

# Bruce Vilanch

## *Biography*

**Bruce Vilanch** is an American comedy writer, songwriter, playwright and actor. He is a two-time Emmy Award-winner. He is best known for his stint on *Hollywood Squares*, as head writer and celebrity participant. "I spent six years on the show just to the left of Whoopi, if that's possible," he says.

In 2000, he performed off-Broadway in his self-penned one-man show, *Bruce Vilanch: Almost Famous*. From 2000 to 2014, Vilanch was the head writer for the Oscars, after being a program co-writer for the previous ten years, working with Whoopi Goldberg, David Letterman, Billy Crystal and others. He is a featured writer for the Tony's, Grammy's, and Emmy's.

Born in New York City, Vilanch grew up in Paterson, N.J. Vilanch's mother helped launch her son's show business career by getting him signed on with Lane Bryant's Charming Chub division as a chubby child model. Upon graduating from high school, Vilanch attended Ohio State University as a theater and journalism student. He appeared in student theater productions and wrote reviews, hoping it would be the beginning of a career as a playwright. In 1999 Vilanch stated, "I was going to be Neil Simon, batting out one Broadway show after another."

Vilanch's career in the entertainment industry began with the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>[9]</sup> As an spending time with as many celebrities "as would let him." It was how he met then-burgeoning nightclub singer Bette Midler. Becoming friends, Vilanch later wrote comedy material for Midler's 1975 Broadway show *Clams on the Half Shell* and co-wrote *Divine Madness* for her in 1980.

Following a move to Los Angeles, Vilanch was a co-writer for *The Donny & Marie Show*,. He wrote jokes for Lily Tomlin, Billy Crystal, Roseanne Barr, Rosie O'Donnell, Paul Reiser, Dame Elizabeth Taylor, Steven Tyler of Aerosmith, and Robin Williams.

The night before the final broadcast of Johnny Carson's *The Tonight Show*, Bette Midler serenaded Carson with "You Made Me Watch You", to the tune of "You Made Me Love You (I Didn't Want to Do It)", with lyrics co-written by Vilanch, Midler and Marc Shaiman, the farewell song later winning an Emmy award.

Since 1980, Vilanch has been a reporter and columnist for *The Advocate*, writing both humorous and serious pieces. *Bruce!: My Adventures in the Skin Trade and Other Essays*, a 2000 collection of his writings, was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award.

Vilanch co-wrote the book for the musical *Platinum*, which briefly played on Broadway in 1978. He has also contributed to concert shows starring Michael Feinstein, Bette Midler and Diana Ross.

As a songwriter, Vilanch co-wrote "Where Is My Man" with musicians Fred Zarr and Jacques Morali. The song was popularized by singer/actress Eartha Kitt in 1983. Also with Zarr and Morali, Vilanch co-wrote "Sex Over the Phone," a minor hit for the Village People that later became a cult favorite.

In 2008, Vilanch co-wrote *The Showgirl Must Go On* with Bette Midler. The show opened at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. Stage and screen veteran Florence Henderson and Vilanch teamed for *An Evening with Friends* in 2010. The show featured Henderson sharing songs and stories from her career on stage, screen, and television.

In 2005, Vilanch starred on Broadway as Edna Turnblad in the long-running 2002 musical *Hairspray* after playing the role for two years in the show's first national stage tour of 2003–6.

Vilanch has also been the recipient of a number of awards for his work in support of AIDS charities and LGBTQ rights charities:

Vilanch sports long blonde hair (with or without a beard), distinctive glasses frequently with brightly colored frames, and his collection of double entendre-themed T-shirts. He has often joked that for years he was compared to a Wookiee, especially after co-writing the *Star Wars Holiday Special*.

In Bruce's words:

*"I can't wait to get back to Columbus to find the high school class ring I lost during an escapade at Mirror Lake during the Fawcett administration. I received a BA in Journalism and Theatre in 1970 -- the riot year! -- and went on to a career in both those fields at the Chicago Tribune for five years, then Hollywood. Unfortunately, my years at the Lantern did not find their way into my movies, but you'll no doubt hear about some of them real soon."*