

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH CASEY NICHOLAW – DIRECTOR, CHOREOGRAPHER

Currently represented on Broadway as co-director and choreographer of *The Book of Mormon* (2011 Tony®, Drama Desk & Outer Critics Circle Awards as co-director with Trey Parker receiving the same nominations for choreography). Other Broadway credits as director/choreographer: *Elf: The Musical*; *The Drowsy Chaperone* (2006 Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle nominations); *Monty Python's Spamalot* directed by Mike Nichols (2005 Tony, Drama Desk & Outer Critics Circle nominations for Best Choreography). Additional New York credits: for City Center Encores! – highly acclaimed productions of *Anyone Can Whistle* and *Follies* (direction/choreography), *Bye Bye Birdie* (choreography) and *Can-Can* (musical staging); for N.Y. Philharmonic – *Candide*; *South Pacific* at Carnegie Hall (also on PBS Great Performances), *Sinatra: His Voice, His World, His Way* at Radio City Music Hall. He directed and choreographed the world premieres of *Minsky's* at Center Theater Group and *Robin and the 7 Hoods* at the Old Globe.



1. What are the five most important things you need to consider before beginning the choreography process?

I think the **STORY** is the most important thing: How does the number function? Where does it begin? Where does it end? What story does it tell?

I think **STRUCTURE** is another important factor: How does it start? How does it build? How does it finish?

WHO IS IN IT? You must factor the dance level of the people that need to be in the number – if there's a principal character in it who doesn't dance well, how do you make them shine?

CHARACTER Make sure the choreography is right for the character and situation in the scene that the number is in.

What is the **REASON TO DANCE?** How is it justified in the number, story, and situation so that there is intention, a reason behind the dance? The steps are the easiest thing once these answers are in place.

2. Which members of the production team are involved in the creative process before the choreography begins?

Choreographer and his/her associates and the Dance Arranger.

3. How did you research each style?

It depends whether it is set in a period or needs a certain energy or style: there are many ways to do it. Pictures, videos – or nothing at all; sometimes I just follow my instincts with no need to research. I always find when I research a period type dance, it may be historically accurate, but it's not theatrical and I just rely on myself anyway.

4. How do you begin to create the choreography?

I meet with the Dance Arranger and I tell him/her what I'm looking for and he/she comes up with an arrangement and we work on it together until I think it's at a good starting point for what I need. Then I listen to it over and over and over and start visualising it. Then I answer the five key questions noted above then we start getting the number on its feet in pre-production. First with my associates, then we set it on a small group of dancers before teaching it to a larger group in rehearsals.

5. Are the costumes an important factor from the start of the creative process?

Yes – but usually I teach the number first and then if the costumes might hinder the movement we'll rehearse with mock-ups. We also incorporate props right from the start.

6. Do you try the choreography out with a group before teaching it to the cast?

Yes – in pre-production with 6 or so dancers playing all the parts and doing all the sections of the dance.

