



Ol' Man River Floods, and a Musical Rises to the Surface in *The Water*, From Composer Stitt

By Kenneth Jones

Georgia Stitt, the respected music director who worked on *The Baker's Wife* for Goodspeed Musicals in 2002 and whose pop songs have been popping up in Manhattan venues, is shopping around a Midwest-set musical she wrote with collaborators Jeff Hylton and Tim Werenko.

The latest draft of *The Water* — a musical about people at risk emotionally and physically when a river floods a town — has been completed, composer Stitt told Playbill On-Line. Werenko is co-librettist and Hylton is lyricist and co-librettist.

“Set in 1997, it’s a completely original story about a small Missouri town that survives a flood,” Stitt explained. “It’s fiction, but bookwriter Tim Werenko lived through a flood and drew quite a bit from his personal experiences.”

The three writers spent a year developing Watertown, as it was first known, in residence at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center. Following readings they “are just now beginning to submit it to theatres, producers and developmental festivals,” Stitt said.

As recently as Jan. 20, a song from *The Water* was heard in an eclectic concert of show tunes and art songs at Symphony Space; George Dvorsky and Jill Geddes sang “River Like Life” in that evening. On Jan. 26, Stitt is presenting three songs from the show with Sally Wilfert, Keith Byron Kirk and Sean

McCourt as part of the “New Sundays” series produced by Phil Geoffrey Bond at the Duplex in Greenwich Village. That evening is an hour of Stitt’s music and includes material from other projects. For information, call (212) 255-5438.

The Water was Stitt’s idea, she said. “I wanted to write about why people choose to live in places that are devastated by nature, and why people rebuild in those same places knowing they face the possibility of another disaster,” she explained. “I wanted to write about the concept of community, particularly in middle-America. This town is situated on the banks of a river that is a tributary to the Mississippi River. It has flooded before, even within memory of some of the older people in town. The river is as much a character in the show as any of the actors, and the idea of ‘water’ — its presence or its absence — is almost always in the music.”

What’s the musical nature of *The Water*?

“It’s a book musical,” Stitt said. “I write both folksy music and groove-driven music. Some of it is very lyrical and some of it is more pop. I wouldn’t call it ‘rock,’ but it’s definitely a step outside the norms of traditional musical theatre. I grew up outside of Memphis as a classical pianist, so there are hints of the South in the music, alongside very pianistic accompaniments.”

Among those who sang in previous readings of *The Water* were Danielle Ferland, Sally Wilfert, Andrea Burns, Jeff Edgerton, Corey Reynolds, Ed Romanoff, Brooks Ashmanskas and Sean McCourt. Jeff McCarthy (*Urinetown*, *Side Man*) and Donna Lynne Champlin (*Hollywood Arms*, *My Life With Albertine*) are the demo recording, along with McCourt, Burns and several others. Peter Flynn has been attached as director of the show.

Stitt said the title was changed from *Watertown* to *The Water* to avoid any comparison to *Urinetown*, the comic Broadway hit about a town devastated by drought.

“There are 12 actors in the show, and it is multi generational,” Stitt said. “There are (among others) two men in their 60s, a single father in his late 40s, a love triangle involving a married couple in their 30s, sweethearts in their 20s getting engaged, and a 13 year old girl.”

Ron Gwiazda at Rosenstone/Wender is the agent for *The Water*. Stitt’s work can be heard at www.georgiastitt.com.