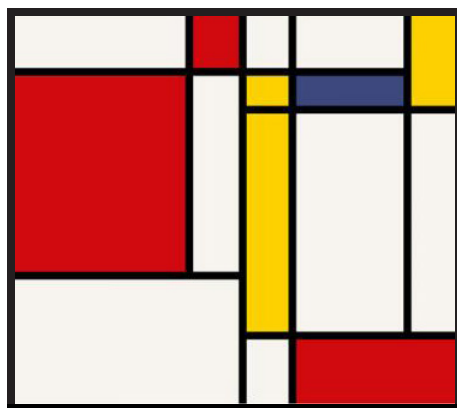
Both at airports and in the air, security was not as strict as it is today. Passengers did not have to show ID, but there was an X-ray machine for luggage. Family members could go all the way to the gate to meet or say goodbye to their loved ones. Children on flights were invited to the cockpit to meet the pilot and see the controls.

ART INSPIRES ART

In 1965, the famous French fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent wanted to create a modern look for women. Inspired by Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, Saint Laurent designed cocktail dresses featuring dark lines, bright colors and a simple, short modern silhouette (shape). The costumes for “Live In Living Color” are a tribute to this iconic 1960s fashion collection.



Rendering by Costume Designer Alejo Vietti.



Composition with Yellow, Red, Black, Blue, and Gray painted by Piet Mondrian.

“LIVE IN LIVING COLOR”

In the 1960s some television shows were still in black and white while others were in color. Beginning in 1957 and throughout the 1960s, every NBC-TV show in color started with a

voiceover saying, “The following program is brought to you in living color on NBC.” When Frank Jr. tells the story of his life in the musical, we are seeing his TV show version of it. The “living color” lets us know we will see it in the flashiest 1960s style. The question is, like a TV show, how much should we believe?



ACTIVITY

We try and avoid spoilers in the study guide. But how much of the story in the musical is true? Using credible sources, as a class, research Frank Abagnale Jr.’s story and compare your findings to the events in the musical.



WHY ARE THEY SINGING?

Not everyone breaks into song and dance in real life. Why do they do it in musicals? Traditionally, the musical theater form follows this trajectory: if a character cannot express themselves through words, they sing. If the emotion becomes too great for singing, then they dance.

DEADHEADING

How did Frank Jr. fly for free? He traveled as a “deadhead.” A deadhead is an airline employee flying for free in order to get home or to their next assignment. Sometimes they are in uniform, but they are not part of the flight’s working crew.

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

**Why is the truth
important?**

2

**How do musicals
uniquely tell stories?**

3

**What impact do parents
have on their children?**

RESOURCES

Dramatics.org. "You Can't Stop the Beat." Accessed January 7, 2022. <https://dramatics.org/you-cant-stop-the-beat/>

Howe, Caroline. "How Pan Am Stewardesses Became the 'Playgirls' of the Air" *Daily Mail*. March 2, 2021. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9286971/How-Pan-stewardesses-playgirls-air.html>

Investopedia. "Bad Check." Accessed January 18, 2022. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/bad-check.asp>

Kennedy, Mark. "Multiple Tony-winning playwright Terrence McNally dies at 81." *AP News*. March 26, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/sarasota-movies-obituaries-ct-state-wire-virus-outbreak-c922f464b78cde81e0780346ca10b167>

Leach, Naomi. "What It was Really Like Flying in the 1960s and 70s?" *The Daily Mail*. January 9, 2017. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-4101602/Glamorous-flight-attendants-relaxed-security-reeked-smoke-planes-noisy-hell-REALLY-like-flying-1960s-70s.html

Maynard, Micheline. "When Pilots Were Stars and Airlines Glamorous." *The New York Times*. February 2, 2002. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/02/movies/film-when-pilots-were-stars-and-airlines-glamorous.html>

Musee YSL Paris. "The Mondrian Revolution." Accessed January 18, 2022. <https://museeyslparis.com/en/stories/la-revolution-mondrian>

PaymentsJournal.com. "A Short Amazing History of Checks in the USA." Accessed January 18, 2022. <https://www.paymentsjournal.com/a-short-amazing-history-of-checks-in-the-usa/>

Playbill.com "A Fictional Captain America Musical..." Accessed January 7, 2022 <https://www.playbill.com/article/a-fictional-captain-america-musical-marc-shaiman-and-scott-wittman-wrote-the-music>

"Relive the Glamour and Glory of Flying During the Swinging 1960s." *USA Today*. February 5, 2016. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/roadwarriorvoices/2016/02/05/relive-the-glamour-and-glory-of-flying-during-the-swinging-1960s/83307840/>

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the seat indicated on your ticket. Ushers are there to help you!
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end! During a musical, audiences sometimes clap after a song or dance. If you love the show or a performer, you can give a standing ovation. The actors bow to thank you.



the mead center
for american theater

1101 Sixth Street SW
Washington, DC 20024

Phone: 202-554-9066
Fax: 202-488-4056

Written by Rebecca Campana
Visit www.arenastage.org for more
information on Arena Stage productions
and educational opportunities.