

THE SHAGGS

philosophy of the world

ELECTRONIC PRESS KIT

22 pages total

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THE SHAGGS

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Press Quotes from the September 2005
New York Musical Theatre Festival

The New York Times

“There’s good news for anyone who accidentally stumbled into a pop-ploitation musical like *Good Vibrations* or *All Shook Up* and has been feeling sugar-saturated ever since: an antidote is available at the Samuel Beckett Theater. It’s called *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* and watching it is much like listening to songs by the real Shaggs: **unsettling, disturbing, challenging, even a little awe-inspiring.**”

“(Joy Gregory and Gunnar Madsen’s) unpredictable concoction is sometimes funny, but just as often grim; a song late in the play called ‘Driving Home (The Rage)’... is **downright scary.**”

“...not merely a biographical look at a 60’s curiosity, but also a **jolting portrait** of a man’s desire to escape ordinariness...”

“*The Shaggs*...tells this story fearlessly and with the same disregard for the conventions of musical theater that the Shaggs had for the conventions of pop music.”



BACKSTAGE

“This is a very good musical about some very bad musicians...”

“...a crowd pleaser of a show about some of life’s most pathetic losers.”

“...a first-rate, eclectic score...”

“...a splendid libretto...”

“Director John Langs...keeps the horrific story moving in sprightly fashion.”



BROADWAY.COM

“The physical production is perhaps the best at this year’s festival.”

“...a frightening look at a family in crisis.”

“Director John Langs has staged the show with a keen eye for eccentricity...”

“...such wonderfully bizarre characters...”

TALKING BROADWAY

“(The) message in *The Shaggs* comes through loud, clear, and melodically...”

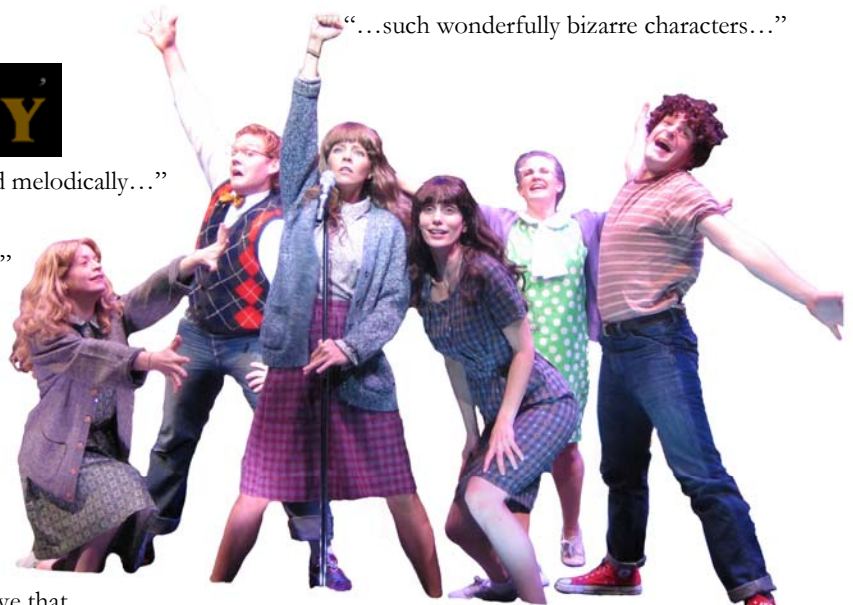
“Gregory’s book captures a specific sense of dreams dreamed, deterred, and denied...”

nytheatre.com
The New York Theatre Experience, Inc.

“...truly entertaining, with music that is at once both heartfelt and funny.”

“It’s a story quite cleverly brought to life...”

“...the real appeal of this play lies in the story of fatherly love that it recounts, however quirky and delusional this father happened to be.”



[PENNEYSEAL] AWOL
THEATREproject, inc.

The New York Times

September 30, 2005

Barely Qualified to Be a Band, but Making History Anyway

By NEIL GENZLINGER

There's good news for anyone who accidentally stumbled into a pop-ploitation musical like "Good Vibrations" or "All Shook Up" and has been feeling sugar-saturated ever since: an antidote is available at the Samuel Beckett Theater. It's called "The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World," and watching it is much like listening to songs by the real Shaggs: unsettling, disturbing, challenging, even a little awe-inspiring.



From left, Amy Eschman, Dana Acheson and Jamey Hood in "The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World."

The Shaggs were a trio of sisters in New Hampshire - Dot, Betty and Helen Wiggin - whose father, at least as portrayed here, more or less ordered them to form a rock band in the late 1960's, hoping it would be his ticket out of the millworker life. The girls were not blessed with natural musical talent - their songs sound like under-rehearsed Roches; some are almost painful to listen to. But their father, Austin (compellingly played here by Peter Friedman), seems to have heard only the good notes.

He sunk the family savings into the band and the recording, in 1969, of an album called "Philosophy of the World," not realizing that he was being fleeced by the producer. A decade later, though, the album resurfaced, its punk/garage-band/nihilistic sound suddenly registering, with some, as alternative-rock genius. A cult following resulted.

"The Shaggs," part of the New York Musical Theater Festival, tells this story fearlessly and with the same disregard for the conventions of musical theater that the Shaggs had for the conventions of pop music. The show doesn't use the Shaggs' songs, though we hear pieces of them; its music is by the versatile Gunnar Madsen, with lyrics by him and the book writer, Joy Gregory. Their unpredictable concoction is sometimes funny, but just as often grim; a song late in the play called "Driving Home (The Rage)," with the now-fractured Wiggin family together in a car, is downright scary.

Making it all work are the actresses playing the sisters: Jamey Hood as the cheery Dot, Amy Eschman as the brooding Betty and Dana Acheson as the silent Helen. Among other things, they achieve the deceptively difficult feat of sounding like the world's worst rock trio at some points, but blending beautifully at others, as we hear the band the way Austin imagined it sounded.

"The Shaggs" ends up being not merely a biographical look at a 60's curiosity, but also a jolting portrait of a man's desire to escape ordinariness, and of his daughters' desire to return to it. "Trash should die," Betty says early in the play, talking about plastic-foam coffee cups, but perhaps really referring to the Shaggs' music. "You should burn it and bury it and never think about it again." Not really, because sometimes yesterday's trash can provide today's insights.

BACKSTAGE

East

Off-Off Broadway *October 05, 2005*

The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World

Reviewed By Robert Windeler

This is a very good musical about some very bad musicians, a crowd pleaser of a show about some of life's most pathetic losers. That paradoxical feat would have been very hard to achieve without a first-rate, eclectic score (music by Gunnar Madsen, lyrics by Joy Gregory and Madsen), a splendid libretto (Gregory) based on a true story, and eight uniformly excellent and committed actors who play their roles as convincingly as if they found nothing at all weird about their characters' story. But weird it is.

Three high-school-aged sisters in small-town New Hampshire in the late 1960s (Jamey Hood, Amy Eschman, Dana Acheson) have nothing to look forward to but "getting knocked up by the age of 20." Their mill-working father (Peter Friedman) forces them to form a rock band despite any discernible inclination or talent on their part -- not to better their position in life, but his. He names the group the Shaggs (after the dog stories and the haircut) and calls himself the group's "proprietor." Against all logic, the trio actually gets some performing dates and self-produces a record that becomes a mini cult favorite. It betters their lives not at all.

Fortunately, the music we hear is not that of the real Shaggs, which is only sampled to demonstrate how truly terrible it was, nor even an attempt to replicate their lack of style.

Director John Langs, who developed the story with Madsen and Gregory, keeps the horrific story moving in sprightly fashion. The four-piece band (musical director Aaron Gandy plus Brian Silvoy, Jason DePope, and Felipe Torres) is terrific. Dialect coach Amy Stoller deserves a deep bow for keeping the whole cast in authentic-sounding accents, even when singing. But the unnamed wigmaker needs pruning shears. These girls -- and their one friend, Kyle (Bill English) -- may have their faults, but they are not Medusas.

**"The Shaggs:
Philosophy of the
World"**

Presented by
PenneySeal
Productions and
AWOL Theatre
Project, Inc. as part
of the New York
Musical Theatre
Festival at the
Samuel Beckett
Theatre, 410 W.
42nd St., NYC,
Sept. 27-Oct. 2.

http://www.backstage.com/backstage/showguide/review_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1001260309

THE SHAGGS: PHILOSOPHY OF THE WORLD

reviewed by Kaipo Schwab

In early 1970, Austin Wiggin, a blue-collar worker from Fremont, New Hampshire, pulled his three young girls out of school, bought them all musical instruments (Helen, the youngest, was given a set of drums; Dot and Betty were each given an electric guitar) and forced them to become a rock and roll band. He named the trio the Shaggs because according to Austin, “everyone likes shaggy dogs,” and in a relatively short time, he got them into a studio to record an album. Years later, *Rolling Stone* magazine named it as one of the most influential alternative albums of all time. The tale of how the Shaggs came to record that album is remarkable not because of how good the album was, but rather because of how awful it actually was. (If you’ve never heard the Shaggs sing, I suggest you conduct a quick Google search and sample their music for yourself. It’s an experience like no other.) Austin likens them to “cotton candy and vinegar...only better.” To say they were way ahead of their time, as Frank Zappa once suggested, is extremely generous in my humble opinion.

But thankfully the play I saw on stage was not “The Shaggs: The Jukebox Musical.”

The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World focuses instead on the Wiggin family’s quest for fame. Sure, you’ll get to hear some of those warbled, discordant, arrhythmic songs the Shaggs are famous for (including my personal favorite “My Pal Foot Foot”), but the real appeal of this play lies in the story of fatherly love that it recounts, however quirky and delusional this father happened to be. At its core, this is a play about a man so driven to have his daughters achieve success as a means of avoiding the dreary existence he feared lay ahead for them in Smalltown, U.S.A., that he became blinded (or in this case deafened) to their biggest fault: that they could neither sing nor play instruments. It’s a story quite cleverly brought to life by Joy Gregory (book, story, and lyrics), Gunnar Madsen (story, music, and lyrics) and John Langs (story and overall direction). Although the production has its flaws, they were not enough to deter me from being really moved by the piece. I found it truly entertaining, with music that is at once both heartfelt and funny. And the acting—as well as the singing—is quite laudable.

The girls are strongly portrayed by Dana Acheson (Helen), Jamey Hood (Dot), and Amy Eschman (Betty)—each played with odd quirks and thick New England accents which only endear them to us more. These talented actresses not only do spot-on impersonations of the Shaggs, but in a fresh directorial moment (which takes place during the recording session) they provide us with a sense as to what the Shaggs sounded like to themselves and their dad (juxtaposed with how they really sounded to the sound engineers) and in so doing gave the audience a taste of what it might have been like if they had actually been able to sing.

The play also boasts a solid supporting cast, including Glenn Peters, whose offbeat comedic timing while playing the school principal and assorted townsfolk is pitch perfect; Jimmy Bennett, appealingly slimy as band promoter Charley Dryer; and Bill English, who smoothly transitioned from an awkward adolescent neighbor/friend to a self-assured soldier (heading off to Vietnam) before our eyes. I especially loved watching Tracy Sallows, who carries herself with such composure and grace on stage as matriarch Annie Wiggin—her silences really do speak volumes. Then, of course, there is Peter Friedman, who plays Austin Wiggin with just the right mix of tough love, insanity, and buried anger that I couldn’t keep my eyes off him. I sat riveted afraid that I might miss some subtle gesture or nuance that would surely reveal yet another layer of this complex character.

The overall design is in keeping with the story and the festival circuit’s natural limitations. Sets by Gary Smoot and costumes by Wade Laboissonniere are simple and understated in order to help facilitate quick changes. Lighting by Aaron J. Mason and sound design by Robbin E. Broad are less prominent features of the production but no less effective.

<http://www.nytheatre.com/nytheatre/nymf1971.htm>

The Dramatic True Story of the World's Most Famous Obscure Band
The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World
As part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival

Los Angeles Times Critics' Choice

“Joy Gregory and Gunnar Madsen’s terrific new musical captures the damaged, resilient voices of these New Hampshire teen girls, forced to become a rock band. It’s a birth-of-a-band back-stager with unsettling overtones of abuse and small-town horror – ‘School of Rock’ as conceived by David Lynch.”

LA Stage Alliance Ovation Awards
WORLD PREMIERE MUSICAL

2003 Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Awards
MUSICAL SCORE, BEST PRODUCTION Nominee

The 25th Annual LA Weekly Theater Awards
MUSICAL OF THE YEAR

August 4th, 2005 (New York, NY) – New York Music Theatre Festival, **PenneySeal Productions** and **AWOL Theatre Project, Inc.** are proud to present the NY premiere of the rock musical ***The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World*** by **Joy Gregory** (writer/ lyricist), **Gunnar Madsen** (composer/ lyricist), directed by **John Langs** and starring **Peter Friedman**. As part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival, this is a limited engagement, running **Tues, Sept 27 at 8pm, Wed, Sept 28 at 8pm, Thurs, Sept 29 at 8pm, Fri, Sept 30 at 4:30pm, Sat, Oct 1 at 8pm, Sun, Oct 2 at 1pm and 4:30pm**. All performances are at the **Beckett Theatre** on Theatre Row (**410 West 42nd Street**). Tickets are **\$15** and can be purchased at www.nymf.org (also good for more information) or by calling **TheaterMania.com** at **212.352.3101**.

Taking place between 1969 and 1973, **The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World** is an earnest look at one of the oddest and most unlikely bands to achieve rock cult status. Forced by a demanding father, the three very awkward sisters of the Wiggin family of Fremont, New Hampshire were prepped to play in a band based on a prophecy laid out by their grandmother. Taken out of school and away from all outside influences, the Wiggin family patriarch pushed the girls to practice non-stop until he thought they were ready to record an album and perform concerts. They were not. They never were, but they did, and this wholly original musical chronicles their journey while incorporating songs influenced by The Shaggs’ canon, as well as a re-imagining of their “hit single” *Philosophy of the World*.

Austin Wiggin, the girls’ father, died before he ever saw his dream realized. Following his death, The Shaggs were no more until the mid-seventies when a Boston radio station played a few cuts from their record. Their only album caught on, spurred by Frank Zappa declaring the band “better than the Beatles”, celebrated by outsider-music mavens who were taken with the Shaggs’ artless style. In 1980 they were Rolling Stones’ Comeback Artists of the Year without having recorded anything in over a decade. Old recordings and footage have been turned into subsequent albums and collector’s items for their thousands of underground fans, but they remain humble loners in the outskirts of New England.

The play stars **Peter Friedman** who originated the role of Tateh in the musical *Ragtime* in its world premiere in Toronto, as well as on Broadway, (receiving an Outer Critics Circle Award and Tony and Drama Desk Award nominations.) He was in the original New York productions of *The Heidi Chronicles* by Wendy Wasserstein and Simon Gray’s *The Common Pursuit* (Drama Desk nominations for both), and Roundabout’s revival of Reginald Rose’s *Twelve Angry Men* amongst many others.

Joy Gregory (Writer/Lyricist) is a founding member of Chicago’s Lookingglass Theater Company where her two most recently produced plays were *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* (Joseph Jefferson-nominated), and *Race: How Blacks and*

Whites Think & Feel About the American Obsession, a co-adaptation with David Schwimmer of the book by Studs Terkel (Joseph Jefferson-nomination for Best Adaptation). Joy currently writes for the new ABC drama *Windfall*, and previously wrote for CBS's *Joan of Arcadia*.

Gunnar Madsen (Composer/Lyricist) was a founder, songwriter and performer with the internationally acclaimed a cappella group The Bobs. Their first album led to a Grammy nomination. The Bobs have released five more albums and Gunnar has received seven consecutive ASCAP songwriter's awards. He has written music for the feature films *Breaking the Rules* and *A Special Providence*; he was the voice of Sammy Davis, Jr. in the Emmy-Award winning HBO film *The Rat Pack*.

John Langs (Director) received a Backstage West award for *The Shaggs*. The show then moved to The Lookingglass Theater of Chicago where it was Jeff-nominated. He is Director and Artistic Associate with The Seattle Shakespeare Company, The Powerhouse Theatre of Santa Monica, The Neurotic Young Urbanites in Los Angeles and Maui Onstage in Hawaii.

PenneySeal Productions (Producer) Co-founded by Laura Penney and Jane Abramson, recent projects include *Slut* (FringeNYC 2003); Carlos Murillos' *Mimesophobia (or before and after)* (SPF 2005, dir. Matt August); *Dreams This Way: The Best of Raw Impressions Music Theatre* (NYMF 2004; TADA! Theatre, dir. Daniella Topol); Karen Hartman's *Anatomy 1968* (SPF 2004, dir. Lisa Rothe); *The End of You* (Lion Theatre, Theatre Row Theatres, dir. Sarah Gurfield); and several Raw Impressions musical theatre and film events (RIMT).

Artists Without Limits (AWOL) Theatre Project, Inc. (Producer), under the leadership of executive director David Southerland, is a not-for-profit organization committed to developing and promoting daring, original new works and musical theatre artists. AWOL's first program, *The Musicals in Development (MID) Series*, supports emerging and undiscovered musical theatre writers in the development process. The first two *MID Series* projects, *The Mistress Cycle* and *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World*, will be presented in NYMF 2005.

Dedicated to discovering new work and new artists, **The New York Musical Theatre Festival** celebrates the diversity, creativity, and future of musical theatre. NYMF is a flagship program of the National Music Theater Network, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, and is America's largest annual musical theatre event. NYMF is produced in association with Virgin Megastores and proudly supported by amNewYork, Village Voice, WB11, Dodger Stages, Receptasign, King Displays, Rosco, Scharff Weissberg, TheaterMania.com, BroadwayWorld.com and Manhattan Living. For more information, visit www.nymf.org.



30 Days of NYMF on BroadwayWorld Day 24: The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World

September 25, 2005 - by [BWW News Desk](#)

The Journey of *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World*

For a long time, playwright Joy Gregory went around telling people she was working on a play about a cult favorite, outsider girl band called The Shaggs. They were these three sisters in New Hampshire in the 60s, and they couldn't really play their instruments at all but their dad forced them to be in a band because of some prediction his grandmother made. "Great idea!" people would say. Joy agreed.

At a playwright-composer workshop in L.A. led by Ben Krywosz, Joy met composer Gunnar Madsen and felt that magic click. Joy mentioned that she was working on a new play about The Shaggs and...hey, what if it was a musical? A musical about people who can't make music? That sounds GOOD! Gunnar sparked to the idea immediately and pretty soon the new team was off to work on the idea at a writers retreat through the now (sadly) defunct A.S.K. Theater Projects in L.A. "I think the eureka moment for us was this idea that the original music in the show would be the beautiful, fully-realized music that all these characters have in their heads only when they try to bring it out into the world, it ends up sounding like The Shaggs." The band's music tends to provoke one of two reactions. Quotes from the reviews of their LP *Philosophy of the World* on Amazon.com pretty much sum it up:

"The Shaggs are sonic evidence of a greater reality beyond that which is dreamt of in any sort of human philosophy."

"This music is lemon juice on paper cuts."

After hearing the Shaggs music, Gunnar tended to fall into the latter camp. While Joy isn't nearly as worshipful as most of the Shaggs fans, there's a quality in the music that led her deeper into the story. "It's a kind of haunted quality," says Joy. "I remember I had only read about them before I heard them, and one night listening to some college radio program, I heard this music that made my heart stop. It sounded like gothic pop made at the bottom of a well. Before the DJ identified them, I knew it was The Shaggs. I find their story actually pretty devastating and that quality is really present in these bizarre, naive little pop tunes they wrote about Halloween and sports cars and lost cats. Music and sports are full of examples of talented kids pushed by an obsessive parent, usually a scary dad -- the Beach Boys, the Jacksons, Venus and Serena Williams. But when you have a parent who literally feels like fame and fortune were promised to him by the Fates and his daughters have no way to fulfill that need, then you get the elements of real tragedy -- hubris, ancestral prophecy, Cronus devouring his children."

The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World received its premiere production in Los Angeles in association with the Powerhouse Theatre, directed by John Langs. By now the score had found its shape, the three sisters became distinct, and everyone's inner lives were expressed in pop ballads, doo wop, plainsong chants, gospel rave-ups, or thickly dissonant choral pieces. "I love how the score gets darker and more challenging in the show," says Joy. "I think by the end of Act One, you're left with this hopeful, funny story of a band on the brink of improbable triumph, complete with a big West Side Story-like Act One Finale. But then in Act Two, things go really weird and dark which, again, I feel honors the real story of The Shaggs." The production won a host of Los Angeles theater awards, including an Ovation award for World Premiere Musical, a L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award for Musical Score (and nominated for Best Production) and the L.A. Weekly Award for Musical of the Year.

The Shaggs was subsequently produced at the Lookingglass Theatre Company in Chicago, where Joy is an ensemble member. The production was again directed by John and the band pit included some exciting players: LeRoy Bach of Wilco and David Hilliard from David Byrne's touring band. Musical director was Rick Sims of the Didjits and the Gaza Strippers.

After participating in the NAMT Songwriters Showcase last year, The Shaggs team was lucky to pair up with producers Laura Penney and Jane Abramson of PenneySeal Productions and Amy and David Southerland of AWOL Theatre Project, Inc., which have shepherded the show into this year's NYMF. The team is thrilled to have Peter Friedman (Ragtime, Outer Critics Circle winner, Tony and Drama Desk nom.) in the part of Austin Wiggin, the father of The Shaggs, and Tracy Sallows (Angels In America) as Austin's wife, Annie. The talented cast also includes Dana Acheson, Jimmy Bennett, Bill English, Amy Eschman, Jamey Hood, and Glenn Peters.

Rounding out the NYMF team, Aaron Gandy serves as musical director, Jessica Hendricks choreographs, Gary Smoot is the scenic designer, Wade Laboissonniere is the costume designer, Aaron J. Mason is lighting designer, Robbin Broad is sound designer, Jennifer Abraham and Gay Taylor are assistant directors, Meredith Palin is the associate costume designer, Julie Pittman is the assistant sound designer, Rafi Levavy is the production stage manager and casting is by Nora Brennan Casting. The band includes Brian Silvoy, Jason De Pope, and Felipe Torres. Associate producers are Jared Cohen and Kevin Cordova.

The in-rep performance schedule for The Shaggs schedule is Sept. 27 at 8 PM, Sept. 28 at 8 PM, Sept. 29 at 8 PM, Sept. 30 at 4:30 PM, Oct. 1 at 8 PM, Oct. 2 at 1 PM and 4:30 PM.

The Beckett Theatre in Theatre Row is at 410 W. 42nd Street. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at www.nymf.org or by calling TheaterMania.com at (212) 352-3101.

<http://www.broadwayworld.com/viewcolumn.cfm?colid=5050>



Photo Coverage: NYMF Preview - *Monica: The Musical*, *The Shaggs*, *Wild Women Of Planet Wongo* and *Don Imbrogio*

September 10, 2005 - by [Craig Brockman](#)

On Friday, September 9, 2005 at the Virgin Megastore in Union Square, 4 NYMF shows - *Monica: The Musical*, *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World*, *The Wild Women Of Planet Wongo* and *Don Imbrogio* showed off their stuff, and BroadwayWorld was there!

The Shaggs: Philosophy Of The World - Compelled by prophecy, a desperate father forces his misfit daughters out of school and into the recording studio. The Shaggs have been called "better than the Beatles," "the worst band ever," "Godmothers of Outsider Music." Based on a bizarre true story about surviving destiny.

For more information on the NYMF Festival, [visit www.nymf.org](http://www.nymf.org).



Dana Acheson is joined by the ensemble of *The Shaggs: Philosophy Of The World* performing "Impossible You"

Dana Acheson





Jimmy Bennett sings “Driving Home (The Rage)” backed up by the Shaggs (l-r) Dana, Jamey Hood and Amy Eschman

Jamey Hood, Amy Eschman and Dana Acheson



<http://www.broadwayworld.com/viewcolumn.cfm?colid=4788>

TM Feature - Sep 9, 2005

Musical Diversity

A New York Musical Theatre Festival preview.

By: [Dan Bacalzo](#)

To anyone who has ever heard the music of The Shaggs, a musical treatment of their story might inspire both fear and excitement. [The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World](#), featuring book and lyrics by Joy Gregory and lyrics and music by Gunnar Madsen, is just one of the many shows that form the second annual [New York Musical Theatre Festival](#) (NYMF for short), which runs from September 12-October 2 in various venues in Manhattan. NYMF debuted last year to both audience and critical acclaim, and led to the Off-Broadway transfers of *Altar Boyz* and, more recently, *The Great American Trailer Park Musical*.

This year's festival showcases a wide range of material, encompassing over 30 new musical productions, as well as staged readings, seminars, and many other related events. One of the festival's goals is to explore the range of musical styles and subject matter that artists are working with. "I think there's much more diversity than gets represented a lot of the time," says Isaac Hurwitz, NYMF's Director of Programming. "If we're going to continue to have a vibrant musical theater community, we have to embrace that and look at how musical theater intersects with the stories we want to tell today."

The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World is based upon the bizarre real-life story of a father (played by Tony nominee Peter Friedman) who forces his three daughters to drop out of high school and start a band. Frank Zappa called The Shaggs "better than The Beatles," contributing to the band's cult popularity, while several music critics simply labeled them "the worst band ever."

Gregory and Madsen have not crafted a jukebox musical, however, nor are their songs in the style of The Shaggs. "We mostly hear the characters' inner lives which are full of different kinds of music -- gospel rave-ups, super duper pop tunes, plainsong chants, doo wop songs of sexual frustration, hymns of anxiety, etc." says Gregory. "We wanted to make it about people who have fantastic music inside them, but when they try to get it out, it comes out all flat and weird and atonal."

"Musical theater is a big tent," says Hurwitz. "There's a real diversity out there and opportunities need to be spread really widely if we're going to have a thriving industry." Hurwitz stresses the importance of the majority of NYMF shows receiving fully staged productions. "A lot of things hit a glass ceiling of readings and do not make it to a production stage," he states. "We felt that theater was about much more than just a reading." The festival attracts a large number of producers and other individuals scouting for talent. Obviously, many of the NYMF participants hope their work will transfer on or Off-Broadway. "I see my show not only as entertaining and informative, but as extremely commercial," says Conn. "I'm hoping everyone else will see it that way, too!"

<http://www.theatermania.com/content/news.cfm/story/6633>



Amy Eschman, Dana Acheson, and Jamey Hood in *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* (Photo © Brad Starks)



Peter Friedman Is Father of Cult Pop Players *The Shaggs*, Making NYC Premiere in NYMF

By [Kenneth Jones](#)
31 Aug 2005

The award-winning rock musical *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World*, based on the real life cult rock group, makes its New York premiere Sept. 27-Oct. 2 as part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival.

The musical by Joy Gregory (writer-lyricist) and Gunnar Madsen (composer-lyricist) is directed by John Langs and stars Peter Friedman, the Tony Award nominee for Broadway's *Ragtime*, as a patriarch who prompts his daughters to form a musical group.

Performances play the Beckett Theatre in the Theatre Row complex on West 42nd Street. The staging is a presentation of NYMF, PenneySeal Productions and AWOL Theatre Project, Inc.

“Taking place between 1969 and 1973, *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* is an earnest look at one of the oddest and most unlikely bands to achieve rock cult status,” according to production notes. “Forced by a demanding father, the three very awkward sisters of the Wiggin family of Fremont, NH, were prepped to play in a band based on a prophecy laid out by their grandmother. ... The Wiggin family patriarch pushed the girls to practice non-stop until he thought they were ready to record an album and perform concerts. They were not. They never were, but they did, and this wholly original musical chronicles their journey while incorporating songs influenced by The Shaggs’ canon, as well as a re-imagining of their ‘hit single’ — ‘Philosophy of the World.’”

The cast includes Dana Acheson, Jimmy Bennett, Bill English, Amy Eschman, Friedman, Jamey Hood, Glenn Peters and Tracy Sallows.

“Austin Wiggin, the girls’ father, died before he ever saw his dream realized,” according to production notes. “Following his death, The Shaggs were no more until the mid-seventies when a Boston radio station played a few cuts from their record. Their only album caught on, spurred by Frank Zappa declaring the band ‘better than the Beatles,’ celebrated by outsider-music mavens who were taken with the Shaggs’ artless style. In 1980 they were Rolling Stone’s Comeback Artists of the Year without having recorded anything in over a decade. Old recordings and footage have been turned into subsequent albums and collector’s items for their thousands of underground fans, but they remain humble loners in the outskirts of New England.”

Aaron Gandy is musical director, Jessica Hendricks is choreographer, Gary Smoot is scenic designer, Wade Laboissonniere is costume designer, Aaron J. Mason is lighting designer, Robbin Broad is sound designer, Jennifer Abraham is assistant director, Julie Pittman is assistant sound designer, Nora Brennan Casting is casting director.

Associate producers are Jared Cohen and Kevin Cordova.

Director John Langs received a Backstage West award for *The Shaggs*. The show then moved to The Lookingglass Theater of Chicago where it was Jeff-nominated.

The Los Angeles production of the show was named Musical of the Year in The 25th Annual LA Weekly Theater Awards, and was nominated for Best Musical Score and Best Production Awards in the 2003 Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Awards.

Joy Gregory (writer-lyricist) is a founding member of Chicago's Lookingglass Theater Company where her two most recently produced plays were *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* (Joseph Jefferson-nominated), and *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think & Feel About the American Obsession*, a co-adaptation with David Schwimmer of the book by Studs Terkel (Joseph Jefferson-nomination for Best Adaptation). She currently writes for the new ABC drama "Windfall," and previously wrote for CBS' "Joan of Arcadia."

Gunnar Madsen (composer-lyricist) was a founder, songwriter and performer with the internationally acclaimed a capella group The Bobs. Their first album led to a Grammy nomination. The Bobs have released five more albums and he's received seven consecutive ASCAP songwriter awards. He has written music for the feature films "Breaking the Rules" and "A Special Providence"; he was the voice of Sammy Davis, Jr. in the Emmy-Award winning HBO film "The Rat Pack."

The in-rep performance schedule for *The Shaggs* schedule is Sept. 27 at 8 PM, Sept. 28 at 8 PM, Sept. 29 at 8 PM, Sept. 30 at 4:30 PM, Oct. 1 at 8 PM, Oct. 2 at 1 PM and 4:30 PM.

The Beckett Theatre in Theatre Row is at 410 W. 42nd Street. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at www.nymf.org or by calling TheaterMania.com at (212) 352-3101.

<http://www.playbill.com/news/article/94843.html>



The Shaggs Musical Presented at NYMF, Sept. 27-Oct. 2

August 17, 2005 - by [BWW News Desk](#)

The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World, a new rock musical about the real-life cult favorites, will be presented as part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival. Presented by NYMF, PenneySeal Productions and AWOL Theatre Project, Inc., the show will run from September 27th through October 2nd at the Beckett Theatre on Theatre Row (410 W. 42nd St.).

The musical features a book by Joy Gregory, lyrics by Gregory and Gunnar Madsen and music by Madsen. "Taking place between 1969 and 1973, *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* is an earnest look at one of the oddest and most unlikely bands to achieve rock cult status. Forced by a demanding father, the three very awkward sisters of the Wiggin family of Fremont, New Hampshire were prepped to play in a band based on a prophecy laid out by their grandmother. Taken out of school and away from all outside influences, the Wiggin family patriarch pushed the girls to practice non-stop until he thought they were ready to record an album and perform concerts. They were not. They never were, but they did, and this wholly original musical chronicles their journey while incorporating songs influenced by The Shaggs' canon, as well as a re-imagining of their 'hit single' Philosophy of the World.

Austin Wiggin, the girls' father, died before he ever saw his dream realized. Following his death, The Shaggs were no more until the mid-seventies when a Boston radio station played a few cuts from their record. Their only album caught on, spurred by Frank Zappa declaring the band "better than the Beatles," celebrated by outsider-music mavens who were taken with the Shaggs' artless style. In 1980 they were *Rolling Stones'* Comeback Artists of the Year without having recorded anything in over a decade. Old recordings and footage have been turned into subsequent albums and collector's items for their thousands of underground fans, but they remain humble loners in the outskirts of New England," state production notes.

The play stars Peter Friedman (*Ragtime, The Heidi Chronicles, Twelve Angry Men*) and is directed by John Langs, who received a Backstage West award for *The Shaggs*. The show then moved to The Lookingglass Theater of Chicago where it was nominated for a Jefferson Award.

Dedicated to discovering new work and new artists, The New York Musical Theatre Festival celebrates the diversity, creativity, and future of musical theatre. NYMF is a flagship program of the National Music Theater Network, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, and is America's largest annual musical theatre event. NYMF is produced in association with Virgin Megastores and proudly supported by *amNewYork, Village Voice, WB11, Dodger Stages, Receptasign, King Displays, Rosco, Scharff Weissberg, [TheaterMania.com](#), [BroadwayWorld.com](#) and *Manhattan Living*.*

The show's performance schedule is: Tues, Sept 27 at 8pm, Wed, Sept 28 at 8pm, Thurs, Sept 29 at 8pm, Fri, Sept 30 at 4:30pm, Sat, Oct 1 at 8pm, Sun, Oct 2 at 1pm and 4:30pm. All performances are at the Beckett Theatre on Theatre Row (410 West 42nd Street). Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at www.nymf.org (also good for more information) or by calling TheaterMania.com at 212.352.3101.

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PRESS

From the LA and Chicago Productions

Los Angeles Times Critics' Choice



“Joy Gregory and Gunnar Madsen’s terrific new musical captures the damaged, resilient voices of these New Hampshire teen girls, forced to become a rock band. It’s a birth-of-a-band back-stager with unsettling overtones of abuse and small-town horror – ‘School of Rock’ as conceived by David Lynch.”

Awfully Good

By Jack Helbig
May 7, 2004



“The beauty of Gregory’s writing is that she doesn’t flinch from describing just how weird the Wiggins were... Gregory’s script sugarcoats nothing... Gregory is quite honest about how badly, or at least how oddly, The Shaggs play. But in brilliant dream-like sequences, she and tunesmith Madsen reveal the beautiful music in the Wiggins sisters’ souls...in fact, there is a lot of beautiful music throughout this show...and Gregory’s lyrics are every bit as expressive as her evocative dialogue... In every way this is a remarkable show.”

The Shaggs Hits the Wrong Note Just Right

By Jeff Favre
November 14, 2003



“...writer and lyricist Joy Gregory has brought The Shaggs to the stage with one of the most inventive and emotionally layered new musicals to premiere in Los Angeles in several years...Gregory and Madsen have created a show that is a joy to watch, and even more exciting to hear... (that) paint(s) an intriguing portrait of how this indescribable sound was born. And any music that inspires a musical this powerful can’t be bad. This is a show that likely will be produced for many years to come.”

OUTSIDER IN: The Shaggs’ Unworldly Philosophy

by Steven Mikulan
November 21-27, 2003



“Gregory’s heartfelt band biography...present(s) an endearing portrait that avoids the saccharine and, indeed, occasionally pricks the audience with some wry imagery.”

“...this is a solid and funny telling of pop history, and nowhere does Gregory better demarcate the schizophrenic divide between mainstream entertainment and neurotic expression than in Act I’s recording-studio scene. When a spotlight illuminates the girls playing with carefree abandon, the music sounds, well, listenable; but when... lighting emphasizes the studio’s stunned engineers, we hear what they hear – the real-life Shaggs from their album. It’s a heartbreaking yet hilarious moment.”

Play That Flunky Music, White Girls

By John Esther

November 13, 2003

pasadenaweekly
News and Entertainment

“Bittersweet, raucous, talented and unique, John Langs’ direction of *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* keeps the Hot Properties series at [Inside] the Ford brewing with another successful triumph.”

Shaggs Forever

by Anne Kelly Saxenmeyer

November 5-11, 2003

SANTA MONICA
Mirror

“Running through some really entertaining musical numbers is a true story that could’ve been plucked right out of Greek drama, and Gregory and Langs agreed that the Wiggin family lore is what intrigued them most about the project. Said Langs, struck by the ‘divine strangeness’ by which his production has become a chapter in the Shaggs saga: ‘I feel very much as the curtain comes down each night that we’re a part of whatever this prophecy was. We are the torchbearers for it in some bizarre way because here we are in 2003, telling their story to hundreds of people, continuing to create the legend of the Shaggs as it was told by Austin’s mother years ago.’ “

AWARDS

*A selection of the 2003 Awards for The Shaggs: The Philosophy of the World
Produced by the Powerhouse Theatre Company at [Inside] the Ford:*

LA Stage Alliance Ovation Awards
WORLD PREMIERE MUSICAL

Backstage West Garland Awards
BEST PRODUCTION - Powerhouse Theatre Company at [Inside] the Ford
MUSICAL SCORE - Joy Gregory and Gunnar Madsen
DIRECTION - John Langs

The 25th Annual LA Weekly Theater Awards
MUSICAL OF THE YEAR - Powerhouse Theatre
Also nominated for:
PLAYWRITING - Joy Gregory

2003 Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Awards
MUSICAL SCORE - Gunnar Madsen (Music) and Joy Gregory and Gunnar Madsen (Lyrics)
Also nominated for:
BEST PRODUCTION - The Powerhouse Theatre Company

Beverly Hills Outlook Awards
BEST MUSICAL OF THE YEAR
BEST PRODUCTION, Runner Up

Travis Michael Holder’s Ticketholder Awards (Entertainment Today)
BEST ORIGINAL SCORE: Joy Gregory and Gunnar Madsen
BEST PRODUCTION, Runner Up

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Biographies of the Creative and Production Teams

CREATIVE TEAM

Joy Gregory (Book & Lyrics) Joy is a member of Chicago's Lookingglass Theater Company where two of her plays were recently produced: *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* (Joseph Jefferson nominated), and *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think & Feel About the American Obsession*, a co-adaptation with David Schwimmer of the book by Studs Terkel (Joseph Jefferson nomination for Adaptation). *The Shaggs* premiered in Los Angeles at the Powerhouse Theater where it won L.A. Weekly Theatre Awards' "Musical of the Year," Backstage West Drama Awards' "Best Production" and "Best Musical Score," L.A. Drama Critics Awards' "Musical score," and an Ovation Award for "Best Premiere Musical." Her play *Dear Charlotte* also premiered with The Powerhouse and was recently produced in Brisbane, Australia with Theatre Activ8. Joy is a member of Dogear, a collective of Los Angeles playwrights. She currently writes for the NBC drama *Windfall* and her favorite new project is her one year old daughter, Lucie.

Gunnar Madsen (Music & Lyrics) is a composer, writer, actor, singer, director and gadfly. He's written for the Minnesota Opera, Lincoln Center, National Public Radio, and ODC; he has performed on PBS, BBC, *The Tonight Show*, *The Smothers Brothers Show*, and major stages in North America and Europe; he's won nominations for a Grammy, a Bammmy, and an Izzy, and awards from ASCAP, the LA Weekly, the LA Drama Critics Circle, the Bay Area Theater Critics Circle, and UC Berkeley. He founded the internationally acclaimed acapella group The Bobs, and for ten years was a driving creative force in their success. His family CDs, "Old Mr. Mackle Hackle" and "Ants in My Pants!" have won virtually every major award for children's music. He provided the singing voice for the portrayal of Sammy Davis Jr. in the film *The Rat Pack*, and his ravishing waltzes are featured throughout the 2nd season of HBO's *Sex and the City*. He wrote and directed a documentary film about an organic farming community for mentally disabled people in Russia, which was an official selection of the Ojai International Film Festival. His new picture book *Old Mr. Mackle Hackle* is called "Ebullient" by the Horn Book, and he and his music are in the forthcoming Universal film *The Break Up*.

John Langs (Director) John is a freelance artist director who has directed and contributed to the authorship of a slew of original theater around the country. *Up the Week Without a Paddle* and *Once Upon A Prime Time* (Lyrics and Music by Amanda Green and Curtis Moore) both received celebrated premieres under his direction. *The Shaggs: Philosophy the World* with fellow creators Joy Gregory and Gunnar Madsen premiered in Los Angeles where John received a Backstage West award for his direction. The show then moved on to The Lookingglass Theater of Chicago where it was Jeff nominated. When not creating theater, John enjoys his role as Director and Artistic Associate with The Seattle Shakespeare Company, The Powerhouse Theater of Santa Monica, The Neurotic Young Urbanites in Los Angeles, and Maui Onstage in Hawaii. This year his work will include the Actors Theater of Louisville and The North Carolina School of the Arts.

PRODUCTION TEAM

PenneySeal Productions (Producer) Co-founded by Laura Penney and Jane Abramson, recent projects include Carlos Murillo's *Mimesophobia (or before and after)* (dir. Matt August, Summer Play Festival 2005); *Dreams This Way: The Best of Raw Impressions Music Theatre* (dir. by Daniella Topol, NYMF 2004 and TADA! Theatre); Karen Hartman's *Anatomy 1968* (dir. Lisa Rothe, Summer Play Festival 2004); Michael D. Cohen's *The End of You* (dir. Sarah Gurfield, Lion Theatre); *Deirdre* ("Best of Festival" Producer's Prize, Daniel Marshall Award Winner; 4th Annual TRU Voices New Musicals Reading Series); *Slut* (FringeNYC 2003); The 2005 TRU Voices New Plays Reading Series; Lark Play Development Center's 11th Annual Playwrights' Week; and several Raw Impressions Musical Theatre events. With Raw Impressions' film division, PenneySeal has produced two short films: the thriller *Friends Like These* (by Geoff Kirsch and Jason Reich, dir. Evan Greenberg) and the movie musical *Free Fall* (by David Simpatico and Jeff Blumenkrantz, dir. Lonny Price). By day, Jane is the Production Coordinator for *The Lion King* at Disney Theatrical Productions. Laura is a graduate of the Commercial Theater Institute.

Artists Without Limits (AWOL) Theatre Project, Inc. (Producer), co-founded in 2004 by Amy & David Southerland and Kathi Iannacone is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to seeking out and developing new, challenging, and unique works of music theatre, and championing original voices in the theatrical landscape. The Musicals in Development (MID) Series is AWOL's first program created to support emerging and undiscovered music theatre writers. AWOL's first two MID Series projects, *The Mistress Cycle* (by Beth Blatt and Jenny Giering, dir. Joe Calarco) and *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* were both presented at the 2005 New York Musical Theatre Festival. For more info, please visit www.AWOLproject.org.

THE SHAGGS

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Development and Production History

- April, 2001. Act One of *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* was initially developed at A.S.K. Theater Projects' 2001 Spring Writers' Retreat in Los Angeles under the title *Musica Mundana*. The retreat ended with an informal reading of the first act with music presented by the composer, Gunnar Madsen.
- September, 2001. Acts One and Two of *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* were presented in a staged reading for invited guests through A.S.K. Theater Project's "Unsettled Scores" program. The reading was directed by John Langs.
- December, 2001. A revised draft of *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* was presented in a reading as the inaugural project for the New Works Initiative at TheatreWorks in Palo Alto, California. The reading was directed by Kent Nicholson, director of the New Works Initiative.
- February, 2003. Staged reading in Geva Theatre's 2003 Hibernatus Interruptus Festival of New Plays, directed by John Langs.
- October – December 2003. *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* received its premiere production as part of the Hot Properties series at [Inside] the Ford, produced by the Powerhouse Theatre Company. Directed by John Langs.
- February, 2004. Several cast members were invited, along with John Langs and the author and composer, to present *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* to an invited audience in a staged reading at Manhattan Theatre Club, NYC.
- April – June, 2004. *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* received its second production at Lookingglass Theatre Company in Chicago, Illinois.
- October, 2004. *The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World* was invited to participate in the National Alliance for Musical Theater's Songwriters' Showcase in NYC.
- February, 2005. *The Shaggs* was selected as AWOL Theatre Project's second MID Series project.
- September, 2005. PenneySeal Productions and AWOL Theatre Project submitted *The Shaggs* to the New York Musical Theatre Festival where it was one of 18 new musicals selected to be presented at the Festival in New York City.

THE SHAGGS

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Synopsis

ACT ONE

Overture. As a contemporary chorus of fans and detractors debate the worth or worthlessness of The Shaggs, a life-size replica of The Shaggs' album cover for "Philosophy of the World" comes to life, singing The Shaggs' song "Philosophy of the World" in toneless contrast to the lively debate. The chorus builds in intensity until the album cover is wrenched away to reveal three worn and defeated-looking women. This is Dot, Betty and Helen Wiggin, the actual Shaggs. The play begins.

In Fremont, New Hampshire, the Wiggin sisters have gathered to watch the fire department burn down their childhood home which is rumored to be haunted by the ghost of their long-dead father, Austin. Dot, the oldest sister, is horrified that their former home is going to be destroyed. Betty, the middle sister, can't wait to see it burn down, and Helen, the youngest, seems fragile and disturbed. When one of the firemen passes around the latest copy of *Rolling Stone* magazine featuring The Shaggs as 1981's Comeback Artists of the Year, Helen breaks down, loudly singing "Philosophy of the World." Betty encourages the firemen to set fire to the house, even offering to light it herself when the ghost of Austin Wiggin appears in an upstairs window. Everyone freezes.

Verses In the Body. Austin sings of the prophetic vision his mother had for him when he was a boy: that he would marry a woman with strawberry blonde hair, have two sons whom she would never meet and that his daughters would somehow save him. When the song ends, we are back in 1967 and the women are girls again.

Helen is anxious about Career Day at school tomorrow – the future terrifies her. Austin reminds her that the future is already laid out in her palm, prophesied by her grandmother. Helen scoffs, but Austin insists it's true. Dot and Betty listen in, eager to hear their future, too, but their mother, Annie, sends everyone off to bed before he can say more. Alone, Austin watches TV and we realize he doesn't know exactly what the prophecy foretold for the girls, either – he stares at the TV, waiting to figure it out. But no answer comes.

Career Day. As students announce their chosen careers, Betty steps up to the microphone and calls for an end to Career Day. The auditorium goes wild as the students revolt against their boring career choices and insist they can do anything! The riot suddenly ends when Austin enters the auditorium. We realize the production number was Betty's fantasy. Back in reality, Betty coldly announces she's going to be a secretary. Next Helen approaches the microphone and freezes, unable to speak. Career Day ends and Austin drags the girls off to the grocery store – but not before their classmate Kyle tells Helen he appreciated her muteness as an act of civil disobedience. Helen is intrigued. Betty drags her off.

At the grocery store the girls see Kyle again, stocking the shelves. Betty, feeling desperate and trapped, throws herself at Kyle – she knows he's really interested in Helen, but her father will never let Helen out of his sight and nobody cares if Betty disappears. Kyle isn't sure what to make of Betty's advance; he's still interested in Helen. Helen, meanwhile, seems to have chosen muteness as a permanent condition. Before they go home, Helen imagines a fantasy life with Kyle, **Impossible You.**

That night, Austin visits his mother's grave and insists that she show him some kind of sign so he'll know how to fulfill her prophecy. But he hears nothing. When he returns home, he sees the girls watching The Beatles on TV and it hits him – the girls are going to play in a band! That, surely, is how they'll save him.

For Helen's birthday, Austin presents all three of the girls with presents: guitars for Betty and Dot and a drum kit for Helen. He announces that tomorrow will be their last day of school. From now on, they'll practice at home while Annie home-schools them. The girls are speechless. Alone, Annie tries to talk Austin out of his scheme, but eventually gives over to her husband's need to believe.

Annie's Lessons. As Annie looks over the home-schooling program, Dot tells her teacher Mr. Wilson that she's dropping out to start a band. Mr. Wilson is appalled. Dot defends her father weakly, but when she steps away she imagines a more articulate and heartfelt defense of her father: **Don't Say Nothing Bad About My Dad.** Kyle, meanwhile, tells Betty he thought about it and he's willing to get together with her sometime. Helen wishes Kyle would talk to her, but he leaves without saying goodbye. The girls leave school to become rock stars.

Show Me the Magic. Betty shows up at Kyle's bedroom window immediately. Uncomfortable, Kyle natters on about his collection of blues records. Betty finally makes a pass at Kyle, but there's no connection. Betty explodes with frustration; she hates her life, hates being taken out of school to start a stupid rock band. This is the first Kyle has heard that the Wiggin girls are going to be in a band. He swoons at the idea of Helen playing drums. Betty sees who Kyle really longs for and leaves. There is no magic for Betty Wiggin.

Austin instructs the girls to write an original song for their first gig at the Exeter Talent Show. At first the girls are overwhelmed by their miserable task, but eventually their attempts to write a song take gorgeous flight as they sing **Words Into Wonder**, ending in a catchy song, "Many Things I Wonder," a transmuted version of The Shaggs' own song.

At the talent show, the girls try to recapture that solitary magic, but it comes out all wrong – “Many Things I Wonder” sounds flat and tuneless, like a burnt field. The audience pelts them with trash. Austin thinks they were superb. So does Kyle.

Destiny/Act I Finale. As Austin brags at work about the girls’ progress, he describes what happened last Saturday night at their gig at the Fremont Town Hall – a producer named Charley Dreyer approached saying he wanted to get the girls down on vinyl. We see the scene: Austin is skeptical about the producer until Charley sings about how “destiny” brought him to see The Shaggs. Austin is hooked. He tells Annie he’s cleaning out their savings to make a record. Meanwhile, Betty encourages Helen to sneak out and go see Kyle. Dot overhears and threatens to tell Dad, but Betty shuts her up and sends Helen on her way. Helen climbs into Kyle’s bedroom and they kiss for the first time as Austin tears into the girls’ bedroom demanding, “Where’s Helen?” Betty and Dot freeze as Helen and Kyle make out with abandon. It’s all happening.

ACT TWO

The girls practice the song “Philosophy of the World.” Austin stops them again and again, insisting that they sing it as he hears it in his head – but they can’t. Trying to pump up the girls for tomorrow’s recording session, Austin sings a gospel rave-up about being on the brink of destiny, **Austin’s Howl**. He leaves the girls to practice, but Helen slips out the moment he’s gone.

Helen meets Kyle at the cemetery where they plan to elope immediately after the next day’s recording session. Meanwhile, Austin makes final arrangements with Charley Dreyer, sinking more and more into debt. Alone in their room that night, Betty, Dot and Helen sing **The Night Before** as they get ready for bed, full of expectations, hoping reality won’t disappoint them as it usually does.

Studio Sequence/Montage. At the studio, two recording engineers listen to The Shaggs stumble through their twelve songs, first with astonishment, then disillusionment and finally a kind of existential angst. Austin, however, is transformed. We hear each song as Austin hears it – a catchy, blissful pop tune – then as the engineers hear it – a dreary, off-kilter mess. Austin pays the engineers their fee and takes the girls home, convinced they’ve just made history.

Ordinary Day. At dinner, Austin fills Annie in on their triumph as Helen quietly excuses herself from the table and sneaks out to elope with Kyle. Helen wants to leave town right away, but Kyle insists she tell her parents and offers to go with her. Helen declines and heads home alone. Intending to leave a note, she’s stopped by Austin, waiting up for her in the dark. He demands Helen tell her who she was out with. When she refuses, Austin says that if he ever finds out who he is, he will kill him. Helen, terrified for Kyle, stays home. Kyle spends the night alone waiting for Helen. Finally he gives up, assuming she chose not to return to him.

This Is Real. Charley Dreyer hears what The Shaggs recorded – and gets it. It’s crazy, but it’s like nothing else. He tries to convince radio stations to play the album with no success as Austin takes publicity photos of the girls. Helen seems broken. Dot doesn’t know why. Betty does. They all wonder why nothing is happening with the record. Frustrated, Austin confronts Charley, accusing him of not following through on his promises. Charley tries to get Austin to understand that The Shaggs may one day be famous, just not like The Beatles, but Austin won’t hear it. He threatens Charley Dreyer with an ultimatum and leaves. Faced with no alternative, Charley makes a phone call.

Poster Girls. As the girls practice endlessly, imprisoned by Austin’s loosening grip on reality, they begin to turn on each other. When Dot sneers at Helen, Helen finally explodes, telling Dot she has no idea what’s really going on and reveals that she’s married. When Austin appears to find out why the rehearsal has stopped, Helen collapses in terror. Dot, for a moment, sees the damage caused by her father. Austin leaves and Dot sings her new song: **My Head Is An Empty Birdcage**, about their dead-end lives closing in on them.

Annie confronts Austin: she went to see Charley Dreyer, suspicious that something was up. Her worst fears were confirmed: Dreyer cleaned out his office and disappeared with the family’s life savings and all the records except for one box. Austin doesn’t believe her. Annie shows him the box of records.

At the Shaggs’ show at the Fremont Town Hall, Austin tries to sell the few records they have. No one’s buying. Kyle is there, but Helen won’t speak to him. Meanwhile, Dot has to tell her father that their shows at the Town Hall were just canceled. In a fit of helpless rage, Austin throws the family in the car and drives home furiously. Everyone is stuck in their own silent world of desperation, elation, misery or rage as they sing **Driving Home (The Rage)**.

In the middle of a tense family dinner, Kyle arrives unannounced. Betty says she invited him over. Helen is paralyzed. Kyle wears an army uniform and reveals he’s going to be shipped out to Vietnam in a few days. Betty waits for Helen to say something, but she doesn’t. Kyle leaves. When Austin tells the girls to resume practicing whether they want to or not, Betty explodes. She begs Helen to tell their father about Kyle. Helen remains silent. Betty finally tells Austin the truth: Helen is married to Kyle.

With shotgun in hand, Austin races out to find Kyle as the rest of the family tries to stop him. Austin demands that Helen choose between her father and her husband. Helen speaks for the first time in months, choosing Kyle. Austin is defeated. As Austin sings of his wish to save his daughters, **Austin’s Elegy**, a policeman arrives to escort him home.

A few months later, Kyle appears, having been released early from Vietnam. He has lost an arm. He explains he heard about Austin’s death from a heart attack and expresses his condolences. He offers to meet Helen and the rest of the family at Austin’s grave.

The Shaggs Are Real. As the women gather at Austin’s grave, the chorus returns and narrates the rise of the cult fame of The Shaggs, climaxing in their being named 1981’s Comeback Band of the Year in *Rolling Stone* magazine. We have returned to the three adult sisters standing in front of their childhood home, confronting the ghosts of their thwarted lives. They sing a **Reprise of Philosophy of the World**, for the first time hitting the notes as Austin heard them. Perhaps Austin’s spirit finds rest. Helen sets the house on fire and the sisters watch it burn, not entirely released from the damage they’ve suffered, but perhaps hopeful that they’ll be able to somehow reclaim their ordinary lives.

THE SHAGGS

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Contact:

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The Shaggs: Philosophy of the World to:



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