Shakespeare Unlimited: Something Rotten

Wayne Kirkpatrick
Karey Kirkpatrick
Interviewed by Barbara Bogaev

A Folger Shakespeare Library podcast

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MICHAEL WITMORE: Here’s something you never thought you would hear in a Folger Shakespeare Library podcast:

[CLIP from Something Rotten. Music plays.]

NICK: Oh, God I hate Shakespeare!
CHORUS: Gasp
NICK: That’s right, I said it.
NIGEL: No!
NICK: I do, I hate Shakespeare!

Don't worry. It's not what you think.

From the Folger Shakespeare Library this is Shakespeare Unlimited. I’m Michael Witmore, the Folger’s director. This podcast is called “Play On.”

In 2015, a new musical opened on Broadway. The plot: two brothers living in England in 1595 have had their playwriting careers upended by the arrival of a new guy from Stratford-upon-Avon. They consult a soothsayer named Thomas Nostradamus who peers into the future and gives them the solution to getting a professional leg up.

[CLIP from Something Rotten, “A Musical.”]

NICK: What the hell are musicals?
NOSTRADAMUS: It appears to be a play where the dialogue stops and the plot is conveyed through song.
NICK: Through song?
NOSTRADAMUS: Yes!
NICK: Wait, so an actor is saying his lines and then, outta nowhere he just starts singing?
NOSTRADAMUS: Yes!
NICK: Well that is… (Singing)
The stupidest thing that I have ever heard!
You’re doing a play,
Got something to say
So you sing it?
It’s absurd.
Who on Earth is going to sit there
While an actor breaks into song?

The show is called *Something Rotten*—written, appropriately enough, by two brothers. Wayne and Karey Kirkpatrick. Wayne’s a successful Nashville songwriter whose credits include the Grammy-winning Song of the Year, “Change the World,” and Karey’s a successful Hollywood screenwriter whose scripts include *Chicken Run*, the best reviewed film the year that it came out. *Something Rotten* ran on Broadway for two years and 742 performances. Now—as we’re recording this—it’s on national tour.

Karey and Wayne joined us from studios in Los Angeles and Nashville to talk about just where this playful idea came from. They are interviewed by Barbara Bogaev.

[CLIP continues.]

A musical!
A musical!
A puffy piece releasing all your blues-icals!
Where crooners croon…

BARBARA BOGAGEV: Well I know it’s been a long road for you two getting this show to Broadway, and I read somewhere it took about twenty years. So if I could take you back to the beginning, did you start out wanting to spoof Shakespeare? And I’ll throw that to you, Wayne.

WAYNE KIRKPATRICK: I don’t know that spoofing Shakespeare was the initial idea. We just, we wanted to write a musical. And actually we don’t really know how the idea came about, it was so organic. You know, there was a lot of: “What if two writers were just trying to write a hit and they were constantly in the shadow of the guy that… everything he wrote turned to gold?” And each of us, we all have someone that is always doing a lot better than we are. [LAUGHS]

BARBARA: So it was really, it was more like Broadway in the ’30s, is what you were hearkening back to?

KAREY KIRKPATRICK: Yeah, the original jokes that we had, we were like, “what if Shakespeare’s London was like Broadway and Hollywood in the thirties and they had agents and they had lawyers, and their agents would be William and Morris, and the law firm was Rosen, Krantz, and Guildenstern.”
BARBARA: I saw that coming.

WAYNE: Yes. [LAUGHS]

KAREY: And one of the early jokes we had was that our two writers who were down on their luck found out that their agent signed Shakespeare, and they went to him because he was this young upstart out of Stratford that had just written *Romeo and Juliet* and they saw him as competition. So they went to their agent and said, "We think this is a conflict of interest here," and their agent said, "You're right, we're dropping you." So those were kind of some of the original arenas that we were playing in. And that led to: "All right, if these guys were trying to beat Shakespeare at his own game because he was a visionary, then the idea was to go to a soothsayer and predict the future of theater, and that soothsayer says *musicals*.

BARBARA: Because that's what every writer who wants to have a hit wants to do, right? They want to find someone to predict the future for them.

KAREY: Yes.

WAYNE: Well, if any of us could find, knew the shortcut to instant success...

BARBARA: Right. The free lunch. And your version of this Shakespeare was a Shakespeare as a rock god. So how did that idea evolve?

KAREY: It's funny, we used to, when we started pitching the story, we would always say, "And Shakespeare, you know, he's like a rock star..."

WAYNE: You know, Shakespeare should really be performing his greatest hits. And that's where we came up with the song that we have now, which is called "Will Power."

[CLIP from *Something Rotten*]

CHORUS:
*We want Will!*
*We want Will!*

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, all the way from Stratford-on-Avon: the king of couplets. The sultan of sonnets. The man who put the “I am” in “iambic pentameter.” Please put your hands together for the one, the only, William Shakespeare

SHAKESPEARE: Thank you! Is it good to see me or what?

CHORUS: “Do Sonnet 18!” “Do ‘Kingdom for a Horse!’” “We love you Will!”
**Karey:** Shakespeare’s in the park doing his hits, and his hits are “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day,” and “Now is the winter of our discontent.” And so the idea is that people are shouting out, you know, “Do Sonnet 18!” like they’re at a Beatles concert.

Do it with me…
Let me hear you say it

**Barbara:** For Shakespeare fans, the funny thing about this idea of Shakespeare as a rock star is that historically other playwrights… Thomas Middleton had a play called *A Game of Chess* that ran for nine days straight; Christopher Marlowe’s play *The Jew of Malta* once had ten performances in six months. Shakespeare didn’t have that. So were you aware of that irony?

**Wayne:** Yeah, I think we were aware of the fact that he was, you know, he wasn’t as popular as we make him out to be. But our show does a lot of melding of two worlds. In our day...

**Barbara:** You mean now and then? Yeah.

**Wayne:** Yes, in our day Shakespeare is the literary rock star so we kind of take that notion and put it into that time with our writers in our show and he is a rock star. You know, so we play fast and loose with some of the facts there.

**Karey:** I think we started with layman’s knowledge of Shakespeare, then we would do our research, then go, “Oh, shoot he actually was... [laughs]”

**Barbara:** “Oops, we got it all wrong.”

**Karey:** “They didn’t publish him... they didn’t do the First Folio...” He really didn’t become that famous until a hundred years later.

And then the whole notion of some of his works, you know, some of them being credited to him that maybe he didn't write, we run with and have fun with.

**Barbara:** Research goes both ways. It can really help you out, it can really get in the way, when you’re writing anything.

**Karey:** Right. Mostly we do it to avoid writing. [laughs] It’s a fantastic distraction. And we would find these facts that we found interesting that we would try to incorporate.

**Barbara:** Well sure, and you come up with a really credible god of rock out of Shakespeare, I’ve got to say. He’s just insanely full of himself, but he’s also kind of insecure, which seems very true to superstars. And, Wayne, I know you’ve worked with all sorts of famous musicians, like
Garth Brooks and Peter Frampton and Eric Clapton. Did you have any experiences with those kinds of collaborators that inspired this Shakespeare character?

WAYNE: Well, I think if you talk to anyone, I mean at the core of it there is this incredible amount of insecurity that’s just constant.

BARBARA: I know you had a conversation with Paul McCartney about this.

KAREY: Oh, I did, yeah.

WAYNE: Karey did.

KAREY: I met him through a project I was doing at DreamWorks Animation and in that meeting he started talking about wondering how you'll be remembered and he said, and there were only four of us in the room so it was a pretty intimate conversation, but he said, "We know how John will be remembered because he's being remembered." But he looked at me and he was like, "But you know, I'm not just the cute one, I wrote ‘Eleanor Rigby,’ I wrote..." I was like, "You don't have to convince me, man!"

BARBARA: He's making the case to you! Karey Kirkpatrick!

KAREY: I said to him, "I have an idea of how you're going to be remembered," and he went “mwah” [ed: sound of kiss being blown]! But it was amazing.

WAYNE: But yeah, you go, "Really, Paul McCartney, you're worried about…?" [LAUGHS]

KAREY: It was weirdly encouraging.

WAYNE: You know, we had a song in our show that it didn't make it all the way through but we had it for several years, and it was a song that Nigel, the kind of insecure brother, sings, and it's all about his insecurities, and it's called "I Suck."

BARBARA: I'm kind of astonished it didn't survive, especially with the poetry of that...

WAYNE: It was just one of those, it made it all the way to the second to last day of rehearsal before we went into the St. James Theater. It was staged and everything and everyone really loved it, but it didn’t move the story forward.

BARBARA: That's really interesting. Which is very different from what you do, Wayne, usually, right? You've written pop songs and country western songs and rock songs...
WAYNE: Yeah, in writing commercial pop songs, you know, it's all about the moment that that song creates and that song is doing a lot of work. You're trying to either tell a story or create a visual of some sort. It's a listening experience.

KAREY: And they're self-contained, right?

WAYNE: Yeah, and they're self-contained. And with a musical, it is only a part of a bigger picture and it has to do a lot of other things. And it also has a lot of other things going on behind it.

KAREY: Is it the right person singing at the right time? Is it the right kind of song? We need something more up-tempo here. We've had two ballads back-to-back so we need a different thing. And then the killer was always that eighth thing, that box that we had to tick was: is it funny? And that was just killer, you know, to go back in... and that's where we had written a song called "Bottom's Gonna Be On Top," which closes Act 2.

[CLIP from Something Rotten, “Bottom's Gonna Be On Top.” Music.]

  NICK:
  No more Mister Anonymous.
  No more world that is Nick Bottom-less.
  My name will be synonymous...

KAREY: And it just wasn't funny. And I remember Wayne and I were leaving a Chick-Fil-A parking lot after going through the drive-through...

BARBARA: Chick-fil-A, hmmm, that seems relevant to your plot...

KAREY: Which is where go for inspiration. And it was just, we came up with this idea of a tap-off.

[CLIP from Something Rotten continues.]

  SHAKESPEARE: Not so fast...
  NICK BOTTOM: Hello, Will. I knew you wouldn’t go down without a fight.

  SHAKESPEARE:
  The top, sir? Nay, thou surely doth jest.
  I say on my honor here, I doth protest

  NICK: Yawn. Rhyming couplet, that is so 1580s.

  SHAKESPEARE: Oh yeah? Well.
  [Tap dancing and speaking rhythmically]
If you want to make it to the top, then you're gonna have to go through me! Because the top is where I live and I will not be giving up that easily! So there!

NICK: Oh man I have been waiting for this moment for so long. I'm gonna enjoy it when I knock you off you perch.

SHAKESPEARE: Oh no, you won't.

NICK: Oh yes, I will.

SHAKESPEARE: Oh no, you won't...

KAREY: We were like, "Yeah, that seems kind of funny." And we went...

BARBARA: You mean like a walk-off?

KAREY: It's sort of like a rumble...

WAYNE: It's a duel.

KAREY: Yeah, it's a duel. And that became our comedic button of that song, what we were building to comedically.

BARBARA: And explain the Chick-fil-A tie-in, which is—we haven't talked much about the plot—but it does eventually involve a very special musical that these two brothers come up with, coming out of their talk with Nostradamus, the soothsayer they consult.

KAREY: The pitch was always, and we would say to people: Nick goes to a soothsayer to say, "Tell me what the future of theater will be," and he says, "Musicals!" And he'd say, "What are musicals?" And the soothsayer, who ends up being Nostradamus, not the Nostradamus, but his nephew, Thomas, he says, "It's a play where the dialogue stops and the plot is conveyed through song." Then Nick goes back because they have a hard time figuring out what a musical should be about, and when Nick goes back to Nostradamus and says, "What will Shakespeare's greatest play be?" and Nostradamus, who's a little bit like a satellite in a rainstorm...

BARBARA: Right, or he's cut-rate, because he is the cousin, he's like B-lister soothsayer, or maybe hard of hearing, I don't know.

KAREY: Yeah, he's just a little... The synapses are not all firing, you know. So he looks into the future and says, "Shakespeare's greatest play, the one they'll be talking about for generations to come, will be called Omelette! And, wait, no wait. Oh, that's right, Omelette, and there's something Danish... oh, there's a breakfast theme, and then ham, 'Ham Omelette'? Must be it."
So he’s like, “All right.” And we always played this like Nick is a guy who got a hot tip on a pony and he’s going to bet the farm on this pony.

**BARBARA:** So once you came up with this “Omelette” idea, did everything flow naturally from that?

**KAREY:** No, we kind of painted ourselves into this horrible corner.

**WAYNE:** Kind of the opposite of flowing.

**BARBARA:** What’s the horrible corner though?

**KAREY:** We had to write it.

**WAYNE:** Yeah, we had to write a song called “Omelette.”

*[CLIP from Something Rotten, “Make an Omelette.”]*

**ACTOR:**

*I see within this fluffy fold  
The scrambled nature of my soul!  
I’m cracking up as I begin  
To see the bits of me within  
This…*

**CHORUS:**

*Om, om, ommmmm…  
Om, om, ommmmm  
Om, om, ommmmm, Omelette!*

**KAREY:** Well, first tried writing the musical, the whole mini-musical.

**BARBARA:** Oh, wow. That’s a lot of work.

**KAREY:** Yes, Wayne’s curling into a fetal position right now as we speak. [LAUGHS]

**BARBARA:** Is that right, Wayne?

**WAYNE:** It was trying to combine musical references meshed with *Hamlet.* We wrote about ten different versions. And these were not short versions, these were, you know, sometimes six, seven minutes long….

**KAREY:** Nine minutes…
WAYNE: Songs, that, yeah, that we would... I know at one point we had written, I think we were on our sixth time, and we knew that one wasn't working, and I remember saying to Karey, "You know there's not a saying that goes, 'The seventh time is the charm.'"

KAREY: That was actually the ninth.

BARBARA: You were grasping at straws at that point.

KAREY: Remember you, said nine times? "There's no 'ninth is the charm.'"

And we were sitting at a restaurant. We had just turned it in to the director and said, "If he doesn't like this, I don't know what I'm gonna do 'cause I don't have another one in me." He had said to us, "I just need a big production number, dance number." Because at one point we had said, "And then the tap dancing eggs come out," and he was like, "Oh, I like that, I can really do something with that." We were like, "Okay," so we kind of always knew we were building to some tap dancing eggs. So we had come up with this song that went, "One singular sensational egg stands alone," and then one...

BARBARA: That sounds familiar.

KAREY: We thought, "This is it, we've done it." And we got the call and it was like, "Guys, sorry, I know you've been working really hard, but I just don't think this is it." And it was [LAUGH] such a dark day. It was just really terrible.

BARBARA: Well that's the thing with musicals: you never know if you're writing the most brilliant hilarious thing in the history of the genre, or if you're doing "Springtime for Hitler."

KAREY: Yeah, exactly.

WAYNE: Yeah. We started grasping for... [LAUGH] Karey, I don't know if you remember this: "What if we make it like a Greek tragedy and there's these guys talking about eggs and fertility. And what if, you know, there's Pericles and Sophocles, and his less fertile brother, Testicles. And..." [LAUGHS]

BARBARA: That's pretty good, actually.

WAYNE: "Okay, let's go there. Okay, no, that won't work."

KAREY: Then we had the Queen reference! Because we were trying to do something scandalous that got them arrested. And so we had the Queen, comes out from *Midsummer Night's Dream*, because we were doing a mash-up, wearing the big Queen Elizabeth-type, with the red hair, and then that hoop opens up, and out steps someone who's doing Freddie
Mercury. And it was a song that was called “Sometimes You Have to Crack a Few Eggs if You Want to Make an Omelette.” It was like a Queen song.

BARBARA: This all sounds awesome.

KAREY: And we wrote all this. [LAUGH] And then finally we came up with this "Make an Omelette."

[CLIP from *Something Rotten*, “Make an Omelette.”]

You make wine from sour grapes!
You got a flat pancake, hey, call it a crêpe!
When life gives you eggs,
Make an omelette!

And we put it up and it got this really good response and we were all kind of amazed. And then the next...

BARBARA: And there you had your answer.

KAREY: And then the next day we added a few things to "Make an Omelette" and you just, like, leave it alone.

[CLIP continues]

When it looks like you should quit,
Find another way of looking at it.
When life gives you eggs—
Just a great big bowl of eggs—
When life gives you eggs,
You gotta make that omelette.

(FADE)

People actually go crazy because we have this song called "A Musical" in Act One, which, it's a love letter to musicals, and it also references a lot of musicals.

BARBARA: Right, which is a showstopper, and it really does illustrate the trick of all of *Something Rotten*, which is that it sends up both Shakespeare and musicals at the same time. And to send something up you have to love it.

KAREY: It makes fun of musical theater while at the same time paying homage to musical theater and loving it.
BARBARA: And since it is kind of this love letter to Broadway musicals, it made me wonder: were you both, you know, high school card-carrying Broadway musical geeks? Wayne?

WAYNE: Yes. We both went to a magnet school, Baton Rouge High School, and we were part of the theater department. We were those people in Glee.

KAREY: We did seven or eight productions a year. And I went and saw, I was in junior high, I saw Wayne do 1776 in that auditorium and I was like, "Oh, I want to do that." Wayne and I didn't go to New York for the first time until 1983.

BARBARA: Baton Rouge is a long way away.

KAREY: That's right. And the first musical I ever saw on Broadway was My One and Only, with Tommy Tune and Twiggy, and it was at the St. James Theater, which is where we ended up forty years later.

BARBARA: Wow. Well, given all that musical theater history, where did Shakespeare come in?

KAREY: I took "Intro to Shakespeare" in ninth grade and hated it. And my teacher was not very good. It wasn't until I did Romeo and Juliet as a senior and played Romeo and that's when I started realizing, "Oh, it's really not meant to be read, it's meant to be performed." And then the more I got into it, I was like, "Oh, this is fun to, you know: 'Gallop apace you fiery-footed steeds!'" And it's like, "Wow, this language is pretty amazing." And so my knowledge, and our other writing partner John O'Farrell, who's British and therefore just Shakespeare is more in his blood, and when John came on board, we joke about, we were adapting one of John's novels into a script. John and I met on Chicken Run. And I told him this musical we were writing and I was like, "Oh, hey, you know a lot about Shakespeare, why don't you write this with us? That would save us a lot of reading." [LAUGH] And John is funny and he did become our... He teases me because every reference I had was all Romeo and Juliet.

BARBARA: Right, you were a one-trick pony.

KAREY: So... and John knows quotes from a bunch of the shows. Now I know more because we've researched more. But it was the opposite with musical theater references: we had all of those and all John knew was Oliver! and My Fair Lady.

BARBARA: What about you, Wayne? Did you have a Shakespeare turning point?

WAYNE: Of course, you know, the general knowledge that we all have on a base level of Shakespeare. But for me, I've always been interested in historical figures. And so from a historical aspect I've always been fascinated with the concept of: "What if we could go back in time and meet some of these people that contributed to history or to pop culture or whatever it
is?" So I think for me that is a way into a story, and the few stories that I've dabbled in writing myself have always involved some sort of historical character like Edgar Allen Poe or Stephen Foster. And so Shakespeare was just another one of those characters that could do that.

KAREY: The original title of this musical was "Shakespeare's Omelette." And our producer Kevin McCollum was like, "I don't think we want Shakespeare anywhere in the title."

BARBARA: And is it because Shakespeare is that sacred cow that people are afraid of? I mean how big a factor was it?

KAREY: I think…

BARBARA: The fact of Shakespeare, just getting your project green lit…

KAREY: I think, Kevin, just thinking ahead to people coming to New York, and when you're competing with these long-running juggernauts like Phantom of the Opera and Wicked and Lion King, and then shows like Kinky Boots or Waitress or things that are based on movies or that have Cyndi Lauper or Sting or whatever they have. I mean, he had nothing. He had us [LAUGH] and we had the director of Book of Mormon, you know, which was sort of helping. And the basic feeling of: you put Shakespeare in it, in the title and it's going to send a signal. It's a deterrent for a lot of people coming for a couple hours of good old-fashioned frivolous entertainment.

We used to have this line, we cut it. "He writes everything: histories, tragedies, comedies." And Nick says, "Comedies? No. Come on. Name one thing of his that's funny. Anything, just give me a line. Anything." And he says, "On my word we'll not carry coals, for then we should be colliers." And everybody laughs and Nick's like, "That's not, it's not funny." And there used to be a line that went, "Well, some people in the theater laughed," and he said, "Right, that one annoying bloke in the back who chuckles loudly: 'Look at me, I'm so clever, I get the reference.'" And there's always somebody at a Shakespeare play [LAUGH] who is like, who goes, "Ha!"

BARBARA: We all, I was going to say, we all know that person. You know, one thing we didn't talk about is that your play is about brothers. Playwright brothers, collaborators. You guys, I've gotten a little bit of a window into how you work together, but is that why you wrote about brothers?

KAREY: They didn't start as brothers.

WAYNE: Yeah, for just several years it was just two guys that were writing partners, and I think at one point…

BARBARA: How'd they become brothers?
WAYNE: Karey, I think one point we were talking, Karey said, "What if they're brothers?" I was like, "Oh, that would be..."

KAREY: "That makes sense."

WAYNE: "Yeah, we could probably [LAUGH] draw from that."

BARBARA: Wayne just said, "We could draw on that." You just said that, what were you thinking?

WAYNE: It's way close to home, yes. [LAUGH] No, I think it was just, you can draw from, it's the old, you know, "Mom always liked you better" kind of family experiences, and how brothers, you're around someone their whole life, it's like, I know what you're doing, I know you. You know I can see through you. You know there's all that stuff that you...

BARBARA: You know each other's playbook.

KAREY: We used to have this argument, and it's not in it anymore, but it was: he would say, "You always do this to me. You always boss me around, tell me what to write, just like with the flower poem." And he was like, "What flower poem?" "The one I wrote when I was ten! I gave it to you and it was a flower and you said it should be a tree."

BARBARA: Wayne doesn't hold on to those...

KAREY: And you said, and Nick goes, "The tree was the bigger idea!" and he's like, "I didn't want to write about a tree, I wanted to write about a flower!" And it's like, "Oh my God, is that what this is all about? You know, something I did when you were ten?" And we had moments like that because we're constantly submitting things to each other and there's a subtle, sort of... an email will come through and a couple days goes by and you don't get a response, it's like, "So, guess you didn't really like that song that much." "Oh, sorry, no, I just, time got away." "Oh no, because usually you write back like, you know. That was great." It's like, "Well, it's not my favorite..." "Oh okay." And there's the baggage of whatever's going on in your life or there is the, "You always do this to me and I know you're still getting back at me because I used to play your guitar." Wayne had a really nice guitar when he was in high school. It was an Ovation.

WAYNE: Or remember when we lived in that apartment and you got the bigger room? Why did you get the big room? You know.

BARBARA: It's like marriage times a hundred.

WAYNE: Exactly.

KAREY: And I still, I don't know why I got the bigger room because I'm the younger brother.
BARBARA: So are you guys finished with musicals, or finished with each other now?

KAREY: No. [LAUGH] No, we're in the midst of writing another.

BARBARA: Yeah. Can you say anything about it?

KAREY: We can't actually because it is a movie and I think the announcement is coming out next month. But we're really excited about it.

BARBARA: Okay, enough said. But before I let you go, let me try this: has writing this musical nominally about Shakespeare changed the way that you read Shakespeare, or your feelings about the plays?

KAREY: Oh yeah, for sure. Definitely.

BARBARA: In what way?

KAREY: I think in a weird way it's kind of personalized him to me a little bit, as you just start to think about what it was like to create back then. And it mostly makes me think about the language, the sophistication of the language, the sophistication of the plot, and how long they take. Now I'll admit, I'm a product of shorter-attention-span media, what it's done to me, so to get to Romeo and Juliet and it's a page-and-a-half Queen Mab speech just about dreams, I'm like, "Come on, can we..."

BARBARA: Can we speed this up a little bit? [LAUGH]

KAREY: "Can we tighten this up a little bit?" But an audience sitting there, I mean what else did they have to do? You know, and what lives were they going back to? But to sit, and just to be fascinated just by language. And I gotta say that our current climate, that what we're listening to everyday, and things being reduced now to 140 characters, and oratory just going out the window...the beauty of language and how important it is and how important language was to the people who were creating it and the people who were listening to it—I watch it now, I read it now with a sort of marveling, at the attention to the word choice.

BARBARA: And I would think also he was writing these plays pretty fast too, I mean at record-breaking speeds. Both the speed and the slow theater movement, the nuances.

WAYNE: Yeah, that's mind-boggling. This is what the depth of what he wrote in such a short amount of time. Why can't we do that? [LAUGH]

KAREY: And I guess the only way we can relate is because Wayne and I, always what we dread the most is the lyric writing, because it's really time consuming. Searching for the right
word, you know, and words that rhyme, and then trying to say something that’s evocative or funny, and that’s not cliché. And that search for the right words is really often demoralizing because you kind of slam up against your own limitations and the limitations of your own vocabulary, and you end up… searching and searching. And fortunately we have Google and thesauruses and things to search for the right word, but often times we will sit there for three hours to come up with one phrase.

BARBARA: "He put the 'I am' in iambic pentameter". [LAUGHS] Three hours, guys.

KAREY: No! I remember sitting for three hours, and then Wayne and I are always arguing over: "I think I wrote that line." But we sat for three hours in "A Musical" and we knew it went, "It's a musical, a musical," and then, like, what does it say next? And for hours just sitting there and it’s like, "What should it be? What should it be?" And it’s like, "There's nothing as amazing as a musical!" Yeah, yeah, that works. Let's go to lunch." [LAUGHS] Because that was a day's work of just landing on, "There's nothing as amazing as a musical." So it had the alliteration that we wanted, it sang well in the phrase. I don't remember who came up with it. Wayne says it's him, I'm pretty sure it was me. [LAUGH]

WAYNE: It was both of us.

KAREY: Yeah. [LAUGH]

BARBARA: Well it was just such a pleasure to talk with both of you today.

KAREY: Our pleasure.

WAYNE: Thank you.

BARBARA: And best of luck with the mystery project.

KAREY: Oh yes. Check your local listings.

[CLIP from Something Rotten. “A Musical.”]

NICK and NOSTRADAMUS:
Oohs, ahhs, big applause,
With everyone cheering for us!
And for some unexplainable reason,
The crowd goes wild every time,
When dancers kick in unison
In one big wonderful line!
And then you've got yourself a musical!
MICHAEL WITMORE: Wayne and Karey Kirkpatrick are co-authors along with John O'Farrell of *Something Rotten*. It ran on Broadway from 2015 through January 2017 and opened its national tour just a few weeks later at the Boston Opera House. Karey and Wayne were interviewed by Barbara Bogaev.

"Play On" was produced by Richard Paul. Garland Scott is the associate producer. It was edited by Gail Kern Paster and Esther Ferington. We had help from Cameron Adkins at WPLN in Nashville and Brian Allison at the Marketplace Studios in Los Angeles. *Shakespeare Unlimited* comes to you from the Folger Shakespeare Library. Home to the world's largest Shakespeare collection, the Folger is dedicated to advancing knowledge in the arts. You can find more about the Folger at our website [folger.edu](http://folger.edu). For the Folger Shakespeare Library, I'm Folger Director Michael Witmore.

[CLIP from “A Musical” continues.]

*Your starlit,*

*Won't quit,*

*Big hit,*

*Musicaaaaaaaaaaaa!!*