

## **Episode 6: ALW Continued — Fallout and Phandom**

Welcome to Re:Adapted, where we take a work and explore why we keep telling the same story over, and over, and over. I'm your host, Kris Pepper Hambrick. This season, we're looking at a long-time favorite of mine, *The Phantom of the Opera*. Over the past few weeks, we've gone all the way from an un-heralded French novel through silent film, classical Hollywood, indie camp, and finally to the blockbuster Andrew Lloyd Webber musical of 1986. In fact, this musical is so big, I needed two episodes to fully unpack the impact it had. So that's what we're doing today: looking at some of the reasons why this show did what it did to people, and what those people did as a result.

Last time, I talked about the origins and making of the musical, and got a little into what made it such a sea change from the versions of *Phantom* which had come before. This shift, from horror/revenge with romantic elements to romance with gothic elements, was both already present in the culture and, I think it's safe to say, accelerated by the popularity of this show. (Side note: the horror elements aren't completely gone, as we'll discuss in episode 8, but the sex will remain.) Lloyd Webber did not create the permission structure to find anti-heroes or "monsters" attractive, by any means—that's always been a thing. But I think it is difficult to separate the proliferation of masked, or unusual, or gothic, romantic figures in film and pop culture from the *Phantom* phenomenon. Tim Burton may have come up with *Edward Scissorhands* as a lonely teen in the 70s, but would the film have been made, and successful, without other outcast antecedents? Would Ron Perlman's Vincent, in 1987's CBS drama *Beauty and the Beast*, have become a sex symbol? We can hope so, for all our sakes, but the point is that *Phantom* both benefited

from and spearheaded a type of acceptance for the darker side of romance that had never been quite so mainstream before and doesn't seem to be slowing down.

One way to frame this is by looking at the continuing popularity of the Gothic style of storytelling, which originated in the late 1700s but has continued to be influential through to the present day and has had many revivals and resurgences. The basic elements of Gothic storytelling are the supernatural or the apparently supernatural, macabre themes like death and betrayal, and the intrusion of the past upon the present. They often take place in castles or monasteries or places with crags or ruins, where the old is physically encroaching upon the present and the setting often reflects the moody interior of the characters. The lush and aristocratic mingle with the melodramatic and sensational, thus allowing movement between so-called "high" and "low" culture. And while these themes are never entirely out of style, I think it's clear that the 1980s were a perfect time for writers like Anne Rice and Stephen King to gain monumental popularity and spawn television and film that incorporated all of these themes. And if you can set your melodramatic romance in the past and allow for all these overwrought feelings to be safely part of some "other" world, all the better.

So while none of the themes or feelings explored here are necessarily new, I do think this period saw some of these concepts, a willingness to embrace that which would once have been deemed too dark or fringe for polite society, enter into the mainstream. There seems to be a greater permissiveness to let your freak flag fly, albeit still in ways that might seem very tame and circumscribed today. Obviously for many, the 80s were still a

repressive era and it's no coincidence we also saw an uptick in media celebrating greed and demonizing the position of the liberated woman in society, for example. But along with the other movements in the culture, the musical's sonic accessibility, lush trappings, emphasis on romance, and medium hopping to the live stage led to a mainstreaming of this story and what it represented in a way a "genre" film wouldn't have allowed at this time.

All of these factors served to make the plot and emotions of the stage Phantom both more streamlined than its brethren and, somehow, bigger. The cast is pared down, the dialogue is subsumed into solos and duets, and you achieve what might be complex emotional moments like an unmasking or a redemptive kiss through big musical numbers rather than expository dialogue; it's emotion through spectacle as opposed to intimate, "close-up" moments. The romance, both in terms of plot and in terms of Lloyd Webber's musical stylings, means you carry a lot of thematic weight in the signifiers of love and passion, rather than discussions of morality or character.

This is extremely apparent in one thing that is transferred from Leroux and missed in most previous adaptations, but is done in a way that provides an entirely different context: the kiss. In the book, Erik recounts this final moment of acceptance and redemption to the Persian after the fact, and can barely get the words out because he's crying. He describes Christine waiting for him, 'like a living bride,' allowing him to kiss her on the forehead. At this, Erik is so overwhelmed by the fact that not even his mother had allowed this that he falls at her feet, weeping. Christine begins to cry too, and when her tears fall on his mask Erik removes it so as not to miss any of them, and marvels at the

fact she yet does not run away. And, he specifies, she did not die.

To be sure, there's a lot of passion here of a certain kind, and mingling of bodily fluids, and it wouldn't be the first or last time death was linked to sex. But I don't think that's what Leroux's painting, here. For me, this scene, which ends with Erik giving Christine a ring as a present and watching her kiss Raoul in front of him in the parlor, as if presiding over their own wedding, has more far-reaching implications having to do with both of them having to give up their parental delusions about one another. Erik requires from Christine what his mother could not provide: proof that he could be loved and was a living man. Christine needs to be released from the constraints of her arrested adolescence after her father's death and the literal death Erik fears his love means for her. Having received these things, they are both free to move on. They have both reached a point of empathy for the other, and their own pasts, that will change them forever. And they never even touched lips.

Compare this to the scene in the stage play, which comes down to the Phantom offering Christine an ultimatum between their marriage or Raoul dying, and her making that choice known by a lip lock that lasts longer than the time it takes for her to decide. This is the sensual climax, as it were, of the piece, and many Christine/Phantom pairs really make a meal of it. After this transcendent moment, they part, and the Phantom, hearing the mob in the distance, realizes he has to let them both go, and they go off while reprising their love song. The actress playing Christine can really choose how she plays this, and communicate anything from merely trying to save her true love, Raoul, to turning back and singing part of her duet to the Phantom. As I

described in the plot summary, the Phantom then wraps himself in his cloak, and disappears.

This is, for sure, a very effective ending and whether you're rooting for Raoul or Erik, you've got something to be intrigued and/or mad about. After the promises made about the music of the night, to end without any sexual release at all would be a bummer. And both do achieve a sort of catharsis and freedom through this moment that is not meaningless. But it's a very different vibe, not to mention message, from the original, despite all the basic elements being the same. And this leads me to a pair of readings of the musical that I think can help us understand why it's been so satisfying to so many people, despite—or maybe because—of the fact they're contradictory readings.

These aren't the only two readings of the musical, but they provide an interesting duality through which to view the popularity of the show. And let me caveat this by saying yes, I'm going to simplify this a lot and summarize to the best of my understanding. The point here isn't to explore these theories academically, but to set up multiple ways of understanding the appeal of the Phantom.

The first comes from Jerrold Hogle, laid out in his book *The Undergrounds of the Phantom of the Opera*. In his reading, the success of the stage musical is due at least in part to its focus on an arrested adolescence that mirrors the way Western society has increasingly prized what he calls 'a culture of adolescence.' He lays out the ways in which the musical conforms to this: this phantom isn't as much older than Christine as in the book and this, combined with his pseudo-goth sexiness and home decor, can appeal to teens. He arouses a nascent and therefore

adolescent sexuality in Christine, in a way that is not covered explicitly by Leroux. She is torn between new sexual discovery and longing for an absent father in a way Raoul cannot really fulfill. Meanwhile, most of the men involved insist on treating Christine like a child unable to make her own choices, until the very end. And at that end, does the Phantom have to learn or grow or change? He lets Christine go, sure, but only after receiving some measure of sexual gratification, and even then, he does not die or evolve, but simply... disappears, through the use of a trick, no less. Stylistically, the opera-opera is presented as pretentious, and yet the main players sing in a style that is a bridge between pop and opera, refusing to test the audience. Hogle argues that the arrested development he sees in the play is not all that surprising in a world with both a changed attitude towards adolescence and less assurance as to the stability of the adult state after the political and economic upheavals of the sixties and seventies. (And, as a side note, certainly tracks with what we've seen in the adaptations running up to this one, especially *Paradise*.)

But let's compare this with a paper written by Kathryn Wildgen titled "Making the shadow conscious: the enduring legacy of Gaston Leroux." Despite the title, she is also talking about the musical when she posits a Jungian interpretation in which Erik, Raoul, and Christine are all, quote, "parts of a single, overriding, amorphous Self." She identifies them as archetypes all vying within the 'body' of the Opera building. The story thus is the self's growth in consciousness, played out within by the three sides of that self. During this interior journey, Christine sees, recognizes, and embraces the Shadow and thus, can leave. The self is rescued and can depart whole. Erik doesn't die—he is reintegrated.

I realize this is getting into the weeds and I'm not here to make an academic statement, but the point here is that fairly reasonable people have disagreed about whether the Phantom of the Opera, in stage form, represents a curtailing of adulthood, or a realization of the same. And that's exactly the point I want to stress—I think one of the reasons it's so popular is that whatever age you are, you can access it and the well of emotions it brings up and it still works. If you're a teenager longing for a more adult world and relationships, you can find it here. If you're older and longing to recapture some of the wild, ungoverned and apolitical passion of youth, you've got it here too. All the more so because it's displaced onto a fictionalized and romanticized "past."

This is all of a part with the highbrow/lowbrow tension I've mentioned all along, and of which I think the musical is the most perfect evocation to date. And I don't mean this at all to denigrate it. But I do think it perfectly rides a line of feeling like something special and sophisticated, without actually requiring a lot of background work or knowledge from the viewer. And thematically, whether or not it's intentional, this dovetails perfectly with Erik's own ambitions—to be like everybody else, take his wife out on Sundays, and have perfectly ordinary middle-class furniture and flowers in his apartments under the opera. Since Chaney, we've seen Phantom variations struggle with whether they're trying to appeal to the people in the boxes, or the people backstage. Lloyd Webber created a perfect way into a rich, lavish world anyone could visit, without looking at all like a compromise. And that tightrope walk also benefited from another aspect of the culture's shifting attitude towards musical entertainment.

As George Perry says in his Complete Phantom of the Opera, "There is another factor in the success of The Phantom of the Opera, that of timing. Lloyd Webber's gifts include a true theatrical instinct, not only in knowing how to hold an audience in performance, but also in his ability to sense that the day of the spiky, abrasive, loose-structured musical may well have passed, and that there is a public thirsting for extravagant romance, colorful spectacle, proscenium arches, orchestra pits, helpless heroines, rugged heroes, tragic villains and evocative melodies."

He doesn't say it outright, but he might as well have named Stephen Sondheim, who as an acknowledged master of the form had risen to prominence in the 70s but who might well be the exact opposite of Lloyd Webber in his approach to music, form, story, and character. Sondheim's musicals require you to listen to the lyrics and have patience for song forms that don't offer much in the way of hooks or melodic hummability. Famously, he wrote his lyrics first and wrote music to suit them, whereas with Lloyd Webber the intent is always to bombard your senses. Sondheim's work doesn't negate strong feeling, of course, but it gets at it via a very different sort of interaction with his audience; if I'm going to be very simplistic, a Sondheim piece thinks and then feels. Lloyd Webber's tend to go straight to the emotion without requiring that interface, and I think this plays perfectly into the mood of the time.

We tend to look back on this decade as one of Ronald Reagan, a booming economy, loud colors and louder hair. Excess and capitalism. But we should remember that the early 80s were consumed with the energy crisis, a recession, and the decline in purchasing power of baby boomers as compared to the previous generation. Meanwhile, as they climbed out of that recession,



many people began to consciously enjoy their upward mobility and this combination may help explain a shift away from the edgy and difficult and towards the lush, over the top, and accessible. Lloyd Webber's music, the style of singing, the rich sets, the overt sensuality, all of this came together to make a product that looked a bit highbrow but didn't give off either the snobbish sense or the (perceived) ear-splittingness of opera. While we reveled in the immersion into a former era, the total experience of Phantom, we were comforted by the modern, so-called 'clean' vocal stylings of Christine and the Phantom. It had all the trappings of the high class, but apart from the price of tickets it didn't bar entry. So an evening at Phantom felt like something both new and special while also being perceived as a link to a lush, lost past.

While, as I mentioned last episode, Lloyd Webber eventually decided against elevating Ken Hill's *Phantom* to the West End, this is exactly the sort of thing Hill introduced when he wrote *his* Phantom to be sung by a modern rock and roll voice. It differentiated him from the buffoonish upstairs characters and, meta-textually, made a class point about the competing styles. In a way, the journey from Ken Hill to Andrew Lloyd Webber encapsulates the tensions that had been present in the story from the beginning and had only become more salient with time. I would argue that not only does Lloyd Webber's Phantom establish the story once and for all as a romance, it also is the culmination of the war between low and high brow entertainment, as well as the expression of capitalism's ultimate dominance.

The fact that it was live theater is also essential to this, both in terms of the audience reaction and to the way in which the relative thinness of the story worked at all. As we've discussed in previous episodes, film generally asks us to take what we see as

'reality,' in the sense that we can judge the world of a film by what is seen or not seen, what we are offered or not. Theater is different, at least in terms of suspension of disbelief. There's a certain amount of audience participation that is inherent in asking people to accept that the actors in the same room with them are different people; that that prop is a sword; that those two people the same age are mother and daughter. We are trained to accept these things differently from live theater than from film, which over time at least has developed a fairly realistic set of expectations.

This isn't to say we don't also willingly suspend our disbelief while watching a movie. But think about watching a play where a dog is clearly an actor in a dog suit, versus a movie where a dog is clearly an actor in a dog suit. Because of what we've come to expect from both mediums, you're more likely to accept that the stage version is meant to represent an actual dog, say Nana in Peter Pan. On film, depending on the setting, you're more likely to assume the actor represents... a person in a dog suit. A bare bones set for Hamlet in the park is more or less expected, while a bare bones set in a film version would be a statement of some sort.

Part of this might be due to our expectations about the money a theater company has to build sets and create elaborate effects, but partly this is due to the experience of sitting in a room with other people all engaged in that same activity as the story unfolds around you. In three-dimensional space, with living, breathing people telling you you're somewhere else, it's easier to fall under the spell. And Phantom, with its lavish sets, live orchestra, and pyrotechnics does this times a thousand. The whole experience is designed to be just that—an experience. And

because it's also about a theater, and because the characters singing songs are actually, well, singers, the whole thing is extremely effective in transporting the viewer into an emotional space where the Phantom's longing is palpable. In this sense, the opening, absent from all other adaptations, wherein we go back in time is important—we, the audience, are invited to enter that flashback along with the chandelier which rises to the bombastic strains of the most rockin' opera you've ever heard. This makes us part of the story, puts us in the Phantom's theater, and helps to explain both audiences' relationship with the story and the sensual intimacy created despite the fact it's a commercial property enjoyed by hundreds of people at the same time.

And this is not only why this iteration captured the public imagination to such a degree, but also illustrates another factor in how adaptation itself creates or changes meaning. We've talked about how the author's voice in the novel is an explicit call to empathy and compassion. We've seen how, in various film versions, that empathy has had to be either watered down or reconstituted out of the circumstantial nature of the Phantom's fate. The films have no Gaston Leroux reminding us Erik is a human being, and their versions of Erik have as a result either been less sympathetic or attained sympathy through being wronged. The stage Phantom, on the other hand, is able to ride a different line, and I would argue it's because of the medium's impact on this adaptation.

Crawford's Phantom is neither blameless nor monstrous. He commits reprehensible acts such as murder, kidnapping, lying, and being pretty abusive to Christine. He extorts the Opera for what would today be millions of dollars. He's often petty, entitled, and certainly has a temper. But there's very little question that

he is the central figure in the musical, despite never being named. He gets the candlelit love song, the emotional climaxes, and the last word. He also gets the vast majority of fan attention—a factor we'll talk in a moment. And while this is certainly doable in another medium, I think this happens because Lloyd Webber has written a score, and Hart and Stilgoe have written lyrics, which bypass the need for us to really think about who he is and what he's done and, for the most part, feel it.

Music affects us differently than dialogue. Dialogue can be emotional, of course, and poetry can have just as profound an effect. But a man standing in front of you telling you in plain language that he's misunderstood and needs your love is a very different thing than a man surrounded by candles, crooning in modulated tones meant to manipulate your romantic feelings. Even if you hate "Music of the Night," the songs in Phantom are constructed to give Erik the most passionate and the most empathetic passages—barring, perhaps, Christine's plea to her father, which is also of course about the Phantom. Most of us can't help but be swept up in the sheer feeling created by those chords, which is why Lloyd Webber is sometimes accused of shallow manipulation—it's because it works.

There has been research on the way music conveys emotion, and the way it evokes emotion. Naturally, the latter is difficult to study due to its subjective nature, but studies have shown that music can have a measurable effect on the interconnected network of systems which create emotional, psychological, and physiological responses. Some of these responses require cultural context and are dependent on upbringing. Others may have to do with dopamine production. Still others play upon memory or nostalgia. But there's a reason we sing to babies, a reason there's

a trope of romantic wooing by singing under someone's window, a reason religious and spiritual ceremonies often center around musical expression. Music offers an access point to deeper, or at least different, experience or meaning.

With musical theater, it's long been noted that a song can stand in for a character's entire background and state of mind. Characters break into song to tell you not just who they are, but where they are in their journey and how they're feeling—and how YOU should feel about them. Phantom, the musical, is able to bypass details about Erik's past or life, and go straight to what he wants and who he is—and millions of people came away thinking he was a sexy beast, not a psycho criminal. Or at the very least, both.

But I've pressed home why it was so popular without really proving how popular it was, and I think that's important for anyone listening who didn't experience it. So, for the rest of this episode, we're going to look at how culture took the themes we've been talking about and ran with them. To do that, we're going to need to talk about fandom for the first time. Many of you are probably familiar with the phenomenon of more or less 'organized' media fandom, but as an overview, I'm talking about the sort of media fandom that is often thought to have originated in the modern age with Sherlock Holmes fandom, which had begun treating the original stories as a "canon" to be studied and writing original fan works decades before Arthur Conan Doyle had stopped writing the stories. The 1930s saw the emergence of science fiction and fantasy fandoms, as as new media as well as modes of communication became prevalent, these fandoms grew and morphed. Activities included in person gatherings, conventions, letter writing campaigns, and the publication of

stories, essays, poetry, and songs in zines and later, of course, online. As far as I know, while horror and Phantom in particular had its share of fans, Phantom fandom in the sense I'm talking about did not arise until the Lloyd Webber musical hit.

Print fanzines including Phantom date back to at least 1988, sometimes combining fandoms (memorably for me, Phantom, Amadeus, and Beauty and the Beast all fell under the banner of the Faded Roses zine). These ranged from information and essays to art and fiction. The first widely-recognized online gathering place was an email list that began in 1995, which led to other forums and discussion groups. In addition, with the rise of these groups and fan-fiction archives, a host of conventions began to crop up in how people wrote about this story. The vast majority of this fiction was wish-fulfillment regarding Christine eventually ending up with the Phantom. Though generalizations are difficult to make, given that fanfiction.net alone boasts over 14,000 works under the Phantom of the Opera category, with another many thousands on archiveofourown.org.

Fanfiction is an interesting way of looking into the way people are affected by a work, because without having to bow to copyright or financial considerations, it can very clearly demonstrate what the actual people who are moved to do so find valuable in a story. They aren't being paid, and they are already circumventing authorial authority, and thus, what you get is whatever they want. A very common trope in Phantom fiction, at least early on, was an almost all-pervasive empathy with Erik, to the point where his crimes were either minimized or deemed excusable by his ill treatment. Raoul was vilified almost to the point of cartoonishness, and even Christine was often treated poorly by the fandom for refusing to treat Erik as the fans themselves

wished him to be treated. On the other hand, fandom and fan fiction allowed elements missing from the adaptations to be explored and fleshed out; you could re-introduce the Persian, for example, or explore Erik's life outside the opera, adding depth to a story that had been pared down for the stage.

If nothing else, the amount of fan fiction created by phantom fans speaks to the intensely romantic feelings the stage show engendered. A far cry from the original author having to insert a plea for compassion for his main character, there was a time in fandom when Erik was pretty near above criticism and anyone daring to mention the inherent stalkeriness and creep factor was not in for a good time. I'm obviously painting with a broad brush, but my own memory of the time is also supported by testimonies from other fans online. With more recent public discussions about consent and grooming and the like, these defenses have become less common and less intense, but I do think it's interesting that for a certain segment of the population, the bodice-ripper-like trope of a man simply obsessed with you is seen as romantic. Again, we see this recurring in the popularity of things like the Twilight book and film series, among other things. And I will hasten to add, as a fantasy obviously it has some currency we cannot discount. There is a very common thread in phantom circles of Erik merely needing to be loved, by the right person, for everything to turn out right. And who wouldn't want to be the one to rescue someone from their lonely fate, especially a genius devoted only to you?

And while it might feel like this was a thing in spite of the changing mores of the time, it's actually a response to it, in the sense that there's a sort of pleasure in hearkening back to a quote-unquote simpler time when we supposedly didn't have to

worry about sexual politics and power dynamics and STDs. It's a form of nostalgic longing for a time pre-sexual revolution.

While not in the strict sense fanfiction—it was published in 1990 by Doubleday—nothing represents this romanticization of Erik so much as Susan Kay's *Phantom*. And nothing except the musical has loomed quite so large in the fandom imagination, even these many decades later. Kay initially purchased the soundtrack on a whim, which led her to the London production, which in turn led to her reading the Gaston Leroux novel. Her reaction was one well known to writers: "My reaction to the book was a mixture of disappointment and fascination. It told me so much less than I had hoped for, and yet the little there was intrigued me even further: the odd paragraph here, the throwaway line there which mentioned the Phantom's earlier life."

And so the book took form, starting from Erik's birth through past his death, incorporating the events of the original novel into a larger story about, essentially, a man's inability to accept love because of the various blows dealt by fate. Each section takes on a different point of view: Erik's mother, a mentor architect, the Persian, Erik himself, Christine. In Kay's hands Erik is the ultimate tragic character, a man with true difficulties but who seems insistent on his own self-destruction because he cannot see past them to a better possibility. He is ultimately redeemable, but along the way he is unable to accept the true regard many attempt to offer. And this, of course, makes him the ultimate romantic anti-hero, a Byronic figure in a cloak who is all the more desirable because he's fallen so far. Kay does not shy away from Erik's crimes, and even makes him a drug addict in the bargain, but at the same time he is clearly intensely sexually desirable in a way he himself cannot see. Said Kay, "Those attracted to him are



always rightly aware of an underlying fear, and I believe it is this mixture of attraction and fear which is responsible for his powerful sexuality.”

This is not nearly as good a book as it was when I was fifteen, but it was intensely important not only to my history as a fan, but to the fandom itself, to the point where certain elements have stuck as more or less “canon.” And this is why, while I’m mostly eschewing written versions in this series, I’m including it here. Kay’s characterization of Erik has found its way into not only fanfiction but even into the way Lloyd Webber himself has reimagined the story. And because of its popularity, I think the fact that it contributes the Phantom’s first first-person narrative is relevant. For the first time, Erik gets to tell his own story.

But much like the musical’s emphasis on romance and sexuality, in the end the book relies on that sexuality for much of its meaning. This is to say, Erik is so sexual that he literally causes an orgasm in Christine with his voice alone, though she’s too unfamiliar with the sensation to name it. Her final ‘gift’ to him is a clandestine return to consummate their relationship, resulting in a child which Raoul will ultimately have to raise, offering this mini-Erik a do-over of the life of love he never had. In this version, Erik’s sacrifice means only that before he dies, he gets to pass on his legacy, making Christine something of a vessel for his redemption through the creation of new life.

On the other hand, I do think the novel is important in that it acknowledges in the text that this is not an inherently unlovable being, but one who has been so beaten down by the world and society that he can no longer accept love when it is offered. Kay doesn’t have to say “hey guys, we should pity this guy.” Right on

the paperback cover, while he's masked, this guy is clearly depicted as hot and misunderstood and perfect for fantasizing. The problem isn't just that society has ostracized Erik; it's that society's ostracization have made him incapable of loving himself.

I'm spending time on the fannish aspects of the musical because I think it is an important window into how the story has ultimately shifted over the past decades. It may well be that Leroux's Christine was in sexual thrall to Erik's voice in a way that was ultimately too powerful for her to succumb to or voice, but that's not the focus of Leroux. Nor, as we've seen, is it an aspect of the 1925, 1943, 1962, or Paradise versions. Which I find extra curious, since both the Ken Hill and Lloyd Webber musicals make a particular point of casting non-classical, rock or pop inspired, sexy voices for their leading men. Although music has always been part of the plot, perhaps it was not until we began understanding the Phantom through the medium of song that this became a point of identification. And Erik becomes the true focal point, not as a villain or antagonist or monster, but as the hero.

I want to be explicit about this thread we've been pulling on regarding Erik's villainy/empathy this entire series. Because I'm going to go big here and posit that the trajectory since 1909 has been as follows: Erik is a man who has done bad things but deserves understanding because he is a human being, to Erik is a man who has been wronged by society and for better or worse we can understand his need for revenge, to Erik is a man who has done bad things but... isn't he kinda sexy?

This is, of course, simplifying things greatly and I don't mean to say anyone making or loving this musical is explicitly stating that it's okay to kill people as long as you're hot about it. But I do

think the overt sexualization of this story does complicate things in a new way that will have ramifications in the ensuing adaptations. So before we go, I want to sum up a few key points.

Essentially, this is the first time since 1925 that someone had gone back to the book and done a traditional 'adaptation' of Leroux, as opposed to building on previous films and adding newly relevant elements. In that way, it transfers elements of Leroux we haven't seen before—Don Juan, for example—to a new format that requires extensive adaptation—because Leroux never wrote out the score or told us what Erik's music sounded like. So in 1986, we have something truly noteworthy—a version of Phantom that has gone back to the original source, but also done it in an entirely new medium. In terms of adaptation and that old friend 'fidelity,' it's been a long time coming.

On the other hand, the combination of a cultural shift in what place a character like the Phantom has in our society, with whom we identify, and the medium/genre itself play a huge role in making the musical Phantom a very different experience from the book. Not least in the physiological sense, where the difference between reading a text with your eyes and interpreting it with your mind versus sitting in a dark theater while music, props, sets, and the actors are all creating a lived experience processed by many senses and mental and emotional systems is vast. But also in who the Phantom is.

So if we're going to ask the question I don't like but keep coming back to despite saying I wouldn't, 'is the musical version version faithful?', I'd have to say that it is both faithful to many aspects of the text of Leroux, but also constitutes a very definite artistic interpretation distinct from his work. And that, I suppose, is what

should be the tension in any subsequent version of a story. But I think more importantly, for the first time the Phantom has reached a mass audience, and one that has been primed to feel some ownership, or at least kinship, with the ostensible "monster." In the episodes to come, we'll get into the other musical versions, the horror backlash, and Lloyd Webber's return to the scene.

Until then, thank you for listening to Re-Adapted. This show was written and produced by me, Kris Pepper Hambrick. Please feel free to contact me at readaptedpodcast at gmail, Facebook, or instagram, or readaptedpod on twitter with comments, questions, and suggestions. Until next time, none of us can choose where we shall love. See you then!

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