



## **Boston**

***September – November, 1999***

Hedwig and the Angry Inch closed on a Sunday. My role as Production Stage Manager of the first national tour of this wildly successful off-Broadway cult musical came to an abrupt and unceremoniously end.

When I was originally hired for Hedwig, the Producers had anticipated a long life for the show. Six months in Boston, followed by six months in San Francisco, three months in Los Angeles – I expect to be tied up for approximately two years.

The Boston run ended on Sunday, November 7, 1999. Only eight weeks after opening. A total financial loss to the Producers.

The only one who cheered the closing was my Aunt Sharon. To this day, she fails to see the magic (or need to produce) Hedwig onstage.



*Rosemary Harris and Lauren Bacall  
One of these women I LOVED.  
One of these women I LOATHED.*

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***November 1999***

Monday, November 8<sup>th</sup> I received a phone call from my now former boss at Broadway In Boston. A Noel Coward play “Waiting in The Wings” was set to begin its world premiere at the Colonial Theatre this month, was I available?

Short answer, yes. I had nothing but available time on my hands. I had carved out “at least two years” for Hedwig Schmidt.

I think they (Broadway In Boston) felt a tinge of guilt for the quick demise of Hedwig and this new assignment was a peace offering. I’ve been in the business long enough to fully understand that there are hits, there are flops, some shows run, show shows close. The risk is real. There are no guarantees. Broadway In Boston owed me nothing, but I would happily accept.

A View From The Wings

It was explained to me during the phone call, that I was to be on hand to “take care” of the director and his wife. Michael Langham was the director. His wife Helen Burns would be joining him for the Boston technical rehearsals and tryout.

Michael, a dear sweet respected British director was eighty-years old when he directed *Waiting in The Wings*. He was well respected amongst his colleagues. A proper British gentleman, he enlisted in the British Army in 1939. Michael spent five years as a prisoner of war before transitioning into the world of the theatre. He worked in the UK, Canada and the United States. He was the artistic director of Stratford Festival, The Guthrie Theatre and even served ten years as the director of the Julliard school. He was lovely to me.

Helen was his devoted spouse. An award-winning actress, she had an amazing career on the British stage, Broadway, films and in television successfully playing comedic roles. She was lovely to me.

Taking care of Michael and Helen; that would be my principal responsibility. As explained, my duties would generally include getting them some tea. Hailing them a taxicab to transport them the short distance from the Colonial Theatre to the Boston Park Plaza hotel after work each evening. Simple.

I arrived for my first call at the historic Colonial Theatre on Boylston Street. As I crossed through the small lobby, I entered the back of the house on the orchestra level of the audience to find the house lights slowly glimmering.

The memories of so many wonderful shows I’ve seen here with my mother and Aunt Sharon rush back. It remains, to this day, a temple to me. Every subsequent chance I’ve had to return with a touring production has proven to be a highlight. These are the theatres where goosebumps are always a breath or memory away. The Colonial Theatre has always been one of those special

places to me. If these walls and stall could talk, oh the stories they could tell of all the wonderful productions, artists, designers and audiences who have shared oh so many performances under the painted fresco painting of the Colonial theatre.

Designed in 1900 by Clarence Blackall, the premiere production that welcomed Bostonians on December 20, 1900 was a sold-out performance of Ben Hur live on stage. The mammoth production featured a cast and crew of 350 people, one of its most notable features was the moment eight live horses appeared onstage in full gallop during the chariot race scene. Winston Churchill attended the very first performance of this hallowed building.

George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess received its first stage production at the Colonial theatre in September of 1935 prior to its historic Broadway transfer. Rodgers and Hammerstein fine-tuned and developed both Oklahoma! And Carousel here in this blessed venue.

I stood in silence and took in all the sights and sounds surrounding me. On the stage before me was Ray Klausen's detailed set under Ken Billington's warm lighting. David and Ken, two award winning designers, would resurface time and time again as my career flourished outside of Boston. Several large tech tables were assembled and scattered throughout the lower level of the theatre.

At the end of the long aisle to the left of the large proscenium arch, I could see the small magical door so eloquently described by Ted Chapin in his first-hand account of working on the musical Follies in Everything Was Possible. There it sat, simple, inviting, unassuming – a passage that separated the “real world” to the magical backstage environment. A portal to imagination by invitation.

Through the doorway rushed a tall man in a dark suit with a purpose in his step. “Jack, where's Jack? I thought he was coming to the stage door?” It was

Leonard Soloway, a major general manager in New York City and the man I was supposed to report to upon arrival. His hand outstretched to me as we met in the aisle, “Jack, call me Lenny – walk with me.” A very warm welcome indeed. Leonard made a great first impression as he moved me with authority to the back of the theatre so we could have a quick meeting. “It’s been a good day, we are ready for the cast. Most people are at dinner right now, but the cast is called at 7pm and we’ll get moving quickly tonight – do you have a resume on you?”

I was confused by the resume question, is this an interview? I thought it was an assignment from Broadway in Boston. “No, I’m sorry I didn’t bring – “.

Lenny interrupted me, “no problem, bring it with you tomorrow – between you and me there may be an opening here soon before we leave Boston, it would be good to have your paperwork handy.”

Gob smacked. Maybe a job, on Broadway, with a Noel Coward play. The thoughts whirled through my head. I tried to remain calm on the outside, but inside a fire was burning. An opportunity, just like that when you least expect it. This crazy business we call show.