

# TURNING A FILM INTO A THEATRICAL MUSICAL

BY BOB GALE



***“We didn’t want everything in the movie to be there, because otherwise you could just stay home and watch the movie. We wanted it to be completely a theatre experience, so that you say, ‘Yeah, I’ve seen the movie, but, wait, you got to go see it on stage because they do some things that are just going to blow your mind...”***

Throughout history, the theatrical stage has turned to source material of many types. With **BACK TO THE FUTURE**, we knew that many people would see the musical without having seen the movie, so it was very important that they could still fully understand the show. There are things in the musical that are especially enjoyable for those who have seen the movie, but it was important to us that EVERYONE have a fully entertaining and understandable experience no matter what. In writing the book and creating the show, we always kept that in mind.

But these are two very different mediums. A movie has an almost unlimited scope. Thanks to visual effects, almost anything that can be imagined can be put on screen. In theatre, we are limited by what can practically and safely be done on a stage with live performers. We can’t do a car chase on stage. We can’t even splash water on someone because the puddle it makes could cause someone to slip and get hurt. Scenery and props must be stored in the wings of the theatre between scenes, so those items have to be designed with limited storage space in mind. Actors need time to change their wardrobe between scenes, so the show must be written to allow for this. And in both movies and theatre, there never seems to be enough money in the budget to do everything we want.

***“The process of translating any story to the stage or the screen always becomes an exercise in creative problem solving.”***

A good analogy is creating a painting. In a movie, we can choose from a vast array of colours. Our ‘paint box’ includes wide angle exterior scenes, close-ups, the ability to immediately cut from one scene to another, and to intercut two or three scenes that are taking place simultaneously. In musical theatre, we don’t have those ‘colours’, but we have others that are not available in a movie, such as song and dance, stage lighting, and live performers who can actually talk to the audience. So, the process is to understand what colours (tools) we have and how to use them to their best effect. If we were going to paint a landscape and had every colour except green, we might paint a desert or ocean scene, but we wouldn’t try to paint a jungle or a golf course. We shouldn’t remind people of the colours we don’t have. Instead, we want them to appreciate the colours that we do have. Simply put, it’s better to find a substitute for a particular element than to present that element poorly.