



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Answered by Trey Parker, Robert Lopez and Matt Stone

Q: How did you come up with the idea for *The Book of Mormon*?

Trey Parker: Matt and I went to see *Avenue Q* when it opened in 2003, and we were like, "Wow, this is actually really good." When it was over I was thinking, "This is exactly the kind of thing I've always dreamed about doing."

Matt Stone: During intermission, we saw that we were thanked in the Playbill. "Well," we thought, "that's weird."

Bobby Lopez: That's because I saw the *South Park* movie when it open in 1999, and I just thought, "Oh my God, this is exactly what I want to be doing." A week after that, the idea came to me for *Avenue Q*.

Trey Parker: It happened purely by coincidence that Bobby showed up that night, he introduced himself and we went across the street for a drink.

Matt Stone: Bobby is younger than Trey and me, so he looked at us like elder statesman and asked what he should do next. We asked, "What did he want to do?" And he said, "I want to write something about Joseph Smith and the Mormons."

Bobby Lopez: When I said Joseph Smith, they were like, "We've wanted to do that, too!" They had it in their heads to do some kind of Joseph Smith musical, but never did. I said, "If you guys want to do that, that's fine, because I'd really love to see what you do, more than what I would do."

Trey Parker: It just became ridiculously obvious that we should team up and do something about Mormons. So we said, "No, let's do it together."

Q: What came first, the story or the score? Can you tell us about some of the songs?

Trey Parker: "Hello" was literally the first thing we wrote. As soon as we figured out the show was going to be about missionaries, we realized that it would be a great introduction to just ring a massive amount of doorbells and somehow work them into a musical number. This symphony of doorbells and white boys with good haircuts and white shirts and black ties -- saying "hello" and offering you a free book -- seemed very much an opening number to us. It is totally Disney in sensibility, and totally Mormon in attack.

Bobby Lopez: There's this idea that Mormons are these very naïve, hopeful, smiling, trusting people from the Midwest. In "Hello" and "Two by Two," we used the energy and optimism, and the



relentlessly hopeful and sunny feeling. It's a great way to start because we go to the opposite in a few scenes.

Q: Did you have any musical theater influences in writing the show?

Trey Parker: There's a lot of Rodgers and Hammerstein references in the show, because that's what it feels like to me. When you're doing this sort of happy-go-lucky, optimistic Mormon, it just plays right into it. For the second act pageant, "Joseph Smith American Moses," we always thought it would be so awesome to do our own version of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" from *The King and I*. We did this improv where we put on African drum loops and started singing African melodies. We had such a great time doing it, it was ridiculous. But then we realized we should make it a bigger number. We went back and actually watched the "Uncle Tom's Cabin" sequence. It was really long but it told such a huge story, and our number didn't. So we were like, "Let's follow *The King and I*, and really make it clear that the story has a much deeper and profound meaning to the Africans."

Bobby Lopez: When we were writing "Making Things Up Again," the first number in the second act, we had just seen *Sunday in the Park with George*. I think Trey was sort of influenced by it, which is weird because I consider myself the Sondheim freak out of everyone. Trey just sat down and started plunking out this Georges Seurat-like rhythm, which became the whole motif for "You're making things up again, Arnold."

Trey Parker: There's just nothing more perfect in the universe to me than a good musical. And a bad musical makes you want to kill yourself. A good musical is to me so much more moving and powerful than a great movie or a great book, or anything.

Q: *The Book of Mormon* is provocative, in the same way that *South Park* is provocative. Are there boundaries?

Matt Stone: There's a catharsis in being able to really laugh at some of the goofier ideas of religion without necessarily laughing at the people practicing them. We never like to make a "point," per se. We want to give you room to feel what the show is saying to you. We don't want to tell anybody what the point is, or what the politics are. It's up to you to figure out what it meant.

Q: Are there boundaries in what you can do or say on stage?

Trey Parker: There is a line that you can cross all you want as long as you have a reason for doing it. If it has a point and it has a story and it has genuine, real character and emotion, then you can pretty much do whatever you want as long as you're being truthful.

Q: How would you describe the show to someone who is a traditional musical theater fan?

Bobby Lopez: The musical is a machine that's designed to bring you down and raise you up, and to give you a positive, uplifting experience. I want the musical to show people the nadir of human experience. For this musical, it's about faith. It's about religious feeling. And I think we show a character that loses his faith, and we give his faith back to him in a better way at the end. And I hope that the experience of the audience mirrors that, whether it's a religious experience or just feeling entertained.