



Starstruck WORDS TO REMEMBER

BRITISH LYRICIST TIM RICE IS STILL ADDING TO HIS TIMELESS BODY OF WORK

BY CHRIS BETROS

"PROLIFIC" DOESN'T EVEN BEGIN

to describe the work of British lyricist Sir Tim Rice. Think *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Lion King*, *Evita*, *Aladdin* or *Beauty and the Beast* (just to name a few musicals and films), and you'll get some idea of what Rice has helped bring to the world. Not that the fame has gone to his head. "Please, call me Tim," he says during a recent visit to Tokyo, where he came to judge the Shine On Idol

singing competition, which raises funds for the Tyler Foundation for childhood cancer. "I enjoy coming back to Japan. My work has been very well received here over the years, especially *The Lion King* and *Superstar*."

Rice first began songwriting in 1965 and went on to collaborate successfully with Andrew Lloyd Webber on four musicals, as well as with Abba's Bjorn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson (*Chess*), Alan Menken (*Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast*) and Elton John (*The Lion King*, *Aida*). "In picking a collaborator, the most important thing is that you admire their music. And hopefully the reverse is true," Rice says. "Elton John is a wonderful composer. We don't actually work together. I always send him a lyric by fax or email and he writes the music to fit the lyric, then sends me a demo of himself singing it."

Sometimes, lyricists don't get as much credit as music writers, Rice concedes. "People regard composers with a kind of mystique, as if it is something that only a few people can do, whereas everybody thinks they can write lyrics. It's rare for someone to write both lyrics and music, and it is usually in popular music rather than the theater where the words have to be more specific. It's not just the words but the story they tell that contributes to the

success of the show."

Rice says there is no magic inspiration. "When you start out, it is just a question of having a good idea. They don't come to you in a flash. You potter around until something grabs your attention. You don't know if it is going to be a success unless other people like it. Years after *Evita*, people said it was an obvious success. That's absolute cobblers, because Eva Peron was hardly heard of in England when we did it."

Rice says he tries to be open-minded about all music genres, though he admits he is unlikely to write lyrics for rap, jazz or folk music. Nor will we hear him singing karaoke during his Tokyo visits, despite the fact that he's in a rock band back home. "We warble away at private parties," the composer says, listing the Rolling Stones, The Beatles, The Kinks, Elvis, Chuck Berry, Eddie Cochran and the Everly Brothers as his favorites. Proving he can still sing, Rice blasted out a wild version of *Satisfaction*, complete with Mick Jagger-like prancing, much to everyone's delight at the Shine On Idol competition.

In between his band and playing cricket, Rice keeps himself busy writing songs. "I have written a play about Machiavelli, but I haven't made up my mind whether or not to make it into a musical. I'm also putting together a new production of *Chess* to debut next May, and I just finished writing eight songs for a movie version of *The Nutcracker*. The music is by Tchaikovsky, who is great to work with because he never rings up and complains." So, with such an impressive body of work, which of his tunes would Rice like played at his funeral? He thinks for a bit. "Probably a song from *Chess* called *Anthem*, which is very dramatic. No, wait. *All I Have to Do Is Dream* by the Everly Brothers would be a good choice for a funeral." **Hear Tim Rice interviewed on the Metropolis Podcast this week (<http://podcast.metropolis.co.jp>).** 🎧