



IN CONVERSATION WITH
ERIN A. CRAIG,
AUTHOR OF
OUR STRANGE DUET

You have a BFA in theatre design and production. What was your relationship with *The Phantom of the Opera* before taking on this project? How did your experience in the theatre inform your writing?

Phantom was actually the show that sparked my interest in theatre and made me want to go into stage management. It was the first musical I saw live and was my hyper-focused fandom all through high school and college. I'd always hoped I would one day get to call a production of it, but my career listed more opera than musical theatre, and by the time I had my daughter and took (what we thought!) was a hiatus, I didn't know if I'd ever get the chance. It's been an absolute joy getting to marry these two facets of myself—writing and theatre—on this project, and I've had great fun sprinkling in little pieces of backstage life as I'd experienced it into such an iconic part of musical theatre history. I wanted the world of the Opéra Populaire to feel entirely authentic and to give readers glimpses of what performers' and crews' lives are truly like behind the curtain.

***Our Strange Duet* allows Christine Daaé to take center stage and tell her own story. What drew you to writing a reimagined *Phantom of the Opera* that centers her voice?**

Christine Daaé has always been a fascinating character to me. She is the catalyst for nearly all of the events within the musical, but because of the constraints of staging and plot logistics, we see so much of the show happening *around* her. It was exciting to experience the story squarely through her eyes and get to see what was happening in moments when she was not onstage. I wanted to witness all the things we aren't able to know in the musical—the moment she first heard the Angel of Music's voice, what she was dreaming of during that infamous Act I swoon, where she was in those quiet months after the chandelier crash, and what was running through her head during the final confrontation. In centering Christine as the sole narrator, we get to go along with her and find out all this and more. The Phantom of the Opera may be here, inside her mind, but now we are too!

Did you meet Andrew Lloyd Webber while working on this project? What was that like?

I spent a glorious weekend discussing the show and book in person with Andrew, and—even though I'm a writer!—mere words will never be able to adequately describe how incredible that time was! We examined all parts of the plot and went into great detail filling in what's happening throughout the rest of the world while certain scenes are being carried out during the musical. Andrew is wonderfully curious, and it was a phenomenal experience to be able to dream up new parts of the canon with him in real time. It was one of the best moments of my creative life.

The epigraph quotes Andrew Lloyd Webber saying “*The Phantom of the Opera* is about love. It’s as simple as that.” Is this true of *Our Strange Duet* as well?

Absolutely! Love infuses every part of this book, from Christine's ardor—not only for the Phantom and Raoul, but for everything in her life: Meg and Madame Giry, her opera company, her creative ambitions and passion for music, her deceased parents—to my own fervency for the show, the story, and for the wonder of everything Andrew and his team have created. Projects don't achieve the level of success of *The Phantom of the Opera*—a global phenomenon still performing and adapting, reinventing itself and its legacy forty years after its conception—without a heaping scoop of collaborative magic, and that is the greatest love of all.



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