

MERLIN

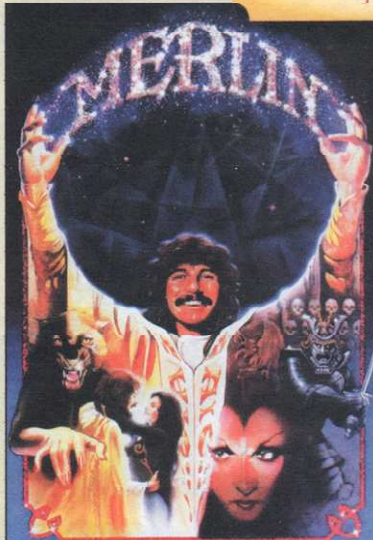


PHOTO BY BILL PAROCK

Seated (above) Bill Link;
insert, at the piano, David Spear

The closing show on Saturday night was hosted by Jim Steinmeyer. That was appropriate since the first event of the evening was about a Broadway show on which he worked extensively: *Merlin* starring Doug Henning as Young Merlin. As he said in his introduction, the show "made Broadway history in more than one way—both good and bad." The Conference made history of its own by reuniting several people involved with the production. The curtain parted and sitting on the stage was Bill Link, the show's legendary writer (with partner Richard Levinson). Joining him on stools behind music stands were several members of the original ensemble cast: Leslie Hicks Newman (Michelle Nicastrò's understudy), Sandy Laufer Blake (Chita Rivera's understudy), and Andy Newman (Doug Henning and Nathan Lane's understudy). Joining them were several guest singer/actors including Yvonne Martin, Doug Carfrae, and Michael Hawkins.

Accompanying them on the piano was David Spear, who was an associate of Elmer Bernstein, the composer of the music in *Merlin*. Mr. Spear was the rehearsal pianist for the original production and the orchestra conductor for every performance. He probably felt right at home for what is called a "table read" of the show. Mr. Link read an abridged version of the libretto, describing the action from the show, and the actors played the parts they originally did or understudied for. (So, for example, Mr. Newman did Doug Henning's parts and he also played "Fergus," the bumbling son of the Evil Queen—and reluctant king-to-be of Camelot—originally played by Nathan Lane. His doing both parts made those scenes where the two characters were together doubly interesting.)

During this production, unofficial video made during the run of the play showed several pieces of the magic as performed by Doug Henning. Mr. Link read the story and the actors sang the songs (I believe all of them were represented, though they were edited for time). Mere words are not enough to do justice for this hour-long spectacle that left us wanting more. For most in the audience, it was the closest we will ever get to that history-making Broadway extravaganza.

After the standing ovation for the *Merlin* cast, the audience barely had time to catch its breath when Jim Steinmeyer introduced the next act. Mike Caveney took the stage to perform



Left to right, standing, Yvonne Martin, Doug Carfrae, Sandy Blake, Andy Newman, Leslie Newman, Michael Hawkins