

"Sisterella" Musical

Date confirmed in ["Los Angeles Times" \(archived\)](#) ("Tuesday [July 25, 1995]")

Larry Hart. "Sisterella" writer. personal website post (June-July 2009) (archived)

Michael was a business partner, who became a dear friend. I am the only composer on earth that Michael Jackson ever attached his name to a project that was not of his creation. Michael was the Executive Producer (along with Jerry Greenberg), Presenter and Investor with his record company MJJ Music of my stage musical "Sisterella". With his support, Sisterella went on to do great things. While in Los Angeles, Sisterella received rave reviews, 12 N.A.A.C.P. Theater Award nominations and 8 N.A.A.C.P. Theater Awards including Best Play and Best Director. In Europe, Sisterella was voted show of the decade.

Michael Jackson changed my life with his belief in me, his support, and his extraordinary talent. I learned many new techniques in the studio while recording the cast album for Sisterella from Michael, and my days working on the album at Sony Music and at MJJ will always be cherished. Michael influenced so much of Sisterella, from the music, to the costumes to the award winning choreography by Raymond G. del Barrio. Sisterella was, in many ways, homage to Michael. It was an extraordinary time in my life, made possible by an extraordinary man.

To celebrate the success of Sisterella, when it opened in Los Angeles, Michael hosted a celebration at Neverland, and invited my family and the whole cast for a day like no other. That visit became the first of many. On closing day at Pasadena Playhouse, Michael came to see the show and see us off before we left to go on tour in Europe. For the European tour, Michael again was the Presenter and Executive Producer of Sisterella. To this day, I attribute the success of Sisterella to Michael, his friendship and support. The last time I heard from Michael was last October. He left a voicemail message for me, to sing Happy Birthday to me. I hadn't heard from him in a while, and that message is more poignant today, as it was surprising and touching then.

I will miss my friend Michael. You changed my life and I will always love you.

"Los Angeles Times" (July 26, 1995) (archived)

Michael Jackson will serve as executive producer for a new musical, "Sisterella," which is scheduled to have its world premiere at the Pasadena Playhouse in March.

This is the first entry into musical theater for the self-proclaimed King of Pop. There appear to be ultimate designs for a Broadway production of the work, an original musical based on the fairy tale "Cinderella."

"Sisterella," set in turn-of-the-century New York, is the first musical written by Larry Hart, a singer and songwriter who won a 1978 Grammy Award for his gospel performance of the song "What a Friend" and has written songs for Johnny Cash and Engelbert Humperdinck, among others.

Jackson's involvement in the venture is apparently only financial--he will not appear in the production or write any of the music or lyrics. The music and the spectacle of the planned production, though, will reflect his sensibilities, according to Michael Sande, director of marketing and publicity for the Pasadena Playhouse.

"When you hear it and see it, it's the type of music Michael Jackson would sing himself," Sande said Tuesday. "It's all sorts of music, very contemporary, and is going to be a huge dance-production show as well."

Jackson could not be reached for comment Tuesday, and his representatives refused to talk about plans for "Sisterella," saying that it was premature to discuss the pop superstar's role in the production. Sande said that the project was initiated by Hart, who brought some songs to Jerry Greenberg, the president of Jackson's MJJ Records company. Greenberg, who will also serve as an executive producer, then took it to Jackson, who gave the go-ahead.

Hart subsequently developed the book and music through reader workshops at New York's Musical Theatre Works, the same organization that did the workshops for Disney's hugely successful "Beauty and the Beast." It was the directors of Musical Theatre Works, which will also be listed as co-presenters of "Sisterella," who suggested debuting the show in Pasadena. A concept album of the musical already has been recorded, but a release date has not yet been set, according to Anthony Stimac, artistic director of Musical Theater Works. Rain Pryor, daughter of comedian Richard Pryor, sings on the album as one of the stepsisters. Stimac said that Rain Pryor will appear in the production as well.

"More and more shows don't premiere on Broadway anymore," Sande said. "Regional theaters are starting shows like the 'How to Succeed in Business' revival with Matthew Broderick, which started [at the La Jolla Playhouse], as did 'Tommy.'"

Because of Jackson's involvement, "Sisterella" could become a financial godsend for the Pasadena Playhouse, which during the past year has been struggling to keep its head above water. The theater and Musical Theatre Works in New York "will have a financial interest in the future of the show," Sande said, though he declined to be specific about how large the interest will be.

The playhouse's former management company, Theatre Corp. of America, filed for bankruptcy protection in March. Theatre Corp. had been saddled with enormous debts stemming from a massive expansion to other Southern California cities, and its largest creditor is the playhouse. Theatre Corp. officials also blamed last year's revenue shortfall at the playhouse on low attendance stemming from the Northridge earthquake as well as general economic conditions. The playhouse borrowed \$200,000 from the city of Pasadena a year ago to keep its programming going. But since then, attendance and fund-raising have improved.

Besides "Sisterella," the playhouse also announced two other new plays for the 1996 winter/spring season. The season will open with the Jan. 14-Feb. 18 premiere of "Same Time, Another Year," Bernard Slade's sequel to his hit comedy "Same Time, Next Year," about a couple who meet for an adulterous liaison once a year. Tom Troupe and Barbara Rush will star, and Slade will direct.

The season will conclude with Jack LoGiudice's "In the Moonlight Eddie," about a Broadway playwright whose latest opening night is altered by a secret revealed by his son. It's scheduled for May 19-June 23.

The move into theater for MJJ follows the company's movie successes with the two "Free Willy" films and seems natural for Jackson, who starred in the 1978 film version of the musical "The Wiz" and once was discussed as a potential star of a movie musical of "Peter Pan." Jackson recently switched agencies for representation as an actor in film projects.