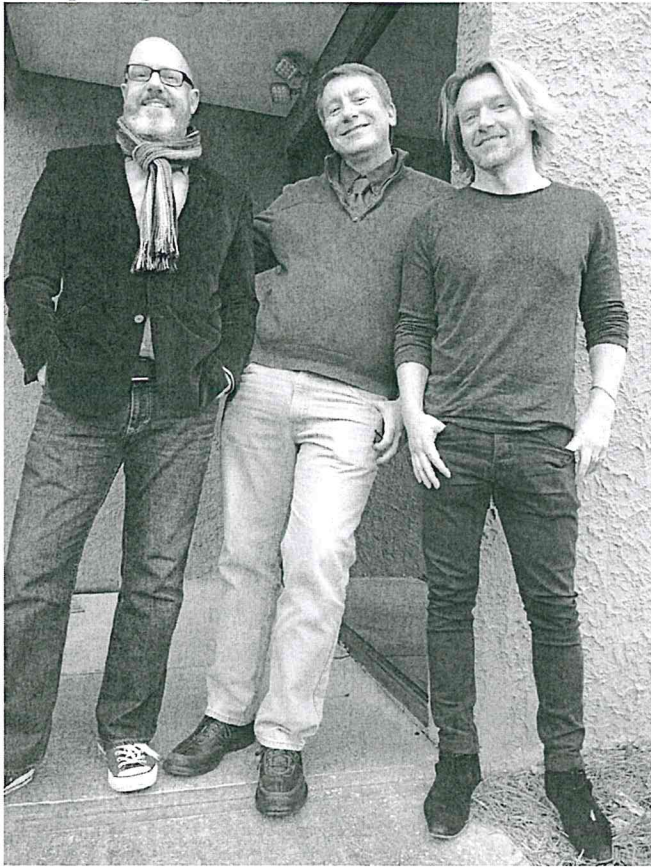


FMU profs get busy to create *bestill*



What's the best way for three fine arts professors to write an original musical centered on a character who's been cryogenically frozen for 20 years?

Starting with a script that's been on ice for a couple of decades itself isn't a bad start.

That's where Francis Marion University profs Keith Best, Brandon Goff and Charles Jeffcoat began their work on *bestill*, a musical production that will debut in workshop mode – limited scenery and production – this week at the FMU Performing Arts Center's Black Box Theatre.

"We were together somewhere, maybe having something good to drink, and one of us said, 'you know, we should do a musical,'" says Goff, who teaches musical composition and other classes in FMU's Music Industry program.

Best volunteered that he did have this script that he'd been working on and ... a collaboration was born.

"It's really something we'd been talking about for some time," says Best, chair of FMU's Fine Arts Department. "The fact that I had this script that I'd written and then put away in a drawer for a long time helped."

Exactly how much it helped is a matter of some interpretation. Best says when he finally began re-writing *bestill* over the Thanksgiving holiday last year, he realized that his old script needed a major overhaul. He ended up using exactly one line from the original play that he'd written (and had produced, also a workshop production) in the 1990s.

"But the story, the idea was there," says Best, "and that's the most important part."

bestill will certainly be a unique production. The theme – not so much cryogenics but relationships amid a series of personal awakenings – is different. It will also be a multi-media show. Jeffcoat, a professor of graphic design at FMU, has developed a series of images that will play on three large

monitors that will form the backdrop for the show.

Jeffcoat says the monitors idea began as "thought bubbles" for characters – "there are a lot of scenes with three characters speaking," he says – but have morphed into much more. The scenes depicted on screen can offer insight into a character's mood or thoughts, or can change the entire feel of a scene.

All three professors say the collaboration has been interesting. Some of Jeffcoat's ideas and designs caught Best and Goff by surprise. And Best says the dozen or more songs that Goff turned out were not at all what he was expecting.

"I've heard some of Brandon's rock compositions and I really thought that was what I'd get here," he says. "But instead it's very Broadway. ... and very good."

Says Goff, "Well of course it's Broadway. It's a musical. That's what I was thinking all along."

Getting into each others head has been the best part of the collaborative process.

Goff says he remembers telling Best during a meeting that the lyrics to one of the songs – Best wrote all the lyrics – sound like "it was supposed to be funny."

"That," says Best "is because it was."

Best's original script was for a play. Preparing the current *bestill* meant crafting lyrics for more than a dozen songs, in addition to the aforementioned re-write. The musical features a cast of around 10. The players include FMU students as well as some well-known talent from the community.

Best, Goff and Jeffcoat are hopeful that this week's debut performance won't be the last for *bestill*. They are looking at taking the show to other venues this summer. Best says that if the finished product turns out as well as it hopes, *bestill* could be a big seller on the college circuit, where original works with lots of variables are in demand.

If you're going:

The original musical *bestill* will open on Wednesday Feb. 17 and run through Feb 21. Shows on the 17, 18 and 19 will be held at 7:30 p.m. Saturday's shows will take place at 2 and 7 p.m.

Reservations may be made by calling the FMU Performing Arts Center at 843-661-4444 between 12 and 5 pm. Tickets are \$5 each.

Note: *bestill* contains adult situations and language. Not recommended for anyone under the age of 16.