

NEW YORK POST

B'WAY COMPOSER TAKES OPERA TURN

By CINDY ADAMS

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COMES now a new original opera, "Séance on a Wet Afternoon," about a husband who plans to make his wife famous. Oscar and Grammy winner **Stephen Schwartz** of "Godspell," "Pippin," "Wicked," "The Magic Show," "Butterflies Are Free," never before composed an opera. So, why now?

"It came about because The Granada in Santa Barbara was commissioned to do this and a friend suggested me. I'm an aficionado," said Schwartz. "I've always entertained the idea of writing an opera. I actually wrote a really bad one in college.

"Doing this is not just a little scary. It's daunting. This is a real opera, not a musical. It's rewriting and rewriting. The hardest part is getting it down the first time. Simply dealing with orchestration was a steep learning curve. I'd never done anything on this scale. I had to learn fast. I thought I'd only first do an outline. But I couldn't. My Broadway process has been: write the song in my head, work it out on the piano, play it into a computer. But this accompaniment's so complex you can't do a section mentally then finish with two hands on the piano. I had to do the entire libretto first. I couldn't just get a tune in my head."

Tune? There are "tunes" in opera?

"Yes. Mozart, Puccini, Verdi all had tunes."

OK. Never having hummed Turandot's "Nessun Dorma," I wouldn't know.

"And defined voice ranges -- tenor, mezzo, bass. A voice type for each role. Like the lead's a soprano, the husband a baritone. You then make adjustments for the optimum range of the cast that's picked. And it will play in an actual opera house. The orchestra of 46 lets out Broadway."

Mr. Schwartz lives in a house in Connecticut, "which 'Godspell' bought, 'The Magic Show' financed and 'Pippin' furnished. And I keep my awards in a room converted from an aquarium, which was too much to keep up. Besides, my work wasn't good for the fish."

"Séance" premieres in Santa Barbara next month.

REMEMBER "Gunsmoke"? Well, it's powdering up again. This time as a feature film, and the writer's **Gregory Poirier**, who brought us "National Treasure: Book of Secrets" . . . Schools Chancellor **Joel Klein** at the Monkey Bar. Who knew education paid that well? . . . The Hamptons getting a classy influx for writer **Ken Auletta's** daughter's wedding. Like Sony chairman Sir **Howard Stringer**. Like **David Geffen**, who arrived on his yacht which makes the QE2 into a dinghy. The hoiest of the polloi were invited. Me, not . . . **Jenna Morasca**, winner of CBS's "Survivor: The Amazon," starting a blog about her love of five years **Ethan Zohn**. He won "Survivor: Africa." He's battling a bad medical diagnosis, and she's asking caregivers to share their

thoughts on Fancast . . . "The Biggest Loser" host **Alison Sweeney** doing "The Mommy Diet" book. For before, after and during pregnancy. Out October 2010. Publisher's Simon Spotlight Entertainment.

FROM the immortal wisdom of Sam Nostradamus: Men are like parking spaces. All the good ones are already taken, and the rest are labeled handicapped.

TONY Curtis will kiss **Edith Shain** in Times Square a week from Friday. Edith Shain's the Army nurse plucked off her feet and roundly kissed by a never-identified NYC sailor in Life's famous Aug. 14, 1945, V-J Day photo. Now 93, she lives in The Bronx. Which, thanks to some smart p.r. hustle, brings up Bronx-born, NYC sailor Tony Curtis. He'll be here to -- Surprise! Surprise! -- hawk his new memoir "American Prince." Veterans Day sponsors found Edith in hopes today's generation will embrace the memories of that great WWII generation. They want young ones to never forget what went before and older ones to have their legacy preserved.

IT's to be marriage for the king of Swe den's beautiful Yale-educated daughter **Victoria**. He's her trainer. At least he was . . . Tattoo magazine publisher **Casey Exton** said all those **Plaxico Burr-up-his-ess** shots started a run on skin art. People want his famous "Everything happens for a reason" tattoo . . . Hearing of elephants' mistreatment, animal lover **Kyra Sedgwick** wrote **Bloomberg** to bar the Ringling Brothers from again performing in Coney Island. "To minimize the misery these gentle giants are enduring this summer. There is no room for animal cruelty at this wonderful landmark." . . . As I've already reported, eyes are watching a carefully choreographed dance between exes **Billy Joel** and **Christie Brinkley**. Married so often they both bear rice marks, it would seem they're comforting one another. Nice. They're beautiful people.