

Song Title: **ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN**

## **REVIEWERS' NOTE**

**Reevaluation:** Mar 28, 2023: change from YES to YES: Note

**This song is admissible because its message and lyrics are benign. The musical from which the song originates is based on a series of books and the 1964 musical film, which have been criticized for containing scenes reminiscent of [blackface](#).** It is important to note that this is not an indictment of Mary Poppins' being "racist," but rather it is a demonstration of how problematic racial history can run through otherwise innocent forms of entertainment. In this case, Mary Poppins' source material – P.L. Travers' series of *Mary Poppins* novels – unmistakably associates the chimney sweeps' blackened faces with racial caricature, as noted in the [New York Times](#) by Daniel Pollack-Pelzner, a professor of English and gender studies professor at Oregon's Linfield College:

["Don't touch me, you black heathen,"](#) a housemaid screams in "Mary Poppins Opens the Door" (1943), as a sweep reaches out his darkened hand. When he tries to approach the cook, she threatens to quit: ["If that Hottentot goes into the chimney, I shall go out the door,"](#) she says, using an archaic slur for black South Africans that recurs on page and screen.

The 1964 film replays this racial panic in a farcical key. When the dark figures of the chimney sweeps [step in time](#) on a roof, a naval buffoon, Admiral Boom, shouts, "We're being attacked by Hottentots!" and orders his cannon to be fired at the "cheeky devils." We're in on the joke, such as it is:

These aren't really black Africans; they're grinning white dancers in blackface. It's a parody of black menace; it's even posted on a white nationalist website as evidence of the film's racial hierarchy. And it's not only fools like the Admiral who invoke this language. In the 1952 novel "Mary Poppins in the Park," the nanny herself tells an upset young Michael, ["I understand that you're behaving like a Hottentot."](#)

[Who are the hottentots?](#) | [Hottentot Venus](#) | [Blackface Minstrelsy](#)

**GENERAL NOTE RE: Innocuous Songs from Problematic Movies/Musicals or Source Material/Author**

\* \* \*

What year was this song written? 2004

Who wrote the lyrics? Anthony Drewe

What did your research tell you about the lyricist?

**Anthony Drewe** is a British lyricist, actor, director, and book writer for Broadway and West End musicals. He is best known for his collaborations with [George Stiles](#). They have worked together for more than 30 years and have written eleven shows. Awards include the [Laurence Olivier Award](#) for Best New Musical ([Honk!](#)), an Elliot Norton Award for Outstanding Musical Production ([Honk!](#)), and a host of awards for *Mary Poppins* around the world. As a founding board-member of [Mercury Musical Developments](#), Drewe & Stiles also award the annual Stiles and Drewe Prize for a new song written for the musical stage.

What other material has been written by this lyricist?

Musicals of *The Wind in the Willows*, *Half A Sixpence*, *Travels With My Aunt*, *Betty Blue Eyes*, *Just So*, *Peter Pan – A Musical Adventure*, *Soho Cinders*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*

Who is the composer of this song? George Stiles

What did your research tell you about the composer?

**George William Stiles** (1961 -) is an [English](#) composer of musicals for the stage. Stiles and Drewe are founding members of [Mercury Musical Developments](#) (MMD), a charity devoted to nurturing new musical theatre in the United Kingdom. They have also written other revues and songs for theatre, TV, and radio, including the [RSC's](#) *Shakespeare Revue*, *The Challenge*, and [Dame Edna Everage's](#) *Look at Me When I'm Talking to You*.

Awards include Best Musical for *Moll Flanders* in the 1995 [TMA Awards](#), the [Laurence Olivier Award](#) for Best New Musical ([Honk!](#)), an Elliot Norton Award for Outstanding Musical Production ([Honk!](#)), and a host of awards for *Mary Poppins* around the world. As a founding board member of [Mercury Musical Developments](#), Drewe & Stiles also award the annual Stiles and Drewe Prize for a new song written for the musical stage.

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Please provide a link to the original song lyrics.

<https://genius.com/Original-london-cast-of-mary-poppins-anything-can-happen-lyrics>

Who and what is this song about, as originally intended by the composer and earlier performers?

About being able to do anything you put your mind to. Intended to enhance the performance of a musical.

What did you learn about the history OF THE SONG?

It was written as part of a musical.

No pertinent historical/social events at the time of writing.

Initially performed/recorded in 2004 as part of Mary Poppins Musical.

Mary Poppins Musical popularized the song.

Never performed in blackface.

Only recorded as part of a musical.

No changes in lyrics.

Share a link to the earliest performance of this song that you can find.

<https://youtu.be/Pzgf4HDeCXI>

Does any illustration or other characteristic of the original sheet music reflect an inappropriate theme? No

Please explain why the illustrations in the sheet music ARE or ARE NOT problematic.

The illustrations are not part of the sheet music but rather the image for the musical. Images:

[Google Image Search](#)

Did this song, originally or subsequently, demean a marginalized racial/ethnic group (a group considered at a social disadvantage) through idiomatic expressions, metaphors, jargon, or message? And/or does the song present a sanitized/idyllic or false narrative regarding the American South and the life of the enslaved or newly freed OR of other marginalized racial/ethnic groups and their history? No

Please supply the links to any sources you used for this section of research.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120210174017/http://www.broadway.tv/broadway-features-reviews/Mary-Poppins-Secrets>

<https://www.mtishows.com/disney-and-cameron-mackintoshs-mary-poppins>

<https://www.mtishows.com/people/anthony-drewe>

<https://www.mtishows.com/people/george-stiles>

#### Additional Questions to Consider (do not pertain to Admissibility)

The remaining questions pertain to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion issues other than those of race. As such, **THESE QUESTIONS DO NOT AFFECT A SONG'S ADMISSIBILITY**. They are provided to encourage your group to consider factors that may affect members of your audience and/or your performers with regard to religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and more. ***Please refer to the Music Choices section of [Chapter Choices to Address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) (in the [Chorus Toolkit](#)) for details and strategies related to these factors.***

Could the message/lyrics of the song, original or subsequent, limit any singer or audience member's ability to engage related to the following? A YES answer does not imply that the song is demeaning or exclusionary. [Please see instructions here.](#)

Age: No

Disability: No

Gender: No  
Religion: No  
Sexual Orientation: No  
Visible Physical Differences: No  
Other? No

Are there any adjustments to the lyrics that would make it more inclusive or current to our chorus culture or societal norms?

I did not identify any lyrics that might be addressed.