

It was April 2002, more or less. I was a comedy writer on TV shows like "In Living Color" and "Mad TV," along with assorted oddball projects to my credit, and was a member of The Stump, an internet chat room/forum populated by hundreds of entertainment industry writers, actors, directors, producers, and miscellaneous. Through this venue, I met Gary Stockdale, a brilliant musician and composer whose long list of work spanned film and TV, and netted him Emmy nominations for his work on the TV shows of Penn and Teller. Gary and I talked of our love for Broadway shows and, momentarily inspired, I posted on The Stump a list of fictional Broadway shows, with titles like "Bergen Belsen Bingo," "Aack! A Cathy Musical!" and yes ... "Bukowsical!", a reference to the famed poet-writer whose highly scabrous work is not exactly conducive to a musical tribute.

Gary, however, was intrigued by that very notion so he and I wrote three songs based upon my joke; we both cobbled lyrics together and Gary composed music with a legitimately "up" theatre sheen. It was introduced at the Los Angeles comedy performance venue Sit 'n Spin, with Andrew Hill Newman, Claudia Lonow, Ron Zimmerman, and Gary Shapiro performing the songs under the guise of a "sneak peek" at a musical-in-progress...and that, we imagined, was that. And it was. Until roughly three years later, or as statisticians like to call it, 2005. Enter Gary's friend Dean Cameron, a very talented actor, writer, and director, best known from his appearances in films like "Summer School" and cable-repeat classics like "Ski School" and "Miracle Beach." Cameron heard the three "Bukowsical!" songs that were gathering dust in Stockdale's computer and suggested that we expand the basic conceit of "Bukowsical!" into a one-act late night show.

We accepted the challenge and, lo, a structure for the show was expanded from the original idea presented at Sit 'n Spin: a backer's audition being held by a fictional Los Angeles theatre troupe called The Sacred Angel Fist Circle of Note Gang (SAFCNG), in which they essentially beg the audience for money to mount their latest project, "Bukowsical!" "Bukowsical!" is just one of countless and highly inappropriate ideas that this troupe and its charismatic Founder have had over the years, like "The Texas Chainsaw Musical," "Make Mine Kampf," and "Chapaquiddical." The members of SAFCNG do not lack the skill or talent to put these ideas across; they simply lack the basic sense to know that these ideas should never ever (ever) have been thought of as the foundations for full-scale musicals. But, because they so fervently believe in the power of theatre to change the world, they keep on plugging away, knowing that some day, somehow, the world will eventually catch on. (Cameron added the "Yeah!" exclaimed at the end of several of the show's numbers, to further emphasize the over-enthusiasm of SAFCNG.)

In late 2005, Cameron and producer John Mitchell pitched "Bukowsical!" to the L.A. theatre company Sacred Fools and, on little more than the concept and the three songs, the show was given a "go." Gary and I began writing the show's book, which consisted of loosely using Bukowski's own life as a thread on which to hang the songs, and then, writing those songs which had to strike a balance between traditional musical forms, parody, and a whole lot of dirty lyrics. By the end of January 2006, a wonderful cast had been assembled: Christina Byron, Kathi Copeland, Matthew Garland, Ian R. Gould,

Michael Lanahan, Fleur Phillips, Kathleen Campbell, David Lawrence as Bukowski, and Steven Memel as The Founder of the SAFCNG. We continued to write songs and lines as rehearsals commenced and, in little more than six weeks, the show had actually coalesced.

The one question that hung over all concerned: would we actually hear a discouraging word from anyone connected to the family or estate of Charles Bukowski? (For the record, he had died in 1994.) A stage production that incorporated his actual writings and that was slated to open around the same time as "Bukowsical!" had been cancelled, apparently, because Bukowski's widow Linda was not pleased with it. "Bukowsical!", of course, is not a serious treatment of Bukowski; it is as much about bad musical theatre conventions as it is about Bukowski. (In fact, not a single line is quoted from any of Bukowski's work.) The show is at once a parody and an homage to all the histrionic excesses of musical theatre and, as such, gives the street-tough life of Charles Bukowski the full Jerry Herman treatment. Or think "Kerouac – the Musical" by Steven Schwartz.

Nevertheless, one night, as Gary was on his way to a club gig with his band "The Jenerators," his phone rang and there on the caller I.D.: Charles Bukowski. He thought it was a gag by a friend but, no, he found himself speaking with Linda, who demanded to know what the hell was going on. Soon, Cameron and Mitchell received letters from her lawyers who were also demanding to know what the hell was going on (but in impeccable legalese). When Mitchell explained that we were not violating any copyright infringements, we heard nothing more from Bukowski's widow or from her lawyers. And still have not.

"Bukowsical!" opened at Sacred Fools on March 17, 2006, was enthusiastically received by a packed house, and scored very good reviews from the "L.A. Weekly" ("riotously funny"), "The Los Angeles Times" ("an uproarious romp"), and "Backstage West," which claimed: "It's terrific fun, and so wrong in all the right ways." The show was immediately extended by the kind folks at Sacred Fools; originally slated to run for five weeks, it wound up running more than four months. As that run came to a close, the idea of expanding it was broached and soon Gary and I were back to writing new material and songs, filling up the musical and story gaps that had been left open because of the time constraints of a 50-minute late night show.

This time, though, Cameron, who had committed to act in a play in Minneapolis, had to bow out as director and was replaced by Jessie Marion, another gifted director and also a choreographer, who also happened to be Cameron's wife (and who had choreographed one of the numbers for the late-night run of "Bukowsical!"). Gary and I hurriedly wrote six new songs in the span of about five weeks. The cast--now with Gary Shapiro as Bukowski--heroically adapted to the hectic schedule, learning new material while blocking scenes around songs that did not yet exist. The new, expanded 90-minute version of "Bukowsical!" successfully ran in the fall and winter of 2006 at Sacred Fools.

Next, "Bukowsical!" was invited to appear in January and February of 2007 at New Mexico's prestigious Revolutions Festival, which featured an eclectic group of productions from places as far off

as Germany, Britain, and Australia. Tricklock, the theatre company that hosted the festival, was founded by Joe Peracchio, an actor / writer / director well-versed in bold and challenging theatrical productions, and who had substituted as an actor during the original late-night run of "Bukowsical!" Peracchio then became the show's director...which was good timing because a few months after Revolutions, the show was invited to appear at 2007's New York International Fringe Festival, the famous venue which has become the launching pad for such shows as "Urinetown!"

Peracchio worked with us in revamping the show and, along with choreographer Leanne Fonteyn, gave it a harder, dirtier edge. The cast – now comprising Garland, Gould, Phillips, Lanahan and Nadia Ahern, Lauren Rubin, Cason Murphy, Jennifer Blake, Brad Blaisdell as Bukowski, and Marc Cardiff as The Founder – rehearsed and gave six performances at the Hollywood nightclub King King to prepare for the performances in New York. At the same time, Peracchio, Mitchell, Gary and I, and Michael Blaha, an entertainment attorney with extensive producing credits ranging from the New York Fringe Festival to Edinburgh, worked feverishly – much as the SAFCNG itself – to raise the money necessary to actually get cast and crew to New York. After much begging, borrowing, scraping, and assorted sexual favors, the money was raised and, within days after the last King King performance in August, cast and crew were in The Big Apple.

Given minimal rehearsal time – standard for a fringe show, but more so with an out-of-town production in a fringe show – the "Bukowsical!" cast and crew worked heroically to get in shape for the premiere date of August 11th at The Bleecker Street Theatre. The hard work paid off with sold-out shows, additional performances that had to be added because of said sold-out shows, and more good notices. (nytheatre.com: "A very polished, high-energy, amusement-park ride of a show"; Edge New York: "Boozy, bitter, brash and barrels of laughs, the musical called 'Bukowsical!' deserves its exclamation point..."; New Theatre Corps: "Unmissable, and in honor of the late Charles Bukowski, a heady brew that's good to the last drop.") "Variety" reported: "It's been a frenzy. That's how a rep for the New York Intl. Fringe Festival described audience demand for 'Bukowsical!'" And, best of all, "Bukowsical!" was named Outstanding Musical at the Fringe Festival.

"Bukowsical!" is a show for people who love musicals and for those who hate them. Similarly, no knowledge of Bukowski is necessary but if you do know his work, chances are that you will enjoy what is done here. Besides, how can you go wrong with a show whose first lyrics cheerfully begin: "What's the feeling you get when you're down on your luck/And you're too drunk to fuck?"

— Spencer Green

(Summary/Song Synopsis appears in CD Booklet)