

# VIRTUAL THEATRE

Nick Lang, Richard Nelson,  
Alex Beckham

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# What is Virtual Theatre?

Since the explosion of the Internet in the 1990s, users have published media, such as books, movies, and video games, online, which allowed these products to be purchased and enjoyed by anyone from the comfort of their own home. However, it took quite some time for theatre to become commonplace on the Internet. Thanks to the efforts of several playwrights, such as Nick Lang (known for his work with Team StarKid), Richard Nelson, and Alex Beckham, theatre is much more accessible via the Internet today than it was when the Internet first gained mainstream appeal. All three of these playwrights, as well as many others, have worked hard to create theatre via the Internet over the past several years. But how exactly does virtual theatre work?

Virtual theatre can be divided into three categories: live productions, Zoom productions, and voiced productions. Live productions are productions that are directed, designed, and rehearsed as if they were going to be a live theatrical performance. However, when it is time to perform, the production is filmed and uploaded to the Internet for anyone to view. One example of this is Team StarKid's production of *Twisted*. It was staged as a live musical and even had a live audience. However, that performance was then uploaded to the Internet, where it has been viewed by over six million users. While this may seem amazing, there are unfortunately some downsides to live productions. Live productions in virtual theatre often run into the same issues that live theatrical performances face, such as limited special effects. Additionally, poor camera quality and/or poor videography can make a viewer dislike a live production.

Regardless, the second category of virtual theatre is Zoom productions. This category became extremely popular in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the name suggests, these are plays that are rehearsed and performed via Zoom. One example of this is Richard Nelson's *The Apple Family: A Pandemic Trilogy*, a series of plays specifically written to be performed via Zoom. However, although plays can be written to be performed via Zoom, adapting an existing play that was written for a live audience into a Zoom production can be difficult. For example, if a play calls for stage combat between two actors who are recording themselves, it is almost impossible for those two actors to perform that blocking in a way that is believable to viewers. Because of this, Zoom productions have become less common in virtual theatre as pandemic restrictions have eased. However, there is one other category of productions in virtual theatre that does not have this problem.

The final category of virtual theatre is voiced productions. In voiced productions, physical actors are not seen. Instead, the story is primarily communicated through each actor's vocal performance. However, other elements, such as artwork and music, can be used to enhance the experience. For example, Alex Beckham's *Chrono Trigger: The Musical*, a musical adaptation of the popular video game *Chrono Trigger*, uses a combination of artwork made specifically for the musical and



gameplay from the original game to accurately represent the source material. With voiced productions, it is possible to tell any story one could

imagine. For example, *Chrono Trigger: The Musical* tells the story of a group of heroes travelling through time to prevent a giant alien that has been sleeping in the earth for millions of years from causing the apocalypse. However, some viewers may not enjoy simply listening to a story; they may prefer sitting in a theatre and experiencing a live play with physical actors they can see. However, this is merely a matter of personal preference.

In conclusion, each category of virtual theatre provides a unique form of storytelling that other forms of storytelling fail to capture. This dramaturgy packet will provide an analysis of all three categories of virtual theatre, as well as themes and symbolism commonly found in virtual productions. One playwright who specializes in each category and one of their works will be discussed in this packet.

## The Theme of Change

One of the most common themes found in virtual theatre productions is the desire for change. Considering the current state of the world, it is easy to understand why this theme would be so common. For the past several years, every country in our world has dealt with at least one of the following issues (and in most cases, more than one of these issues): war, disease, poverty, homelessness, a corrupt government, racism, high crime rates, economic recession, terrorism, and many other unfortunate events. Unfortunately, the world is not getting better. These issues, on top of the other issues individuals may face in their personal lives,



have led to a general sense of unhappiness throughout the world and a desire to change things. Naturally, this has led to plays where characters are unhappy with their current lives and/or the state of their world and desire to change it.

In Team StarKid's *Twisted*, Ja'far is unhappy with the corrupt government of the Magic Kingdom and the arrogance of its future ruler, the Princess. However, as the Royal Vizier, he understands that he must attempt to help guide the Princess in learning how to rule so that she does not make the same mistakes her father made. At the end of the musical, it is made clear that the Princess does not make those same mistakes; instead, she is the one who ultimately brings the Magic Kingdom into its third golden age. This shows that Ja'far's attempt to change the kingdom's future by guiding its eventual ruler was ultimately successful.

Another successful attempt to change the future can be found in Alex Beckham's *Chrono Trigger: The Musical*. After time traveling into the far future and learning about The Day of Lavos, where Lavos erupted from the earth and caused the near extinction of humanity, Crono, Lucca, and Marle, are clearly distraught about what will come to pass, despite the fact that this catastrophic event will take place centuries after their deaths. However, they vow to use their ability to travel through time to prevent this tragedy from occurring. After a long journey across many different time periods, they are eventually able to defeat Lavos, preventing it from causing the apocalypse. However, although both *Twisted* and *Chrono Trigger: The Musical* show that the desire to change the world can eventually lead to that goal, it is unfortunately not always possible.

In Richard Nelson's *What Do We Need To Talk About?*, the Apple Family obviously wants the pandemic they are currently facing to end so that they can go back to their normal lives.

However, the Apple Family alone does not have the power to suddenly end a pandemic. As a result, instead of even thinking about trying to end the pandemic themselves, the Apple Family attempts to navigate the pandemic together by using Zoom as a method of communication. They discuss the events happening (or in some cases, not happening) in their lives as a way to stay connected and keep themselves from having to face this pandemic alone. In short, the desire to change the circumstances one finds him/herself in is a common theme found in virtual theatre, whether each play's characters have the ability to actually change their current circumstances or not,.

## A Looming Threat

A common trope found in virtual theatre is some sort of looming threat that the characters in the play must at least acknowledge at some point in the story. Whatever this threat may be, it serves as a symbol for something each individual must acknowledge and handle at some point in his/her life. This could be something as simple as an assignment that needs to be completed or something as serious as a potential war with another country. In *Twisted*, the looming threat of Aladdin potentially sleeping with the Princess drives Ja'far to talk to her about the manipulative tactics a man may use to seduce a woman. In *What Do We Need to Talk About?*, the looming threat of the pandemic prevents the Apple family from being able to physically get together leads to them meeting through Zoom instead. In *Chrono Trigger: The Musical*, the looming threat of The Day of Lavos and the massive destruction and loss of life Lavos will cause is what prompts Crono, Lucca, and



Marle to attempt to travel through time and change history. In short, Aladdin's sexual advances, the pandemic, and Lavos are all looming threats that characters of each play must face. These looming threats serve as symbols of things we must face in our own lives, such as projects we must complete.

## Nick Lang

Nick Lang is an actor, playwright, and director. According to an article on [moviefone.com](http://moviefone.com), he is one of the co-founders Team StarKid, a theatre company from the University of Michigan. As a co-founder who is still involved with Team StarKid to this day, Lang has worked on several of Team StarKid's original musicals as a writer. However, he has also worked with Team StarKid as an actor and/or director, depending on the production. Some of these projects include *A Very Potter Musical*, *A Very Potter Sequel*, *A Very Potter Senior Year*, *Firebringer*, *The Guy Who Didn't Like Musicals*, *The Trail to Oregon*, *Black Friday*, and *Twisted*.

In an interview with Kelly Meehan Brown, Nick Lang discussed the history of Team StarKid. In short, their recording of *A Very Potter Musical*, which was uploaded to YouTube because uploading it online was an easier task than distributing physical DVD copies to the cast, managed to go viral. After this, Lang and the rest of Team





StarKid continued working on new musicals, attempting to make each one better than the last. As their projects became more technically demanding, they began using crowdfunding websites as a way to raise money for their productions, despite Lang's initial objection to the idea. Today, Team StarKid has several future projects planned. Given their success with projects such as *Twisted*, many of these project will also likely captivate Team StarKid's current fans and may even bring in new fans. Nick Lang's years of experience with filming live productions and uploading them to the internet make him the perfect playwright to study when one desires to know more about the live productions category of virtual theatre.

## *Twisted*

*Twisted* was a massive collaborative effort. It was written by Nick Lang, Matt Lang, Eric Kahn Gale, A.J. Holmes, and Kaley McMahon. The musical was produced by Team StarKid and was uploaded to their YouTube channel on November 28, 2013. With over six million views on the uploaded production, *Twisted* is easily one of Team StarKid's most well-known works.

## Summary

*Twisted* tells the story of Ja'far, the Royal Vizier of the Magic Kingdom. After hearing about a thief that has been terrorizing the city, Ja'far heads to the palace to find Prince Achmed, a potential suitor for the Princess, extremely angry, due to the Princess's tiger attacking him. Because of this, he declares war on the Magic Kingdom. After Ja'far destroys some decorations out of anger, he finds a golden necklace that reminds him about his past. The ensuing flashback shows how



Ja'far became the Assistant Royal Vizier, how he met his wife Sherrezade (as well as the story she tells him about a cave containing a lamp that holds a Djinn who can grant wishes) and how she was ultimately taken from him by the Sultan to be his wife instead before eventually dying.

At this point, the thief, known as Aladdin, meets the Princess, who has run away from the palace. However, the guards catch them, put Aladdin in prison, and bring the Princess back to the palace. Ja'far then frees Aladdin from prison and sends him to retrieve the lamp. However, Aladdin decides to keep the lamp for himself. He also reveals that he does not actually love the Princess and only wants to sleep with her, ending the first act as he, the Princess, and Ja'far sing about their happy ending.

The second act opens with Prince Achmed's return to the kingdom of Pik-Zahr, where he gathers his soldiers for war. Meanwhile, Ja'far warns the Princess about Aladdin and his sexual intentions. However, their discussion is interrupted when



Aladdin, disguised as a prince, begins a parade. Aladdin and the Princess meet up again, and Aladdin attempts to seduce the Princess. However, he instead finds himself agreeing to marry her so that his non-existent army can defend the Magic Kingdom in the upcoming war. Aladdin then convinces the Sultan and the Princess that Ja'far is a sorcerer before Ja'far steals the lamp and leaves.

Shortly after, Prince Achmed and his army arrive in the Magic

Kingdom while Aladdin has conveniently disappeared. Ja'far then uses the lamp to make himself a sorcerer and fight against Achmed's army, while Aladdin reappears and once again tries to seduce the Princess; she refuses him, and Aladdin reveals his evil alternate personality. When Ja'far arrives, he trades Aladdin the lamp for the Princess. However, before he gives it to him, Ja'far becomes the new Djinn with the lamp, causing Aladdin to flee. Using Ja'far's new power, the Princess is able to bring an end to the war. After the Princess uses all of her wishes, Ja'far returns to the lamp, where a resurrected Sherrezade explains that she returned because the Princess wished for his happiness. She also tells him that the Magic Kingdom has once again entered an age of prosperity and that her and Ja'far's story will never end.

## Characters

**Ja'far:** Ja'far is the protagonist of *Twisted*. Despite the fact that the people of the Magic Kingdom do not like him, Ja'far still seeks to use his powers as the Royal Vizier to better their lives. He helps teach the Princess how to rule so that she can better the lives of her people one day and warns her about Aladdin's sexual intentions to protect her. When war arrives, he uses the lamp to become a sorcerer to defend his kingdom. However, he then becomes the lamp's new Djinn, granting the Princess's wishes before being sent back into the lamp and reunited with his wife, who was taken from him by the Sultan.

**The Princess:** Despite Ja'far actually being her biological father, the Princess is raised as the Sultan and Sherrezade's daughter because Sherrezade joined the Sultan's harem while she was pregnant with the Princess. Oblivious, naïve, and a little greedy (wanting "everything and more"), she falls in love with

Aladdin after her meeting with Prince Achmed ends in a tiger attack. However, this love is one-sided, as Aladdin only seeks sexual gratification from her. She eventually realizes Aladdin's true intentions and rejects him. Afterwards, she uses the lamp to end the war peacefully, correcting her mistake (the tiger attack mentioned above) from the beginning of the show. At the end of the musical, Sherrezade explains that the Princess was able to lead her people into the Magic Kingdom's third Golden Age.

**Aladdin:** Aladdin is one of two antagonists in *Twisted*. When he first meets the Princess, he is immediately attracted to her. However, his desires are entirely sexual. After the Princess realizes that he is only looking for sex, she refuses him, leading to his evil alternate personality revealing itself and taking her hostage. He claims that this alternate personality also killed his parents because they wanted him to move out. At the very end of the musical, Sherrezade reveals that Aladdin eventually begins telling an alternate version of this story (possibly the same story as Disney's *Aladdin*), before a thief eventually murders him for bread.



**Sherrezade:** Sherrezade is Ja'far's wife and the Princess's mother. After meeting Ja'far, she falls in love with him, and the two are married. However, when the Sultan sees her, he decides that she must become his wife instead. Despite her not wanting to leave Ja'far, she accepts and joins his harem. After the Princess is born, Sherrezade dies, but is revived when the

Princess wishes for Ja'far's happiness. She then explains all of the story's remaining loose ends to Ja'far, such as what happened to Aladdin. Now, the two will never be apart and will live inside the lamp together forever.

**Prince Achmed:** Prince Achmed is the other antagonist of *Twisted* and the ruler of the kingdom of Pik-Zahr. After not only being rejected by the Princess, but also being attacked by her tiger, Prince Achmed declares war on the magic kingdom, believing that she will love him if he conquers her kingdom. After returning to the Magic Kingdom and beginning the war, Prince Achmed's army struggles against Ja'far and his new powers. However, when the Princess offers to buy Achmed's kingdom, he agrees to her terms. This plot point is a reference to Disney's purchase of Pixar.

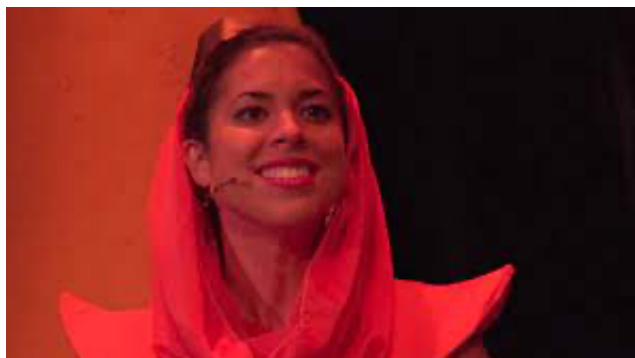
**The Sultan:** The Sultan is a character who is almost entirely played for laughs. He is the ruler of the Magic Kingdom and takes whatever (or whoever) he wants from his subjects until he dies, making the Princes the new Sultan. At the end of the musical, Sherrezade explains that the Princess has become a fantastic Sultan, implying that this Sultan was not the best ruler.

**The Djinn:** The Djinn is another character played for laughs. Throughout his time onstage, he constantly makes pop culture references that none of the other characters understand. However, all of the characters (except for Ja'far) still find these references funny for some reason. At the end of the musical, it is explained that the Djinn could see both the past and future, explaining how he knew all of those pop culture references.

**The Captain:** The Captain is a minor character in *Twisted*. He is primarily known for saying the same line almost every time he is onstage. Each time he enters, he blames something on Ja'far, saying the line, "This is all your fault, Ja'far."

## Language Analysis of Lang

*Twisted* perfectly illustrates Lang's comedic style of writing. The jokes in this show come and go extremely quickly, meaning the few jokes that do not land are quickly discarded. However, most of the jokes are hilarious and can cause the viewer to need to pause the production to finish laughing before continuing with the show. However, Lang's writing style is also extremely crude. Lang uses a lot of cursing, as well as sexual innuendos and other potentially offensive jokes that might make some viewers uncomfortable. Hopefully, no small children have ever accidentally clicked on this. Regardless, Lang's crude humor can be extremely hilarious and is a perfect comedic style for a parody of a popular Disney film. However, because Lang was not the lyricist for this project, this only applies to the spoken dialogue within the show (though the songs are definitely also hilarious). In short, Lang's writing is hilarious, but it is definitely not suited for children despite the fact that this production is a parody of a popular Disney film.



# Richard Nelson

Richard Nelson is a playwright and director. He is famously known as the author of the *Rhinebeck Panorama*, a



series of twelve plays about families that live in the town of Rhinebeck, New York. The first play in the *Rhinebeck Panorama*, *That Hopey Changey Thing*, debuted in 2010, while the twelfth and final installment, *What Happened?: The Michaels Abroad*, premiered in September 2021. These plays often involve one of these families simply enjoying each other's company and discussing current events, such as election nights. Nelson describes these plays as putting, "...characters in a room with an audience, who can watch them just be." At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nelson gathered the actors who originally portrayed the Apple family, one of the families the *Rhinebeck Panorama* focused on, wrote a trilogy of plays that were written specifically to be performed via Zoom. These plays are known as *What Do We Need to Talk About?*, *And So We Come Forth*, and *Incidental Moments of the Day*. These three plays, which were eventually released as *The Apple Family: A Pandemic Trilogy*, take place in April, July, and September 2020 respectively and focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other events that were occurring during this time. Nelson's experience in writing plays specifically designed to be performed via Zoom make him the perfect playwright to study when examining the Zoom productions category of virtual theatre.



# What Do We Need to Talk About?

*What Do We Need to Talk About?* is the first of three plays in Richard Nelson's *The Apple Family: A Pandemic Trilogy*. The trilogy follows the Apple family at various points throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (specifically in 2020, as the last of the three plays takes place in September 2020). These plays primarily involve members of the Apple family sitting in their homes using Zoom to talk to each other about recent events both in their personal lives and in the world.

## Summary

*What Do We Need to Talk About?* begins with members of the Apple family joining a Zoom meeting and getting set up to chat. As the conversation continues, they begin to discuss how the pandemic has impacted them, such as walking in the cemetery instead of the usual route to avoid people and being afraid to even go grocery shopping. They also discuss events that have been cancelled, such as Tim's daughter's prom and upcoming theatre productions. At the play's climax, Richard, to the surprise of his sisters and brother-in-law, announces that he is going to retire because he realized that he enjoys the accomplished feeling he gets when doing tasks around the house, such as cleaning the dishes. They then try to convince him that



he is only doing this because of everything happening around them, but Richard insists otherwise. The conversation then continues as each family member shares something on



his/her mind, ranging from famous novelists, to old family grudges, to politicians. Eventually, the family begins playing audio and video recordings of certain events from the past. After this, the conversations continue until each family member begins to log off, agreeing to meet up on Zoom again tomorrow.

## Characters

**Barbara Apple:** Barbara Apple is a high school English teacher, who was also recently in the hospital. She is the one who suggests that each person tell a story, possibly as a way to change the subject after Richard announced his retirement.

**Jane Apple:** Jane Apple is freelance writer, who often writes for local magazines. At the beginning of the play, she is afraid of having to go grocery shopping because her partner is sick. Her contribution to Barbara's storytelling idea is a theory she has pieced together about a novel that was anonymously published in 1950s. According to her theory, the book was written by Helen Granville-Barker, but it was published by Gladys Huntington. Jane plans to publish her theory so that Helen Granville-Baker can get the credit she deserves for her work.

**Richard Apple:** Richard Apple is a lawyer that works for the Governor's office. Since the pandemic began, he has been living with his sister Barbara and learn to appreciate the simple things in life, such as cooking and doing the dishes. This, combined with his age, has made him realize that it is time for him to retire. Although the rest of the family tries to suggest that he is overthinking this, at the end of the play, after he has already left, Barbara confirms that it still seems like his plan is to retire.

**Tim Andrews:** Tim is Jane's partner. He also has a daughter (who is a senior in high school), owns a restaurant, and works as a part-time actor. During the play, he is in a room upstairs because he is sick, presumably with COVID-19, based on the way he describes his symptoms and how Jane is currently treating him. He spends most of the play talking about how his daughter's big senior events, such as prom, are getting cancelled, as well as a few theatre productions that were also either postponed or canceled. By the end of the play, he says he has started to feel a little bit better, presumably meaning he will recover from whatever sickness he has.

**Marian Apple:** Marian is an elementary school teacher. She seems to be understanding of Jane's fear of going out. Her story involves their Uncle Paul and how he was essentially disowned by his father after an argument. His father was so angry that he only left one silver dollar for Paul in his will.

## Language Analysis of Nelson

Nelson's language is extremely natural. Reading his plays feels like watching people have a natural conversation, which is something he specifically strives for in his work. Additionally, because this particular play took place around two years ago at the beginning of an event that impacted the entire country and had been impacting the entire world for even longer, it was extremely easy to understand the characters struggles and empathize with them. Discussing the cancellation of events and the fear of even going grocery shopping can likely remind anyone about what that time was like for all of us. In short, Nelson's natural language helps enhance the storytelling. This combined

with the play being set during a recent event created a perfect picture of his vision for this play.

## Alex Beckham

Alex Beckham is an actor, voice over artist, director, playwright, and lyricist. According to his LinkedIn profile, he currently resides in Austin, Texas. Beckham claims that, as a child, struggled with conversation and memorizing the dialogue from popular Disney movies was what allowed him to learn to speak clearly. He also claims that this is what first prepared him to become an actor. Beckham graduated from St. Edward's University in 2015 with a bachelor's degree in Theatre. However, in 2015, he also created his YouTube channel, which he named "Man on the Internet." In April of 2016, he uploaded the first song of what would become *Undertale: The Musical*, a musical adaptation of the popular 2015 video game. A



complete, virtual performance of this production was uploaded to Beckham's YouTube channel on June 25, 2017. For this project, Beckham served as the director, librettist, and voice of the character Mettaton. Since the release of *Undertale: The Musical*, Alex Beckham has released several other projects on his YouTube channel, such as *Chrono Trigger: The Musical*, *Super Paper Mario: Musical Bytes*, *The Legend of Zelda: Musical Bytes*, and even a virtual production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, produced in the style of a visual novel. In conclusion, Alex Beckham is one of the most prominent artists in the voiced productions category of virtual theatre. Although his idea of

turning popular video games into full musicals and smaller musical bytes packages may sound crazy to some, the projects that have stemmed from this idea have been viewed thousands (and in some cases, millions) of times online, showing that there is indeed an audience for projects like these.

## ***Chrono Trigger: The Musical***

Alex Beckham's largest work to date is *Chrono Trigger: The Musical*, which contains a total of sixty songs. The first song was released via Beckham's YouTube channel on January 21, 2018, and the complete, 193 page libretto was released on October 1, 2021, alongside a compilation video of all the songs in the musical. Beckham is still working hard to this day to mount a full virtual production of this script; it is expected to release sometime this year.

This adaptation follows the story of the video game *Chrono Trigger*, which was originally released in 1995 for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System. It takes place on an unnamed fictitious continent, where the kingdom of Guardia is established in the year 1 AD. (Note: this time travel story does not use periods for the terms B.C. and A.D., nor does it use commas in its years.)

### **Summary:**

In the year 1999 AD, a creature known as Lavos will erupt from the earth, causing mass destruction across the world and nearly causing the extinction of humanity. Through a series of events, three teenagers from the year 1000 AD time travel to the year 2300 AD, where they learn about this apocalyptic event. The party then decides to use their ability to time travel to hopefully prevent this disaster from happening. Throughout their

journey, they recruit more characters from other time periods to help them on their quest, including a cavewoman from the year 65000000 BC, a powerful sorcerer originally born around 12000 BC, a talking frog from the year 600 AD, and a sentient robot from the year 2300 AD.

*Chrono Trigger: The Musical* can be divided into three different story arcs. The first arc involves Crono, Lucca, and Marle, the three teenagers from 1000 AD, accidentally discovering time travel. This leads to a time paradox causing Marle's disappearance, leaving Crono and Lucca to rescue her.



Once she is rescued, the three return to their own time period. However, after being framed for a crime that did not actually occur, Crono is forced to jump into a time gate, where he, along with Lucca and Marle, learns about The Day of Lavos in 1999 AD. This arc ends with the three friends vowing to rewrite history so that this tragedy does not occur.

The second arc begins with the introduction of Robo, a sentient robot, who agrees to help the party on their journey. After this, the party continues to meet other characters from different time periods. While helping them accomplish their goals, the party gains new allies to travel through time with them. The stakes are constantly raised as the party battles against a powerful sorcerer in 600 AD (Beckham marks this battle as the end of Act 1 in his adaptation), the ruler of the evil Reptites in 65000000 BC, and the misguided Queen Zeal in 12000 BC, who seeks to use Lavos's power to gain immortality. However, when the queen does successfully awaken Lavos and gains immortality, her entire kingdom is ultimately destroyed. Lavos's

premature awakening leads to a battle between Crono and Lavos in which Crono is killed, ending the second arc.

As the third story arc begins, the rest of party must process their grief over losing their dear friend. However, they eventually discover a method to potentially resurrect him. After enduring many hardships, this method ultimately succeeds, and Crono is resurrected. After reviving Crono, the party determines that they need to become stronger to be able to fight against Lavos. As a result, the party travels to all of the time periods they have visited on their journey, wrapping up their own personal character arcs and becoming stronger in the process. After these quests, which were optional in the original game, the party decides that the next logical step is to take down the now immortal Queen Zeal's airship, the Black Omen. By doing this, Queen Zeal is defeated, and Lavos is awoken, leading to the climactic battle against Lavos and the party (which takes up three songs in total). Ultimately, Lavos is killed, which now means the disaster that occurs in 1999 AD



will never come to pass. The party has successfully managed to change history. They spend one final night together at the Millennial Fair in 1000 AD before saying goodbye and returning to their respective time periods. However, just before the time gate closes, Crono's mother accidentally ends up inside the portal, prompting Crono, Lucca, and Marle to follow and search for her, ending the third story arc, as well as this massive musical.

# Characters:

## The Main Party:

**Crono:** The main protagonist of the story. In the original game, Crono was a silent protagonist, allowing the player to insert him/herself into his role. However, in his adaptation, Alex Beckham ultimately decided to give Crono a voice. After all, it would be extremely difficult to write a musical involving a leading man who would never even say a word. Regardless, Crono is depicted in both the game and the musical as a kind young man, who is willing to do anything for those around him. His strong desire to protect his friends shines through when he ultimately battles Lavos when he is first awoken by Queen Zeal, leading to his death. Thankfully, his friends are able to revive him (though this was optional in the original game), allowing him to take part in the final battle against Lavos and succeed in defeating it.

**Lucca:** Crono's childhood friend, and a prominent inventor. Smart and resourceful, her inventions are what first allow Crono, Marle, and herself to discover hidden time gates throughout the world, allowing them to travel through time. As it turns out, her father is also an inventor, and her original interest in technology unfortunately comes from a tragic accident from one of her father's inventions, causing her mother to lose the use of both legs. Thankfully, in the final arc of the story, she is given the opportunity to go back in time and prevent this accident from occurring. However, her younger self still takes an interest in inventing, preventing some sort of time paradox from occurring.

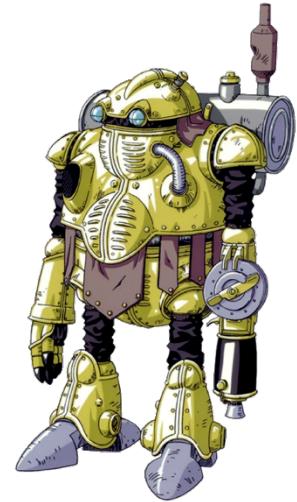


Marle (Princess Nadia): The disguised princess of Guardia, who quite literally runs into Crono near the beginning of the show. She is the "cheerleader" of the group. However, she is also stubborn and not afraid to stand up for what she believes in. Her character arc focuses on her strained relationship with her father, King Guardia XXXIII, who never allowed her to explore the outside world. As a result, she disguises herself as a commoner, leading to her first meeting with Crono. Her character arc concludes when she protects her father from being condemned for a crime he did not commit. This action opens up the opportunity for them to begin mending their relationship, which has been continuously worsening throughout the show.

Frog (Glenn): Crono and Lucca first meet Frog when Marle disappears due to a time paradox during their first experience with time travel. As it turns out, helping Frog rescue this time period's queen will undo the time paradox, so the three work together to accomplish this goal. However, upon revisiting the year 600 AD, the party learns that Frog's best friend, Cyrus, was killed right in front of him. Frog, originally named Glenn, was then transformed into an anthropomorphic frog by Magus as punishment for his cowardice during the battle. Once the party recovers Cyrus's legendary sword, the Masamune, Frog is finally willing to face Magus and joins the party to prevent him from summoning Lavos in the year 600 AD. However, this is not the end of his character arc. After Crono's death, Magus appears once again. After a brief battle, Frog realizes that killing Magus as revenge for Cyrus and Crono will not bring them back to life. As a result, he spares Magus and even allows him to join the party, as Magus has his own motives for defeating Lavos. After this, Frog eventually encounters the spirit of Cyrus, who reminds him

that his death was not Frog's fault, allowing Frog to unlock the full power of the Masamune, which concludes his character arc.

**Robo:** The party first encounters deactivated Robo shortly after learning about The Day of Lavos. Once Lucca repairs him, he vows to protect humanity and joins the party on their journey to rewrite history. As a result, before the final battle with Lavos, Robo and the party return to 2300 AD to protect the few surviving members of humanity from an invasion of malicious robots. However, after the final battle with Lavos, the party realizes that by changing history, they may have doomed Robo to no longer exist in the new future. As the musical ends, Lucca creates a miniature version of Robo, which is likely what leads to his creation in this altered timeline.



**Ayla:** Out of all seven party members, Ayla is the one that receives the least amount of development in this story. Ayla is a powerful cavewoman from the year 65000000 BC. She is the leader of a tribe that has been under attack by the Reptites for quite some time. After the party helps Ayla defeat the Reptites for good, Ayla joins the party on their journey through time. Though she speaks in broken English, Ayla makes it clear throughout several points in the story that she believes in the importance of physical strength. She believes it is important for humans to fight against their problems instead of hiding from them, which is why she leads the fight against the Reptites and joins the party on their quest.

Magus: Unlike Ayla, Magus is arguably one of the most developed characters in the party. In the year 12000 BC, thanks to Queen Zeal's attempt to gain immortality, a young Magus, as well as several other individuals, were scattered throughout time. Magus found himself in the Middle Ages (a few years before 600 AD). Because of this event, Magus wanted revenge against Lavos, since the incident led to both the fall of his homeland, as well as the murder and time displacement of many of its inhabitants. He studied magic under Ozzie, who eventually became his second-in-command. About ten years before 600 AD, Cyrus and Glenn attempted to stop Magus. However, the attempt failed, and Magus and Ozzie continued their plans, until Glenn, now known as Frog, and the rest of the party battled him in 600 AD. However, Lavos created a huge time gate and sent the party back to 65000000 BC, while Magus was sent back to 12000 BC, before the fall of his homeland. Using his knowledge of the past, he convinced Queen Zeal that he was a prophet, which would allow him to be present when Lavos awoke in the queen's undersea castle. Unfortunately, Magus was too weak to fight Lavos on his own, which prevented him from stopping the fall of his homeland, as well as the death of Crono this time. After Crono's death, Magus eventually meets the rest of the party and, after a brief battle with Frog, explains who he really is, why he wants revenge, and decides to accompany the party. By joining the party, Magus is able to fight alongside them in the final battle. With his vengeance achieved, he leaves the party without saying a word about where he is going or what he plans to do, even after he is asked what he plans to do now. Despite his status as a party member in the final arc, Magus does not befriend the rest of the party. He allies himself with them to accomplish his goal, and when that goal was reached, he left them behind without saying a word. However, from his solo in the

final song, it is clear that the party had an impact on him, as he sings the following lines:

"Even when your hopes seem gone  
Always time to journey on  
Night is darkest 'fore the dawn  
But there's always a new day beyond."

From these few lines, it is clear that the party's hopes to revive a dead Crono, defeat Lavos, and change history had a profound impact on Magus. Now, no matter where his future journeys take him, he will always take the rest of party's hope and optimism with him on those future journeys.



## Antagonists:

To keep things from getting too confusing, each antagonist listed below is under the time period they are usually associated with. With the exception of Queen Zeal and Lavos, all of the antagonists remain in the time period they have been placed in below.

65000000 BC:

**Azala:** Azala is the leader of the Reptites, a sentient species of reptiles determined to wipe out humanity because they desire to be the dominant species of earth. However, she is ultimately defeated by Ayla and the party moments before Lavos makes its first appearance in history (but long after it's introduced in the story). When Lavos first lands on earth in this time period, he crashes directly into their base, killing Azala, as well as most of the Reptites. The few who survived likely died off in the years that followed.

## **12000 BC:**

**Queen Zeal:** Queen Zeal is one of the most important antagonists in *Chrono Trigger: The Musical*. Her kingdom, known as Zeal Kingdom, uses the power of Lavos to provide power to its inhabitants through a device known as the Mammon Machine. Queen Zeal hopes to use Lavos's power to gain immortality. Though her original attempt (without any time travel) ironically ended in her death, she is able to successfully ally herself with Lavos when Crono and the party attempt to intervene, gaining the immortality she desired. However, she is defeated in battle by the party and disappears. Considering Lavos awakes immediately after her defeat, she likely became a part of its life force and would be killed alongside it when it is slain by the party.

**Dalton:** Dalton is Queen Zeal's second-in-command and acts as her "comedic underling." After the fall of Zeal Kingdom, Dalton becomes the leader of the few survivors and immediately arrests the party. However, they are able to defeat him and escape when his final attack backfires and sends him into a portal to an unknown time and/or destination.

## 600 AD:

Ozzie: Ozzie, a green monster from the Middle Ages, is the first to find Magus after he arrives in that time period from 12000 BC. He taught Magus how to use his magical powers and ultimately became Magus's second-in-command. However, Magus tricked him, claiming that his goal was to summon Lavos and destroy humanity, when it was actually just so Magus could get his revenge against Lavos. After Magus joins the party, they briefly return to 600 AD, where Ozzie claims Magus betrayed him, to which Magus replies he only "sought power." Ozzie, along with his two generals, are swiftly defeated in battle by their former master, who came to take back a treasure they had stolen from him.

## 1999 AD:

Lavos: Lavos is the primary antagonist of *Chrono Trigger: The Musical*. Its presence and power are felt in almost every time period the party travels to. Lavos originally crash lands on earth in 65000000 BC, causing the extinction of the Reptites. In 12000 BC, it is briefly awoken by Queen Zeal and nearly causes the extinction of humanity. In 600 AD, Magus's attempt to summon Lavos leads to him and the party being thrown into another time period. In 1999 AD, Lavos emerges and nearly causes the extinction of humanity once again. In 2300 AD, long after The Day of Lavos, Lavos produces spawn that will eventually travel to other planets and cause the same





disaster. Lavos essentially acts as a parasite. Ever since it landed on earth, it has been gathering data from all life forms as they die to further evolve itself. Once it has enough data, it erupts from the earth and produces spawn to carry on its lineage. Additionally, it seems to cause disruptions in the flow of time (either intentionally or unintentionally), which is what allows the gates to appear, allowing the party to travel through time to defeat it. Players of the original game still debate to this day over whether Lavos is simply like an animal, acting on instinct to carry on its natural life cycle, or if it truly is a sentient being, capable of intentionally trying to destroy humanity. Like Crono, Lavos did not speak in the original game, further adding to the debate. However, in *Chrono Trigger: The Musical*, Beckham does give Lavos a voice (which is actually three different actor's voices mixed together). Some of its lines seem to suggest that Beckham intended Lavos to be an evil villain, intentionally working to destroy humanity, while others suggest that Lavos is only following the natural life cycle of its species. This has led some to believe that Beckham wrote Lavos to be a combination of both perspectives. Lavos, in following its natural life cycle, is aware of the problems it is causing humanity. However, it ultimately decides to continue its plans, as it believes it is leading humanity down its proper course as a species.

## 2300 AD:

**Mother Brain:** Mother Brain is the leader of the robots in 2300 AD. Not much is known about her, except for the fact that she wants to cause the extinction of the last survivors of humanity to end all pain and sadness in the



world. Additionally, she is capable of altering every robot's memories, which she does to a former friend of Robo's, forcing the party to have to fight her before fighting Mother Brain. The party ultimately defeats Mother Brain during the final arc of the story before the final battle with Lavos.

## The Chorus:

The chorus includes featured roles, such as the three Gurus, Gato, Pierre, Spekkio, Nizbel, the Mammon Machine, Schala, young Janus, Toma, King Guardia XXI, Queen Leene, Masa & Mune, Crono's Mother, Lara, Taban, Doan, and Atropos, as well as the ensemble. All of the chorus members sing during every song that involves the chorus, including the actors who voice the featured roles mentioned above. This musical has a humongous cast of characters; attempting to discuss each and every one of them and their roles in the story could take hours.



# Language Analysis of Beckham

For *Chrono Trigger: The Musical*, Alex Beckham adapted the original video game's text to communicate the same story in a musical format. However, there is one detail about the original game's text that Beckham went out of his way to preserve in his adaptation. Because the story takes place in several different eras of history, the people of each era have slightly different speech patterns, like the game's original writing. The people of 65000000 BC speak in broken English, often omitting words such as "the" and "to," ignoring verb tenses, and speaking from a third person point of view. Thankfully, even with this simplified language, the audience is still able to understand the people of 65000000 BC are saying. For example, when Ayla says, "Ayla want see Crono," the audience understands that, if she spoke the same way we speak today, she would say, "I wanted to see Crono." Additionally, the people of 600 AD have more formal speech patterns than the characters from future time periods. For example, when Frog says, "I blame you not," the audience is able to interpret this phrase as, "I don't blame you." Details like these in the writing of *Chrono Trigger: The Musical* help bring the characters and setting to life, making the audience feel as if these characters are actually travelling through time.

Additionally, because he is the lyricist for this musical, it is important to acknowledge Beckham's strengths in lyrical writing. As a lyricist, Beckham went above and beyond in writing lyrics that both fit the overall narrative of the musical and the rhythm of each track. This, along with the various rhyme schemes ensures that viewers will find themselves singing songs from this musical long after their first viewing. In conclusion, Alex Beckham's attention to detail in preserving the ideas of

the original game's language and his skills as a lyricist help make *Chrono Trigger: The Musical* one of the most enjoyable virtual musicals to listen to.

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