

Schönberg and Boublil in the 1990s: *Miss Saigon*

Miss Saigon is a quintessential megamusical. Most of the shows discussed so far, especially those written after the first wave of the 1980s, demonstrate many but not all the features of a megamusical. But *Miss Saigon* has it all. It features a sung-through score from the creators of *Les Misérables*, Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil. It was produced by the leading force behind the megamusical, Cameron Mackintosh. It featured expensive, elaborate sets, including one hugely famous *coup de théâtre*, a helicopter that landed onstage and flew away again. John Napier designed the sets, as he did for *Cats*, *Starlight Express*, *Les Misérables*, and *Sunset Boulevard*. Costume designer Andreae Neofitou and lighting designer David Hersey had worked on *Les Misérables*, as did most of the other key players on the creative team. The plot had all the epic, emotional qualities that megamusical audiences expected, with a plot drawn from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, an opera with smaller dimensions but equally romantic, exaggerated emotions. (*Miss Saigon* was the first of a mini-wave of Broadway productions based on operas, followed by Jonathan Larson's *Rent*, based on Puccini's *La Bohème*; Elton John and Tim Rice's *Aida*, based on Verdi; and *La Bohème* itself, in a trendy staging by Baz Luhrmann.) It was the biggest of Mackintosh's "high-tech spectacular 'event' musicals" so far, yet one with a personal, somewhat realistic story.¹

Miss Saigon takes place in Vietnam in April 1975, as the last American troops are being pulled out of the war, just before Saigon falls and Ho Chi Minh takes control. Kim, a seventeen-year-old girl whose family of rice farmers has been killed in the war, has just arrived in Saigon and is working her first night as a "bar-girl" in the sleazy nightclub Dreamland. It is run by a half-French, half-Vietnamese man known as the Engineer, who makes shady deals, pimps his employees, and cares for nothing but his own profit. Kim, full of charming wide-eyed innocence, falls immediately for Chris, a tired marine stationed at the American embassy in Saigon. Despite the desperate urgings of Chris's fellow soldier John, Chris spends the last tense days of the American presence holed up in blissful love with Kim. They even participate in a ceremony that Kim considers a wedding.

Unlike Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*, Chris does not intentionally leave Kim behind. Saigon falls, the embassy is evacuated, and Chris and Kim are separated in the chaos. We learn this only later, in a flashback in the second act. But by the end of the first act, three years have gone by, and Kim is now struggling to keep herself alive—as well as her young son, Tam, whom Chris never knew he had fathered. In fact, having been unable to find Kim after a year of searching,

he presumed her dead and returned to America, marrying his back-home sweetheart, Ellen. Ellen is aware that she does not have Chris's whole heart; eventually Chris tells her about Kim.

Kim has a back-home sweetheart of sorts as well, Thuy, who was pledged to Kim when they were children and who has since taken up with the victorious North Vietnamese. When Thuy tracks Kim down and threatens to kill her illegitimate son, she shoots him. With the help of the ever-present Engineer, Kim and her son become boat people and flee Vietnam. They dream of going to America, but make it only as far as Bangkok. Chris's old friend John now works as an advocate for the *bui doi*, the children of soldiers and Vietnamese women who are often ignored by their American families. Through his work, he finds Kim in Bangkok and takes Chris and Ellen there. Kim then accidentally meets Ellen before she can be reunited with Chris. The Engineer still dreams of the good life in America, which he plans to win by continuing to hook himself to Kim and her half-American son. But Kim is only interested in giving Tam a better life. Believing that Chris will honor his second marriage to Ellen and that Tam's best hope is to go to America with his father, Kim shoots herself. The show ends with Chris weeping over her body.

The story obviously called for a nearly all-Asian cast. The creative team mounted a far-reaching search for suitable actor/singer/dancers of Asian descent to play the bar girls and local Vietnamese. After extensive searches in London, New York, Los Angeles, and Hawaii, they finally found their Kim in Manila, a teenager who was also a theater veteran, Lea Salonga. In fact, the London cast featured a number of Filipinos along with English performers (both white and not).² For the Engineer, Mackintosh and the creative team chose English actor Jonathan Pryce. No one thought anything was controversial about this choice at the time. Pryce was a well-known theater and film actor who would garner rave reviews for capturing the smarmy, slithering Engineer—a character who was more a product of the ongoing war and his own opportunism than that of either his Vietnamese or French parentage.

Schönberg and Boublil explained that their inspiration for *Miss Saigon* came from a photograph they saw of a child being given up by her Vietnamese mother to be taken to an American father that the girl had never seen. This reminded them of the sacrifice in *Madama Butterfly*, so they combined elements of that plot with the backdrop of actual events in Vietnam. Schönberg noted that they used Puccini merely for inspiration, and that the show was meant to be as far from the opera as *West Side Story* is from *Romeo and Juliet*.³ Schönberg, in fact, was less enthusiastic about using the *Madama Butterfly* story as an inspiration

until he came across Pierre Loti's novel *Madame Chrysanthemum*, with a similar but less tragic East/West backdrop. This made it seem as if *Miss Saigon* would be part of a tradition of telling stories of conflict between cultures (and using such stories as fodder for romantic plots) rather than simply retelling Puccini.⁴ Certainly many other operas and musicals tread similar ground, such as Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* and *The King and I*.

The composer and lyricist worked for months on the book before writing any of the score, paying great attention to the dramatic arc of the plot and the details of the characters. Mackintosh, on board now as their producer, had been a bit wary at first about such a modern, volatile subject, so different from their previous show. But he slowly came to believe in the dramatic power of the story and then to admire the music. He was not accustomed to the duo's working methods. Unlike Lloyd Webber, who often visits his drawer full of tunes when he begins a new project or when he needs to find a song to add to a show, Schönberg focuses first on the book with Boublil and then retreats to compose. Certainly the fact that *Les Misérables* and *Miss Saigon* have nothing in common in terms of setting or mood would make it difficult to use a melody cut from one show in the other. Whatever their differences from Lloyd Webber, Mackintosh eventually found that Schönberg and Boublil had at least something in common with a number of famous American musical composers and lyricists (even if Schönberg knew virtually nothing about Richard Rodgers): "They're not Parisians. They're good Jewish boys—like most writers of the theatre."⁵

Mackintosh's search for a director began, not surprisingly, with Trevor Nunn. But Mackintosh feared that Nunn's sensibilities lay more with historical epics than modern love stories, and he searched for other options. At the same time, Lloyd Webber was considering Nunn for *Aspects of Love*, and Nunn was engaged in the New York reworking of Tim Rice's *Chess*. (The megamusical, for all its hugeness, was still quite a small world; Lloyd Webber, Rice, Nunn, Mackintosh, Napier, Schönberg, and Boublil perpetually rearranged themselves in new combinations, bringing along many of the same team members in slightly shifted groups.) Lloyd Webber thought the young, relatively unknown director Nicholas Hytner might be good for *Aspects of Love*, though Nunn promised everyone that he could do both that show and *Miss Saigon*. But Mackintosh was not convinced, and in the end, Lloyd Webber got Nunn for *Aspects* and Mackintosh got Hytner for *Miss Saigon*.⁶ Choreographer Bob Avian, another American on this French/British creative team (he had worked alongside Michael Bennett on Sondheim's *Follies*), came on board, as did the entire design team from *Les Misérables*. Boublil, much more confident in his ability to write English lyrics than he was at

the time of *Les Mis*, now had a partner instead of a translator: Richard Maltby Jr., who had directed Lloyd Webber's *Song and Dance* (and many musicals since), worked with Boublil on translations both poetic and colloquial.

Mackintosh had originally intended to take *Miss Saigon* to New York first, but when a suitable theater proved difficult to find, he went the traditional megamusical route and opened in London in September 1989. In typical Mackintosh fashion, the show boasted big numbers: it cost \$5 million to stage, had advance sales of \$8 million, and was sold out for six months.

The show earned very strong reviews from critics and raves from audiences, and Lea Salonga became an overnight star. The show settled in for a ten-year run.

With the show proving an immediate success, talk resumed about bringing it to New York, and the usual rumors arose—speculation about which theater would win the bidding war, for example. The show soon broke the record for the largest advance ticket sales in New York, at an astounding \$24 million, and it wasn't even scheduled to open until March 1991.

But then a controversy descended on *Miss Saigon* that would become better known than any other aspect of the show (except for the helicopter). Megamusicals have often, intentionally or not, attracted publicity from casting controversies; in the case of *Miss Saigon* the issues were not merely the stuff of gossip but involved politics and race relations, and led to changes in how producers and directors thought about casting. The scandal also retained an element of behind-the-scenes gossip, which gave the show even more free publicity.

In July 1990, the Asian division of the ethnic minorities committee of Actors' Equity, the union of Broadway performers, filed a complaint with their parent organization. The complaint, spearheaded by playwright David Henry Hwang and actor B. D. Wong, alleged that the casting of Jonathan Pryce, a white man, as the half-Asian Engineer, was offensive. Pryce had won the Olivier Award for his performance in London, and Actors' Equity had granted him "star status" to bring the role to New York. British Equity pointed out that they had searched for an Asian-English actor to play the Engineer, but when they did not find a suitable one, cast Pryce and received no complaints from their union members or the Asian community. Pryce wore a subtle make-up design when the show first opened, suggesting his character was of color and had Asian eyes, which again garnered no protest until the American controversy began. Pryce then ceased using the make-up.

Hwang had won a Tony for his play *M. Butterfly* in 1988, as had B. D. Wong for Best Actor in that play. (*M. Butterfly* also drew inspiration from the Puccini opera, in this case with a gender-bending twist.) Both Hwang and Wong were

strong advocates for more opportunity for Asian-American performers, in roles meant for Asians or for nonspecific roles. Actors' Equity supported this policy, as did the theater community at large—but when it came to this particular example, players were sharply divided. Actors' Equity, quick to back the views of its protestors from within, condemned the casting of Pryce, a white man “painted yellow,” in their words. Mackintosh responded that the casting director had seen countless actors in open calls, not only in New York but also in Hawaii, Los Angeles, other California cities, and Manila. None had the talent or reputation of Pryce. Mackintosh did not see the offense in having the half-white character be white rather than Asian; in fact, he declared it a double standard. “Ironically,” he noted, “in the current Broadway production of ‘Phantom’ we have an Amerasian actor of tremendous ability playing the lead role of [Raoul,] the Vicomte de Chagny. Why is it quite proper for him to play a European aristocrat and not for Jonathan Pryce to play a Eurasian?” He accused Actors' Equity of being far more interested in protecting American jobs than Asian-American ones, and since they could not deny Pryce star status, they hoped to block him this way instead.⁷ Mackintosh immediately threatened to cancel the show if he could not bring Pryce.

With this, the controversy erupted into front-page news, moving beyond the gossip of the New York theater scene to become a national debate. Could a white man play a man of color without offending the ethnic minority he portrayed? Why, then, could a man of color play a role intended for a white man, including everything from Raoul in *Phantom* to roles in Shakespeare? Why shouldn't the union fight to give the role to an Asian-American? This was the union's job—to fight for its own, both minorities and Americans in general, and the Engineer was a potentially star-making role. Equity, through its spokesperson and executive secretary, Alan Eisenberg, responded to Mackintosh's accusation of a double standard by explaining affirmative action: colorblind casting is intended to give unspecific or even white roles to minority actors, not to give minority roles to white actors.

But many of Equity's own members did not support the barring of Pryce or even the principle behind Wong and Hwang's protest. *Miss Saigon* would bring fifty jobs to actors, at least thirty-four of which would be filled by minorities. If Mackintosh were to cancel this show as a result of Equity's standing on the principle of having one Asian-American actor get one role, all thirty-four would be out of work. So would all the white actors, all the stage workers in sibling unions, all the replacement actors that would work if the production ran for years, all the potential employees of tours, and so on. Then, just as it looked like the members of Equity might overrule their own administration, Mackintosh

cancelled the show. Within hours, members of Equity had signed a petition that forced their governing board to reconsider barring Pryce.⁸

The controversy made news in the *New York Times* nearly every day during the summer of 1990. It became clear that the majority of Equity members felt that colorblind casting should be a two-way street, and that more important, New York needed this show. But a few did support the principle behind the original protest: Asian roles should be filled by Asian actors. Pryce, from London, said that he felt as if he were being called a racist, when all he hoped to do was a good job. "I've never had any doubts or qualms about playing the Engineer," he noted. "What is appropriate is that the best person for the job play the role, and I think it's completely valid that I play the role. If the character is half Asian and half European, you've got to drop down on one side of the fence or the other, and I'm choosing to drop down on the European side."⁹ As the controversy raged, Pryce's air of general calm about the whole thing continued; to him, acting was acting. "Changing our appearance is what we do as actors," he pointed out. "I'm Welsh, and in 18 years of working, I've never played a Welshman. Does that mean that every time I appear, I'm offending the acting community?"¹⁰

Frank Rich, reporting in the *New York Times* about the London production, made an even stronger case for the Engineer's being cast with a white man: it did not matter, really, that the role was only half-Asian. Fundamentally, the role was not even a real person. Similar to the role of the Emcee in *Cabaret*, the Engineer's job was to "personify the spirit of the war in Vietnam itself—of warped ideals, bottomless corruption, unspeakable atrocities, hypocritical politicians (East and West) and moral chaos. He's not really an Engineer, but rather a parasitic fixer." It did not matter in the slightest what race the actor was—but it mattered completely that the role be played by Pryce. Rich declared it one of the two best performances he had seen in thirty years in London, and he felt that Mackintosh was absolutely right not to bring the show to New York without him, since he carried and saved a production that otherwise would suffer from what Rich saw as its dull, bloated sections. Rich supported the idea of colorblind casting no matter the direction, and declared Equity's decision "hypocritical reverse racism." But even if he could understand that Equity was making a stand in favor of helping minorities, they chose the worst possible example with which to do so. The Engineer is half French and half Vietnamese because the setting of the show makes it appropriate for him to be so, but he is "in reality a theatrical device, a chorus, an eternal camp follower—alternately American and satanic in personality, a character without a proper name and without an ethnic or national identity of any recognizable sort in the text or on stage."¹¹

Indeed, not only was the Engineer's ethnicity unclear (he speaks of learning various life lessons from various groups but aligns himself with none), he rarely interacts with the other characters in any realistic way. He makes events happen, he schemes, but he has few human emotions other than greed. He often speaks to the audience, not to the other characters, about his cynical beliefs and goals. Thanks partly to Pryce's effective performance, the big eleven o'clock number was not Kim's self-sacrifice, but the Engineer's twisted fantasy about what he hopes to find in America when he wheedles his way there with Kim and her son. In "The American Dream," the audience sees the Engineer's vision come to colorful life. He begins with a reminder of his multicultural, hard-luck childhood: his mother was a whore for whom he pimped as a child. But when the Americans came to Vietnam, he found new ways to earn money: "I can sell shit, and get thanks. / That's what I learned from the Yanks."¹² He feels that he is an American at heart, because of the opportunity one can find there.

What's that I smell in the air?
The American dream
Sweet as a suite in Bel-Air
The American dream
Girls can buy tits by the pair
The American dream
Bald people think they'll grow hair
The American dream
Bums there have money to spare
The American dream . . .
Schlitz down the drain
Pop the champagne
It's time we all entertain
My American dream!

As he becomes more enthralled by the fantasy he spins, the stage transforms into a cartoonish vision of his America. The Asian girls he used to employ now enter in Vegas-style sequined showgirl costumes and very fake blonde wigs. Dancing men in sparkling tuxedos frolic about. And, in the middle, a huge pink Cadillac convertible carries a girl in a Statue of Liberty costume. The Engineer throws himself onto its hood amid a fit of sexual ecstasy. The song reaches a peak of volume and intensity, but it gets there slowly, building from a soft Kander and Ebb-style vamp and a rather vaudevillian sensibility.

It became clear to the board of Actors' Equity that they had made an ill-informed decision, supporting the protest of Hwang and Wong and barring Pryce without realizing the backlash it would receive from many of its members, minority and not. Equity had seventy-nine voting members at the time, and only

about half had voted (in a very close count) on the question of barring Pryce from coming to New York. They represented about 39,000 performers. Now, with hundreds of Equity members demanding that the decision be reconsidered so that they all might have the chance to work, Equity was forced to reconvene. Statements were released, meetings were called, editorials for both sides abounded. Finally, Equity's board voted again, reversed their decision, and invited Pryce to New York. Their statement said they had "applied an honest and moral principle in an inappropriate manner."¹³

At this juncture, Mackintosh made an ingenious—or perhaps diabolical—move. He did not immediately cheer the decision and agree to bring his show to New York. Instead, he made a new demand: that he have complete creative control over any future decisions, including those of casting. Rumors suggested that he feared Lea Salonga, the Filipino actress, would be blocked by Equity. But what he explained publicly was that he did not want to bring the show to New York under the cloud of a hostile working environment. He wanted assurance that, although he would be perfectly happy to cast any person of any race in any role, the ultimate criterion had to be talent, and the final decision his.¹⁴

A fresh round of discussions sprang up. The *New York Times* and other papers ran not just editorials, but features about the history of Asians in entertainment. If Wong and Hwang's primary goal had been awareness, they had achieved it. Equity released a statement saying that they had reached an agreement with Mackintosh, the details of which were kept secret—but the show would go on.¹⁵ Casting began; many hundreds of Asian-American and other actors of color flocked to the open calls in New York and Los Angeles.

But, as expected, Mackintosh had one more round of fighting to go. He asked Equity for special permission to bring Salonga to New York. He had auditioned over 1,200 women, he argued, and not one had both the youth and the range of talent that Salonga brought to the role. Equity could not justify the exception by declaring Salonga an international star, since this was her first high-profile role, so they had to be convinced that no American could do the job. Equity rejected Mackintosh's request, Mackintosh took the next step of seeking outside arbitration, and finally—with *Miss Saigon's* advance rising to a new record of \$34 million—Equity granted Salonga permission to come to New York.¹⁶ (Taking over the strenuous role for occasional performances was an Asian-American woman from Allentown, Pennsylvania.)

By this time, Mackintosh had become a star in his own right, more famous than he had been for his work on *Cats* or *Les Misérables*. In the *New York Times Magazine*, Mervyn Rothstein wrote a long article about the controversial producer in which he used a then-unfamiliar term to describe his shows; *Cats*, he opined,

was “the first of the British megamusicals.” Rothstein offered interesting insights into Mackintosh’s working methods, including his commitment to getting investors their money back as soon as possible; his persuasive techniques that involve a mix of charm, ego, and temper; his admiration for Lloyd Webber; his hands-on involvement in everything his company does, including a single advertising slogan in a newspaper; and his earlier biography.¹⁷

With so much attention paid to the casting, the role of the Engineer, and the power of Mackintosh, few critics or historians have looked at the score. “The American Dream” is the Engineer’s only big number, and he otherwise sings while engaged in various deals or scams. Kim, on the other hand, carries a great deal of the music, as does Chris. They sing several duets, including the delicate “Sun and Moon” and the equally crystalline “Wedding Ceremony (Dju Vui Vai).” These numbers, like many of Kim’s, feature flute and other delicate, high instruments, though for their duet, “The Last Night of the World,” they are given a soft-rock saxophone and a more pop-oriented, less theater-like number.

Kim also belts out several anthems; for “I Still Believe,” she is joined (from the other side of the planet) by Ellen. As Kim remains hopeful for Chris’s return, Ellen attempts to understand why he remains troubled after three years at home. The act 1 finale, “I’d Give My Life for You,” begins with Kim softly pledging to protect her son, but slowly builds and then merges, in a chilling dramatic effect, with the dirge-like march of the boat people as they trudge hopelessly off to a different life.

The use of the chorus, in fact, is one of the most effective elements in *Miss Saigon*, as it had been in *Les Misérables*. Serving as poor bar girls and patrons (“The Heat Is On in Saigon”), then as dispirited disenfranchised Vietnamese, then as victorious soldiers (“The Morning of the Dragon”), the chorus surrounds and saturates the love story with its moody context.

In terms of form, the score works much like that of *Les Misérables*, with scenes made up of interlocking sections of song and recitative-like material. Overall, however, the score relies far more on set numbers than on amorphous binding material, and contains fewer revisitings and reworkings of moveable musical ideas.

With the casting controversies finally settled, *Miss Saigon* opened on Broadway on 11 April 1991. In true megamusical fashion, it easily overcame mixed reviews with publicity and extremely positive word of mouth from audiences. But unlike *Cats*, for example, *Miss Saigon* received fairly level-headed reviews, without much of the open hostility or snide remarks that megamusicals sometimes inspire. Most critics found the show worth seeing, even if they had a number of criticisms.

Frank Rich, having already weighed in with his view that Jonathan Pryce was a must for the show, told his *New York Times* readers to go see it, now that it had finally arrived. Interestingly, Rich cast *Miss Saigon* in a non-megamusical light, finding that it had much more in common with older American musicals than with the newer British imports. He saw the influence of *Follies*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Oliver!*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *West Side Story*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*, among others. The first two shows on this list are Sondheim's—not normally a name that springs to mind when critics consider the megamusical. But this was Rich's point: *Miss Saigon* has "lush melodies" like Rodgers and Hammerstein's works, excellent star-making performances rather than undefined ensembles, and despite the "inane" helicopter moment, this is the most "intimate" and "least spectacular" of the imports from the West End. In fact, he argued, it only goes astray when it tries to be more like the megamusical. This happened in two ways. First, the spectacle moments seemed pointless (and in fact the flashy Bangkok set reminded Rich of a similar moment in the ill-fated *Chess*). Second, *Miss Saigon* shared the fatal flaw of all megamusicals: they all demonstrate "their creators' utter bewilderment about what happens between men and women emotionally, psychologically and sexually." Ellen drew inadvertent laughs, and Chris came across as bland. Many earlier megamusicals got away with not addressing intimacy because they were almost completely lacking in a traditional love story (*Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Evita*, *Cats*, *Starlight Express*), but this one faced the problem head-on. Rich found the results rather embarrassing. But Salonga, Pryce, and the seedier, moodier sections that did not deal directly with the love story sold the show for Rich; he also praised (as all others did) Hinton Battle as Chris's friend John, who delivered the corny "Bui Doi" with a passion that stopped the show. The show might not say anything new about the war, noted Rich, but it "still manages to plunge the audience back into the quagmire of a generation ago, stirring up feelings of anguish and rage that run even deeper" than the recent casting controversy.¹⁸

Understandably, most critics compared *Miss Saigon* to earlier megamusicals, although here in 1991, they were each still making up their own labels: British imports, spectaculars, and so on. Some found the spectacle impressive and well-integrated; others found it gratuitous and responsible for the new high in ticket prices (regular seats went for \$60, and Mackintosh sold a few select spots for a record-breaking \$100). Some thought the music tuneful, others a bland wash of Euro-pop. Douglas Watt, in the *New York Daily News*, found the score less successful than that of *Les Misérables*, made up of "trifling melodies punctuated by downward crashing Andrew Lloyd Webberisms" (though he neither defines the term nor cites examples).¹⁹ For *Time* magazine, William A. Henry III wrote an

enthusiastic rave, finding the show “relevant and thought provoking” as well as full of deeper meanings: Kim’s fate was “a paradigm for all the promises that Western powers made but failed to keep in Vietnam and other colonies.” Linda Winer in *Newsday* admired the staging, sets, and performances, but was put off by the very element that Henry found so moving: the message and subject matter. She found the photos of actual Vietnamese children, projected during “Bui Doi,” offensive; the show “dances on a sliver of a line between exploitation and the show-biz equivalent of passionate commentary about exploitation.” She declared that the team had “created a big, slick, entertaining, sentimental yet cynical melodrama that plays pat and loose with political history and charges up to \$100 for people to feel guilty about orphans left by American servicemen.”²⁰ Her tone was similar to that of Michael Feingold in his review of *Les Misérables*; both sense a lack of sincerity in the creative team, and a manipulation of the audience, tapping into their upper-middle-class guilt about those less fortunate. Neither show, it is safe to say, intends this. Nothing suggests that anyone on the creative team for *Miss Saigon* (or *Les Misérables*) used the subject matter for its ability to evoke guilt. If audiences were moved, the goal was reached; if some of them went out to make the world a better place, the goal was surpassed. But, in increasingly cynical times, it is understandable that critics may find grand emotions and naïve, sincere characters hard to swallow, and therefore decide that the creators could not have been sincere.

Even those who disliked certain aspects of the show found others to praise, and no major newspaper panned the show completely.²¹ It scarcely mattered, since the publicity (especially from the casting dispute) was more than enough to keep the show running for some months, and by then, good word of mouth from audiences handed the show a healthy ten-year run, until January 2001, for a total of 4,092 performances.

Lea Salonga, Jonathan Pryce, and Hinton Battle all won Tony Awards for their work. The entire creative team was nominated in their respective categories, but lost most of their Tonys to *The Will Rogers Follies* (which also beat *The Secret Garden* in many categories). The media, which had run a *Miss Saigon* story nearly every day for much of the summer in 1990, and which had covered the show’s opening with great attention, left it alone until Mackintosh announced its closing. Originally announced for 31 December 2000, the date would be moved a month later, thanks to a last-minute boost in ticket sales; Mackintosh did the same shift with the closing date of *Cats* (which finally shut down around the same time, in September 2000). By the time of *Miss Saigon*’s closing, it had grossed \$1.3 billion worldwide, which for a musical is enormous but for a megamusical is quite average—unlike *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon* had by then opened in “only” seven

foreign countries. A feature in the *New York Times* noted that the show had done wonders for minorities, especially Asians, by keeping hundreds of people steadily employed—and the worldwide productions, plus two U.S. tours, would continue.²²

Andrew Lloyd Webber in the 1990s

Andrew Lloyd Webber chose a different path—or at least attempted to—when he followed *The Phantom of the Opera* with *Aspects of Love*. *Phantom* was not only immensely popular, it was also far better received by critics than many of his previous works. But Lloyd Webber wanted to write something other than a megamusical. He knew the formula was not infallible; *Cats* had been an unprecedented hit, but there had also been *Starlight Express*. And Lloyd Webber was never one to rest on his laurels or rely on a formula, in any strict sense; despite his two big hits of the 1980s sharing certain megamusical qualities (a sung-through score, elaborate sets, enormous marketing campaigns and publicity), they also demonstrated strong differences. *Cats* was heavy on theme and light on plot and character, and was told almost entirely through dance and movement; *Phantom* was a character-based book musical revolving around a love story.

Braving a new experiment once again, Lloyd Webber turned to *Aspects of Love*. Having long been criticized (or at least known) for writing musicals lacking in realism or fully developed love stories and emotions, Lloyd Webber set out to write an earthbound story about love. Based on a 1955 novella by David Garnett, the story revolves around Rose, an actress, and her young admirer, Alex. They impulsively begin an affair and run off to a villa owned by Alex's uncle, George. George must interrupt his tryst with his lover, Giulietta, a sculptor, to investigate what young Alex has been doing at his villa. There he is immediately taken with Rose, much younger than himself but much older than Alex. When Rose is called to work and Alex to his duties as a soldier, their affair ends. Two years later, Alex is stunned to find that Rose has taken up with George. Rose meets Giulietta (George is still seeing her as well as Rose) and the two women become friends, bonded by their love for George and by a (mostly implied) homosexual experimentation. George and Rose eventually marry and have a daughter, Jenny. Act 2 opens twelve years later; Rose has become a huge success. Upon seeing Alex for the first time in all these years, both she and Alex abandon their current unimportant love interests (no one is entirely faithful to anyone) and return to George's villa, where Alex befriends young Jenny, the daughter of George and Rose. By the time the girl is fourteen, she and Alex have developed an illicit