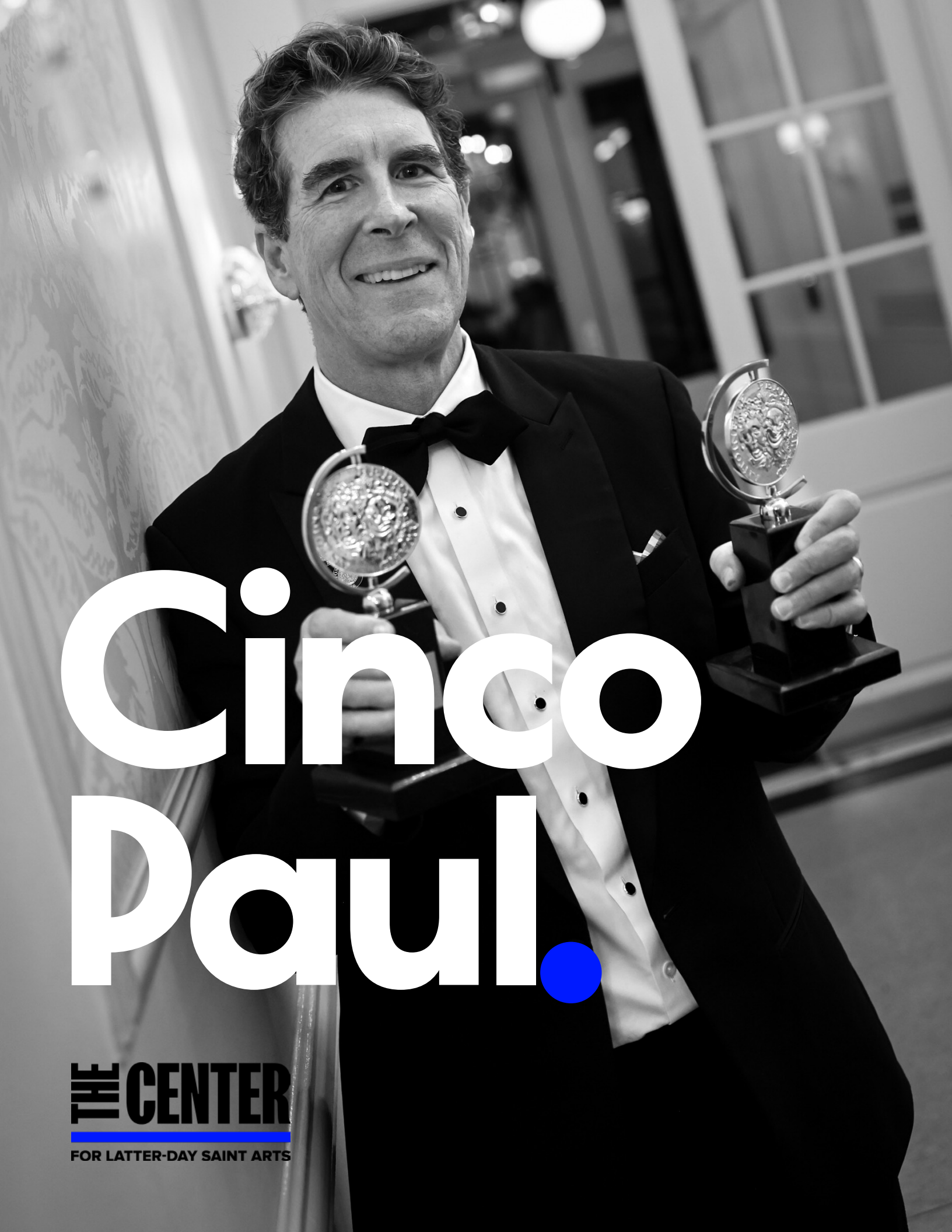




Cinco Paul.

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FOR LATTER-DAY SAINT ARTS

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Cinco Paul

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MCKAY COPPINS: Welcome. I am McKay Coppins, and I am here with Cinco Paul, legendary screenwriter, songwriter, auteur, genius—we're gonna talk about all of it today. I'm really excited for this conversation, and I'm going to start with a little bit of a curveball. You've obviously written famous movies, many well-known songs, Broadway shows, everything. I want to start by asking you about the local Church production in 1997 that you were asked to write.

CINCO PAUL: Oh, are you talking about *Dear Diary*?

I would like to hear about it because I just feel like to set the stage here, I want to hear a little about how your creative life and religious life may have intertwined from early on.

Well, it was the sesquicentennial. It was the 150th anniversary of the pioneers arriving in the Salt Lake Valley. And there was a sort of direction from the Church leadership—they wanted every stake or whatever to put on some sort of production. So, initially my stake asked if I would direct it, and I said no. But then they asked if I would write it, and I said, Yeah, I'll write it. I feel comfortable doing that.

You went high-concept with it though in a way that I think might have surprised some people.

Well, I told them, If I do this, it's going to be a comedy. It's not going to be a reverential treatment of the pioneers. So it was basically a modern girl and a pioneer girl switch places. And so you follow the modern girl while she's on the pioneer trail and then the pioneer girl—it's her great, great, great grandmother—in modern times. And so it was very sitcom-y, and it had that kind of high-concept movie vibe.

What were the reviews like?

Fantastic, McKay! [laughs] I mean, we brought it back. There was a revival seven years later. Yeah, seven years later, we did *Dear Diary* again. It went really well. I was proud of it. It was fun. I think it surprised a lot of people because typically when they go to a Church production like that, they aren't expecting the comedy and the laughs.

Right.

You know, there were jokes about polygamy, et cetera, et cetera.

The reason I wanted to start by asking you about that is because I feel like there is sometimes a tendency, among religious people of any kind who are also in creative spheres, to figure out—they have to make a decision early on, or they feel like they do—about whether they're going to fully blend those two worlds or those two parts of themselves or if they compartmentalize, right? And I wonder if you fall into one camp or the other. Do you find your religious life, your spiritual life, the cultural background that you have, informing the work that you do, whether it's movies or shows or songwriting or whatever?

Yeah, for sure. I feel like that has not been compartmentalized much in my life. You know, *Dear Diary* and the road shows that I wrote have led to rules of what subjects can be dealt with in road shows in my stake, but then in the work I've done in movies and TV, it's certainly informed by the religious beliefs I have in my faith. I'm trying to do things that are uplifting, and I think when I've looked back on my career, I feel like a lot of it is about the power of love to change people. And I think that's really what my faith is about, too. So for sure, they line up pretty closely.

Photograph: Center for Latter-day Saint Arts



Well, *Schmigadoon!* is a good example of that. We're going to talk about that theme, that idea of love, in a second. But when I watched *Schmigadoon!*, your TV show, which you adapted for the stage, the first season especially, I kept thinking as I watched it—the premise is a couple gets trapped in a town that is a real life musical; they can't get out—and I found myself thinking that there were elements of it that felt very Mormon to me. Specifically, I think that maybe outsiders who visit Provo, Utah might feel like they were trapped in *Schmigadoon*.

Yeah.

I kept thinking about that David Foster Wallace quote, “There's always a Mormon around when you don't want one, trying your patience with unsolicited kindness.” That's kind of the vibe of *Schmigadoon!* And I wonder, did you find that maybe it was conscious or unconscious that like your background in Mormonism informed *Schmigadoon!* at all?

It certainly wasn't a conscious choice, but I am who I am! But I will say that the character of Mildred Layton, who's played by Kristin Chenoweth in the TV show, was definitely based on some women from church that I knew who are a little judgmental and like to get in everybody's business. So that was definitely informed by some of my experiences growing up.

I think Cecily Strong was quoted talking in some piece that the tone of the show is really interesting because it's not corny, but it's also not mean. And she said she would tell people, Can you believe a sweet Mormon man wrote this show?

Ah, Cecily.

How did you think about the tone of that show, in particular? What was the kind of needle you were trying to thread?

In the writers' room day one I said, This all has to come from a place of love. We love these shows. I said, It's kind of like the way you think of your parents. They say some things that are problematic and that make you cringe, but you love them all the same. And that's kind of the way I feel about *Oklahoma!*, and *South Pacific*, and all these shows. I love them so much. But we also need to be able to have fun pointing out the things that are stupid, or problematic, or offensive, these days. That was really important, and I think everybody in the writers' room got that. And so that's why I think it was embraced in many ways by the musical theater community, because it wasn't simply poking fun or punching down at them. It was kind of a celebration while also a little bit of mockery.

Satire and homage at the same time.

Yeah, exactly. That was the goal.



Photograph courtesy of Cinco Paul

When you were looking for a writers' room, did you hit them with esoteric Broadway trivia to see if they qualified to be in the writers' room?

I did. [laughs] I will say that Julie Klausner—who's been in our writers' room all three years—in our Zoom with her, sort of her audition, I guess, she blew me away with all her musical theater know-how. But it wasn't a requirement; however, every day of the writers' room, I showed a couple of videos to sort of help people see what we were getting at, so they could see the musical numbers we were basing things on.

What was the first musical you remember falling in love with?

It's a couple of things. When I was growing up, I had access to my mom's cast recordings, and I really fell in love with the *Camelot* recording. The little boy, and King Arthur, and all that, helped make it accessible for me, but I loved that. And then I remember seeing the movie *Oliver!* in the theater and just fell in love with that, wanted to be Artful Dodger so badly, even though I was an Oliver at heart. And then *Singin' in the Rain* also was one that I saw very early on, and when I saw Donald O'Connor doing "Make 'Em Laugh," it was the greatest thing I'd ever seen.

...and when I saw Donald O'Connor doing "Make 'Em Laugh," it was the greatest thing I'd ever seen.

I don't know if you had this growing up, but my Mormon family that I grew up in, we had rules about what music we could listen to on Sundays, and it was mainly church music. But then there was also a loophole for musicals, for some reason.

Of course, because they're godly. [laughs]

I guess that was my mom's theory. So on our drives to church, we would listen to compilations of the greatest Broadway hits, or the cast recording of Les Mis, or whatever. For a long time, I feel like Broadway musicals were almost indistinguishable from gospel music in my brain. It was like only later in life that I could disentangle them.

It's dangerous because occasionally, an inappropriate song could sneak through.

She always had to hit the skip on the "Master of the House."

Yeah, that's good. Thank heavens.



Photographs: Center for Latter-day Saint Arts

Like, that's not Sunday-appropriate music. Growing up, did a lot of members of your church, were they into musicals, too, or is it your family, or is it just you?

You know, I grew up half in the Church, half out, because my dad wasn't a member, and my mom was a member, and I didn't officially join until I was 18. But I did feel that vibe. I attended church, more or less, growing up. And everybody loved those musicals, because it harkened back to a more innocent, pure time, right? Even though, *Carousel* is so dark. But people's memories of things are generally brighter than they actually were.

When you first had the idea for *Schmigadoon!*, I think you've said it was like 30 years ago, how did that creative brainstorm happen, and what was it about the idea that you attached to at the beginning?

It's sort of weird because I was watching *An American Werewolf in London*, and it opens with the two guys backpacking through the English countryside, and it reminded me of, Oh, this is the same opening as *Brigadoon*. And I was like, What if these two modern guys stumbled into a musical? And that really is what got me thinking, That's a fun high concept: two modern people stuck in an old-fashioned musical. But I didn't really know what to do with it. I thought, Is it a stage show? Certainly, I never thought it was a TV show at that time because TV just, it wasn't like that then. There's no way that *Schmigadoon!* —

You weren't going to see that on CBS prime time —

No, that wasn't gonna happen. So I wrote one song, and then I kind of shuttered it away for years and years, until after I was kind of done with animation and wanted to do something new. I left and took a meeting with Broadway Video, Lorne Michaels' company, and at the end of the meeting they said, If you have anything musical we're interested in that, because they were looking for something for Cecily. And I thought, has the time come for my musical? It literally had been 25 years, and I thought maybe its time has come. It's a lesson. Sometimes you just have to wait till the right time comes along.

Well, should we hear a song?

Yeah, the first song I wrote 25 years ago was this song called "Not That Kinda Gal." It ended up not being in the TV show. It was going to be, but we wrote eight episodes, and we had to squeeze it down to six—because Apple only wanted to make six—and so we had to make some cuts, and that song fell by the wayside. But now that I've done the stage adaptation, I brought "Not That Kinda Gal" back. And so here to sing it for us is the fabulous McKenzie Kurtz. McKenzie just played Betsy, the flirty farmer's daughter, at The Kennedy Center. And she's also a Broadway luminary. She did *Wicked*, she did *Frozen*,

The Heart of Rock and Roll, and so I feel very lucky to have McKenzie here. All right, so here's "Not That Kinda Gal."

[Performance: "Not That Kinda Gal," McKenzie Kurtz, voice; Cinco Paul, piano]

McKenzie Kurtz, ladies and gentlemen!
[applause]

That was great. I could not perform like that, so I'm glad you brought some visitors.

Yeah, no one wants to hear me sing that song.

Your original idea for *Schmigadoon!*, like you said, was two guys hiking. You changed it eventually to have it be about a couple. What was it that drew you to that idea? What kind of narrative problems did it solve? Did it open up new themes you wanted to explore?

After that meeting with Broadway Video, I said, maybe this old idea will work. And immediately I thought, What is it? What sort of story can we tell? And then I thought, It should be a couple that's struggling—together, but struggling. And then I thought, then they can't get out until they find true love. It was interesting because I think there are so few romantic comedies that are about a relationship that already exists, that are about, how do you navigate a relationship after the happy ending or whatever it is? You know, usually it ends when they get together. And so our story starts when they get together, and they've been together for three years, and it's like, How do we make this work?

I think that was what made the show interesting. You could have seen easily a version of that show that was about people falling in love for the first time, or they find themselves in *Schmigadoon* and fall in love. The show is actually taking on pretty real issues that couples confront, obstacles in love, whatever. You said that love was always a theme that you found yourself trying to explore



in your work. Did you find in making this show that it was an evolution from past treatments of love? Obviously, you've made a lot of animated movies. You've written animated movies. You've done family movies. This is more mature and probably a little more complicated and sophisticated. Did you find that was a challenge for you? Did you find you were learning from it?

Yeah. I mean, it was definitely why I wanted to leave the animated world and try something new and try something a little more grown up and complicated. But it was hard, right, because I've been writing minions and those sort of characters that are not quite as thorny and complicated as these characters needed to be. But that's why it was great for me to have a writers' room populated with writers who had different experiences than I did, you know, and people who had different tone in their writing than I did, frankly. The producers said, We need some people to counter the Cinco sweetness, so find some people that are a little thornier, and that was Julie Klausner and some of the other people. That was a challenge, but it was really important. We're dealing with contemporary issues, and so all of us in the writers' room, myself included, drew on our own experience. My wife's here, so I don't want to embarrass her too much, but there's certainly a lot of our story and our relationship in Josh and Melissa's.

I was going to ask you what you were pulling from for those characters, and maybe some of it was your own your own marriage, your own relationship?

For sure. I mean, my wife's a doctor. I think that's the reason they're both doctors, but I am definitely the Melissa who loves musicals, not that my wife hates musicals, but she is not as enthusiastic as I am. So I think opposites do attract, right? And so that's part of Josh and Melissa's story—they're very different, and how do they make it work.

When you finally started filming the show, did you have the idea in your head at that

point, like, I eventually want to put this on stage, too? Or were you just so focused on the initial project?

To be honest, that never had really—I mean, it's possible that in the back of my mind, I was thinking, I would love for high schools to do this at some point, but for the most part, I was just so—being a showrunner, it's very demanding, so I really didn't have time to think about anything else. I didn't really think about it until we had two seasons done, and then the strike came, and then I had some free time on my hands and thought, Oh, maybe I should turn this into a stage show. Because that's how I had originally conceived it, way back when.

Obviously there are logistic differences—they are different mediums—but what was the biggest difference creatively in adapting it for the stage versus making the TV show?

Even as someone who's pretty aware of musical theater and how it works, I had a big learning curve. In a TV show, you can cut back and forth from scenes rapidly, and you have the advantage of closeups. There're just so many things that work in a TV show that actually don't work on stage. My first challenge was I just plopped down all the scripts and said like, Here, now I have a musical. And then I quickly realized that's not how it works. So there were a lot of things I had to address. I mean, in *Oklahoma!*, the entire first act takes place in one location. So you have to realize that we can't move around as much. And there was a lot of cutting to do. I didn't want to lose any songs, and I wanted to add a couple songs. So there was a lot of that sort of work to be done.

Did the experience leave you wanting to do more on stage? Like, can you see yourself going back to the stage?

Yeah for sure. No, I would love to. Yeah.

McKenzie, should he? [laughs]

If McKenzie shows up, I'll write something! I mean the experience that we just had with *Schmigadoon!* at The Kennedy Center was such a joy and such a great group of people. You have a little bit of that with a TV show, but unfortunately, we shot the first season during COVID. I had imagined myself at the piano, and Kristin and Alan and Cecily—everybody hanging out the piano while I am singing songs, while I played. And that wasn't able to happen. I just wanted to recreate my high school musical theater experience with famous people. [laughs] That didn't happen, but that's my favorite part of theater—this community of people, and you're just like, Let's go, we're gonna put this thing on, and it's gonna happen, and it's gonna be live in front of people every night. It was just a great experience.

You mentioned earlier that this tone you were trying to strike in the show was optimistic and positive, but maybe with a

little bit of an edge. The show, like we've discussed, touches on issues like sexuality, and morality, and tensions within a relationship, and love. How did you navigate those issues, and in making this more grown-up show, to use your term, how did you think about how you wanted to explore those issues in your show?

I think I just wanted to be truthful and real. That's the goal, just to be as honest as you can. And that's the key to comedy, I've always felt, is just to be truthful. Don't try to be funny. Just be truthful, and you'll find the comedy there. So I think that was really what it was all about. And then Cecily was involved very early on, and just talking with her and getting to know her better, that also informed the tone of it, and what I knew she could do, and what she was capable of, and so wanting to push things in that direction, also. And she was so fantastic. The first table read we did, she just blew me away. I was just like, My gosh, she's so funny. But she's also very real. Her roots are in musical theater. She showed me some video of her like seven years old on a stage in Chicago, doing some Christmas show. And so it was really a labor of love for her, too.

Should we hear another song?

Yes, McKay. I think we should hear another song. [laughs] And for this one I brought on Broadway legend, Ann Harada. [applause] Ann, of course, was in both seasons of *Schmigadoon!* playing Florence Menlove and Madame Frau. Ann, I'm so glad that you're here today. She's gonna sing Florence Menlove's song, "He's a Queer One, That Man o' Mine," because Florence is unaware—no one in *Schmigadoon* is aware—that her husband is actually gay.

[Performance: "He's a Queer One, That Man o' Mine," Ann Harada, voice; Cinco Paul, piano]

Ann Harada, ladies and gentlemen! [applause]



Photograph: Center for Latter-day Saint Arts

It was interesting because I think there are so few romantic comedies that are about a relationship that already exists...

That was wonderful.

She's wonderful.

Still makes me laugh. I want to ask about another show that you wrote. Tell us about *A.D. 16*, and how you got the idea, and what was it that drew you to that project.

The first musical I wrote was actually based on the first movie that I wrote that got made, *Bubble Boy*, starring Jake Gyllenhaal. [pauses to wait for applause; silence] Exactly. [laughs] It was a massive critical and commercial failure, but at one point I realized, I have the rights to turn this into a musical. Let me try it. And so I turned it into a musical, and I was really determined. I thought, This belongs on Broadway—which it does not. But I was so focused on that, and then at one point I realized, I'm not taking my own advice, which is finish something and then move on and do something else. So I felt like, I need to write another musical, and what should it be? I really wanted something with a female protagonist, actually to try that. And then I've always been obsessed



Photographs:
Center for Latter-day Saint Arts

with the idea of famous people when they were younger, when they were teenagers. And so I started to think about Jesus as a teenager. Ooh, that's really interesting. But then I thought, But I don't want to do a male protagonist. So I thought, Oh, what if Mary Magdalene, when she was a teenager, met Jesus and got a big crush on him? And then that was the concept for *A.D. 16*. And so then I started to write it, and I started to write some songs. And then I realized I should not do all this myself. So I found this playwright named Bekah Brunstetter, and she and I collaborated on the book together.

I was thinking about this because I feel like a lot of Christians who are also in whatever creative realm hesitate to make art about their faith or that intersects with their faith in any way. Because often what you get is kind of two options, which is it's either kind of devotional in nature, which is it's designed to be faith-affirming with maybe creative merit, like a secondary concern, or it's deliberately kind of provocative and irreverent and maybe taking aim at the faith. A lot of Christian artists don't want to do either of those, and they decide just not even bother. How did you think about that? Have you ever kind of navigated those questions as you were writing?

100%. That's a very astute observation and question. Because yeah, there's *The Book of Mormon* [musical], right? Which is just not my style. But also there's so much faith-centered art that is just so bad. And it's kind of like what you're saying—they're focusing so much on faith promotion that they are unable to give the honesty that true art requires, you know? And so I knew this was never going to be *Book of Mormon* because of who I am. Look, I think that show is awesome. I think it's great, but it's a little like, in some ways, it's a little bit of a pat on the head to religion. And obviously way too raunchy for anything that I would write myself. So I knew that if I did this, it would hopefully hit the sweet spot, which is sort of the *Schmigadoon!* sweet spot too, which is

coming from a place that is respectful, but still really, really funny and playing with all the stuff that we know. In the same way that *Wicked* plays with our knowledge of *The Wizard of Oz*, this is playing with our knowledge of who Jesus was going to become and the things that he was going to do. But because there's no biblical record of him when he's 16, it's like free rein. We could do whatever we want. Bekah is also a person of faith, and so we talked about it a lot. And she's dealt with faith a little more in her work than I have in mine, but she always comes at it with a very humorous, real point of view. So that's always been the goal with this, but it makes people nervous. Whenever I tell someone from the Church I did this musical about Mary Magdalene falling in love with Jesus, I get two reactions. Most often, they get really nervous, right? Like, What are you doing, Cinco? But then there's people who are cool or like, That sounds awesome. Those are the two schools of thought.

I am so curious though, because you're right, there's no biblical record of 16-year old Jesus, right? So you do have a lot of creative possibilities. Once you you started thinking about that, what avenues did you start taking? What was it about teenage Jesus that seemed like a compelling, interesting character, and what did you want to do with it?

For me, the fun thing was he's still figuring it out. Like everything. The idea was that Mary kind of helps him with his rough drafts of parables. His parables initially are all very action adventure-y, focusing on this one bandit character. The Good Samaritan is initially more about the bandit who attacked the guy left in the road. So Jesus starts to tell a story about the bandit. Mary interrupts, Actually, I'm more interested in the guy who was left on the side of the road. What happened to him? And another example: early on, one of the Nazareth cops slaps him. And then Jesus says, Again, you know, he turns his cheek, and then he gets slapped again. And Mary says, What was that about? Jesus



says, Yeah, I'm still figuring it out. [laughs] I'm workshoping, working this out. So to me that was kind of the sweet spot of he hasn't got it all, but his heart is in the right place. And he has a feeling that he's destined to do something great, but he hasn't quite figured it all out yet.

I wasn't going ask you about this until you opened the door—

Oh no. What door did I open?

Famous people when they were 16. Can you give us a little peek into what 16-year old Cinco was like?

Oh my gosh! Just very nerdy. You know, I was always reading a book, always playing piano. I mean that was me. I wanted to be cool so badly. But I was making movies, and I was trying to be a singer-songwriter. That was, I think, my initial thing. I wanted to be Paul McCartney or Randy Newman or Elvis Costello, or something like that.

Would this 16-year old version of yourself be surprised by where you've gotten if he could see you now?

Yes and no. I've always had either a strength or a flaw, this confidence, like, It's going to work out. It's going to happen.

You wouldn't have been surprised. You always knew you were going to make it.

I always sort of had this feeling that I was. But when I was making *Schmigadoon!*, and all these amazing people that I'm working with...I got kind of emotional thinking about young Cinco. And then one of the songs in Season Two is actually a song I wrote when I was a teenager, and I kind of repurposed it. And I just thought, Oh my gosh! Teenage Cinco—it would blow his mind that Aaron Tveit and Dove Cameron are singing the song that he wrote, you know? So it's a little mix of both.

Can we hear a song from A.D. 16?

Sure! Let's bring out Shayna Steele! Shayna has sung on both seasons of *Schmigadoon!* And so just to give you little intro, this



is a song sung by Mary Magdalene right after she has first met Jesus. Jesus has sort of come to her defense in the marketplace and stood up for her, and she fell for him instantly. So this song is called "Perfect."

[Performance: "Perfect," Shayna Steele, voice; Cinco Paul, piano]

So I want to ask you, in 2018 you wrote an article in which you argued that Latter-day Saint music should be expanded. And I'm just going to quote you here.

Oh no.

No, this is not a gotcha. Don't worry. But you wrote, "I love the music we sing in church, and like most other members, have my favorite hymns. But the fact is our hymnal and notions of what music is reverent are antiquated and tied to 18th and 19th century Western European tradition. Both the Church and the gospel are a lot bigger than that now and in truth always have been." And then later you say, "It's time to welcome other types of music into the chapel, other instruments, other traditions. If we're truly a worldwide church shouldn't we sound like one?" And so that was 2018. [Audience applause]

That was pretty good.

I'm curious because in the years since then the Church has begun to undertake this new project of releasing a new hymn book. They're adding new hymns. I think that's an ongoing process. What do you think of that project so far? Do you think it should go further? Talk a little about about where we stand in Latter-day Saint music today.

I'm so happy that they've expanded. "His Eye Is on the Sparrow" is now in the hymn book. "This Little Light of Mine" too. But things move so slowly, too slowly for me. And I just think we need to push. I think, kind of like I said, that we're stuck basically in the time period in which the Church was formed. But the Church has evolved, and we've evolved, and so I think there's so much more variety of music, and music that to me brings so much joy and spiritual feeling that some people—the fuddy-duddies, the Mildred Layton's of the wards—would look down their nose at or would complain about, you know, which annoys me because I don't think the Spirit has any connection to instrumentation or beat or any of that. And I think the problem is that there's some music that doesn't really bring the Spirit for a lot of the population, but that's the only music we've got. So anyway, I've been beating this drum for a long time. No one listens to me. But anyway, I would love for it to be expanded, way beyond what it is currently.

It's interesting because Gladys Knight has her choir, and she does these kind of more upbeat, classic gospel choir renditions of Latter-day Saint hymns and other songs. She's performed in churches and stake centers, and it seems like every time you hear about somebody who's been to one of those, they say, It's so incredible. It was so different from a typical Latter-day Saint meeting. And you can tell that people were really having genuine spiritual connections to it, and yet it's still like a bracketed thing that's happening, but it hasn't permeated into our normal worship services. Why do think that is, and what how can we push past it?

If we're truly a worldwide church shouldn't we sound like one?

I don't know—the bunch of fuddy-duddies. I mean, that's the only explanation, and change happens way too slowly. It's weird because there's this feeling like, That was amazing, but we could never do that in sacrament meeting, you know? And I don't agree with that. I think we *should* do that in sacrament meeting. I would love for there to be clapping and all that. I am not opposed to any of that. And I understand that some people might have an issue with it, but I think that's their problem. And they need to repent or whatever. [laughs] They need to figure it out. They need to figure it out and get on board. I don't think the problem is the type of music. I think it's just the people who are a little backwards in their thinking. And I don't mean to be too judgmental. I understand where they're coming from, and change is difficult, but it's good.

My goal was to get Cinco Paul to go fire and brimstone.

Oh, yeah.

Let me ask you about this though. I'm always a little torn in conversations like this because I agree with you that I would like to see a much broader range of music in the Church. And that applies to a lot of different things in the Church and in Mormonism, in general, right? I think that there's a tension between wanting to change and evolve and adapt to modernity and to the fact that the Church has become a global religion, and it's not just this kind of small Utah-based faith anymore. But I always am mindful that I don't want to lose what is distinctively Mormon about these various elements of the faith. I wonder if you think there is a kind of distinctively Mormon approach to music or idea about music that should be kind of our guiding star as we think about music in our faith? Maybe a big question.

Anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report? I don't know. Things that are hopeful and uplifting, and it is all about love for me. My favorite hymns are the ones that

are about love. I think what I'm proposing is additive, right? And that's why I said that. I love "I Stand All Amazed." I love "I Know That My Redeemer Lives." I love these great hymns, and I wouldn't want to lose those, but I might want to jazz them up a bit. [laughs] But yeah, I think there's room for all. Cast a wide net.

Well, speaking of which, I think we have a song from you, that you wrote. Can we listen to it, that's along these lines?

Yes. I'm going to do one. This is "The Book of Mormon Song." I wrote it for a road show. Remember those? A long time ago. And it's kind of a Primary song. I know there's a new Primary song book they're working on. And I submitted some songs. I never heard back from them. [laughs]

So if anybody's watching who has influence over the Primary song book, this is your audition.

So this is a song called "The Book of Mormon Song." It takes a little audience participation during the chorus. [plays piano] So I want you all to sing after me. So the chorus goes, [sings] Every night and mornin'...

AUDIENCE: Every night and mornin'...

Read the Book of Mormon.

Read the Book of Mormon.

Good. And then I'll go, There's hurricanes stormin', talk of global warming, so you better start reading that Book of Mormon.

That's great. These wonderful singers from my professional life are now singing "The Book of Mormon" song! [laughs] Okay. Yeah, just so everybody knows, if you know *the Book of Mormon*, this will be more meaningful and you'll get it a little more... [laughs]

[sings]

The Lord told Lehi to get the plates,
So Nephi and his brothers went to Laban's gates.
Then Laban the brass, he decided to hoard,
So the Spirit said, Hey Nephi, look at that sword.
Nephi got the plates in nothing flat,
And Laban had no place to put his hat.

Every night and mornin'...

Every night and mornin'...

Read the Book of Mormon.

Read the Book of Mormon.

There's hurricanes stormin', talk of global warming, so you better start reading that Book of Mormon.

One day, Nephi broke his bow.
Laman and Lemuel said, Way to go, bro,
We're in the middle of nowhere
With nothing to eat.
How're we supposed to get ourselves
some meat?
Well, Nephi made a new bow,
Asked the Lord what to do,
And that very night they had a barbecue.

I said, every night and mornin'...

Every night and mornin'...

Read the Book of Mormon.

Read the Book of Mormon.

There's hurricanes stormin', talk of global warming, so you better start reading that Book of Mormon.

This King named Noah was really mean.
Abinadi said, I don't dig this scene,
None of you are doing what the
Lord required.
So Noah said, Abinadi, you're fired.
A little while later the worm was turning,
Noah woke up one morning and said,
You smell something burning?

I said, every night and mornin'...

Every night and mornin'...

Read the Book of Mormon.

Read the Book of Mormon.

There's hurricanes stormin', talk of global warming, so you better start reading that Book of Mormon.

Korihor was an anti-Christ
Which means he spoke against God,
Which isn't very nice.
They took him to Alma,
High priest at the time,
And Korihor said, Alma, show me a sign.

Alma said, For a sign, you'll be struck dumb.
And Korihor said, [mmm, mmm, mmm].

I said, every night and mornin'...

Every night and mornin'...

Read the Book of Mormon.

Read the Book of Mormon.

There's hurricanes stormin', talk of global
warming, so you better start reading that
Book of Mormon.

There's only one more.

The Anti-Nephi-Lehies buried their swords,
Soon they were attacked by the
Lamanite hordes.
Two thousand stripling warriors came up
in a flash,
And made themselves some Lamanite hash.
When the battle was over, not a one
was dead,
So you better remember what your
mama said.

She said, every night and mornin'...

Every night and mornin'...

Read the Book of Mormon.

Read the Book of Mormon.

There's hurricanes stormin', talk of global
warming, so you better start reading that
Book of Mormon.

[applause]

Coming soon to a hymnal near you.

**Cinco, this has been so great.
Thank you for making the time.**

My pleasure. This is fun.

**Last question. For people who are thinking about following
your career path or trying to, they're inspired by what you've
accomplished. They have their own ideas they want to go out
and make. What advice would you give?**

A couple of things. The biggest thing I think is to write stuff and then finish it. And then write something else. The more you write, the better you get. People get stuck with one script or one thing that they're doing, and they just keep trying to rewrite that and rewrite it, till it gets better and better. But I don't think that's the right path. It's your first script. It's not going to be anything except your first script. So write it, set it aside, and then write another one and that one will be better, and then the next one will be better and better, until finally you're a writer. You're actually a writer of some talent and experience and skill, and then someone's gonna want to hire you, you know?

The other thing I always talk about is I was really bad at taking notes early on in my career. I mean, I was horrible. Whenever I got notes on a script, I would compile my own notes in response, like notes on their notes, and send it back to the studio. And there was a point where my agent called me and said, Cinco, this has to stop. No one is going to hire you. No one wants to work with that person. And finally, I had that epiphany and realized it didn't matter if I was right. I was still losing the battle because no one wants to work with that person who's constantly arguing and defending and fighting things. And it doesn't mean never fight, obviously. But when you do, it will mean so much more if you rarely do it. And that was really a turning point for me. That happened before *Horton Hears a Who* and *Despicable Me* and all those things. And I think it had to happen before that success.

I realized, You're not always the smartest person in the room, and that's no way to go through life. You just need to take the notes, and do them, and trust that other people know what they're doing. And even if they don't, the good stuff always rises to the top. Like, all three of these ladies [McKenzie, Ann, Shayna], people want to work with people that they want to work with, people who are pleasant to be around. And that's almost as important as your talent. And there are plenty of talented people who are nice to work with. And those are the people I choose to work with.

**Well thank you so much Cinco for doing this. Thank you,
everyone.** [applause]

And that's a wrap!



McKay Coppins

McKay Coppins is an author and staff writer at *The Atlantic*, where he covers politics, religion, and national affairs. He is a *New York Times* bestselling author of *Romney: A Reckoning* and *The Wilderness*. He has received the Aldo Beckman Award from the White House Correspondents Association for his coverage of the Trump presidency and the Wilbur Award for religion journalism. In 2026, Coppins served as a producer on *Dynasty: The Murdochs*, a Netflix docuseries based on his reporting. He also co-hosts a podcast, *Deseret Voices*, and appears frequently on television as a political analyst.

Cinco Paul

Cinco Paul is a writer known for his award-winning TV series *Schmigadoon!* as well as the blockbuster family films *Despicable Me 1, 2 & 3*, *Horton Hears a Who*, *The Lorax*, and *The Secret Life of Pets*. He's been nominated for a Grammy and won an Emmy for the song "Corn Puddin'". In 2026, he won Tony Awards for Best Original Score and Best Book of a Musical for *Schmigadoon!*, which also won the award for Best Musical.

