



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**NEW BACKSTAGE MEMOIR RECOUNTS CELEBRITY GOSSIP
EMBEZZLEMENT OF FAMED PRODUCER, AND GRISLY MURDER**
The Wrong Side of the Room: A Life in Music Theater Published Friday, October 26

New York, NY— *The Wrong Side of the Room: A Life in Music Theater* by Norman Mathews is one man’s tale of a harrowing journey to a fulfilling life in both music and theater. Dreams of a life in show business and of passionate romance were stymied by lack of self-assurance. Psychological abuse by a priest led to absurdly comic psychotherapy over his sexuality. At age twenty, a failed suicide nearly shattered a promising future. From the ashes of this calamity rose a staggering resolve to build a meaningful life. Byzantine twists paved the way to a career as a magazine editor and eventually a life as a Broadway and movie dancer. During his performance years, he worked with Barbra Streisand, Dorothy Lamour, Gene Kelly, and Michael Bennett. After an untimely injury, he reinvented himself as a composer and playwright, for which he created highly acclaimed works for Tony-Award performers.

His passionate autobiography is steeped in dark humor, hilarious celebrity gossip, and backstage intrigue. It is a rare book that can intimately describe a self-destructive trajectory, recount the grisly murder of a Broadway conductor, provide an inside look at the embezzlement of a famed Broadway producer, detail an ugly never-reported rehearsal scene involving Michael Bennett, and give a behind-the-scenes look at the birth of new musicals and operas. Mathews brings his colorful Sicilian-American family, his triumphs and heartbreaks, and his mine-strewn path to fulfilling love vividly to life.

What the Critics Are Saying

The author clearly delights in detailing his life story, starting with his Sicilian ancestry and beginning with his grandparents, who arrived in America via Ellis Island. He goes on to present his distinguished life on Broadway with all the glow of center stage and the nerve-wracking thrill of opening night. . . The book also has a delightful, chatty sense of humor with moments of wry wit that make it exciting to read. In the end, it effectively celebrates a life of artistic inspiration alongside the giddiness and glory of live theater.

—*Kirkus Review*

Norman Mathews delivers a riveting memoir with *The Wrong Side of the Room* that opens with a contentious genesis and powerfully surges through to its finale. This is the ultimate tale of a man who is knocked down seven times and gets up eight, except in this case our tenacious narrator is struck to the ground far more than that. . . Mathews is the consummate phoenix and, much like he displays in the writing of this book, skillfully maneuvers the trajectory of his life's own narrative into a story that we are fortunate enough to have shared in *The Wrong Side of the Room*.

—*Asher Syed, Readers’ Favorite*

Impressively candid, exceptionally informative, deftly written, organized and presented, *The Wrong Side of the Room: A Life in Music Theater* is an extraordinary memoir that will have special and particular appeal for anyone with an interest in show business. . . highly recommended for both community and academic library Contemporary American Biography collections.

—*Midwest Book Review*

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For a Media Kit or More Information, visit <https://normanmathewsauthor.com>
For review copies or to schedule an interview with Mr. Mathews, contact:
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Critical Acclaim for

The Wrong Side of the Room: A Life in Music Theater

The author, now 76, clearly delights in detailing his life story, starting with his Sicilian ancestry and his grandparents, who arrived in America via Ellis Island. He goes on to present his distinguished life on Broadway with all the glow of center stage and the nerve-wracking thrill of opening night. Overall, he delivers an alluring autobiography of a man “who wore enough hats to fill a millinery shop” thanks to a highly varied career that included editing, dancing, and musical composition. . .the book’s second half is fully stocked with accounts of stage shows galore—not to mention impressive name-dropping (Barbra Streisand, Betty Grable, Dorothy Lamour, Gene Kelly). These anecdotes from the theater’s social scene glide alongside vivid imagery from the author’s performances and other successes. The book also has a delightful, chatty sense of humor with moments of wry wit that make it exciting to read. In the end, it effectively celebrates a life of artistic inspiration alongside the giddiness and glory of live theater.

—*Kirkus Review*

The Wrong Side of the Room: A Life in Music Theater by Norman Mathews is an autobiography chronicling the author’s life as he transitions from a confusing and often abusive childhood, born in a sleet of uncertainty (literally, as it turns out). Masked by imagination and written with a humor that most would not be able to apply to such situations, Mathews is able to harness this creativity and hitch it to his own ambitions as a rising star. When an injury threatens to derail an ascent that defies all odds, Mathews is forced to reinvent and reignite himself once more, and does so amid a whole host of personal and professional turmoil, scandal, and the kind of stories that are all the more shocking – and inspiring – because they are actually true.

Norman Mathews delivers a riveting memoir with *The Wrong Side of the Room* that opens with a contentious genesis and powerfully surges through to its finale. This is the ultimate tale of a man who is knocked down seven times and gets up eight, except in this case our tenacious narrator is struck to the ground far more than that. But he does continue to rise and appears to have carved out a genuine niche for himself until, “I woke up one morning with a strange pain in my back and running down my right leg. In a few days, it got much worse, and I began limping.” With the support of his partner Todd, he buys a Steinway, dives into formal education, and. . .well, at first that all implodes too. But Mathews is the consummate phoenix and, much like he displays in the writing of this book, skillfully maneuvers the trajectory of his life’s own narrative into a story that we are fortunate enough to have shared in *The Wrong Side of the Room*.

—*Asher Syed, Readers’ Favorite*

Impressively candid, exceptionally informative, deftly written, organized and presented, "The Wrong Side of the Room: A Life in Music Theater" is an extraordinary memoir that will have special and particular appeal for anyone with an interest in show business. While very highly recommended for both community and academic library Contemporary American Biography collections, it should be noted for personal reading list that "The Wrong Side of the Room" is also available in a digital book format (Kindle, \$9.99).

—*Midwest Book Review*



NORMAN MATHEWS

BIOGRAPHY

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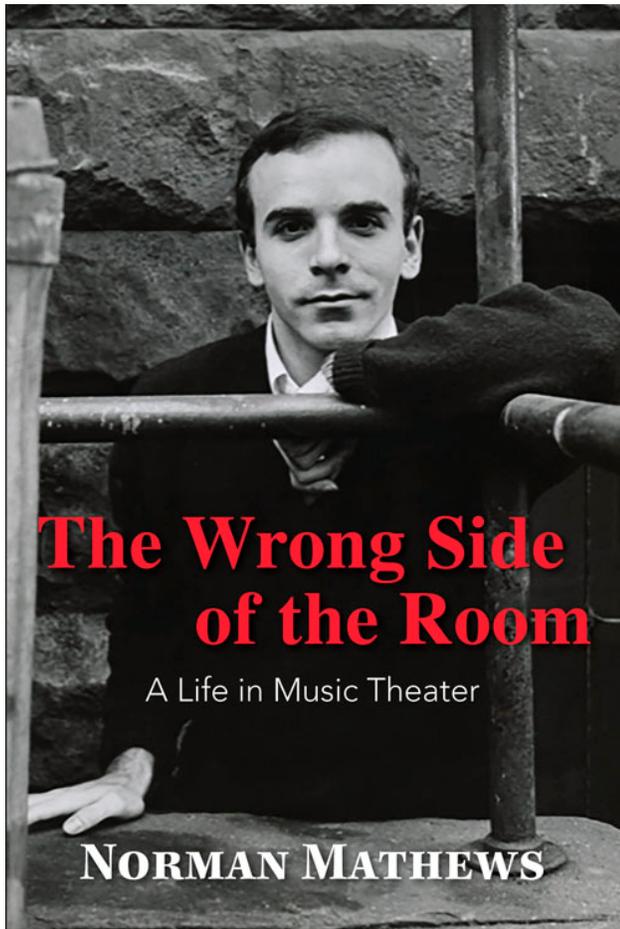
<https://normanmathewsauthor.com/>

NORMAN MATHEWS is a composer, author, playwright, and librettist. His autobiography, *The Wrong Side of the Room, A Life in Music Theater*, will be published by Eburn Press in October. He has been News Editor of *Dance Magazine*, Managing Editor of *Sylvia Porter's Personal Finance Magazine*, and Editorial Director of inhouse publications at Merrill Lynch. His articles have appeared in *Common Dreams* and the *Times of Sicily*.

As a composer, Mathews's music was featured, along with the works of John Kander, and Charles Strouse, at the Kennedy Center in a program of classical music written by theatre composers. Mathews's one-woman musical play about Dorothy Parker, *You Might as Well Live*, has been performed by Tony-Award-winner Michele Pawk and Broadway star Karen Mason. The play, in which Mrs. Parker's verses are set to music, received a Vogelstein Foundation Playwriting Grant and was a finalist for the Stanley Drama Award and the Mill Mountain Playhouse Best Play Competition. Along with three Pulitzer-Prize finalists, *You Might as Well Live* was selected for a festival of new plays at the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre.

La Lupa, an opera for which Mathews wrote the libretto and score, is based on the novella by Giovanni Verga, author of *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The piece was selected for the Ft. Worth Opera's showcase of new works. His newest play, *Drone*, which examines the human cost of drone warfare on two parallel families, is scheduled to have a reading directed by Michele Pawk this fall. *Rossetti Songs*, set to poems by Christina Rossetti, was recorded by Navona Records, and broadcast on public radio. His song cycle, *Songs of the Poet*, composed to Walt Whitman poetry, was premiered in Germany by Gregory Wiest, an American tenor with the Munich Opera. Wiest recorded the work for Capstone Records. It has been performed throughout the world. Mathews' *Sonnet No. 61*, set to Shakespeare, for chorus, piano, and oboe won the VocalEssence choral award. His cabaret works have been performed by Liz Callaway (Tony nominee), and Debbie Gravitte (Tony Award).

Mathews began his career as a Broadway and film dancer-singer-actor, during which he worked with Barbra Streisand, Gene Kelly, and Dorothy Lamour. He holds both a bachelor's and master's degree. His music is published by Graphite Publishing.



The Wrong Side of the Room

A Life in Music Theater

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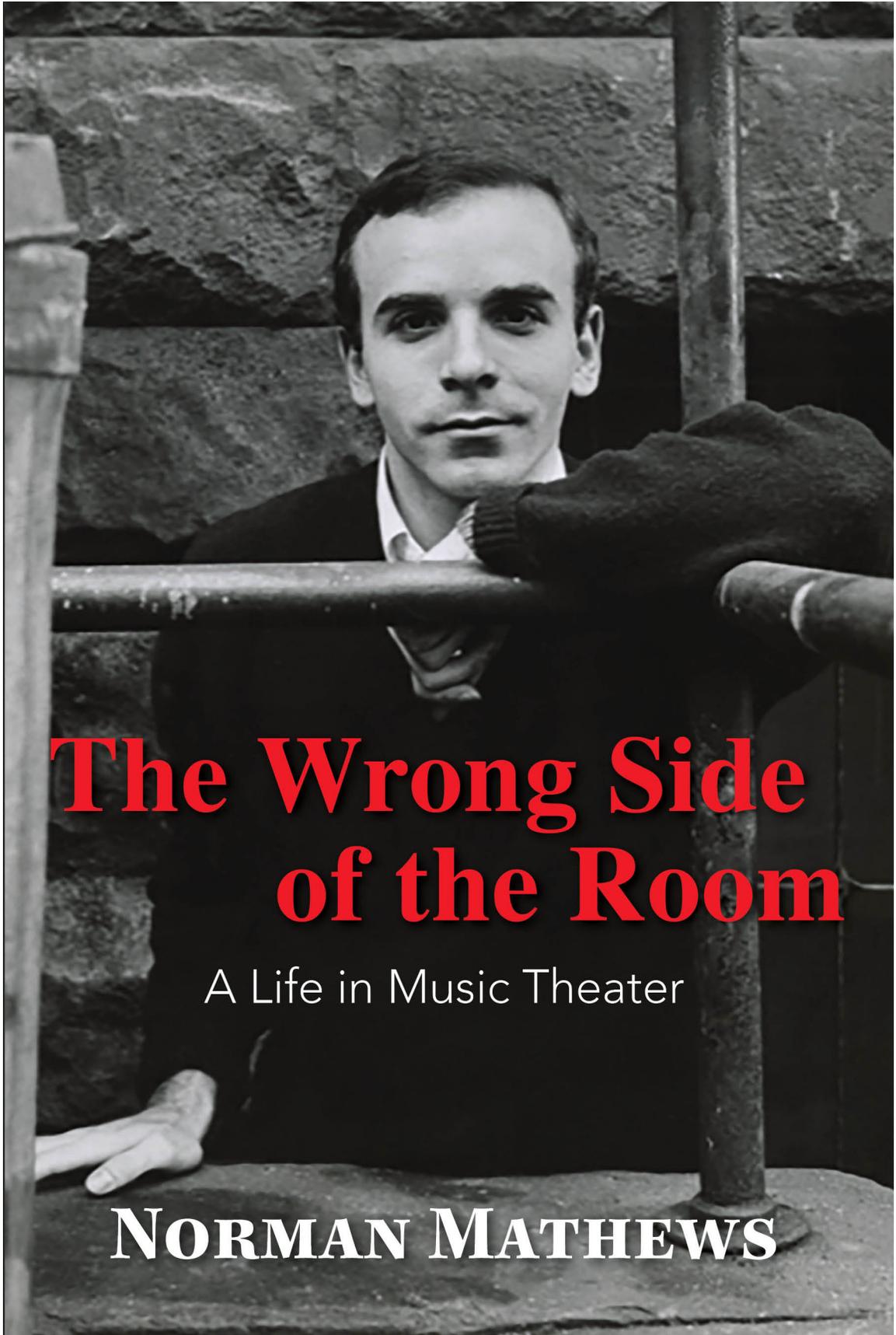
BOOK EXCERPT

In the summer of 1968, I was hired as a dancer in the film version of *Hello, Dolly!* starring Barbra Streisand and Walter Matthau. The following excerpt, taken from the chapter, “Hello, Barbra!” recounts the filming of the movie’s finale, which was shot at West Point.

Once “Sunday Clothes” was completed, we moved on to the finale, which meant piling thousands of people into buses and driving us across the Hudson River to West Point every day. I could scarcely believe what I saw when we arrived. They had flown in by helicopter the frame of a full-sized New England-style white wooden church and placed it strategically at the tip of the point. The scene involved a wedding procession, beginning at the top of the hill and ending as Barbra and Walter Matthau entered the church.

I was assigned a partner, and we began learning our little dance steps, which once again required no remarkable technique. I was excited when I learned that we would be positioned in the front row just before the entrance to the church, and therefore very visible to the camera as Barbara and Walter passed us on their procession. The three thousand extras literally cloaked the hill overlooking the point.

The music began to play, Gene Kelly called “take one, action,” the cameras started to roll, and Barbra and Walter made their way slowly down the hill to the church. Just as they passed in front of my partner and me, I heard a screaming voice from up on the hill. “Stop the cameras. Stop the movie this instant.” All action ceased. Everyone was frozen in place as the woman whose voice we heard came storming down from the top of the hill. Who is she? What does she want? Why is she so angry? Everyone looked puzzled. This particular “she” was famed Hollywood costume designer, Irene Sharaff. As we watched her approach the church, she seemed to be heading straight for me and my partner? Is that possible? Yes, she was definitely glaring at us. What could we possibly have done wrong? When she reached us, she gave immediate and irrevocable orders to Gene Kelly, who came to see what the problem was. Pointing accusingly at my partner, she screamed, “Get that ugly dress out of my movie and get it out now. It’s hideous.” My partner had been fitted in a dress worn by Judy Garland in *The Harvey Girls*, at least according to the label inside the dress. Admittedly, it was one of the most unsightly dresses I had ever seen—a nauseatingly colored brown crepe, covered with turquoise chenille balls. My partner and I were swiftly exiled to what was the equivalent of Siberia—the far reaches of the hill, behind even the extras, where no camera would catch the slightest glimpse of us.



The Wrong Side of the Room

A Life in Music Theater

NORMAN MATHEWS

NORMAN MATHEWS was born in the wrong town, the wrong era, and with the wrong name. What's a boy to do? He conjured up a more enticing, imaginary world to better navigate the perils of childhood. Dreams of a life in the theater and of passionate romance were stymied by lack of self-assurance. Psychological abuse by a priest led to absurdly comic psychotherapy over his sexuality. At age twenty, a failed suicide nearly shattered a promising future. From the ashes of this calamity rose a staggering resolve to build a meaningful life. Byzantine twists paved the way to a career as an editor and eventually a life as a Broadway dancer. As a performer, he worked with Barbra Streisand, Dorothy Lamour, and Gene Kelly. After an untimely injury, he reinvented himself as a pianist, composer, and playwright, for which he created award-winning works for top Broadway and concert-stage performers.

His passionate and inspirational autobiography is steeped in dark humor, hilarious celebrity gossip, and backstage intrigue. He brings his colorful Sicilian-American family, his triumphs and heartbreaks, and his mine-strewn path to fulfilling love vividly to life. This riveting drama is a paean to all late-bloomers, proof that no matter how many wrong cards you are dealt, it's possible, with hope and tenacity, to come up with a winning hand.



As a composer-playwright, Norman Mathews has established himself as a lush melodist and a writer of sarcastic wit and insightful observations. These qualities are particularly evident in *You Might as Well Live*, his musical about Dorothy Parker, and his opera, *La Lupa*. His work has been performed at the Kennedy Center, on radio, and at theaters and concert halls around the world.

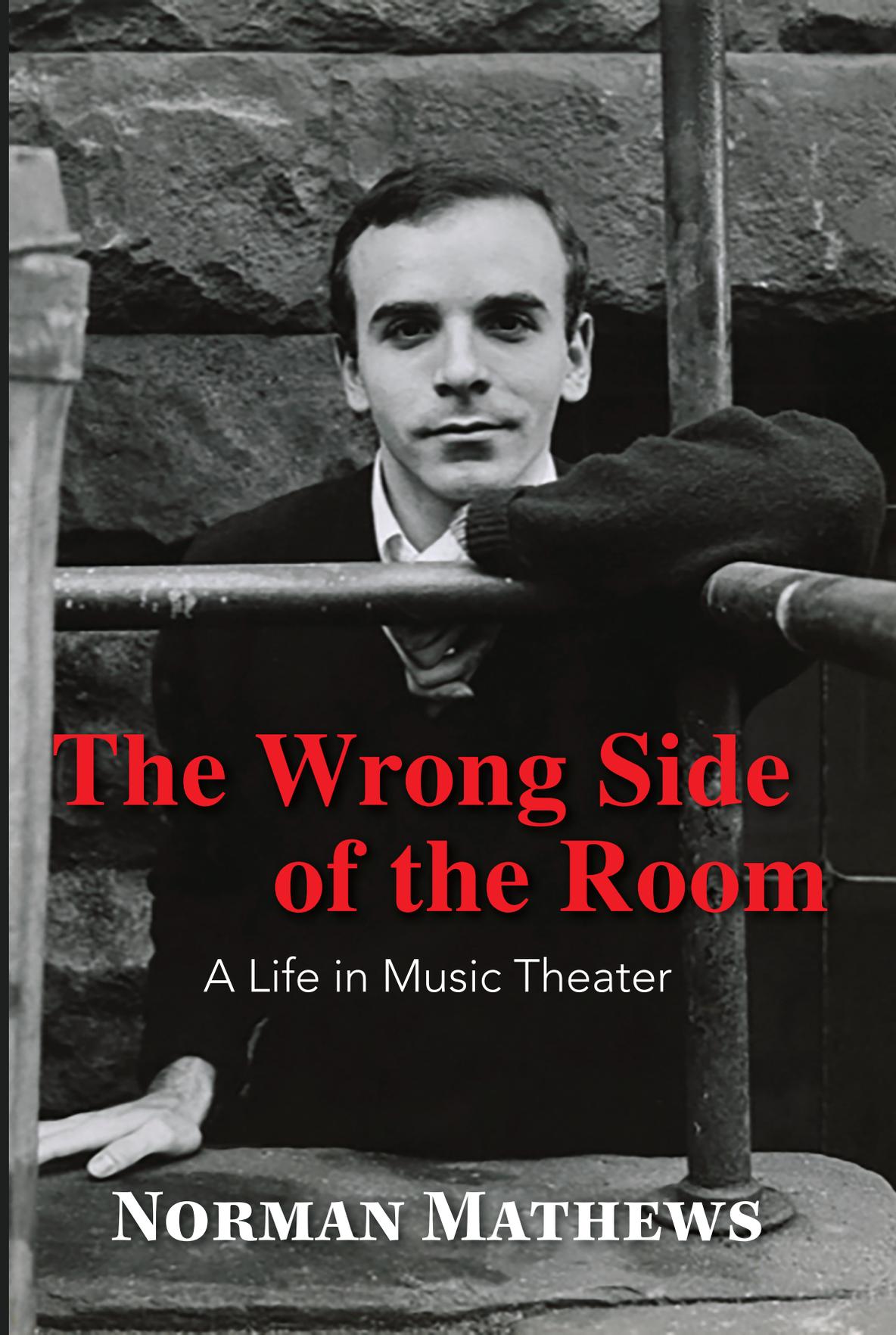
He is a recipient of numerous awards, foundation grants, and commissions. Mathews has been News Editor of *Dance Magazine* and Managing Editor of *Sylvia Porter's Personal Finance Magazine*. He lives in New York City with his artist-writer spouse, Todd Lehman. Mathews's music can be heard at www.normanmathews.com



The Wrong Side of the Room

Norman Mathews

Ebourn Press



The Wrong Side of the Room

A Life in Music Theater

NORMAN MATHEWS



Interview Question Suggestions for Norman Mathews

- How do you explain that you've been involved in so many different careers?
- You say that you were a late-bloomer, yet you knew from childhood that you wanted a life in the theatre. How do you explain the contradiction?
- Tell us about the terrible encounter you had with a priest in the confessional. How seriously did that affect your future sexual awareness?
- You claim that you experienced ageism from the time you were twenty-one. How so and how did it affect your life?
- Which of your careers in the arts has given you the most satisfaction – dancer, pianist, or composer/playwright?
- Can you give us some insights into working with Barbra Streisand and Dorothy Lamour?
- What advice would you give people who want to make changes in their lives but are discouraged by others?
- How isolated did you feel growing up gay in a conservative community in the 1950s?
- What was it like experiencing psychotherapy as a teenager in the 1950s?
- If you had to make the choice between a cooking career or a musical career, would you make the same choice today?
- What drew you to Dorothy Parker as the subject for your first musical?
- You say you've never been a strong opera fan, yet your first opera has seen some success. Why did you choose to write the work as an opera?
- Can you talk about what drove you to write a play about drone warfare?
- As an artist, did you feel an outsider in the corporate world of Merrill Lynch?
- To what do you attribute the success of a 50-year relationship with another man?
- What role does your Sicilian-American heritage play in your career?
- Why did your creative, as opposed to your recreative work, begin only at age 50?
- What advice can you give LGBTQ youth about dealing with their sexuality?