Arts & Humanities

8 Famous Creative Partnerships with Columbia Origins

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From Broadway legends to indie bands, Columbians in the arts have joined forces on campus for generations. Here are eight creative acts and collaborations that made their debuts in Morningside Heights.



Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart. (Library of Congress, New York World-Telegram & Sun Collection / Wikipedia)

Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart

Composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist Lorenz Hart first met while Rodgers was a Columbia student and Hart, who had dropped out of the Journalism School, was still involved in campus life. After co-writing the 1920 Columbia Varsity Show musical, *Fly with Me*, a romcom set in a Bolshevik dystopia, Rodgers and Hart went on to have a wildly successful partnership in show business.

The duo created dozens of stage musicals together through the early 1940s, including *Babes in Arms* and *Pal Joey*, which yielded classic songs like “My Funny Valentine” and “The Lady Is a Tramp.” Rodgers and Hart’s famous fallout is dramatized in the 2025 Richard Linklater film *Blue Moon*, which stars Ethan Hawke as Hart and Andrew Scott as Rodgers.

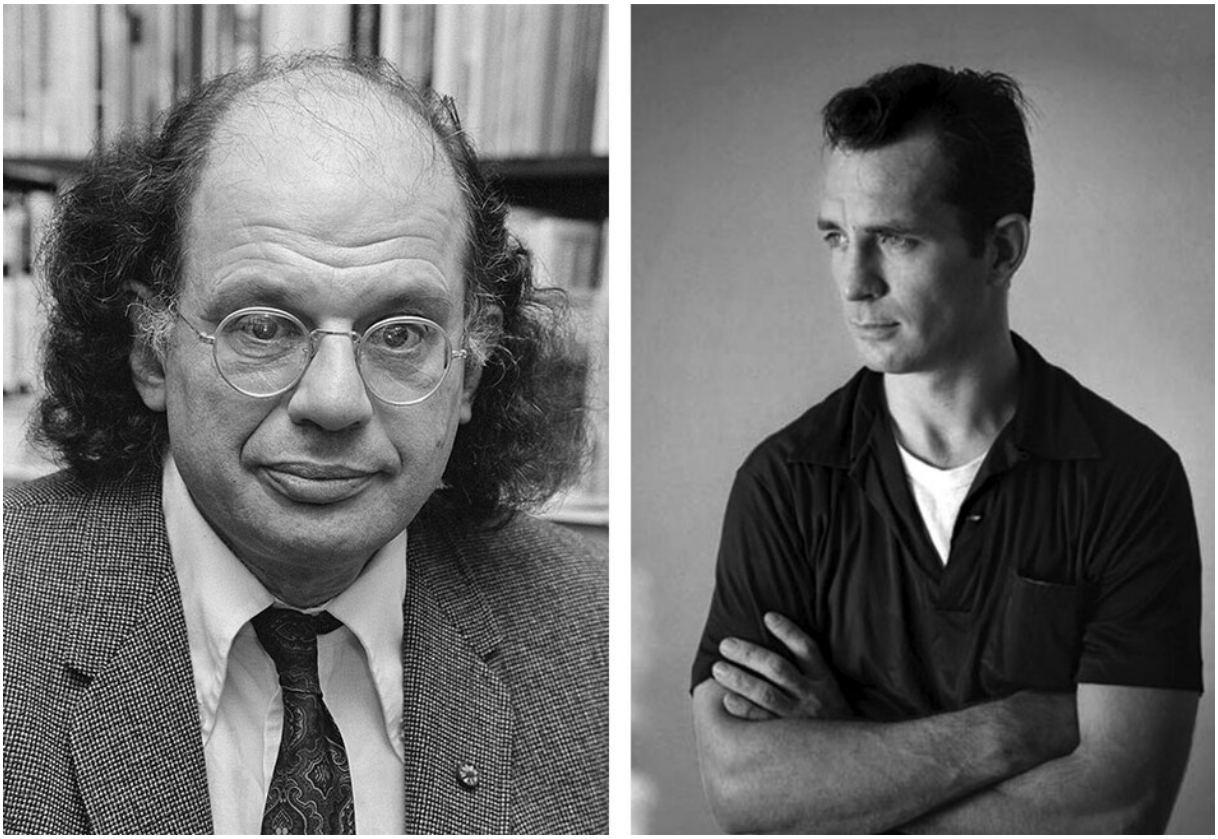


Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. (IMDb)

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II

When they teamed up to write the 1943 musical *Oklahoma!*, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II 1916CC had already crossed creative paths back in 1920, at the Columbia Varsity Show, when Hammerstein contributed lyrics to *Fly with Me*.

More than two decades later, when creative differences and Lorenz Hart’s alcoholism caused the professional breakup of Rodgers and Hart, the partnership of Rodgers and Hammerstein was born. The legendary duo is widely credited with transforming American musical theater with operatic productions such as *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The Sound of Music.*



Allen Ginsberg (Hans van Dijk / Wikipedia) and Jack Kerouac (Tom Palumbo / Wikipedia)

The Beat Generation

One of America’s most influential literary movements, the Beat Generation’s origins can be traced back to a Columbia dorm. In 1943, poet Allen Ginsberg ’48CC met fellow student Lucien Carr while both were living in the Union Theological Seminary dormitory, which at the time was being used as overflow housing for Columbia undergrads. Carr introduced Ginsberg to his friend Jack Kerouac, who had played on the Lions football team before dropping out of college, as well as William S. Burroughs, who lived in the city.

The friends — who famously held court at the campus-adjacent West End Bar — went on to form the nucleus of the Beat Generation, producing iconic literary works such as Ginsberg's 1955 poem *Howl*, Kerouac's 1957 novel *On the Road*, and Burroughs' 1959 novel *Naked Lunch*. Carr's own career was derailed when he was convicted of killing his alleged stalker, David Kammerer, but after his release from prison, he worked for many years in journalism at United Press International.



Sha Na Na in 1972. (Wikipedia)

Sha Na Na

Before appearing at Woodstock and in the 1978 film version of *Grease*, Sha Na Na was a Columbia act. The doo-wop revival group, which included members Alan Cooper '71CC, Scott Powell '70CC, Joseph Witkin '70CC, and Rob Leonard '70CC, '82GSAS, spun off from the Kingsmen, Columbia's all-male a cappella group, and made its campus debut in 1969. That same year, Sha Na Na took the stage at Woodstock in gold lamé right before Jimi Hendrix performed his legendary "Star-Spangled Banner" rendition.



Tom Kitt (Philip Romano / Wikipedia) and Brian Yorkey (MTV International / Wikipedia)

Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey

Nearly seventy-five years after the Varsity Show meetup of Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, and Oscar Hammerstein 1916CC, Columbia's annual campus revue birthed yet another successful Broadway partnership: composer Tom Kitt '96CC and lyricist Brian Yorkey '93CC.

Kitt, a student at the time, was a member of the Kingsmen a cappella group, and Yorkey, a recent graduate, had contributed to past Varsity Shows and worked for Miller Theatre. Rita Pietropinto-Kitt '93CC, '96SOA, a Varsity Show organizer and Kitt's future wife, suggested that Kitt and Yorkey team up to write material for the 1994 production, which marked the 100th anniversary of the show. A parody of Columbia history, the musical featured original songs like "The Great Columbia Riot," about the turmoil of 1968.

Kitt and Yorkey went on to create the hit 2008 rock musical *Next to Normal*, which won three Tony Awards and the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Kitt has also worked on productions such as *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Hell's Kitchen*, and in 2020, he wrote the song "Oh, Columbia" as a gift to the Class of 2020 during the pandemic shutdown.



Jenny Slate in Gifted (Wilson Web / IMDb) and Gabe Liedman (CleftClips / Wikipedia)

Jenny Slate and Gabe Liedman

Like many duos before them, comedians Jenny Slate '04CC and Gabe Liedman '04CC met while working on the Columbia Varsity Show. They became friends, participated in the Two Left Feet campus improv troupe, and after graduating, formed the comedy duo Gabe & Jenny and the standup show Big Terrific. On top of their individual careers in film and television, Slate and Liedman have worked together on *Kroll Show*, and in 2014 they both starred in the indie romcom *Obvious Child*.



Julio Enriquez - Flickr / Wikipedia

Vampire Weekend

Not only did the members of Vampire Weekend meet at Columbia, they actually started the indie-rock band on campus. Formed by Ezra Koenig ’06CC, Rostam Batmanglij ’06CC, Chris Tomson ’06CC, and Chris Baio ’07CC, Vampire Weekend made its official debut in 2006 at Columbia’s Battle of the Bands in Lerner Hall. The band’s hit self-titled debut album arrived in 2008, followed by four subsequent records and two Grammy awards. Numerous Vampire Weekend songs contain references to the band’s Columbia days, such as “Mansard Roof,” “Young Lion,” and “Harmony Hall.”



Morningsiders

Morningsiders

Magnus Ferguson ’14CC, Reid Jenkins ’14CC, and Robert Frech ’14CC were students at Columbia when they formed the indie-folk trio appropriately named Morningsiders. After the band’s single “Empress” was used in a 2014 Starbucks commercial featuring Oprah Winfrey, Morningsiders released several studio albums and continued to perform within and outside of New York City. Today, Ferguson is an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago, Jenkins has released a solo album and performs with the band Bold Forbes, and Frech works in finance with a focus on the music and entertainment industries.

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