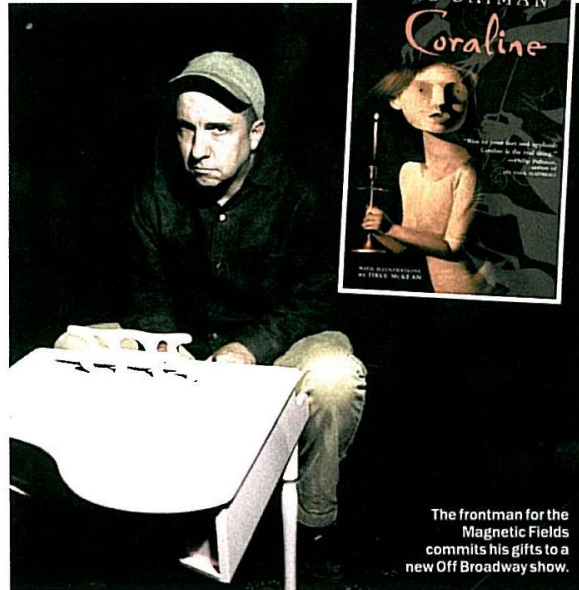


May 2009

An "other" musical



Songwriter Stephin Merritt sounds off on his musical version of *Coraline*. By **Julia Stroud**

In the 2002 film *The Ring*, a videotape kills those who watch it; the only way to lift the curse is to make a copy of the tape. A similar force seems to emanate from Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. The 2002 children's book, about a girl trapped in a world ruled by a deceptive "other mother," has been adapted as a graphic novel, a video game and a film—all released within the last two years. *Coraline's* viral success continues this month, when it takes the form of an Off Broadway musical. Actor-playwright David Greenspan wrote the book and also stars as the "other mother." Stephin Merritt wrote the score and lyrics. *Time Out Kids* talked with Merritt about his take on the twisted tale.

How did this project begin?
I wrote a song for the audio book, which turned out to summarize almost the entire plot. It seemed like I had already halfway written the musical, so I suggested it to Neil Gaiman. He didn't bat an eye.

Does the show stay close to its source material?
I didn't want to do a literal

translation of the novel, so David Greenspan was the first person I thought of. He's kind of absolutely wrong for this, and I thought that would be a good idea. *Coraline* will be played by Jayne Houdyshell, a 50-years-plus woman, and we have other actors crisscrossing gender boundaries, even crossing species.

What does that contribute?
I think it's important to subtract the assumption that what you see is what you get in the theater. We're trying to have the audience look at the stage and realize the story is not what you're looking at. When you read, you're looking at letters on the page and the story is taking place in your head. The same is true with a stage show. You're seeing actors and the story exists in your mind.

Do you think kids will relate?
Yes, I would like it to be performable in schools. We're not doing it cheaply, but because the score is played by one pianist, it could be done cheaply! It's definitely not bowdlerized for childhood consumption, though.

But you've kept it appropriate?
Yes. Well, there is one swear word, but it's not an American one. I feel like *buggerall* is a word that you can print in *Time Out Kids*, right?

See *Weekly Calendar* for details.