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HANDBOOKS

THE PALGRAVE HANDBOOK OF MUSICAL THEATRE PRODUCERS

Edited by
Laura MacDonald and William A. Everett

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Laura MacDonald • William A. Everett
Editors

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Laura MacDonald and William A. Everett, February 2016

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Overture

CHAPTER 1

A Ballyhoo for Producers

Laura MacDonald and William A. Everett

Captain Andy knows how to make a show sound dandy, a crowd of potential theatre-goers exclaim while deciding if they want to buy tickets to see *The Parson's Bride*, *Show Boat*'s show-within-a-show. In the Florenz Ziegfeld-produced musical from 1927, Queenie, the *Cotton Blossom*'s African American cook, actually gives her boss some advice on the matter in 'Queenie's Ballyhoo'. Captain Andy learns what to do from his cook's 'ballyhoo', which Merriam-Webster defines as 'talk or writing that is designed to get people excited or interested in something' or 'flamboyant, exaggerated, or sensational promotion or publicity'.[1] As Captain Andy's travails demonstrate all too well in *Show Boat*, making a show sound dandy through ballyhoo—better known today as marketing and advertising—is just one part of any producer's job, and a key strategy for selling tickets. Harold Prince, profiled in this volume, is, like Ziegfeld, another legendary producer; he directed the 1994 revival of *Show Boat* on Broadway, which Garth Drabinsky's Livent company produced in true Ziegfeld fashion. Like Captain Andy, figures such as Ziegfeld, Prince, and Drabinsky have produced projects that excited them and managed to translate that excitement again and again to musical theatre-goers. They also recruited creative teams to bring musicals to the stage as well as casting and developing specific performers, often helping to turn them into stars. Captain Andy's show boat travelled with him, but many of the musical theatre producers investigated here built their own theatres, tailored to the needs of their particular brand of

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musicals. They may also have assembled financing when the costs of producing rose or when their musical theatre vision was more expensive than their own bottom line could sustain.

These elements of a producer's work—project development, the recruitment of collaborators, casting, marketing and advertising, budgets and finance—are topics that theatre scholars, especially musical theatre scholars, have not yet comprehensively charted and explored. Yet without these skills and the labour of producers around the world, musical theatre could not have progressed as it has for more than a century.

Musical theatre itself has looked to producers—fictitious and real—as characters. Kathryn Edney discusses perhaps the most famous of these fictional incarnations, Max Bialystock and Leo Bloom from Mel Brooks's *The Producers* (1968 film, 2001 Broadway, 2005 film) in Chap. 2. Mary Jo Lodge, in her chapter, also acknowledges *Curtains*'s (2007) Carmen Bernstein, who attests, in song, that 'It's a Business'. Ziegfeld himself features prominently in *Funny Girl* (1964), casting Fanny Brice and contributing to making her a star. He also makes his presence known in another biographical musical, *The Will Rogers Follies* (1991). An eighteenth-century Viennese impresario, Emanuel Schikaneder, the librettist for Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, built the Theater an der Wien, which would become a home for the Austrian producer Vereinigte Bühnen Wien. Schikaneder, who was in reality also a singing actor, appears in that company's musical *Mozart!* (1999) and sings about his ambition for a full house. So lively is the love story of Schikaneder and his wife Eleonore that VBW developed and produced a new musical, Schikaneder (2016) in which the producing couple sing to an investor about "Geld und Glück"—explaining how money pays for the happiness theatre provides.

More recently, as referenced in Kevin J. Wetmore's chapter on the Japanese producers Tōhō and Shiki and in Mary Jo Lodge's reflection in the final chapter, Broadway producer Harold Prince's professional life and reminiscences provide a structure for the revue musical *Prince of Broadway* (2015 Toyko, 2017 Broadway). Directed by Prince, in collaboration with Susan Stroman, the production features a Times Square Ballet in which an aspiring musical theatre performer auditions for a series of producers. She lands a job, culminating in an elegant pas de deux with a producer. Not only do musical theatre's own efforts recognize and represent the producer's role in making musicals, but Captain Andy's brashness, and the elegance of the Times Square Ballet, begin to suggest the vast spectrum of styles and approaches to producing. It is this history that our volume seeks to illuminate, celebrating the highs and lows of the passionate, creative, budget-conscious producers who have innovated and ultimately sustained musical theatre.

Many musical theatre producers around the turn of the twentieth century had financially lucrative careers in fields other than entertainment before turning to their passion projects, namely producing theatre, including musical theatre. Henry W. Savage (1859–1927), for example, amassed a fortune in real estate before turning to producing. In Boston, after the contractors who were building the Castle Square Theatre abandoned the project in 1895, he took over its completion and soon presided over the Castle Square Opera

Company, which successfully offered operas translated into English. He also ran his own Henry W. Savage Company, Inc. and produced turn-of-the-century musical comedies by George Luders and Frank Pixley, most famously *The Prince of Pilsen* (1903). Like George Edwardes in London (see Chap. 5), Savage scored commercial and critical triumphs when he produced English-language adaptations of Continental operettas in New York, including *The Merry Widow* (1907) and *The Gay Hussars* (1909). A sense of Continental élan characterized his work. Charles Dillingham (1868–1934) likewise began his career as a critic before turning to producing in 1902. He brought early works by Irving Berlin (*Watch Your Step*, 1914) and Jerome Kern (*Miss 1917*, 1917) to the stage.

In yet another example, Oscar Hammerstein (1846–1919), a German immigrant, became wealthy in the cigar manufacturing business and used his capital to fund his theatrical pursuits. He began as a theatre owner, erecting the Harlem Opera House (1889), the Manhattan Opera House (1893), and the Olympia Theatre (1895), among other venues. Hammerstein was passionate about opera and established his own company, the Manhattan Opera Company, in 1906 at a new Manhattan Opera House in order to compete with the Metropolitan Opera. Hammerstein presented the American premieres of several contemporary operas and sponsored and promoted the highly publicized American debut of Mary Garden. He also welcomed the noted soprano Nellie Melba to his company when she became disenchanted with the Metropolitan Opera. His productions, which exhibited extremely high quality stagecraft and singing, were also very expensive to produce. Bankruptcy loomed during his fourth season, and in 1910 his son Arthur effected an agreement with the Metropolitan Opera that it would buy out the Manhattan Opera with the stipulation that Oscar would not produce grand opera in the United States for ten years. The elder Hammerstein also oversaw Victor Herbert's *Naughty Marietta* (1910), an operetta starring Manhattan Opera soprano Emma Trentini for which he had his son Arthur take care of the day-to-day producing responsibilities. Hammerstein's model of theatrical ownership and high-cost productions return again and again throughout the story of musical theatre production. Furthermore, he championed the Times Square area as a theatrical hub and was instrumental in its development through placing several of his theatres there.

Oscar Hammerstein's two sons were both involved with the theatre industry. Arthur Hammerstein (1872–1955) worked alongside his father at the Manhattan Opera and became especially known as the producer of bubbly operettas by Rudolf Friml and Otto Harbach, including *The Firefly* (1912), *Katinka* (1915), and *Rose Marie* (1924). William (Willie) Hammerstein (1875–1914) managed theatres for his father, first the Olympia and then the Victoria, which he took over in 1904. (Both theatres, significantly, were in the area of what is now Times Square.) Willie made the Victoria the most popular vaudeville house in New York, and its profits helped underwrite his father's cost-guzzling Manhattan Opera House. Willie's son Oscar became a household name in musical theatre, especially after he began collaborating with composer

Richard Rodgers to form the lyricist half of 'Rodgers and Hammerstein' (see Chap. 18).

Owning theatres and sporting savvy business sense typified many producers of the 1920s and 1930s. The Shuberts (see Chap. 8) succeeded through a corporate model, which others, including the team of Laurence Schwab and Frank Mandel, followed. Laurence Schwab (1893–1951), a librettist, and Frank Mandel (1884–1958), a journalist and musical comedy librettist, created a partnership that produced several important musical comedies and operettas in the 1920s. Like the Shuberts, Schwab and Mandel's corporate portfolio included several different companies. In 1928, for example, they held six different interests: (1) Schwab & Mandel-Good News Company, (2) Schwab & Mandel-New Moon Company, (3) The Desert Song Corporation of Delaware, (4) Schwab & Mandel-Chanin's 46th Street Theatre, (5) Laurence Schwab & Frank Mandel, Inc., and (6) Malem Corporation.[2] Through these entities, Schwab and Mandel managed New York and touring productions of their highly successful shows (*The Desert Song* [1926], *Good News* [1927], and *The New Moon* [1928]), leased a theatre with the Shuberts (Chanin's 46th Street Theatre), and ran their enterprise.

Schwab and Mandel were not only involved with the business side of producing but also helped create a new operetta paradigm that was rooted in the contemporary in terms of story and music—they were creative forces as well as businessmen. With scores by Sigmund Romberg, the bitter-sweet sentimentality of Shubert-produced operettas such as *Blossom Time* (1921) and *The Student Prince* (1924) gave way to works like *The Desert Song* with happy endings and, even if the setting was historical, as in *The New Moon*, slightly syncopated songs and lyrical ballads to join luscious waltzes in the fashionable scores.

While operetta gave way to musical comedy and integrated musicals became the standard of Broadway's mid-century Golden Age, a new kind of musical theatre producer was emerging: the regional theatre. A derelict paper mill in Milburn, New Jersey was reopened as the Paper Mill Playhouse in 1938. Focusing initially on plays, by the 1950s the repertory theatre added more musicals and operettas to its programming and began casting film and theatre stars, the latter often recreating their Broadway performances. Its proximity to New York City attracted not only theatre-goers but also performers and other practitioners. Revivals in the 1970s included classics such as *Anything Goes*, starring Ann Miller. Though it burned down in 1980, a new theatre opened in 1982, with modern, accessible facilities. Robert Johanson was appointed artistic director, programming new works, revivals, and literary adaptations, including a *Show Boat* revival that was broadcast on PBS in 1989. Contemporary stars of stage and screen, including Anne Hathaway and Laura Benanti, trained or performed at Paper Mill in the 1990s, and the theatre released its first original cast album, Stephen Schwartz's *Children of Eden*, in 1998. The theatre struggled financially in the early 2000s, leading to community fundraising to

complete the 2006–2007 season and ultimately prompting Milburn Township to purchase the theatre and its facilities.

While Paper Mill continues to programme popular revivals, new commercial partnerships under the leadership of producing artistic director Mark S. Hoebee since 2000 have launched national tours of new musicals such as *Little House on the Prairie* and a twenty-fifth anniversary production of *Les Misérables*. Its greatest recent success was a partnership with Disney Theatricals to premiere *Newsies*—a surprise hit in 2011 for all involved (see Chap. 42). Subsequent new musicals developed at Paper Mill (and adapted from successful films) have included *Honeymoon in Vegas* (2013), *Ever After* (2015), and *A Bronx Tale* (2016).

A similar regional story unfolded in East Haddam, Connecticut, where in 1959, a derelict nineteenth-century theatre building, the Goodspeed Opera House, was saved by Goodspeed Musicals, a group formed by local residents. By 1963, the building reopened as a professional musical theatre. The not-for-profit theatre initially focused on revivals of rarely produced musicals, but it then began to develop new works, such as *Man of La Mancha* in the summer of 1965, prior to its premiere in New York City. In 1968, Michael Price became Goodspeed's executive director, leading the theatre until 2014. During his tenure, more new musicals were developed and tried out in Connecticut, including *Shenandoah* and *Annie*, but revivals of musicals such as *Oh, Kay!* and *The Most Happy Fella* have also transferred to Broadway from Goodspeed. The proximity to New York City allows Goodspeed to hire Broadway creative teams and performers but is far enough away to call itself a safe haven. Its smaller space, the Norma Terris Theatre in Chester, Connecticut, has since the 1980s focused exclusively on new musicals, and the East Haddam site has expanded into a large artists' colony campus with a musical theatre education centre, a musical theatre research library, programmes for local youth, and professional development opportunities for aspiring musical theatre professionals. Goodspeed was the recipient of a Tony Award in 1980 for outstanding contributions to the American musical and another in 1995 for distinguished achievement for a regional theatre. Michael Gennaro assumed leadership of Goodspeed Musicals in 2015, having previously worked as producing director at Paper Mill. Like many of the regional and not-for-profit musical theatre producers profiled in this volume, these theatres have succeeded by balancing revivals and new musical development, investing locally in training and professional development while also maintaining strong links to Broadway and its high-calibre performers and practitioners.

Moving between not-for-profit institutions and commercial production companies, brothers Tom (b. 1941) and Jack (b. 1948) Viertel have led eclectic careers and have left several important marks on musical theatre. Tom worked extensively in real estate and, since 2001, chairs the board of the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, which supports new writers and composers. As part of the Baruch-Viertel-Routh-Frankel Group, he has produced musicals such as *Smokey Joe's Cafe* (1995), *The Producers* (2001), and *Hairspray* (2002), along

with many revivals. This group of producers caused a sea change in Broadway ticketing when they introduced $480 premium tickets during the run of *The Producers*. Claiming to cut out the scalpers who were already inflating ticket prices for hot shows (such as *The Producers*), Tom Viertel and his partners felt that they and their investors and creative team should be the ones benefiting from theatre-goers' willingness to pay, and not scalpers. Within a few years, the majority of Broadway producers were selling premium tickets, and box office grosses were increasing.

Tom Viertel's producing group also owns the New York supper club 54 Below, a venue championing musical theatre, in particular new writers, composers, and performers. In 2013, Tom was appointed executive director of the Commercial Theater Institute, a leader in training early-career Broadway producers.

Jack Viertel is a former theatre critic for the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* and former dramaturge at the Mark Taper Forum. He has worked for Jujamcyn Theaters since 1989, first as creative director and then as senior vice president, producing revivals and new musicals including *The Secret Garden* (1991), *Jelly's Last Jam* (1992), *The Full Monty* (2000), *Grey Gardens* (2006), and *Something Rotten!* (2015). Along with developing new plays and musicals for commercial runs with Jujamcyn, Jack has since 2001 been artistic director of the *Encores!* series (see Chap. 40) and has detailed aspects of the world of Broadway musicals in his book *The Secret Life of the American Musical: How Broadway Shows Are Built*.[3] The Viertels' mobility across theatre sectors reveals not only the producers' transferable skills but also the close, complex relationships between commercial and not-for-profit producers in musical theatre.

Rocco Landesman (b. 1947), a veteran Broadway producer, has also seen his skills valued outside commercial theatre—in his case, on a national, public stage as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) from 2009–2012. He followed in the footsteps of producer and past NEA chairman Roger L. Stevens (see Chap. 21). Landesman grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, where his family owned a cabaret theatre, and he eventually earned a doctorate in theatre from Yale. He began his career as an independent producer and was a member of Dodger Productions, where he was instrumental in developing and transferring the American Repertory Theater and La Jolla Playhouse musical *Big River* to Broadway in 1985 (see Chaps. 38 and 49). In 1987 he became president of Jujamcyn Theaters, purchasing the company in 2005 following the death of its founder James H. Binger. He later sold a 50 per cent share to Jordan Roth (see Chap. 50). It was Landesman who hired Jack Viertel as part of his effort to restructure Jujamcyn as a resident institutional theatre. He also initiated the renaming of three of the company's theatres—the Virginia for playwright August Wilson, the Ritz for theatre critic Walter Kerr, and the Martin Beck for iconic theatrical caricaturist Al Hirschfeld.

Producing since the 1980s, Barry (b. 1939) and Fran (b. 1928) Weissler have specialized almost exclusively in musical theatre, producing both revivals and new musicals. They refined celebrity casting to a science, using it to keep

a revival of *Grease* running for several years in the 1990s. They did the same with the Broadway transfer of the *Encores! Chicago* in 1996 (see Chap. 40), a revival still running at this writing, lasting longer than the original Broadway production and holding the record for the longest-running American musical in Broadway history. More recently the Weisslers have partnered with the American Repertory Theater (see Chap. 49) to help bring the *Pippin* revival (2013), *Finding Neverland* (2015), and *Waitress* (2016) to Broadway.

While the Nederlander empire, the second largest owner of Broadway theatres (nine) after the Shuberts, has primarily been known as a theatre operator with venues across the United States and in London's West End, the organization has occasionally invested as a co-producer of Broadway revivals and new musicals presented in Nederlander theatres. Its Nederlander Worldwide Entertainment (NWE) division has since 2000 produced Broadway musicals in China and Cuba and brought the Chinese martial arts spectacle *Soul of Shaolin* (2009) to Broadway. Marc Routh and Simone Genatt have also established an American producing presence in Asia, as executive producers of the Broadway Asia Company, a musical theatre licensor and producer. Beyond licensing the Rodgers and Hammerstein agency's catalogue of more than 100 musicals in a dozen Asian markets, Broadway Asia has presented tours throughout Asia and has more recently begun developing new musicals and immersive theatre productions. Bridging Broadway and Asia, Routh and Genatt are also an example for other producers seeking to bring the world's musical theatre to Broadway.

Partnerships have been key in helping Chinese musical theatre producers to rapidly develop a potentially huge market for musicals. Founded in 2010, the United Asia Live Entertainment joint venture saw state-owned Chinese companies China Arts and Entertainment Group and the Shanghai Media Group partner with the South Korean entertainment and media company CJ E&M. While English-language tours of Broadway and West End musicals began visiting China in 2002, the joint venture's 2011 production of *Mamma Mia!* was the first Mandarin replica production. It toured China for three seasons, followed by *Cats* in 2012. Partnering with each musical's original producer, Littlestar and the Really Useful Group (see Chap. 32), the Chinese joint venture brought in British creative teams to mount Chinese replica productions and in doing so, began to develop triple threat Chinese performers. Productions of original Korean musicals in China followed before the joint venture partners began pursuing other collaborations and independent projects as the Chinese musical theatre industry began to grow.

Around the same time, Yang Jiamin was working for a venture capital firm in Tokyo and observed the well-established, profitable musical theatre producer Shiki (see Chap. 28) selling musical theatre tickets in convenience stores. She later quit her job in Japan to return to China and founded her own musical theatre production company, Seven Ages, modelled after Shiki. With the

successful premiere of an English-language production of *Man of La Mancha* in 2012, she gained the attention of the private equity firm China Media Capital, and eventually secured nearly US$5 million in financing. Seven Ages has since produced and toured non-replica, Mandarin productions of *Man of La Mancha*, *Avenue Q*, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, and *The Sound of Music*. Still inspired by her initial observations of musical theatre marketing in Japan, Yang's Seven Ages has marketed its productions in Chinese convenience stores and sold tickets via mobile apps, striving to make musical theatre consumption as convenient as possible for China's millions of potential ticket buyers.

From the nineteenth century to the twenty-first, producers have been an integral part of the musical theatre landscape. These often larger-than-life individuals have largely been unsung heroes (with the notable exceptions of *fictional* producers Captain Andy, Carmen Bernstein, Max Bialystock, and Leo Bloom and the real Emanuel Schikaneder in Austria and Florenz Ziegfeld in New York City, all of whom actually *do* sing on stage), but their contributions to the global phenomenon of musical theatre have been immense. Some are individuals whose strong personalities infuse every production they mount while others exist as corporate entities. What follows is a cavalcade of producers, which, like Captain Andy's ballyhoo in *Show Boat*, invites us to explore the diverse, effervescent, and sometimes incongruous world of musical theatre in new and compelling ways.

Notes

1. 'Ballyhoo', simple definition and full definition 2, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ballyhoo, accessed 20 February 2016.
2. Malem Corporation was created as the production side of *The Desert Song* and was subsumed into The Desert Song Corporation of Delaware (see Seidman & Seidman, Certified Public Accountants, 1928 Audit Report on Schwab and Mandel Interests, 20 February 1929, Frank Mandel Papers, collection 844, box 10, University of California Los Angeles Special Collections).
3. Jack Viertel, *The Secret World of the Musical: How Broadway Shows Are Built* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2016).

CHAPTER 2

Actors Act. Directors Direct. Producers … Produce? Mel Brooks's *The Producers* and the Creation of an Archetype

Kathryn Edney

Early in the first act of Mel Brooks's 2001 stage musical version of *The Producers*, the character Leo Bloom sings 'I Want to Be a Producer'. Stuck in his office, he envisions a life that is vastly different from his humdrum existence as an accountant: sleeping late, selecting pretty girls for use in the chorus, perhaps having sex with those girls, wearing a tuxedo, and seeing his name in lights. The number then explodes into a fully-fledged fantasy. Once Bloom reveals that he wants his name to be seen and known all across Broadway, the office set splits in half with each section flying off-stage to reveal a stage occupied by Bloom and rapidly filled with an expanding line of chorus girls. Behind them all is a huge sign comprised of light bulbs proclaiming 'Leo Bloom Presents'. Since at this point in the musical Bloom is living within his fantasy, there is no indication as to what, as a producer, he is presenting (other than himself) or how the fantasy might be achieved. All Bloom can imagine is himself on centre stage, framed by his own name in lights, and surrounded by pretty girls. Bloom's imaginings are persuasive precisely because in contrast to ideas about directors or actors, the idea of what producers do has been relatively undefined. The work of a producer is a complete blank; the remainder of *The Producers* functions to fill in that blank.[1] In a similar fashion, the goal of this book is to expand on our existing definitions and understandings of what it means to be 'the producer'.

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Within popular discourse, the work of a producer—what they actually do—is vague at best and derogatory at worst. Writer/director Brooks used the confusion concerning the work of producers to his advantage, first in the 1968 comedy film *The Producers*, and then later in his two adaptations of that film, first as a stage musical in 2001, and then as a musical film in 2005.[2] Through the characters of Broadway producer Max Bialystock and accountant-turned-producer Leo Bloom, Brooks answers the question 'but what does a producer actually do?' and thus creates an archetype by showing Bialystock and Bloom at work securing and making money, assembling a creative team, and reassuring investors, albeit with unethical and misogynistic methods.[3]

This chapter will briefly examine *The Producers* in its most impactful incarnations—the original 1968 film and the 2001 Broadway musical—then discuss the differences between the 1968 film and the 2001 Broadway show versions. The 2005 film adaptation of the stage musical will be referenced in passing; there are few narratively significant differences between the two versions, and audience and critical responses to the film were lukewarm. While the 2005 film reinforced the idea of the archetypical producer, it did not have the same level of cultural impact of the earlier film and stage incarnations. According to Brooks and as evidenced through his version of *The Producers*, the role of the producer remains unchanged. His is an essentially static vision of a producer which inscribes, and then reinscribes, the individualist, white, Jewish, heterosexual male as the only true model for a producer.

The basic plot for all three versions of *The Producers* is essentially the same. A Broadway producer, Max Bialystock, has lately been producing nothing but flop shows. To supplement his income, he performs as a gigolo for old ladies and persuades them to give him cashier cheques.[4] An accountant, Leo Bloom, comes to Bialystock's office to do the books and innocently remarks that it would be conceivable for someone to earn more money with a flop show than with a hit. Bialystock and Bloom then enter into a partnership to find, and then stage, the worst Broadway show ever by overselling shares in the production to Bialystock's cadre of women. The play they find is 'Springtime for Hitler: A Gay Romp with Adolf and Eva at Berchtesgaden', authored by a Nazi, Franz Liebkind. Next, they hire a buxom Swedish secretary, Ulla. More importantly, they engage the services of the worst possible director for their production: the campy Roger de Bris. Finally, they audition a slew of 'Hitlers' in search of precisely the wrong actor for the title role. Unfortunately for Bialystock and Bloom, all of the wrongness—the wrong play, the wrong director, and the wrong star—comes together before a live audience to create a strange alchemy of rightness. 'Springtime for Hitler' is a hit and the pair land in jail when they cannot pay off their investors.

Within the plot of *The Producers* are important ideas about producers, what they do, and how they go about doing it. First and foremost is the centrality of *money*, the feelings of desperation associated with the need for money, and the lengths to which producers will go to obtain funding. Second is the idea that a primary job for producers is the act of *finding*; they find the right script, the

right director, the right actors, the right investors, and so on. At different stages of the finding process, producers must also engage in the process of *selling* the idea of the play as it is being built. For example, Bialystock and Bloom must sell the script of 'Springtime for Hitler' to the director who they want to hire, and they will say almost anything to make that sale. Brooks also creates producers who can never stop producing. Even after they land in jail, Bialystock and Bloom cannot seem to help themselves, and are last seen embarking on a jailhouse production entitled 'Prisoners of Love'. Finally, embedded within these representations of what producers do—although not entirely consciously—is a representation of who they are: male and Jewish. The Jewish male identity coupled with a fear of failure, and even emasculation, shapes the archetypal Broadway producer as conceived of by Brooks.[5]

As scholars on Jewish immigration have noted, Jewish definitions of manliness did not always fit easily within the Protestant/Christian framework of American social-cultural ideas of masculinity. As a result, Jewish American men were often characterized as 'feminine' or as sexually inept, but also adept at making and keeping money.[6] Some Jewish American performers—such as Woody Allen—embraced this socially constructed persona for comic effect, and the characters of Bialystock and Bloom fall within this rubric. But they also fit within larger discourses about, for example, producers like the Jewish American Shubert Brothers who are simultaneously celebrated for their business acumen and critiqued for their apparent lack of artistry.[7]

The Producers (1968) as a Film

All three versions of *The Producers* were career milestones for Brooks, with the original film version of *The Producers* serving as his first experience as a film director.[8] The origin story behind the film version of *The Producers* was told and retold by Brooks in various interviews after his musical stage adaption was clearly destined to be a huge hit. In short, after a series of false starts—*The Producers* was initially conceived by Brooks to be a book, then a play—*The Producers* became a movie, with Brooks managing to persuade a producer that he should be allowed to direct his first feature film.[9]

The film, starring Broadway veteran Zero Mostel as Bialystock and the then-relative newcomer Gene Wilder as Bloom, was initially a complete flop. Reviewers were frankly offended by the apparent trivialization of Hitler, and many were unimpressed with Brooks's efforts as a director.[10] However, after this inauspicious start, the film went on to earn two Oscar nominations, one for Brooks for best screenplay (which he won) and another for Wilder in the best supporting actor category.[11] *The Producers* has since earned a reputation as a cult film, in large part because of the performances of Mostel and Wilder.[12]

Mostel in *The Producers* never seems to fully relax, and his tension, coupled with Brooks's penchant for close-ups, often makes his performance uncomfortable to watch. While Mostel's level of anxiety manifests itself outwardly through copious sweating and a forceful vocal delivery, Wilder's performance

as Bloom forces the tension inward. Wilder, who reportedly was at times very intimidated by Mostel, reacts to what is going on around him through a series of behavioural tics and winces, including a childish need for his blanket whenever situations spin out of his control.[13] As Wilder himself noted 'I didn't have a lot of words, but I had a lot of reactions. And that was even better. I am the audience, whatever they're thinking I can show it. I remember thinking when we were filming it, this must be how the audience is going to react.'[14] Both performances, in their own way, reflect the high-stakes nature of producing, ideas about Jewish masculinity, and the shared fear of risk that producers must overcome in order to be effective.

While much of what Bloom must react to is Bialystock and his excesses, Bloom must also respond to the strangeness of late 1960s Broadway, including drugged-out actors and an explicitly articulated politically charged performance culture that did not always favour traditionally constructed plays and musicals. Bloom serves as the audience's avatar when responding to the various absurdities involved in producing as seen in the show-within-a-film 'Springtime for Hitler'. For as extreme as the concept of 'Springtime for Hitler' is, within the plot of *The Producers* the play serves as a representation of all plays that all producers attempt to stage. Any play has the potential to be either a flop or a hit, and all producers must go through the process of finding, funding, selling, and believing in that play. As Mostel demonstrates in his performance, the idea that producers are men with a strong personal involvement in the show they are producing is central to the archetype Brooks created in the film. Good play or bad, a producer's investment in a show is both financial and emotional, but without that latter investment, the primer for producing as articulated in the film will not be workable. That Bialystock and Bloom's belief regarding 'Springtime for Hitler' is in terms of it being a flop does not negate the step-by-step process of believing in and producing a play that Brooks schematized within the film.

The Producers (2001) on Stage

Although the fundamentals of the plot remain the same, there are some key differences between the original film version and the musical stage adaptation of *The Producers*; that the stage version contains extended song and dance numbers is only the most obvious. Less obvious is the impact on the characters in adapting Brooks's movie to the stage and how those changes subtly shade, but do not fundamentally alter, the definition of 'the producers' as established by Brooks in his film. The other significant alteration, although it might not seem so, is setting the story in 1959 rather than 1968. Although Brooks has not publicly commented on the temporal shift, one potential reason for the change is that the 1958–1959 and 1959–1960 seasons on Broadway were witness to the premieres of what came to be canonical musicals, including *Gypsy*, *The Sound of Music*, and *West Side Story*. In contrast, with the exception of *Hair*,

the late 1960s is not generally perceived to be an era when beloved musicals were being produced.

In adhering to the genre rules of musical comedy—the boy-meets-girl trope in particular—Brooks significantly expanded the role of Swedish secretary Ulla so that she can serve as a believable love interest for Bloom. The change to Ulla works to masculinize Bloom's milquetoast character from the film and provides him with the means to act, and not just react, to situations. The masculinization helps to transform Bloom into a more believable, modern producer. Bialystock and Bloom's entire production scheme is predicated on bilking old women, while Ulla is initially hired for her 'assets' and not her secretarial skills. Bloom's new love for Ulla in the stage musical has the effect of de-emphasizing the idea in the film that all producers see all women as something simply to be used, sexually or otherwise. Although both the film and the stage versions of Bloom eventually embrace being a producer, on Broadway his journey is much shorter, in part because in 1959, Broadway—or at least the Golden Age Broadway as idealized in 2001—privileges particular kinds of musicals and their producers. As the liner notes for the cast recording of the show state, '*The Producers* … is not a new Musical Vaudeville, or a new Musical Play, or a new Musical Theater Piece. It is that thing which used to be ubiquitous on Broadway … a new Musical Comedy.'[15] By setting *The Producers* musical during Broadway's Golden Age, Brooks imagines Broadway as a utopia, where musical comedies, not plays, and their American Jewish producers, not corporations, control an integral part of American popular culture.[16]

At the conclusion of the stage version of *The Producers*, Bialystock and Bloom walk off into a painted sunset together, singing of their final triumph. Although they were arrested and jailed for fraud, against the odds they flourish in jail and have become top producers in the meanwhile, writing Jews back onto the Broadway stage where, as the stage directions note, 'logos of future Bialystock and Bloom musicals' are revealed, including: 'Katz', 'South Passaic', and 'Funny Boy 2'.[17] Not surprisingly, the titles are all comedic, and Jewish, reworkings of more familiar—and more serious—musicals: *Cats*, *South Pacific*, and *Funny Girl*. With the producers Bialystock and Bloom building on their financial and emotional investments, one show and one success leads to other shows and more successes that are solidly rooted in American Jewish masculinity. Accordingly, in the Broadway world created by Mel Brooks, actors act, directors direct, and producers believe.

Notes

1. This is not to say that there have been no other representations of a Broadway producer in popular culture. William Powell's 1936 film portrayal in *The Great Ziegfeld* is perhaps one of the more memorable of the early popular culture representations of 'the Broadway producer'. However, it is difficult to argue that the film represents the archetypical

Broadway producer, rather than the quintessential Ziegfeld, who happened to be a producer.

2. The material in this chapter is loosely based on a chapter from my dissertation on nostalgia and the Broadway musical. The emphasis on the nature of 'the producer' as discussed here covers new ground. See Kathryn Edney, '"Gliding through our memories": The Performance of Nostalgia in American Musical Theater' (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2011).
3. The question of what a producer actually does is further complicated by the fact that on contemporary Broadway, a corporation (e.g. Disney), rather than a person, can be a producer.
4. The ladies think they are helping fund Bialystock's latest play, titled 'Cash', because that is how he has them fill out their cheques.
5. While Bialystock and Bloom were clearly created to be Jewish—Bialystock is a city in Poland whose Jewish population suffered enormously under Nazi occupation, and Bloom is named after the character of Leopold Bloom from *Ulysses*, a Jew who converts to Catholicism—their Jewishness explicitly relates to Brooks's desire to mock Hitler. It is only implicitly that the characters' gender and ethnicity reflect on their profession as producers. See Susan Gubar, 'Racial Camp in *The Producers* and *Bamboozled*', *Film Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (December 2006): 26–37.
6. For a succinct overview of this scholarship, see Clay Motley, '"Dot' sh a' Kin' a man I am!": Abraham Cahan, Masculinity, and Jewish Assimilation in Nineteenth-Century America', *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 30 (2011): 3–15. See also Henry Bial, *Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage & Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1860–1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), and David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997) for analyses of American popular culture representations of 'Jewishness'. The flip side of Jewish male as sexually incompetent is the Jewish 'Other' as sexual threat, something which Mostel in his performance could be said to embody, especially in contrast to the less threatening Wilder.
7. Ken Bloom, 'Shubert Brothers', in *The Routledge Guide to Broadway* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 238.
8. The 2001 version of the film was Brooks's first experience as a lyricist/composer for an entire Broadway musical, and the 2005 musical film marked his return to screenwriting after a ten-year absence. Brooks had contributed to, or written the books for, three musicals in the 1950s and 1960s, but he had not written the music for those shows. His last film credit prior to 2005's *The Producers* was for *Dracula: Dead and Loving It* (1995).

9. A much longer version of Brooks's standard version of the story can be found on *The Producers* DVD: Laurent Bouzereau, *The Making of The Producers* (MGM Home Entertainment, 2002).
10. Lawrence Christon, 'Producers Pic Gains Stature as Time Goes By', *Variety*, 10–16 September 2001, A26; Maurice Yacowar, *Method in Madness: The Comic Art of Mel Brooks* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 84–5.
11. Yacowar, *Method in Madness*, 85.
12. Christon, 'Producers Pic Gains Stature'.
13. Bouzereau, *The Making of The Producers.*
14. Ibid.
15. John Weidman, '[*The Producers* CD Liner Notes]' (New York: Sony Music Entertainment, 2001), 7. *The Producers* also distances itself from the Sondheim concept musical model by rejecting any claims to seriousness.
16. David Desser and Lester D. Friedman, *American Jewish Filmmakers* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 113. Richard Dyer contends that musicals work to address perceived inadequacies in society by proposing particular kinds of utopias. See Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia', in *Only Entertainment* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 17–34, 25–7.
17. Mel Brooks and Thomas Meehan, *The Producers* (New York: Hyperion, 2001), 221.

Act 1. To the 1940s

Musical theatre was far from being a clear-cut, easy-to-define genre in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Under its umbrella came subgenres as diverse as minstrelsy, variety, burlesque, extravaganza, revue, opera, operetta, and assorted forms of musical comedy. Moreover, the line dividing what could be considered musicals and non-musicals (by twenty-first-century definitions) was largely non-existent, since music and songs infused nearly every theatrical performance.

Since the genre itself reflected so much diversity (at least in terms of style), the definitions, roles, and responsibilities of what we might call a producer exhibited a similarly broad scope. Business matters, or making money, constituted a centrepiece of a producer's life. Owning and operating theatres and managing artists often became constituent parts of these intrepid individuals' daily activities. Some, like Tony Pastor and George Edwardes, were central in developing the material they presented on their stages while others, such as the Shuberts, focused on the business side of their enterprise and left it to high-quality directors and performers to fashion the artistic products that bore their names as producers.

One important distinction of musical theatre practice in the decades surrounding 1900 is that touring productions with fixed runs in different cities were typical. The idea of a multi-year engagement in a theatre near Times Square (e.g. a 'Broadway musical') was not part of the theatrical psyche. Many of the producers profiled in this section thus changed the very nature of the genre through focusing their attention on 'the Great White Way'.

While most of the essays in this section concern figures active in the United States, we offer three glimpses into producers who made their careers and legacies elsewhere: George Edwardes in Great Britain, J. C. Williamson in Australia, and the Takarazuka Revue in Japan.

CHAPTER 3

Tony Pastor: The Father of Vaudeville

Gillian M. Rodger

In many ways, Tony Pastor and the success he found was an anomaly in the cutthroat world of variety. Variety, a genre that presented a series of solo and group performances that were unconnected by a linking theme or overarching narrative, had always been an entertainment form that drew businessmen with few or no theatrical ties into management. These men sought to provide their audience of working-class men with the elements they desired most: alcohol and entertainment that affirmed their world-view. Tony Pastor was one of a number of performer-managers who emerged in the 1860s, and his skill lay in understanding that there was a niche for family-style entertainment in which women and children were welcome in a world that was more traditionally centred on men. Through much of the 1860s and 1870s, Pastor was associated with efforts to persuade the broadest audience possible that variety was a respectable entertainment form, even as he continued to cater to the tastes of his largely working-class audience. The businessmen who dominated variety management, which came to be known as vaudeville by the end of the nineteenth century, eventually adopted and further built on the model that Pastor established, and by the first decades of the twentieth century their claim that vaudeville was decent middle-class entertainment was true, at least to some extent. Even the Keith–Albee publicity machine, which rarely acknowledged competitors or the existence of circuits run by other managers, credited Pastor as one of the early reformers in variety.

Tony (Antonio) Pastor was the third of six children, born on 28 May 1837, to Antonio (Anthony) Pastor and his wife Cornelia. Anthony immigrated to the United States from Seville, Spain, in 1823, at the age of 23. Some evidence

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suggests that Antonio's family was Sephardic Jewish and that he left Seville in order to evade the Spanish Inquisition, which had been reinstated in 1823, but he claimed to be Roman Catholic on entering the United States.[1] Anthony had paid his own way from Spain and had sufficient resources to purchase a small house and establish himself in business upon his arrival in New York, establishing a barbershop in lower Manhattan. Cornelia, who was 15 when she met Anthony, had been born and raised in Connecticut and travelled to New York seeking employment.[2]

Tony Pastor was the first son born to the couple and was named for his father. He had three younger brothers, Frank, Billy, and Fernando (Dody), who followed him into show business, and two older sisters about whom little is known. Tony showed an enthusiasm for performance while still a child, entertaining attendees at Temperance meetings at the Dey Street Hall with comic songs.[3] By the age of 10 he was performing as part of a minstrel troupe at Barnum's Museum, and in 1847 he joined Raymond and Waring's minstrel troupe as a tambourine player.[4] After several months with Raymond and Waring, Tony and his younger brothers Frank and Billy were apprenticed to John J. Nathan, who ran a circus, in 1847.[5]

Circus entertainment included a broad range of acts in this period. Clowns presented physical and acrobatic comedy, but they also presented short comic plays or minstrel performances during the course of the entertainment. In addition, acrobats, trapeze and high wire performers, and equestrians performed in the ring, along with other animal acts. There was considerable overlap between circus and early variety, but generally, variety relied more on comic songs and sketches, while circus included a greater proportion of animal and acrobatic acts. Frank Pastor excelled as an equestrian, while Tony was more an all-round performer. Tony not only rode, but also performed as a tumbler and clown, which allowed him to further develop the comic skills he had learned in minstrelsy. Tony and his brothers remained with Nathan's circus into the 1850s. By 1850, Tony has assumed the role of ringmaster, and when he left Nathan in 1853 he worked as a clown and ringmaster with other circuses. The role of ringmaster prepared him well for his future career in variety in that it allowed him to combine his showmanship and comedic skills, while also singing and entertaining the crowd in between the successive acts in the ring. Pastor both charmed and entertained his audience, and he was described as being 'the very concentration of genuine wit … facetious, chaste and elegant, yet humorous and laughter-provoking as the most fun-loving could desire'.[6] Even early in his career, Pastor was concerned that his act should present clean and respectable comedy.

In 1860, Pastor moved from circus to variety when he appeared at Frank Rivers's theatre in Philadelphia.[7] Rivers was a former circus performer who moved into variety management as the form emerged from small rooms attached to saloons and into theatre buildings during the late 1850s. The earliest form of variety was designed to encourage men to spend more of their money on drinks and to provide conviviality through communal singing led

by professional singers. By the mid-1850s the form had expanded and begun to move into larger theatres, some of which had been abandoned by minstrel troupes that had begun to tour for most of the year rather than remaining resident in a single city. In this period variety was able to present a large and varied bill because expenses were underwritten by alcohol sales, and a wide range of acts drawn from circus and minstrelsy, as well as female ballet dancers and singers, all appeared on the variety stage.[8]

Variety was a context that was well suited to Pastor's skills, and he remained in this theatrical form until his retirement from the stage in 1905. During the early 1860s, Tony Pastor worked on the stages of some of the leading variety managers of the period, including Frank Rivers in Philadelphia and Robert Butler in New York City.[9] Working for these managers, Pastor saw the opportunities to be found in the form, but he also saw the pitfalls of the business. Because variety theatres served working men they were often the first to close during economic downturns, and they also frequently came under attack by moral reform forces in urban areas. Moral reformers saw variety as crude and degrading, and assumed that the women active in the genre were engaged in prostitution. They also targeted alcohol sales as fundamentally exploitative of poor urban populations. In 1862, New York State passed a law that was intended to eliminate New York City variety halls, known as concert saloons in this period. Pastor was working at Robert Butler's theatre when the law passed and the city police raided theatres to ensure compliance, and he witnessed the immediate aftermath of this law that caused a number of concert saloons to close or to revert to saloons and abandon entertainment altogether.[10]

Early variety managers had a range of responsibilities that included acquiring the lease to a theatre and the theatrical and liquor licences required to remain within the law. Each week the manager assembled a bill, working with the stage manager to arrange acts in a way that allowed performers time to change costumes, or to prepare to assist in each other's acts or for their appearance in the one-act comic burlesque that ended each performance. Like the longer multi-act burlesques of the mid-nineteenth century, these short one-act plays relied heavily on satire and making fun of topical evens and current fashions. While rudimentary scripts for some of these plays survive, it is likely that performers improvised dialogue. The manager had a corps of performers, including singers, dancers, and comedians, at his disposal, but each week the bill included star performers who spent the theatrical season on the road, travelling from city to city for bookings of one to two weeks. Both the stars and members of the company were pressed into service in the burlesque afterpiece, and stars remained in the character they portrayed in their solo act. In the period in which theatrical agents did not serve variety, managers used personal connections and advertising to procure talent. The manager was also responsible for making sure that there was sufficient income to pay these performers, and he needed to find ways to attract the largest audience possible to his hall in order to make sure that all the bills could be paid. When managers took touring troupes on the road in the summer months, they were also responsible for

arranging the tour, negotiating arrangements with the managers of the theatres in which they performed, and paying for the transportation and lodging for the entire troupe.

In the wake of the anti-Concert Saloon law, New York City variety halls were forced to adopt new business models, including charging admission and dispensing with the large-scale acts and re-enactments that had been featured on the bills of the early 1860s. The theatre manager could no longer hold both a theatrical licence and an entertainment licence, and bar-rooms were walled off from the auditorium and lobby, forcing theatre patrons to leave the theatre and go out onto the street to enter the bar if they wanted to buy a drink. Variety managers quickly found ways to remain within the letter of the law, while also continuing to benefit from alcohol sales by providing members of their audience passes to leave the auditorium and go out to the bar. But the removal of alcohol sales from the auditorium fundamentally changed the atmosphere in the theatre, focusing the attention of the audience onto the action on the stage. This new climate gave an advantage to singing performers who could form a bond with their audience through interpolated comic monologues that included cutting class and social critique as well as puns and nonsense.

Tony Pastor flourished as a performer, and, as he gained more stature in the genre, he also moved into management. While Pastor was by no means the first performer-manager in variety—Charley White had taken on this role in the 1850s—he was the most successful, and he was among the first performer-managers to run a theatre that remained in business over multiple decades. Where managers with few ties to variety performers could attract performers by offering a high salary, Pastor's connections to members of the profession, and his understanding of the world they lived in, allowed him to book some of the leading performers of the period for less money. In financially difficult times, Pastor was generous to performers—his account books show him extending small loans to fellow performers, and he did not appear to expect repayment on a fixed schedule. As a result, performers were willing to work with him for a discounted salary. Pastor was also active as a mentor to performers, making suggestions for changes to their acts and allowing young performers to develop their skills on his stage. All of these features distinguished him from many of the managers with whom he competed.

Tony Pastor's first theatre, known as Pastor's Opera House, was at 199–201 Bowery, and he opened it in 1865. In many ways Pastor's theatre was little different from other variety halls of the period, although the location placed it apart from many of the halls that had moved across to Broadway below Houston and to surrounding streets during the late 1850s. Pastor's audience came from the neighbourhood, which was also in transition in the years after the Civil War. This area had been home to working-class families in the years before the Civil War, but increasing numbers of immigrant families, particularly Germans, had moved into the neighbourhood. Pastor focused on the English-speaking residents who remained and sought to expand his audience by encouraging women to attend his hall. Before the end of the 1860s, Pastor had introduced

matinee performances for women and children and also encouraged women to attend evening performances, offering door prizes that were designed to appeal to women, such as bags of flour or sewing kits.[11]

Pastor's experience as a child performer gave him valuable insight into moral reform thinking, and he managed to avoid being targeted by New York reform societies throughout his career, which was no small feat. He was renowned for providing good respectable entertainment that was suitable for families and was often cited as a model that less respectable managers should follow. At the same time, Pastor understood that there was a business opportunity in offering fare that appealed to an all-male audience, and he briefly held a financial interest in a cancan troupe during the early 1870s, although it did not bear his name. This suggests that while Pastor understood moral reform thinking, he did not share its antipathy to entertainment designed to please an all-male audience.

Tony Pastor was also instrumental in introducing respectable variety entertainment to new audiences in parts of the nation in which variety was not present or viewed as indecent. He was not the first to take a variety troupe on tour; indeed he had been part of Robert Butler's touring troupe that performed in Boston during July in both 1863 and 1864. It was customary for theatres to close in the summer, when the heat made indoor entertainment less attractive to the audience. This meant that many theatre managers could earn income primarily during the theatrical season, which ran from early in the autumn through the winter months and into the spring. While the audience for variety was generally unable to escape the heat of the city, outdoor entertainments, beer gardens, and parks and beaches, provided some competition for variety theatres. Rather than competing with summer entertainment, Pastor shuttered his theatre and took his first touring troupe on the road in the late 1860s, performing in smaller and factory towns that lacked a full-time theatre and in cities through New England, upstate New York, and Pennsylvania. During subsequent years he expanded his summer touring schedule, and he and his troupe travelled through the north-east and Midwest, taking up residence in respectable theatres in Chicago, St. Louis, and other Midwestern cities and posing unwelcome competition for local variety managers.

During the Long Depression of the 1870s, as theatres failed, touring troupes sustained variety, and many variety halls and smaller theatres shifted to for-hire houses that provided a theatrical licence, backstage personnel, and a rudimentary orchestra for touring companies of all kinds. Variety performers who had been part of stock companies joined touring combinations, as did ballet dancers who had once been part of ballet corps attached to theatres. The influx of female performers, particularly dancers, heightened the anxiety about indecent performance, and it became particularly important for managers catering to a broader audience to offer respectable entertainment.[12] Pastor not only survived the prolonged economic downturn but he was also able to move to a theatre at 585–587 Broadway that came to be known as Pastor's New Theater. This theatre was close to other major variety theatres, which posed considerable

competition for Pastor. Despite this, he prevailed by using the same approach that had made him successful in his old theatre and across the country: he presented an evening of entertainment suitable for a mixed-gender audience that centred on comic singing and concluded with a one-act topical burlesque. By the late 1870s, as the economy was improving, Pastor was viewed as one of the leading variety managers in the United States.

For the rest of the nineteenth century, Pastor faced the challenge of maintaining his position in the increasingly competitive world of variety entertainment. In 1882, he moved to Pastor's New 14th Street Theater in the Tammany Hall building in order to remain closer to his audience that had moved north on Manhattan. He recognized the popularity of English culture for his audience and produced a number of burlesque versions of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas in response to the success of the originals. These included the 'Pie-Rats of Penn-Yann' and 'Patience; or, the Stage Struck Maidens'. The latter featured a young singer, Lillian Russell, who began her career on Pastor's stage, as well as the sisters May and Flo Irwin. During the 1880s, Pastor continued to present burlesques of fashionable and popular plays as the concluding afterpiece of an evening's performance. In order to maintain his prominence in New York, Pastor was the first variety manager to travel to England to recruit the leading English music hall performers. While English performers had long been present on the American variety stage, variety managers had never sought out these performers although they had been happy to book them when they appeared on the American scene. Pastor understood their appeal to a broad range of Americans and signed them to contracts during summer trips to England. When English performers appeared in his theatre, he not only filled his house, he also attracted reviewers from newspapers and magazines that typically ignored variety performance. Their reviews cemented his position as a leading manager of decent performance.

Pastor maintained his dominant position into the 1890s, when he was finally overtaken by a new generation of cutthroat businessmen who had entered variety management in the 1880s. These men, including B. F. Keith and Edward Albee, sought to monopolize all aspects of variety, from the booking process to the behaviour of the audience in their theatres. During the 1880s, Keith and Albee solidified theatres in Massachusetts and Rhode Island into a circuit, and then began to expand southward into New York and Pennsylvania. By the 1890s they were moving into small industrial centres in the Midwest, and by the early twentieth century they formed their own booking agency, which then began to book acts for other theatres as well as for the growing Keith–Albee circuit. After fifty years in entertainment, Pastor was outmatched, although he continued to perform in his own theatre and also book acts until his retirement in 1905. Despite his declining position, Pastor could continue to book some of the leading acts even though he could not match the pay rates offered by his competition. For example, the English male impersonator Vesta Tilley performed at Pastor's 14th Street theatre in 1895. Tilley accepted Pastor's offer because of the relationship he had built with her in his yearly visits to

England—he had been trying to persuade her to tour the United States since the late 1880s.[13] Pastor's reputation as a generous man who supported actors and actresses down on their luck meant that members of the profession viewed him with affection and would work for him when they could. Performers whose careers he had launched still sometimes returned to his stage, as did old-timers who had worked with him in the 1860s and 1870s and whose careers were now in decline. This allowed the theatre to continue, even after Pastor's retirement, and it operated until his death in 1908 under the management of his treasurer, Harry Sanderson.

At the same time, Tony Pastor was also forced to adopt some of the business practices of vaudeville in order to survive into the twentieth century. By the early 1890s, Pastor's theatre offered three performances a day, while nearby vaudeville houses offered continuous performances in which acts appeared on the theatre's stage beginning mid-morning and ending at the close of the evening performance. In the continuous system, the stars appeared just twice a day, while the second-tier performers were issued three-a-day and five-a-day contracts for considerably lower pay. In 1896, Pastor was forced to adopt the continuous system to survive, and that year he also included moving pictures as part of his show. By 1899 he was partnering with the American Vitagraph Company to offer movies at every performance.[14]

Pastor's approach to management, which relied heavily on cooperative agreements with fellow managers and supporting and nurturing variety performers at all stages of their careers, was not adopted by the managers who succeeded him; they did, however, build on his innovations in attracting a family audience to the theatre. By the mid-1870s, terms such as 'high-class variety' had emerged to refer to variety that followed Pastor's approach, and by the 1880s, the term 'vaudeville' had come into use. Managers such as Keith and Albee were so determined to offer inoffensive, family-style entertainment that they provided guidance to their audience on correct behaviour in the auditorium and censored the content of the acts on their stages. They also sought to attract an audience from the growing middle class. While this moved vaudeville beyond the scope of the kind of entertainment Pastor offered, it continued Pastor's approach of seeking to appeal to the broadest possible audience while offering an evening of entertainment and comedy that did not offend any portion of their audience.

Notes

1. Armond Fields, *Tony Pastor: The Father of Vaudeville* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2007), 3–4.
2. Ibid., 3.
3. Parker Zellers, *Tony Pastor: Dean of the Vaudeville Stage* (Ypsilanti, MI: Eastern Michigan University Press, 1971), 3.
4. Ibid., 4.

5. Parker Zellers notes that it appears that Pastor's mother had arranged this apprenticeship in order to take care of her sons and ensure them a future profession. Antonio Pastor had died in 1846 or 1847 and it is likely that Cornelia Pastor lacked the funds to take care of her family. Ibid., 6.
6. '"The Circus"', *Daily Missouri Republican*, St. Louis, 24 October 1858, 3.
7. Zellers, *Tony Pastor*, 13.
8. Gillian Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Entertainment in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 28–38.
9. Zellers, *Tony Pastor*, 13–15.
10. Rodger, *Champagne Charlie*, 59–71.
11. Zellers, *Tony Pastor*, 46.
12. Rodger, *Champagne Charlie*, 158–67.
13. Zellers, *Tony Pastor*, 94–5. Zellers notes that, in 1897, when Tilley returned to the United States, she was paid £1,000/week by Oscar Hammerstein, and accepted it only after writing to Pastor to ask his advice (102–3).
14. Zellers, *Tony Pastor*, 100–1.

CHAPTER 4

Adolf Philipp and the German American Musical Comedy

John Koegel

The German immigrant stage flourished in New York City, parallel to its English-language counterpart, from its beginning in 1840 through 1918. It temporarily closed after the entrance of the United States into the First World War, was revived after the war in the early 1920s, and later experienced a period of gradual decline until its ultimate closure before the Second World War. In its heyday between the 1850s and 1918, and again in the 1920s, professional troupes offered extensive theatrical seasons, with almost daily changes of bill. Immigrant audiences in Klein Deutschland (Little Germany, New York's German American community) attended a wide variety of German-language theatrical types: operas, operettas, musical comedies, plays with music, dramas, comedies, and farces.[1]

The theatre-going experiences of New York's German population were as diverse as those of their non-German-speaking neighbours, and as part of a bilingual and bi-cultural community German Americans embraced both German and American stage traditions. Klein Deutschland's theatrical producers primarily emphasized the centrality of the imported Continental German-language theatrical tradition, both musical theatre and spoken drama. However, a few German American producers such as Adolf Neuendorff and Adolf Philipp recognized the viability of staging musical plays based on the local German American immigrant experience. In their local-themed works, Neuendorff and Philipp used German humour, folklore, and music in ways familiar to their audiences—but with New World references—in order to create a theatrical experience that was both meaningful to audiences and profitable to them.[2]

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A succession of leading producers determined the direction of New York's German American theatre over an eighty-year period: Otto Hoym (1823–1876), Adolf Neuendorff (1843–1897), Gustav Amberg (1844–1921), Heinrich Conried (1855–1909), Adolf Philipp (1864–1936), and Rudolf Christians (1869–1921). Each of these men was exceptional in different ways: Hoym, Conried, and Christians as producers and actors; Neuendorff as a producer, composer, and conductor; Philipp as a producer, playwright, librettist, composer, singer, and actor; and Amberg as a producer. All had as their principal goal the encouragement of the German American stage, although they varied considerably in their purposes and methods. With the exception of Neuendorff and Philipp, all these producers very strongly emphasized the imported standard German repertory over locally created stage productions. This was also the case in all other German theatres throughout the United States. Only in New York City could Adolf Philipp so consistently and tenaciously produce his own extensive series of more than sixty musical theatre works—through the force of his prodigious talent, personality, and financial success—that so humorously and poignantly reflected the daily experiences of the multitude of New York's German immigrants. Philipp also had success on Broadway with several musical comedies, some translated to English from the original German and some written in English.

His close competitors, such as Conried and Christians, sought to downplay his importance in their desire to promote the Continental German theatrical repertory over Philipp's home-grown, immigrant-themed musical stage productions.[3] Though Philipp did not attempt to produce high art, unlike Conried and Christians, and claimed to prefer cash over glory, he nonetheless produced up-to-date popular musical theatre and attempted to meet his audiences' expectations, especially with regards to their thirst for entertainment and desire to support German culture and to be immersed in the Americanization process. Here I analyse Philipp's career and works, examine his adaptability as a theatrical producer to continually changing circumstances, and position his work in connection with ethnic and 'mainstream' American musical theatre. Philipp's activities as a director, composer, playwright, and performer are also considered, because it is impossible to separate out the various strands of his theatrical work. Although his theatrical career stretched from 1881 to 1933, I emphasize his work at the Germania Theater between 1893 and 1902, his most original period of activity.

Philipp at the Germania Theater

Adolf Philipp was born into a Jewish family in Lübeck, Germany in 1864. He got his start on the stage in 1881 at the age of 17 when he ran away from home to join a travelling company. Philipp appeared as an actor and singer in the chorus and later as a leading lyric and comic tenor in operetta throughout Germany, Austria, and Bohemia between 1881 and 1890. As his career developed, he moved from small provincial stages to large theatres in several of

the most important urban centres in northern and central Europe. In the late 1880s, in addition to vigorously pursuing his own singing career, Philipp also wrote the libretti for at least five German operettas.

Gustav Amberg, director of New York City's German-language Amberg Theater, recruited Philipp in 1890 to perform in his theatre. Philipp performed leading comic and lyric roles in the standard operetta repertory there between 1890 and 1893. In the latter year, he assumed the directorship of the newly established Germania Theater on Eighth Street, between Broadway and Fourth Avenue. Although this was not a propitious time to start a new theatrical endeavour—the economic chaos caused by the Panic of 1893 was also felt on the New York stage—the Germania Theater nevertheless flourished for a decade with Philipp at the helm in all the principal capacities. He originally intended that the Germania would be a repertory company with a frequent change of bill, like all other Klein Deutschland stages. However, the fantastic success of his first German American musical comedy (labelled a *Volksstück*, or 'folk piece'), *Der Corner Grocer aus der Avenue A* (The Corner Grocer from Avenue A) of 1893, ensured that his works dominated the Germania from then until its closure in 1902.

At the Irving Place Theater, producer and director Heinrich Conried followed the German model of a daily change of repertory and fervently emphasized Continental German works. He especially favoured translations of works by Shakespeare, and important plays by other European masters, such as Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Ibsen, and Hauptmann. He also produced some popular Continental German operettas and light comedies to satisfy popular taste. In contrast, Philipp produced long runs of his own low- and middlebrow German American musical comedies as long as audiences kept coming—and come they did. But when attendance began to falter, he would put on a new musical, usually of his own authorship, or add new songs or afterpieces to refresh an older work. In 1902, the *Brooklyn Eagle* commented on Philipp's long runs at the Germania Theater and contrasted them with the usual experience of German American theatre producers: 'Heretofore German managers were satisfied when they could run a play or an opera three or four successive nights. A play that could be kept on the boards for one week was regarded as a marvel.'[4] Philipp's immigrant musical comedies ran from three to six or more months during a season and were frequently revived in later seasons. (*Der Corner Grocer aus der Avenue A* was reportedly performed more than 1,000 times.) These long runs compared very favourably with, or exceeded, the usual runs of performances of contemporaneous English-language musical comedies.

In *Der Corner Grocer aus der Avenue A*, as in his many other German American musical comedies in which he always took a leading performing role, Philipp expanded upon characters common to both English- and German-language theatrical traditions, created new types, and blended immigrant 'old world' and 'new world' social and cultural values and sensibilities. Philipp's Germania Theater company represented on stage the comic and serious experiences

of both the newly arrived German immigrant—the Greenhorn—and the established German American New Yorker. In seeing themselves portrayed on the stage, Philipp's audiences, made up principally of working- and middle-class German Americans, were encouraged to laugh and cry at their daily existence and acknowledge through comedy, pathos, and evocative music both their separateness from and inclusion in mainstream New York and American society (see Table 4.1 for a list of Philipp's New York musical stage works).

Philipp's musical comedies were based in part on the musical plays of playwright and lyricist Edward (Ned) Harrigan (1844–1911) and composer David Braham (*c.*1837–1905), which featured Harrigan and actor-singer Tony Hart (1855–1891) in principal roles. Indeed, Philipp was often called the German Harrigan. Similarities between their works include characters and scenes drawn from immigrant life, an emphasis on local situations and humour, cross-dressing with males playing comic female characters, a use of working-class speech, and the mixing of American, German, and Jewish character types, expressions, and accents. Harrigan's works often centred on the experiences of New York's Irish population and its dealings with other ethnic and racial groups, especially African Americans. Philipp's musical comedies and Harrigan's musical plays differed in that the former primarily treated the lives of German Americans in the context of Klein Deutschland, whereas Harrigan's German characters existed in the context of English-speaking society. Non-German characters were usually incidental to the main action in Philipp's musical comedies, although Jewish characters with Yiddish or German accents were integrated more extensively into his plots. Philipp was by no means simply a Harrigan imitator, for German theatrical conventions and the German genres of farce, comedy, *Volksstück*, and operetta influenced the creation of his musical comedies more than Harrigan's musical plays did. And the Yiddish musical stage, whose theatre district was located close to Philipp's Germania, must also have had an influence on his works.

Philipp emphasized the *Sehnsucht* (longing) many German Americans felt for the homes and families they had left behind when they came to America, and his musical stage works were especially poignant reminders of this longing for the *Heimat* (homeland). Philipp also stressed German and American local, regional, and national pride, and frequently used *Plattdeutsch* (Low German) and other German dialects and accents (e.g. from Swabia and Berlin) and linguistic inflections, alongside *Hochdeutsch* (High German) in his musical comedies of the 1890s.

Occupations favoured by German Americans were humorously depicted in the titles, plots, and songs of his works: *Der Corner Grocer aus der Avenue A*, *Ein New Yorker Brauer*, *Der Pawnbroker von der East Side*, *Der Butcher aus der Erste Avenue*, *Die Landlady*, and others. The German American grocer, brewer, pawnbroker, butcher, and landlady that populate his musical plays were very familiar to local audiences: some in his Germania Theater audiences followed those professions.

Table 4.1 Adolf Philipp's New York musical theatre works, 1893–1928

Der Corner Grocer aus der Avenue A (The Corner Grocer from Avenue A); 1893
Der New Yorker Brauer und seine Familie (The New York Brewer and His Family); 1894
Der Pawnbroker von der Eastside (The Pawnbroker from the East Side); 1894
Der Butcher aus der Ersten Avenue (The Butcher from First Avenue); 1895
Mein Vaterland (My Fatherland); 1895
New York in Wort und Bild (New York in Word and Image); 1895
Trüllbü aus der Avenue A (Trilby from Avenue A); 1895
Die Landlady (The Landlady); 1896
My New York; 1896
New York bei Nacht (New York at Night); 1896
Der glucklichste Mensch in New York (The Happiest Person in New York); 1897
Die Ziegeunerbraut (The Gypsy Bride); 1897
Dollars und Cents (Dollars and Cents); 1897
Klein Deutschland (Little Germany); 1897
Der Reise nach Amerika (The Voyage to America); 1898
Ein Tag in Manila (A Day in Manila); 1898
Die Geheimnisse von New York (The Secrets of New York); 1900
Der Millionenschwab (The Millionaire Swabian); 1900
Der Kartoffelkönig (The Potato King); 1901
Im Lande der Freiheit (In the Land of Freedom); 1901
New York Spellbinders; 1901
Alma, wo wohnst Du? (Alma, Where Do You Live?); 1909
Der Butcher von Yorkville (The Butcher of Yorkville); 1909
Ein Abend bei Pannemann (An Evening at Pannemann's); 1909
Hein Snut's Hochzeitsreise (Hein Snut's Honeymoon); 1909
Alma, Where Do You Live?; 1910
Theresa, Be Mine!; 1910
Therese sei nicht böse (Theresa, Don't Be Naughty); 1910
Auf nach New York; 1911
Auction Pinochle; 1912
Adele; 1913
Das Mitternachtsmädel (The Midnight Girl); 1913
Zwei Lots in the Bronx (Two Lots in the Bronx); 1913
Auction Pinochle; 1914
My Shadow and I; 1914
The Midnight Girl; 1914
Two Lots in the Bronx; 1914
The Girl Who Smiles; 1915
Two Is Company; 1915
Sadie from Riverside Drive; 1916
The Masked Marvel; 1916
Our Heroes; 1917
Oh Emile!; 1918
Tin Pajamas; 1919
Mimi; 1920
Also das ist New York (So This Is New York); 1922
Home Brew; 1922
Nur einmal blüht die Liebe (Love Only Blossoms Once); 1922
Schön war's doch (It Was So Beautiful); 1922
Ohne Louis geht es nicht (It Doesn't Work Without Louis); 1923

(*continued*)

Table 4.1 continued

Zwischen Zwölf und Eins (Between Twelve and One O'Clock); 1923
Die deutsche Marie (The German Marie); 1924
Wilhelminche (Little Wilhelmina); 1925
Die Trockenen und die Nässen (The Teetotallers and the Drinkers); 1926
Bertha von Ridgewood (Bertha from Ridgewood); 1928
Die Tanz um den Dollar (The Dance for the Dollar); 1928
Heil Germania – Heil Erin (Hail Germania – Hail Erin); 1928
Sie hat so etwas (There's Something About Her); 1928

The New York City locales portrayed in Philipp's works were also well known to his audiences—some of them were located just outside or close to his theatre: Avenues A and B, the Bowery, Broadway, Chinatown, East Side tenements, Second Avenue. Social events and venues frequented by German Americans were also represented on stage: the popular Arion masked ball (an annual event given by the exclusive German American singing society of the same name), German coffee houses, beer gardens, and music halls. Philipp made colourful use of the urban landscape just before and after the incorporation of the five New York-area boroughs into the unified, metropolitan New York City in 1898. He had his characters sing songs that related especially to the urban drama played out in the various New York locations that formed the backdrop to his musical comedies. His complicated plots have many twists and turns, all of which are usually tied up happily at the end. Plots are set in the present day, as opposed to imaginary or historical realms often used in Continental German operetta. He emphasized broad comedy allied with sight gags, slapstick, low and physical humour, and the occasional comic use of live animals on stage, alongside more elevated dramatic situations.

Philipp emphasized a tight dramatic ensemble and maintained a resident stock company at his Germania Theater (and also, later, at his Deutsch-Amerikanisches, Wintergarten, Adolf Philipp, and Yorkville Deutsches theatres). Philipp almost always appeared in one of the principal roles, frequently as a wide-eyed, innocent singing youth. Up-to-date parodies of current political developments and events were presented, as well as burlesques on popular plays and literary works. Satirical references to political figures and other prominent individuals often appeared. Elements of dramatic realism were highlighted, and references to social inequality and the need for social reform were integrated into plots. Philipp sometimes represented poverty and vice on stage, though probably with spoken dialogue instead of song, and he also depicted certain notorious aspects of New York's underworld (e.g. an opium den, the Tenderloin). What the radical journalist Hutchins Hapgood (1869–1944) wrote about the contemporaneous Yiddish theatre in his important and well-known 1902 study *The Spirit of the Ghetto* perfectly describes Philipp's musical comedies. 'In almost every play given … all the elements are represented. Vaudeville, history, realism, comic opera, are generally mixed together.'[5]

Philipp used men in women's roles for both comic and subversive effect, most notably the very talented Bernhard Rank, who appeared as a singing cross-dresser in most of Philipp's musical comedies of the 1890s. Philipp did not have Rank appear in blackface, unlike Hart in Harrigan's plays, who often performed African American 'wench' roles, since African Americans rarely appeared as characters in Philipp's New York works. However, Philipp did incorporate some African American popular music styles and dances (e.g. the cakewalk) in his works. Rank's drag roles illustrate the humorous character types that Philipp based on German American figures, occupations, and ethnic stereotypes, such as with Röschen Traubenfrost (Little Rose Ice Wine), 'red-headed landlady', in *Der Corner Grocer aus der Avenue A* and Hulda Camillenthee (Hulda Camomile Tea), 'Saxon Sewing Machine Girl', in *Der New Yorker Brauer und seine Familie*. While cross-gender impersonation was a common feature on the American stage, and female to male cross-dressing was regularly seen in Viennese and German operetta, female impersonation was apparently less common on the German American stage, except in variety acts.

The sense of fond nostalgia in many of his song lyrics was balanced by sharper theatrical elements. Humorous or satirical parodies of current political events and figures, and developments in popular culture appeared in the guise of musical comedy on Philipp's stage, as they did in the English-language, Italian, and Yiddish theatres in the city. For example, Philipp quickly jumped on the American patriotic bandwagon during the Spanish–American War with his *Ein Tag in Manila* (A Day in Manila) of 1898, in which Emilio Aguinaldo (leader of the anti-Spanish forces in 1896–1898 during the fight for Philippine independence) and Admiral George Dewey figure in the plot. Philipp also parodied popular novels and plays, as in his musical burlesque *Trüllbü aus der Avenue A* (Trilby from Avenue A) of 1895, based on George Du Maurier's popular *Trilby* of 1894 (with Rank as Trüllbü/Trilby in drag).

As with many Tin Pan Alley popular songwriters, a significant number of the participants in Klein Deutschland's theatrical life were Jewish. Philipp, an assimilated, secular German Jew, created overtly humorous and sympathetic Jewish characters for his musical comedies, such as Mandelbaum in *Der Corner Grocer aus der Avenue A* and Issac Rosenstein, 'Clothing Store Besitzer und Wall Street Man' ('Clothing Store Owner and Wall Street Man') in *Der Pawnbroker von der East Side*. Yiddish accents were heard alongside varying degrees of *Hochdeutsch*, *Plattdeutsch*, other German regional speech, and English interpolations. Despite the presence of Jewish characters, which Philipp used as only one among many plot devices, his musical comedies were not exclusively geared to the large Lower East Side Jewish community, which had its own very vibrant and active Yiddish stages. However, contemporary press reports indicate that German and Eastern European Jews made up a substantial part of his Germania Theater audiences, and that at the turn of the twentieth century New York's German American stage could not have existed without Jewish patronage. It is also significant that a number of the directors of

the German theatre as well as its principal performers were themselves Jewish, including Conried and Philipp.[6]

Even though he enjoyed financial success, Philipp was forced to close the Germania Theater in spring 1902. Plans for a new theatre were announced but never realized. Philipp then embarked on an extensive although unsuccessful tour of the Midwest with his company. Forced to disband his company in Chicago and file for bankruptcy, Philipp disappeared from the historical record for a time.

Ever resilient, Philipp reappeared in 1903 when he opened his own Deutsch-Amerikanisches Theater in Berlin, where for four years he successfully produced seven of his New York-themed German American musicals for Berlin audiences, including *Über'n grossen Teich* (From Across the Big Pond), *Im wilden Westen* (In the Wild West), and *New York*. He resurfaced in New York in 1908 at the Wintergarten zum schwarzen Adler (Winter Garden at the Sign of the Black Eagle [the symbol of the German Empire]), a small theatre located in largely German Yorkville on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. In 1909, he produced one of his most popular musicals there, *Alma, wo wohnst Du?* (Alma, Where Do You Live?), which was also a great hit on Broadway when Joe Weber produced and directed its English-language adaptation in 1910. Avoiding immigrant themes for the first time, and sparked by *The Merry Widow* craze, with *Alma* and later works Philipp would go on to produce his own French-flavoured musicals falsely credited to the fictitious team of Jean Briquet (music) and Paul Hervé (libretto), with works such as *The Midnight Girl* and *Auction Pinochle* (German and English versions), and *Adele* (English only). Although he remained active until the late 1920s, his productions from that decade capture only some of the spark and vitality of his Broadway musicals and his earlier Germania Theater works, even when they were on German American themes.

When Adolf Philipp died in New York in 1936, the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, New York's principal German-language newspaper, noted that despite his important contributions to German theatre and culture, he died mostly forgotten by New York's German American community.[7] Although he had often claimed only to be interested in cash, not glory, Philipp had a craftsman's approach to theatrical production and composition and a true gift for creating captivating dramatic situations along with sentimental and comic songs that caught the spirit of the times in humorous and evocative ways. Philipp was arguably the most successful and significant German American musical playwright-performer-producer; his immigrant-themed musicals should be understood as an important, integral part of the theatrical landscape of New York City at the turn of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. Most US cities with German American populations had their own German-language stages in this period; see John Koegel, Introduction to *Music in German Immigrant Theater: New York City, 1840–1940*

(Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009); Koegel, 'Non-English Language Musical Theater in the United States', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 2nd edn., ed. Paul Laird and William Everett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 29–53.

2. Regarding the German American stage in New York City, see Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater*; Koegel, 'The Development of the German-American Musical Theater in New York, 1840–1890', in *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900*, ed. John Graziano (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 149–81; Peter Conolly-Smith, *Translating America: An Immigrant Press Visualizes American Popular Culture, 1895–1918* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian University Press, 2004); Conolly-Smith, '*Kulturkrieg*: *Direktor* Christians, the Irving Place Theater, and German-Language Drama in New York', in *Not English Only: Redefining 'American' in American Studies*, ed. Orm Øverland (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2001), 48–66; Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880–1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
3. On Adolf Philipp, see Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater*; Koegel, 'Adolf Philipp and Ethnic Musical Comedy in New York's Little Germany', *American Music* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 267–319; Conolly-Smith, '"*Ersatz*-Drama" and Ethnic (Self) Parody: Adolf Philipp and the Decline of New York's German-Language Stage', in *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 215–39; Haenni, '"A Community of Consumers": Legitimate Hybridity, German American Theatre, and the American Public', *Theatre Research International* 28, no. 3 (2003): 267–88.
4. 'The Amphion', *Brooklyn Eagle*, 13 April 1902, 56.
5. Hutchins Hapgood, *The Spirit of the Ghetto: Studies of the Jewish Quarter in New York* (New York: Funk &Wagnalls, 1902), 137.
6. Issac Moses Herz, '… E Wörtsche vom deutschen Theater', *New York Phonograph/New York Figaro* 4, no. 37 (21 October 1893), 2.
7. 'Adolf Philipp dem letzen Ruf gefolgt', *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 31 July 1936; 'Adolf Philipp zurletzten Ruhebebettet', *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 1 August 1936.

CHAPTER 5

George Edwardes: The Guv'nor of Late Victorian Musical Theatre

William A. Everett

As the final decade of the nineteenth century began, musical theatrical entertainment in Britain was a multi-faceted affair. Offerings ranged from music hall and revue, with their performer-centred approaches, to plot-driven comic opera, pantomime, and burlesque (defined here as a spoof of popular plays, novels, or stories, usually with bawdy humour). New forms and approaches were on the horizon, and one individual who realized and promoted several of these was George Edwardes (1855–1915), known as 'the Guv'nor'. ('Guv'nor' is a common term of authority, but in his day, Edwardes wasn't just a Guv'nor—he was *the* Guv'nor.) Edwardes's accomplishments in terms of production included transformations in the presentation of burlesque, early versions of musical comedy, and adaptations of Continental operettas for English-speaking audiences. His significance lies in his combination of artistic foresight and business acumen.

Edwardes was first and foremost occupied with the business of theatre. He managed and owned various venues throughout his career. One of his primary tasks as a theatre manager was to choose and produce the shows that appeared on his stages. He was associated primarily with two London houses, the Gaiety and Daly's, though he also held interests at the Prince of Wales's, the Empire, and the Adelphi. Edwardes possessed a keen ability to know what audiences wanted, especially as theatrical tastes were changing with the arrival of the new century, and lived by the dictum, 'the public never makes a mistake'.[1]

George Edwardes (whose name was originally spelled Edwards) was born and raised near Grimsby, Lincolnshire. With his cousin Michael Gunn, an Irish

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theatre manager, the future impresario moved to London in 1875 to work for Richard D'Oyly Carte at the Opera Comique. Edwardes served as Carte's treasurer, where he gained solid knowledge about theatrical finances during the first London productions of two works by the esteemed team of Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Pirates of Penzance* (1880) and *Patience* (1881). When the Savoy Theatre opened in 1881, Edwardes, who around this time added the 'e' to his surname to exude a sense of class sophistication, became its first managing director. In this role, he helped bring more works by Gilbert and Sullivan to the stage, including *Iolanthe* (1882), *Princess Ida* (1884), and *The Mikado* (1885). In addition to solid managerial skills, Edwardes learned from Carte the importance of quality sets and costumes—visual dimensions played significant roles in how an audience responded to a show.

Edwardes also ran the Edwardes Menu Company, which sold theatre programs and liquor in refreshment bars.[2] Combining this business interest with his managerial position at the Savoy, Edwardes claims to have instigated changes in the theatre-goer's experience, some of which remain to the present day:

> While occupying that position I was the first to introduce into a London theatre really good drinks, well-appointed bars, and a superior class of attendants; also, I originated the system of printing tickets for every reserved seat each night, to obviate the frequent mistakes of selling seats twice over, and I introduced the *queue* system in England for the unreserved parts of the house. This was the result of the nasty accident we had on the first night of 'Princess Ida', when, owing to the awful rush and pressure of the crowd, several persons had to be taken to Charing Cross Hospital, and many might have been killed had I not been able to open a side door in the nick of time.[3]

In December 1885, Edwardes acquired a half-share of the famed Gaiety Theatre and became its co-manager. John Hollingshead (1827–1904) had owned and managed the Gaiety since 1868, and was planning to retire. After one year, apparently satisfied with his new partner's work, Hollingshead sold Edwardes his half of the business, making Edwardes the Gaiety's sole manager. It was at the Gaiety that Edwardes ventured beyond the business aspects of running a theatre and became involved with the very nature and style of the works that appeared on its stage.

The Gaiety was famous for its burlesques, comic improvisations, gorgeous women, and bawdy humour. Edwardes wanted to attract a more sophisticated audience to the Gaiety, so he produced a comic opera, *Dorothy*, at the venerated venue on 25 September 1886. The male-dominated Gaiety audience, though, favoured burlesque, so Edwardes sold *Dorothy* to his accountant, Henry J. Leslie, who reworked it and took it to the Prince of Wales's Theatre, where it became a runaway hit.

Edwardes, meanwhile, remembering his quip 'the public never makes a mistake' and wanting to improve the quality of his Gaiety clientele, decided

to institute a new type of burlesque at the house, one he simply called 'new burlesque'. As opposed to the standard forms of burlesque that were short, formed part of a larger program, and had music drawn from various sources to which rhymed couplets were set, new burlesques were something different. These were full-evening parodies with songs generally by one composer, in this case Meyer Lutz (1829–1903). They were less formulaic than their predecessors and also included a wider array of musical approaches. Productions that Edwardes brought to the Gaiety included *Monte Cristo*, *Junior* (1887), *Frankenstein, or The Vampire's Victim* (1887), *Faust Up to Date* (1888), *Carmen Up to Data* (1890), *Cinder Ellen Up Too Late* (1891), and *Don Juan* (1892). With the new approach came new audiences. Edwardes succeeded in broadening his target audience at the Gaiety to include women and the growing middle classes. The new clientele filled seats, which in turn added to Edwardes's coffers and reputation.

The Gaiety's owner-producer, however, remained interested in developing a new type of musical theatre, one that would incorporate the liveliness of the burlesque with a modern, comic plot. He dubbed his new approach 'musical comedy' or 'musical variety comedy'. His first effort in this regard was *In Town* (1892), with a book by Adrian Ross and James Leader and songs by Osmond Carr. Remembering what happened when he staged *Dorothy* at the Gaiety, Edwardes wisely chose to open *In Town* at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, which he also managed at the time. The thin contemporary plot concerns stuffy aristocrats from Duffshire and their encounters with the ladies' chorus from the fictional Ambiguity Theatre, and paying homage to the beloved Gaiety, it included a burlesque version of *Romeo and Juliet*.[4]

Meanwhile, changes were afoot at the Gaiety. The resident male comic lead, Fred Leslie, died, and the leading lady, Nellie Farren, retired. These significant personnel changes gave Edwardes the opportunity to replace new burlesques with shows like *In Town*. In fact, after *In Town*'s success at the Prince of Wales's, Edwardes brought it to the Gaiety in December 1892—after all, it included a burlesque as a show-within-a-show. *In Town* became the paradigm for a series of so-called 'girl musicals' in which an independent young woman ends up marrying a well-to-do-man. Shows such as *The Shop Girl* (1894), *The Circus Girl* (1896), *A Runaway Girl* (1898), and *The Sunshine Girl* (1912), among others, remained the mainstay at the Gaiety until Edwardes's death in 1915.[5] Ivan Caryll (1861–1921) served as music director and house composer for this string of successes, and Lionel Monckton (1861–1924) often provided additional songs. James Davis (1853–1907), writing under his nom de plume Owen Hall, crafted many of the lively, though scant books, while Adrian Ross (1859–1933) provided many of the shows' lyrics. These 'girl musicals' combined aspects of music hall with hints of comic opera and catered intentionally to a more affluent audience that the earlier burlesque. They exuded brightness and sparkle with their lightness, innocence, and Cinderella-style happy endings.

Central to the Gaiety Theatre brand were the glamorous members of the female chorus, the 'Gaiety Girls'. These ladies exuded elegance and

sophistication and were always impeccably dressed in the latest fashions. Many of them wed into wealthy families or the peerage. 'Stage-door Johnnies' would famously wait for these beautiful actresses at the stage door, hoping for at least a dinner, at most a marriage. Edwardes kept a close eye on his Gaiety Girls. Actresses at the time typically did not have good moral reputations, and Edwardes, in addition to cleaning up the content of the shows that appeared at the Gaiety, also wanted to improve the status of female actors, especially those in his employ. Established society women, however, felt threatened by the new celebrities, and Edwardes, seeing an opportunity for a successful, up-to-date show, made this resentment the basis for *A Gaiety Girl* (1893), in which a member of the Gaiety corps, Alma Somerset, ends up marrying a handsome military officer, much to the disappointment of the young matrons who had their eyes on him.

A Gaiety Girl, despite its name, did not open or even play at the Gaiety Theatre but rather opened at the Prince of Wales's on 14 October 1893. *A Gaiety Girl* had a more substantial plot than *In Town*, and audiences loved the variety of costumes featured in the show. Sidney Jones's score ranged from music hall numbers to lyrical songs reminiscent of light opera.

In 1894 Edwardes took over the management of Daly's Theatre at 2 Cranbourn Street, just off Leicester Square, from its namesake impresario, the American Augustin Daly (1838–1899), who opened it in 1893.[6] The shows that Edwardes produced there were similar to their Gaiety siblings, but with more developed plots, foreign settings, romantic tales that didn't focus wholly on class differences, and more substantial musical scores. They exuded opulence, wit, and romance. Edwardes brought *A Gaiety Girl* to Daly's, where it opened on 10 September 1894.

Subsequent Daly's Theatre musicals, namely *An Artist's Model* (1895), *The Geisha* (1896), *A Greek Slave* (1898), and *San Toy* (1899), reflect a further amalgamation of the Savoy Opera style with that of music hall. The Savoy tradition, associated with Gilbert and Sullivan, provided the notion of plot and general musical aesthetic for the more noble and class-superior characters, while music hall offered the idea of improvisation in performance (called 'business' in the scripts) and the overall comedic-based performance style of class-inferior roles. The visual opulence, fine music, and star performances became hallmarks of what audiences would come to expect from a George Edwardes production. The perennial cast included romantic leads Hayden Coffin and Marie Tempest, dancing soubrette Letty Lind, Gilbert and Sullivan veteran Rutland Barrington, and comedian Huntley Wright.

Collaboration and competition remained key at Daly's. Edwardes maintained a relatively large creative team with multiple book writers, composers, and lyricists. In order to maintain quality and to ensure that no creator or lead performer became complacent, Edwardes encouraged a spirit of competition. Sidney Jones (1861–1946) was the principal composer, but Edwardes encouraged interpolations, and the Gaiety's Lionel Monckton wrote what became some of Daly's most popular songs. Edwardes thought that the possibility of

interpolations would keep Jones writing at his best. (Indeed it was precisely because of this policy that Jones ended up leaving Daly's and Edwardes.) The producer also encouraged a spirit of competition among his performers. He ensured that the two leading ladies, Marie Tempest and Letty Lind, had the same number of songs in each show so that neither could claim exclusive rights as leading lady.

Edwardes's role as producer, overseeing all the constituent parts, was essential to the creative process at Daly's. His experience with the immutability of Gilbert and Sullivan and the near antithesis of this with the Gaiety burlesques gave him the insight and ability to fuse these approaches in his creation of musical comedy. His Daly's style relied heavily on the performers themselves and required untapped skills from veteran actors. Edwardes wanted, even required, that his actors be able to develop their own characters, stating 'it requires artists who can not only act well, but also sing and dance well, and be able, out of their own humorous resources, to build up their parts'.[7] Performers did not just interpret the work of the show's listed creators; they were expected to invent some of their own material. The accomplished Gilbert and Sullivan actor Rutland Barrington, who created roles such as Captain Corcoran in *H.M.S. Pinafore* and Poo-Bah in *The Mikado*, wrote of his early experiences at Daly's:

> When first making acquaintance with the irresponsibilities of what is popularly known as musical comedy, I felt a certain sense of insecurity, owing to the absence of boundary marks in the shape of lines written by the author, and I believe that for quite a year or so I shocked a great many of my fellow-artists by the tenacity with which I clung to the 'text'.[8]

Extemporaneous substitutions or elaborations to the script were commonplace, if not expected.

Touring was fundamental to the success and reputation of the Daly's shows. In addition to playing throughout the United Kingdom, the shows transferred to New York and played in translation throughout Continental Europe, from Amsterdam to Zagreb. *The Geisha* was especially popular in the German-speaking world. It wasn't just because of the shows' appeal that Edwardes promoted the tours—they were financial necessities. Daly's shows, because of their opulent stage designs and forty-member orchestras, were expensive. They simply cost more than the Gaiety shows to bring to the stage. Hence, Edwardes often found himself in the red at Daly's and needed the additional income from tours to ensure a profit.[9] As one show embarked on its tour, another took its place on the Daly's stage. The well-attended and highly publicized touring productions amassed a substantial profit for Edwardes, who often was overseeing multiple productions of the same show.

After the turn of the century, Edwardes became increasingly drawn to comic opera. On 17 October 1903, he opened a production of a new work, *The Duchess of Dantzic*, at the Lyric Theatre. Called his 'first experiment in comic

opera proper',[10] the work featured music by Gaiety composer Ivan Caryll and lyrics by Henry Hamilton. The visual production values associated with the Gaiety and Daly's were clearly evident, for as a reviewer wrote, 'The dresses were in George Edwardes's most superb style.'[11]

Meanwhile, the powerhouse team of performers at Daly's gradually left, and in 1905, rather than continuing to create original works, Edwardes began adapting Continental operettas for London audiences and producing them at Daly's. He knew from experience that London audiences craved sentimentality and believed, correctly, that they would take to the nostalgic nevermore of operetta. Edwardes's productions infused the foreign works with English sensibilities while maintaining their Continental charm and slight vintage tinge. He brought his understanding of Savoy Opera, his innovations at the Gaiety and Daly's, and his familiarity with contemporary comic opera to the new venture. Among Edwardes's most notable adaptations were *The Little Michus* (1905), *The Merry Widow* (1907), *The Dollar Princess* (1910), and *The Count of Luxemburg* (1911). All were popular, but *The Merry Widow* took London audiences by storm. Edwardes's idea crossed the Atlantic, where producers such as the Shuberts brought their own adaptations to the New York stage. The American versions differ from the British ones, for each was prepared expressly for its respective audience.

Edwardes suffered from various physical ailments, for which he made annual visits to a German spa in the second decade of the new century. He was caught there when the Great War began and was imprisoned for several months, which only caused his health to deteriorate further. Edwardes died just before his 63rd birthday at his home in Regent's Park, London. He left behind a tremendous legacy that included full-length burlesques, innovative approaches to book musicals, and operetta adaptations. Though Edwardes did not have any direct disciples, his ability to discern and even guide public tastes, as well as his expertise in both the business and the artistic aspects of musical theatre, established an important paradigm for musical theatre producers in the early decades of the twentieth century. His success can be summarized in his core belief that 'the public never makes a mistake'.

Notes

1. Ernest Short, *Theatrical Cavalcade* (Port Washington, NY and London: Kennikat, 1942, reissued in 1970), 103.
2. Ibid., 104.
3. Untitled article, *The Sketch*, 12 September 1894, 360.
4. John A. Degan, 'The Evolution of *The Show Girl* and the Birth of "Musical Comedy"', *Theatre History Studies* 7 (1987), 42.
5. In 1903, the original Gaiety Theatre was razed as part of a road-widening scheme. The new Gaiety opened soon thereafter at the corner of the Strand and Aldwych with a performance of *The Orchid*. The new Gaiety closed in 1939 and was demolished in 1957.

6. Daly's Theatre closed in 1937 and was razed. In 1894, Edwardes was managing Gaiety, Prince of Wales's, Empire, and Daly's theatres at the same time (Untitled article, *The Sketch*, 12 September 1894, 360).
7. Untitled article, *The Sketch*, 12 September 1894, 360.
8. Rutland Barrington, *A Record of Thirty-Five Years' Experience on the English Stage* (London: Grant Richards, 1908), 109.
9. Alan Hyman, *The Gaiety Years* (London: Cassell, 1975), 79–80.
10. 'King Edward Sees New Play', *New York Times*, 18 October 1903.
11. Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

Charles Frohman: King of the Star-Makers

Brian D. Valencia

Charles Frohman (1856–1915)[1] was a pudgy, moon-faced man with a comforting, homespun smile. His many charming eccentricities were no doubt a product of his sensible Midwestern childhood. His suits, for example, were all of the same ordinary style, and he utterly refused to wear the fussy silk stovepipe hats that were then in fashion.[2] He seldom left home without a bag of peanuts to munch on, and he was not ashamed to send an assistant for heaps of his favourite cream pies (both, no doubt, contributing to his squat physique). In fact, Frohman's comportment was so plain and unassuming that, on more than one occasion, doormen in his own theatrical employ did not believe that he could be *the* famous American stage producer Charles Frohman and barred him entry to his own rehearsals and performances. Perhaps more with naive optimism than unbridled ego he embraced the motto 'The whole—the boundless earth—is mine' (an inadvertent misquotation of Alexander Pope), and it indeed seemed to be, as his producing might spread across North America and Britain, to Paris and Berlin. For this he was called the 'Napoleon of Theatricals', a title he balanced with the 'Great Unphotographed', for, despite his notoriety, Frohman defended vehemently his own privacy, making himself virtually inaccessible to all but his 'stars', the celebrity show people—the performers and writers—whose careers he lived to propel, his very reason for being.

Today Frohman is best remembered as the producer of J. M. Barrie's original play *Peter Pan* (1904 London, 1905 New York) and as a founding member in 1896 of the formidable Theatrical Syndicate, the ruthless turn-of-the-century monopoly on American theatrical tours originally intended as a well-meaning simplification and centralization of theatrical bookings. (Because of the

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reluctance of some stars to acquiesce to the Syndicate, and the establishment of a nationwide chain of competing theatres by the Shubert brothers, the Syndicate's vice-like grip on the American theatre was loosened in 1910 and abolished in 1914.) Additionally, however, Frohman was the most prolific theatrical producer of his day, helming, by various counts, between 500 and 700 total productions over the course of his independent producing career, which spanned 1883 to 1915. Among these were the original American productions of three plays which later served as the bases for important twentieth-century Broadway musicals: *Shenandoah* (1889), musicalized in 1974; the United States premiere of *Charley's Aunt* (1893), adapted as *Where's Charley?* in 1948; and, of course, Barrie's *Peter Pan*, musicalized under the direction of Jerome Robbins in 1954. His personal and professional lives saw an endless parade of musical and non-musical theatrical luminaries of the age: Tony Hart, Julian Mitchell, Henry E. Dixey, Montgomery and Stone, Lester Wallack, Dion Boucicault, even Cecil B. DeMille. But Frohman, known to those in the profession as 'C.F.', remained a figure always in the background, which he preferred to the spotlight anyway.

Though Frohman produced fewer than thirty musical titles in all, he and his many collaborators helped signal a modest but important shift in American theatrical taste away from the haphazardly constructed farce–comedies of the 1880s and 1890s towards the more plot-driven musical comedies of the 1910s and 1920s. Throughout this period, Broadway musical fare (including operettas) existed very much as open texts: a single show's book and songs were fluid elements which could vary widely from production to production, from cast to cast, or, sometimes, from night to night. This was then an expected convention of the popular musical theatre, and Frohman cannily seized upon it to customize, in his estimation, the best European musical properties to his stars' strengths and special talents, while at the same time reshaping them specially for his American audiences. Frequently these undertakings required new lyrical settings, or else entirely new songs by American songwriters, and for these Frohman relied most heavily on one promising young ghost-composer, at this time still an unknown. This was Jerome Kern.

The third and youngest son of German immigrants, Frohman spent his earliest years in Sandusky, Ohio. Around 1864, however, the Frohman family moved to New York City at the insistence of Charles's mother Barbara, who was convinced that brighter educational prospects awaited her seven children in New York. After failed attempts making soap and distilling alcohol, patriarch Henry Frohman established a cigar shop at 708 Broadway, between 4th Street and Washington Place, no more than a fifteen-minute walk from Tony Pastor's Opera House, the Academy of Music, and Niblo's Garden. New York's theatre district was at this time still slowly crawling its way up Broadway from its roots near the tip of Manhattan Island, and in the 1860s and 1870s, the cigar shop was at the very centre of its excitement. Once resettled in the city, little Charley Frohman showed no interest in school; nevertheless, he received an education of the theatrical sort by helping out at the family business. There he had a

front-row seat for Broadway's stirring brass-band parades (which he later replicated to drum up business for his travelling minstrel shows); his father's regular customers included Tony Pastor himself and the Guy Brothers Minstrels, among many other New York theatrical personalities; and the shop's front window was coveted advertising space for the nearby theatres' coming attractions.

Frohman's middle brother Gustave made pocket money by selling play- and souvenir books outside these theatres, and one evening Gustave allowed Charles to assist him at the legendary melodrama *The Black Crook*, still in its inaugural run at Niblo's, at the north-east corner of Broadway and Prince Street. There Charles not only witnessed the magic of theatrical performance unfold for the first time, but he earned seventeen cents by selling a copy of the play's novelization in the lobby. To the little boy, this mixture of magic and money was intoxicating, and from that night, all his thoughts turned towards show business.[3]

A chance opportunity in 1872 to assist with the management of a then well-known blackface minstrel troupe secured Gustave his first professional foothold in the theatre, and he was quick to pull his older brother Daniel into the organization as his replacement when he rose to a higher position within the company. Gustave repeated this manoeuvre with an all-too-ready Charles in 1877 when he vacated the role of advance agent for J. H. Wallick's travelling thespians. As advance agent, Charles was required to chart the route of the tour ahead of the rest of the company, book lucrative engagements, and post playbills in the most coveted well-trafficked places—which the cigar shop window had given him practice doing years earlier. Following the 1877–1878 season spent paving the way for Wallick's, Charles repeated the work of advance agent for Haverly's Mastodons, a forty-man, all-white minstrel mega-company, from 1878 to 1881, rising eventually to the position of company manager. The next years found Frohman overseeing out-of-town bookings for Steele MacKaye's Madison Square Theatre (which his brothers also helped to manage), at one point coordinating fourteen simultaneous road companies, and returning briefly to minstrel management for a tour of Callender's Consolidated Spectacular Colored troupe. But road life was exceedingly hard, and Frohman too often found himself having to pay company debts with personal belongings. So, in 1883, he struck out alone to present projects of his own choosing.

Charles Frohman's early years as an independent producer—during which he also frequently wore the hat of modern-day director—were fraught with sharp reversals of fortune, and it wasn't until the 1889 production of Bronson Howard's Civil War play *Shenandoah* at New York's Star Theatre that Frohman achieved his first bona fide hit. Its smashing success afforded him the reputation and the resources necessary to construct his own Broadway theatre, the prophetically named Empire, in 1893. At the time of its opening, the Empire Theatre, located at the south-east corner of Broadway and 40th Street, had the company of only the Casino and Broadway Theatres and the old Metropolitan Opera House in its immediate vicinity. Regarded as one of the finest playhouses in the city, the Empire drew consistent crowds, thereby confirming the financial

viability of a theatre so far north and encouraging the building of additional theatres even further up Broadway, into what would soon be Times Square. The Empire, it was said, led the way. In time Frohman collected six more Broadway houses: the Standard, Garrick, Criterion, Savoy, Garden, and part of the Knickerbocker (where he presented many of his musicals, right next door to the Empire)—as well as three theatres in Boston and two more in Chicago. And in 1897 Frohman signed a long-term lease on the Duke of York's, his flagship London theatre, and began his command of that city's Vaudeville and Adelphi Theatres, arrangements that required annual crossings to Europe.

Frohman never married—though he jokingly spoke of his walking cane as his wife. He shared his personal life instead with Broadway musical theatre producer Charles Dillingham in, it has been posited, a furtive same-sex partnership.[4] C.F. and C.D. shared a house in White Plains, New York, aptly named Hiddenbrook Farm, to which Frohman retreated regularly on weekends. In a memorial biography of his brother, written following Charles's death in the *Lusitania* disaster of 1915, Daniel Frohman described the two Charleses as 'bosom friends' and 'inseparable companions', and wrote that the 'friendship' his brother had with Dillingham was 'one of the closest of his life'.[5]

On most weeknights, however, Frohman could be found gobbling up chocolate candies as he pored over mountains of play scripts in his office, under the silent, watchful gaze of his adored and adoring stars' many portraits hanging around him. In his voracious search for candidates worthy of production, Frohman ceaselessly hunted for an ineffable 'human' quality that he recognized in the best British plays and performers; forms of this word appear with an almost startling ubiquity in his business correspondence and print quotations. For example, in describing the works of J. M. Barrie—whom he regarded as 'the most *human* of living playwrights'—Frohman was recalled as saying, 'There is rich *human* blood in everything he writes. He is … a *humanist* who never surfeits our senses …'[6] And in a 1914 letter to an English colleague he reasoned: 'It seems to me that a strong *human* play, with good characters (and clean) is the thing over here [in London, whereas] I do believe that throughout the United States a play really requires a star artist …'[7] By producing on both sides of the Atlantic, ferrying plays and personnel back and forth, Frohman was able to accommodate these two national sensibilities shrewdly to one other: inculcating in the English a taste for the celebrity culture of the new century, raising American expectations for characterological richness, and multiplying his box office returns many times over in doing so.

Florenz Ziegfeld and George M. Cohan were his immediate contemporaries, and perhaps it was their celebrated triumphs in musical revues and comedies that incited Frohman to embark on or accelerate his own course of musical-theatrical production. Unlike Ziegfeld and Cohan, however, Frohman was not a showman; he was a star-maker and -exhibitor, who found far greater opportunities for the human pathos he so craved in spoken drama than in the musicals of early twentieth-century Broadway. But as a matter of pride and prowess, Frohman would not be left out of the musical game. (Similarly,

though he professed no tolerance for European experimentalism, he did produce Ibsen, Wilde, and Shaw: 'The whole—the boundless earth—is mine'.) Consequently, between 1903 and 1914, he produced, on average, two musical shows in America per year, almost all of them revisions of European originals, at a time when his full Broadway season typically comprised between fifteen and twenty titles, plus another half-dozen in London.

Although Frohman's early-career minstrel shows were absolutely musical theatre in the broadest sense, his first venture producing a long-form, single-narrative musical launched in 1891 with a French *opérette* he had purchased abroad: *Miss Helyett* (1890 Paris), 'rearranged' for Frohman's American audiences by his friend David Belasco. Probably because neither man could point to any credible experience working in operetta, Frohman announced to the press that it was *not* one,[8] but rather a 'quaint and amusing comedy with "musical attachments"', consisting of 'twenty musical numbers'.[9] The cast, including its star, Leslie Carter, was faulted for tone-deaf performances, and it was almost a decade before Frohman backed another musical production on Broadway. The follow-up arrived in late 1900, presented in association with the D'Oyly Carte Company, which provided the British cast. But *The Rose of Persia* (1899 London), an English comic opera penned by Sullivan without Gilbert, lacked the vim of the latter's delicious illogic and struck New Yorkers as oddly irrelevant. It closed in less than a month. A rare original musical comedy followed in 1901: *The Girl from Up There*, depicting the bizarre adventures of a woman following her liberation from 500 years of entrapment inside an Arctic glacier, proved to be a viable star vehicle for picturesque American beauty and burgeoning Frohman starlet Edna May—notwithstanding its apparently derivative choreography, dialogue, lyrics, and music. Upon the conclusion of its Broadway run, the production was reprised at Frohman's Duke of York's in London, affording the producer the important opportunity to observe the responses of the two cities' very different audiences to the same new musical comedy.

The bulk of C.F.'s subsequent musical theatre activity grew primarily from his business relationship with British theatrical doyen George Edwardes, impresario and producer of the unprecedentedly popular musical comedy *The Gaiety Girl* (1893 London, at the Prince of Wales Theatre; 1894 New York), sometimes looked to as the progenitor of the musical comedy form. Frohman and Edwardes had jointly produced a non-musical French farce at the Vaudeville Theatre in 1896, and the two teamed up again in 1902 and 1903 to offer London *Three Little Maids* (in which three society matrons are threatened by three society upstarts from the sticks) and *The School Girl* (in which a Parisian *écolière* contrives to save her schoolmate from an arranged marriage)—both starring Frohman's 'Girl from Up There', Edna May. When Frohman brought these titles to New York in 1903 and 1904, the *New York Times* exhibited rare approval for musical productions. 'It is just possible that there have been better musical comedies … but if there have [been], nobody in the audience could think of them at the end of the evening', it wrote of *Three Little Maids*

(co-produced on Broadway with Edwardes, but without Edna May). 'It was the marvel of a musical comedy in which music and comedy were in just proportion, in which good looks, good dancing, and good acting worked together for the common weal.'[10] As for *The School Girl*: 'They manage these things better in London!' it sang in praise,[11] employing a wording that surely reinforced Frohman's instinctual perception that Edwardes's musical *management*—despite its unabashed reliance on 'showgirldom'—held greater potential for theatrical integrity than the available American models. Between these two shows, in late 1903, Frohman also co-presented with Edwardes the long-running Broadway engagement of *The Girl from Kay's* (1902 London). Rising star Hattie Williams, making her debut under Frohman's management, played the titular hat shop girl who accidentally spoils her friend's honeymoon by giving him an innocent kiss. While these New York transfers kept much of the plays' original core material intact, Frohman personally toiled to tailor them to and for a new audience, principally by supplementing their foreign scores with new songs written by rafts of, in some cases, more than a dozen additional composers and lyricists.[12]

From this time until his death, Frohman continued to mould a host of great Broadway successes from properties purchased or licensed from his esteemed London associate. Into all of these were interpolated songs written by Jerome Kern, though the only credit he usually received, if any, was his name on printed sheet music. Kern also submitted songs to half of the dozen or so musical imports Frohman discovered or developed without Edwardes's assistance; supplied the songs for Frohman's plays with music *The Girl from Montmartre* and *The 'Mind the Paint' Girl*, produced on Broadway back-to-back in 1912; and made substantial contributions to two of Frohman's three other original, American-born musicals: *The Rich Mr. Hoggenheimer* (1906)—a spin-off of *The Girl from Kay's* that presaged strongly the maritime folderol of *Anything Goes*—and *Fluffy Ruffles* (1908)—a '*Musical Melange*' featuring Hattie Williams *as* Fluffy Ruffles, a globe-trotting job applicant whose beauty proves to be a workplace liability.

How exactly Kern and Frohman met is a matter of some dispute, though they almost certainly did so in London during the summer of 1904. The oft-told story that Frohman had mistaken a stiff-mannered 18-year-old Kern for an Englishman and invited him back to America aboard the SS *Kronprinz Wilhelm*, only to recognize his error as the ship pulled into New York Harbor, is complicated by the absence of Kern's name on the ship's passenger manifest.[13] More likely, their meeting was brokered by music magnate Max Dreyfus of the publishing house T. B. Harms, who had arranged for Kern's first Broadway interpolations into *An English Daisy*, produced by Weber and Fields earlier that same year. Regardless of the inciting circumstances, as soon as Kern completed songs previously promised to E. E. Rice for *Mr. Wix of Wickham* (1905), he quickly turned to his third Broadway commission: Frohman's *The Catch of the Season*, a modern-day twist on the Cinderella story, featuring Edna May—and the beginning of an enduring working relationship between composer and

producer. Finally, as the opening-night press exalted, the songs were worthy of the gowns!

Even more than Frohman was in the business of making productions, he was in the business of making stars. Indeed he insisted on *making* them, scorning the thought of merely adopting pre-existing stars under his management (though, in truth, he tended to catch his musical theatre stars mid-ascent or higher). Called by brother Daniel 'king of the star-makers', Frohman is frequently cited as the architect of America's twentieth-century 'star system': a movement away from the centuries-old stock company/repertory model, towards a culture of shorter-lived production companies playing single titles, headlined by celebrities.[14] In actuality, this shift had already been underway for some time. Frohman's real kingly accomplishment in this arena was the impressive number of first-rate stars he accumulated in his managerial constellation; in the last years of his life alone, he could count twenty-eight. Throughout his career, he burnished the likes of William Gillette, John Drew, Ethel Barrymore, and Maude Adams, living to serve and support them, coaching them from the wings on opening nights, and holding in his office late-night private conferences akin to therapy sessions. Frohman secured their commitment to him via handshakes, not signed legal contracts, another vestige of his folksy Midwestern ways and a practice that generated a remarkable sense of trust and good grace. It offered his collaborators tacit permission to withdraw from a business arrangement at any time, without legal recourse, but few ever did. Why would they? Among the members of his inner circle, Frohman found 'the love of children and the loyalty of fine soldiers'.[15]

He specialized in fostering female talent, and the brightest stars of his musical plays were without question Edna May, Hattie Williams, Billie Burke, and Julia Sanderson—each playing the title *Girl* in at least one of the producer's many such offerings. Edna May had already risen to prominence (probably apocryphally from chorus girl to leading lady) in *The Belle of New York* (1897, 1900 revival) by the time she joined Frohman's organization in *The Girl from Up There*. Her final production with him was Kern's first, the New York *Catch of the Season*. Hattie Williams joined Frohman after a few Broadway chorus roles in long-forgotten shows produced by the likes of E. E. Rice and Charles H. Hoyt. Altogether, she played four of Frohman's *Girl* s: *The Girl from Kay's*, *The Rollicking Girl*, *The Girl from Montmartre*, and *The Doll Girl*, more than any other actress. (Both she and Julia Sanderson each played six total Broadway musical engagements for Frohman.) Williams retired from the stage in 1913 while still in C.F.'s employ. Although Billie Burke's first outing for him was musical—the London production of *The School Girl*, in which, as a chorus girl, she sang a standout comic solo—Frohman saw in her 'a genuinely *human* actress',[16] better suited to his less frivolous spoken dramas, and cast her in only one more singing role among the many roles she eventually played for him. In 1912 she starred in his Broadway production of *The 'Mind the Paint' Girl*, a rags-to-showgirl play by Arthur Wing Pinero with a title song by Kern, which Burke sang.

Of all Frohman's celestial maidens, Julia Sanderson sustained the most prolific consistently musical stage career. (Unlike Billie Burke, Sanderson *only* played in musicals, even though the *New York Times* assessed her 'vocal and histrionic gifts above the level of musical comedy'.)[17] After more than two decades of stardom, concluding with the lead role in the first revival of *Oh, Kay!*, Sanderson retreated from the Broadway stage in 1928—as she prepared to undertake a third marriage following two very public, very messy divorces, a flagrant airing of private affairs that would have been unimaginable under Frohman's mindful watch. But it was during his search for a pair of leading ladies for his 1907 production of the English import *The Dairymaids* (1906 London) that Frohman discovered Sanderson, already with several Broadway credits to her name, then headlining in vaudeville. Her success in *The Dairymaids*—a comic opera in which a double romance blossoms despite class confusion on a 'model dairy farm'—was repeated in *The Arcadians* of 1910 (1909 London)—a Savoy-style operetta depicting the incursion of a magical utopia into modern-day London, and vice versa. (Intervening was the less successful *Kitty Grey* [1909], adapted from an 1897 French source, also starring Sanderson.) According to Daniel Frohman, *The Arcadians* was his brother's favourite musical production. 'If the public does not like *The Arcadians*', Charles threatened, 'then I am finished with light opera.'[18] The piece ran for 201 performances; only *The Girl from Kay's* and *The Dollar Princess* (1909), a Viennese operetta in the spirit of Lehár's *The Merry Widow*, ran longer.

Sanderson and Frohman engineered further triumphs in *The Siren* (1911) and *The Sunshine Girl* (1913). But it was their last show together—the last musical of Frohman's career, before his abrupt death—that lives on with any name recognition today. Despite the seemingly native veneer of *The Girl from Utah* (1913 London), Frohman purchased the property from Edwardes to present at Broadway's Knickerbocker in the autumn of 1914, less than two months after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (odd timing, thought some, given the play's blithe derring-do). The New York production of the decidedly wooden libretto starred Sanderson in the title role, alongside the two brightest *male* stars of Frohman's musical cosmos: Joseph Cawthorn, a recent acquisition who had been a favourite comedian of Victor Herbert, and Donald Brian, a suave tenor made into an overnight sensation by his dulcet performance of Prince Danilo in the American premiere of *The Merry Widow*, from which Frohman poached him. Here, Sanderson played a Utah Mormon fleeing to London, seeking escape from Cawthorn's bigamous clutches, and the refuge of Brian's gallant arms. Frohman again commissioned Kern to vitalize the musical's undistinguished British score, desiring some of the pep of Irving Berlin's 'Alexander's Ragtime Band', Frohman's favourite new song, which, he was convinced, signalled the future of American music. Kern's substantial contributions included the enduring 'They Didn't Believe Me' (written to lyrics by Herbert Reynolds), undoubtedly his legacy from this early period, and 'The Land of Make Believe' (lyrics by Harry B. Smith), a framing song perhaps intended, amid so much whimsy, to hold the incipient world war at bay.

Despite a lukewarm reception by the press of all but the stars ('two hours of fooling with an orchestra accompaniment', wrote the *Times*),[19] *The Girl from Utah* ran on Broadway for a respectable three months before commencing the customary tours. In a rare demonstration of unchecked pride, Frohman wrote to the staging director, who had worked on both the English and American productions, 'Believe me that the success is due entirely to the *American* members, the *American* work and, of course, the *American* stars … The English numbers went for nothing. In short, the American numbers caught on.'[20] Perhaps swayed by this sweep of nationalist pride, Frohman granted Kern, for the first time, proper public billing. Or, perhaps Frohman was persuaded to do so following a September 1913 article in the *New York Times* extolling Kern's often anonymous interpolations, de-masking the composer as 'a sort of first aid to foreign scores for ever so long' and calling for credit long overdue.[21] Whatever the case, Kern had arrived, and by the end of 1915, his score for *Very Good Eddie* (glimmers of which can be heard in *The Girl from Utah*) would mark an important development: it contained—*almost*—no musical interpolations. American musical comedy was inching its way towards greater dramaturgical integrity and narrative coherence.

In a letter to one of his actresses dated April 1915, C.F. wrote: 'I am sailing Saturday (per *Lusitania*). Heaven only will know where I am in July.'[22] In no way could he have known how prescient his words would be. Despite public warnings about boat traffic in and out of Allied waters, Frohman made his annual business trip to London that year aboard the RMS *Lusitania*, which on 7 May was downed by a German U-boat torpedo as the liner neared the coast of Ireland. (Kern was apparently to have travelled with Frohman on the same crossing, but, by some stroke of perverse luck, he overslept and missed the launch.)[23] Frohman was smoking a cigar on the promenade deck when the ship was struck and maintained his characteristic calm as chaos erupted around him. As has been frequently recounted, the legendary producer's last words were, reportedly, 'Why fear death? It is the most beautiful thing in life'—an inadvertent misquotation of his beloved *Peter Pan*.[24] A friend and *Lusitania* survivor, actress Rita Jolivet, recalled that when the punishing wave crashed over the side of the listing ship, 'He was smiling'. His good nature, it seems, was truly unshakeable.

In one of several memorial tributes circulated in the national press, it was said that Frohman 'transformed the careless and heedless thespians of old into practical folk'.[25] The sheer output of his transcontinental production machine required an ordered sense of professionalism that indeed had been lacking across much, if not all, of the American theatrical landscape. And if, as it has been sometimes accused,[26] Frohman was wont to emphasize the *business* at the expense of the *show*, he deserves substantial credit still for attempting a measured balance of the two at a time when serious managerial attention to *either* was rare. His career was in peak form when he was killed suddenly at the age of 59; had he delayed his voyage—as so many friends urged him to do—there's

no telling what Frohman would have produced next, especially with Sanderson and Kern fixedly in his corner.

If Frohman's life in the theatre was spent for the money alone, his efforts might seem rather unremarkable: despite his many popular successes (and occasional artistic coups) his net estate in America totalled just $451 at the time of his death.[27] But as a boy who wouldn't grow up, the theatre to him remained a place of profound magic, and his greatest joy was sharing its intrigue, its wonder, and its *humanity* with a generation of the finest English-speaking theatrical talent. These performers and writers rose to glory because of his unflagging dedication and promotion. But this was a kind of selfish selflessness. As their stars ascended, Frohman's, tethered to them, did, too.

Once he was asked if, given the chance, he would live life over again as a Broadway producer. Without hesitation he replied, 'If I could be surrounded by the same actors and writers who have made *me*—yes. Otherwise, no.'[28]

Notes

1. Frohman's birth date is often given incorrectly as 16 July 1860, as it is engraved on his tombstone in Ridgewood Cemetery, Queens. According to birth documents, the correct date is 15 July 1856.
2. In the 2004 Miramax film *Finding Neverland*, Dustin Hoffman plays an uncharacteristically grumbling, penny-pinching Charles Frohman, who wears just such a hat; Kelsey Grammer inherited this contorted characterization in his portrayal of Frohman in the film's 2015 Broadway stage musical stage adaptation. Though hardly a documentary, the 1946 MGM feature *Till the Clouds Roll By* presents a considerably less curmudgeonly illustration of Frohman, played by Harry Hayden, in a sensible homburg.
3. This moment, as are many of the incidents cited here, is recalled in Isaac F. Marcosson and Daniel Frohman, *Charles Frohman: Manager and Man* (New York: Harper, 1916).
4. See Kim Marra, 'Birds of a Feather: The Queer Theatrical Empire of Frohman and Adams', in *Strange Duets: Impresarios and Actresses in the American Theatre, 1865–1914* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 77. Dillingham had been married but was then divorced when he and Frohman took up shared residence at Hiddenbrook, and—despite his closeness with Frohman—Dillingham married a second time in 1913. Marra writes, 'It is possible the marriage served as a cover for one or both parties', 87.
5. Marcosson and Frohman, *Charles Frohman*, 154, 156, ibid., 204.
6. 'Frohman Plans New Type of Play', *New York Times*, 12 January 1909, 9; and Marcosson and Frohman, *Charles Frohman*, 261. Italics added.
7. Quoted in Marcosson and Frohman, *Charles Frohman*, 414. Italics added.

8. See Gerald Bordman with Richard Norton, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle*, 4th edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 211), 129.
9. 'The Theatrical Week', *New York Times*, 1 November 1891, 10.
10. 'Three Little Maids', *New York Times*, 2 September 1903, 3.
11. 'Edna May Here in "The School Girl"', *New York Times*, 2 September 1904, 7.
12. In a letter dated 15 April 1905, to his brother Daniel, Frohman gives a rare glimpse into this process: 'I am working steadily on this play [*The Catch of the Season*] for Daly's Theatre New York, [making] changes and trying to add good people and numbers. I don't quite see that I can get as many laughs as we had in *The School Girl* though I am working on it …' Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Correspondence File.
13. See Gerald Bordman, *Jerome Kern: His Life and Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 34.
14. The twentieth-century star system differed from that of the nineteenth century in that the latter depended on touring foreign (usually British) stars. Frohman explained the difference, though, in terms of cultivation: the old stars pulled themselves up, whereas Frohman's stars were forged by him. See Marcosson and Frohman, *Charles Frohman*, 139.
15. John D. Williams, 'Stories of Charles Frohman', *New York Times*, 21 November 1915, 90.
16. Marcosson and Frohman, *Charles Frohman*, 410. Italics added.
17. 'The Dairy Maids' [sic], *New York Times*, 27 August 1907, 7.
18. Marcosson and Frohman, *Charles Frohman*, 280.
19. 'A Trio of Stars Are All the Light', *New York Times*, 25 August 1914, 9.
20. Quoted in Marcosson and Frohman, *Charles Frohman*, 411. Original emphasis.
21. 'Credit Due Kern', *New York Times*, 14 September 1913, 98.
22. Marcosson and Frohman, *Charles Frohman*, 418.
23. Bordman, *Jerome Kern*, 113–14.
24. The final line of Act III as Barrie scripted it is 'To die will be an awfully big adventure.' Jolivet later remembered Frohman's last words as 'Death is only a beautiful adventure.' See 'Frohman Died Smiling', *New York Times*, 3 June 1915, 11.
25. 'Charles Frohman', *New York Times*, 9 May 1915, 32.
26. Brooks Atkinson, for one, characterized Frohman as a 'huckster', charging that, 'his taste in plays was indifferent. He had no intellectual curiosity; there was always a fundamental core of show business in his attitude towards the theater.' See his *Broadway* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 44–5.
27. Ibid., 42. Approximately $11,000 in today's money.
28. Marcosson and Frohman, *Charles Frohman*, 295.

CHAPTER 7

Aggressive, Beleaguered, Commercial, Defiant: Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger

Marlis Schweitzer

Marc Klaw and Abraham Lincoln Erlanger—or Klaw & Erlanger as they were known—were two of the most reviled Broadway managers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As members of the Theatrical Syndicate, a loose assemblage formed in 1896 by six leading managers and booking agents to establish a continuous touring circuit, Klaw & Erlanger effectively controlled theatrical booking throughout the United States and much of Canada. Though many managers appreciated the efficiency offered by the Syndicate, others felt threatened by the reorganization of theatrical booking and objected to Klaw & Erlanger's aggressive business tactics. In 1897, newspaper editor Harrison Grey Fiske and a group of disgruntled actors waged an anti-Syndicate campaign in print and in court, accusing Klaw & Erlanger and their Syndicate associates of unfairly privileging their own touring companies over those of their rivals to the detriment of all theatre artists. Manager rivals likewise accused the Syndicate of 'restraint of trade' and related business crimes. Ultimately, it would take the innovations of the Shubert brothers, another group of savvy, business-minded managers, to break the Syndicate's hold on North American theatrical production.

In addition to running a booking agency, Klaw & Erlanger owned or controlled numerous theatres in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, including the infamous Iroquois Theatre, where over 600 people perished in a horrific (and preventable) fire. The managers' flagship was the New Amsterdam Theatre on 42nd Street in Manhattan, a beautiful art deco playhouse that opened in

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1903 and featured a rooftop theatre made famous by *Ziegfeld Follies* producer Florenz Ziegfeld, as well as a nine-storey office building, out of which Klaw & Erlanger ran their extensive business operations.[1] While Klaw & Erlanger's producing work is less celebrated than that of contemporaries such as Ziegfeld or fellow-Syndicate member Charles Frohman, they nevertheless produced dozens of plays and musical comedies throughout their thirty-one-year partnership; notable examples include *Ben Hur* (1900), *Little Nemo* (1908), *The Pink Lady* (1911), and *Oh, Oh Delphine* (1912).[2] For the purposes of this chapter, however, I will focus primarily on Klaw & Erlanger's work with and through the Theatrical Syndicate.

American theatre history scholarship has not been especially kind to Klaw & Erlanger or the Theatrical Syndicate (hereafter just Syndicate). As Vincent Landro argued in 2001, historians have generally taken a broad anti-Syndicate perspective when writing about the early twentieth-century US theatre, borrowing the bombastic rhetoric of turn-of-the century journalists to characterize the Syndicate as a 'rapacious monopoly under the dictatorship of a small group of vulgar and greedy hucksters whose only interest was money and whose power had a stranglehold over the American stage'.[3] The problem with this narrative, Landro maintains, is that it has kept theatre scholars from fully acknowledging the Syndicate's role in the modernization of US theatre. This tendency to accept and reproduce the indictment of Klaw & Erlanger and other Syndicate members is indicative of a still-lingering anti-commercial bias within theatre studies, a bias informed by classism, xenophobia, and Judaeophobia. As historian Mark Hodin powerfully argues, the seething anti-Semitism that lay beneath much of the anti-Syndicate rhetoric cast commercialism 'as essentially *alien* to the theatrical institution, the distasteful enterprise of pushy outsiders and unassimilated ethnics rather than an activity more foundation to the national stage'.[4]

In recent years, revisionist historians including Landro, Hodin, David Savran, Peter A. Davis, and Tracy C. Davis have challenged the anti-commercial bias in theatre scholarship, emphasizing the value of attending to economics and the practicalities of business decisions.[5] As Davis remarks in her landmark 2001 study, *The Economics of the British Stage*, 'If culture's historians ignore business, they overlook the resources that make or break an artist's choice.'[6] Inspired by this revisionist scholarship, this chapter details how Klaw & Erlanger shaped the development of the American theatre industry at the turn of the twentieth century, and therefore influenced the production and circulation of musical theatre.

Abraham Lincoln Erlanger (1860–1930) lived a life in the theatre. At a young age, he worked as an 'opera glass' boy and usher at Cleveland's Academy of Music before becoming a ticket seller and eventually a treasurer for the Euclid Avenue Opera House.[7] Looking for greater adventure, he took a job as a travelling advance man for touring productions such as Joseph Jefferson's *Rip Van Winkle*, a job that required him to travel ahead of the production to arrange advertising, playbills, tickets, and other production details.[8]

Marc Klaw (1858–1936) was born in Paducah, Kentucky on 29 May 1858 and began his career as a lawyer in Louisville, Kentucky. While setting up his practice, he also worked as a journalist and critic for several Louisville papers and performed with the amateur theatre company, the May Club.[9] In 1881, theatre manager Gus Frohman (brother of Daniel and Charles Frohman) hired Klaw to track down the pirates who were illegally producing Steele MacKaye's hit play *Hazel Kirke*.[10] The experience was transformative and Klaw soon abandoned his law career to dedicate himself fully to life as a showman. Although he had to learn quickly about the profession, his law education and writing skills gave him a considerable advantage over his less-educated peers, which he later put to good use as the official spokesperson for the Syndicate.

According to stage legend, Klaw first met Erlanger in a small Texan town (possibly San Antonio) in 1888 when they were both working for touring star Effie Ellsler. The men struck up a friendship and decided to become business partners. Upon returning to New York, they rented an office at 23 East 14th Street out of which they ran a booking agency. Klaw's personality and temperament differed considerably from Erlanger's; where Klaw was 'quiet and keen', Erlanger was 'outspoken and aggressive'.[11] But while such differences destroyed some partnerships, they made Klaw & Erlanger a formidable team.[12]

Like many of their male contemporaries, Klaw & Erlanger (especially Erlanger) modelled themselves after Napoleon. As cultural historian Jackson Lears details, the popularity of the Napoleonic model of masculinity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century coincided with anxiety that the intensity of modern life was having a disastrous effect on the psychological and physical health of American men. To counter fears of 'overcivilization' and feminized weakness, men of industry surrounded themselves with images and objects associated with the fiercely militaristic French Emperor, seeing in him an 'alternative[s] to modern softness'.[13] Like many of his peers, including fellow managers David Belasco and Charles Frohman, Erlanger was an avid collector of Napoleonic materials, 'manuscripts, books, engravings, and prints appertaining to the First Empire', which he showcased in domestic and professional settings.[14] In 1914, fellow manager Augustus Pitou recalled that Erlanger's was the largest collection in the United States 'if not the largest collection extant'. 'I doubt there is any man better informed than he is of First Empire and the history of France that led up to and followed it', Pitou claimed.[15] Napoleon thus haunted the lives, careers, and working spaces of Broadway's leading managers. Indeed, the press often referred to the short-statured Erlanger as a 'Little Napoleon'.[16] Little wonder, then, that these men were driven to establish empires of their own.

The Syndicate arose from a lunch meeting at New York's Holland House in February 1896. Concerned about the theatre's future following the Panic of 1893 and frustrated by the inefficiencies they observed in the current booking system, the six men in attendance began to discuss an alternative. They were well positioned to do so. By 1896, Marc Klaw and A. L. Erlanger owned numerous first-class theatres throughout the United States and coordinated

the booking of another 200 theatres in the south-west. Charles Frohman and his business partner Al Hayman likewise owned several first-class theatres in New York City and ran a booking agency in the west that did business with 300 theatres. Based in Philadelphia, Frederick Zimmerman and Samuel Nirdlander (Nixon) owned or controlled most of the major theatres along the mid-Atlantic coast. Over lunch, the men agreed that they would pool sixteen theatres that they either owned or leased along with seventeen independently managed theatres that held exclusive agreements with Klaw & Erlanger. These thirty-three first-class theatres, located in major cities throughout the country, formed the beginning of a national theatre chain. In the years that followed, the Syndicate members brought more theatres into the circuit, either through ownership, leasing, or a business arrangement, one for every stop on the existing touring circuit.[17] Managers who cooperated with the Syndicate reaped the benefits of the growing theatre chain. In 1908 manager Henry W. Savage launched not one but *two* road companies of his vastly popular production of *The Merry Widow*, a Viennese operetta that ran for 416 performances in Klaw & Erlanger's New Amsterdam Theatre and sparked a fad for Viennese operetta that would last until 1914.[18] Of course, Klaw & Erlanger also profited from the operetta's success, collecting a percentage of the box office receipts for both the New York production and Savage's many road companies.

In April 1909, as *The Merry Widow* continued to tour North America, *The Saturday Evening Post* published an article detailing the advantages of the Syndicate. Written by Marc Klaw to address the Syndicate's critics, the article offered a brief anecdote to illustrate the superior efficiency of its booking system:

> Shortly before Sir Henry Irving's last trip to America, Mr. Bram Stoker, his business manager, came to New York from London on a fast liner to arrange the American tour. Mr. Stoker arrived in New York on Saturday, came to the offices of Klaw & [Abraham] Erlanger that afternoon, and returned to England on the following Wednesday's steamer, bearing with him contracts signed and sealed for a thirty weeks' tour on this side. To the Englishman, accustomed to his deliberate system of booking a tour in the provinces, the rapidity with which the tour was arranged, together with all the details of the contracts, was almost incomprehensible.[19]

Klaw's anecdote is notable for several reasons. First, as mentioned above, it offers a strong defence of the Syndicate's booking methods. Where once booking a thirty-week tour had required lengthy negotiations with smaller booking offices scattered throughout North America, now an entire continental tour could be arranged in a matter of days thanks to the centralization of all booking in Klaw & Erlanger's New Amsterdam Theatre offices. Moreover, thanks to the Syndicate's binding contracts, managers like Irving or Savage could confidently begin a tour knowing that the arrangements they had made with local managers would be upheld. Likewise, local managers who had travelled long

distances to New York to book touring productions for the upcoming season could trust that the productions would arrive on time as promised.

Second, Klaw's anecdote highlights the Syndicate's close relationship with British actor managers and their agents, specifically Klaw & Erlanger's ties to the celebrated actor Sir Henry Irving and his business manager, Bram Stoker. Stoker's apparent surprise at the speed of the booking process offers a powerful endorsement of Klaw & Erlanger's services. It also foregrounds the interconnectedness of European and North American theatrical networks, reminding the *Post*'s readers that American access to stars such as Irving or the latest musical comedies or operettas from London, Paris, or Berlin, hinged on the Syndicate's efficiencies. For as much as Henry W. Savage used extensive advertising to remind audiences that *he* was responsible for bringing *The Merry Widow* to North America, his touring productions would have faltered without the Syndicate's booking system. Klaw & Erlanger thus directly facilitated the geographic circulation of Viennese operetta, and in so doing, indirectly encouraged other writers and composers to think Viennese. Of course, Klaw & Erlanger also tried their hand at producing operettas and musical comedies in this period, scoring a major success in 1911 with *The Pink Lady*, an English-language musical comedy inspired by the French farce *Le Sartyre*.[20]

Third, the anecdote's appearance in the pages of one of the nation's most widely read magazines demonstrates both the pervasiveness of early twentieth-century theatre culture and the importance of print media to the industry leaders. For Marc Klaw and the other members of the Syndicate, mass circulation newspapers and magazines like the *Post* were critical tools for shaping public opinion, countering rivals' claims, and developing what we would today describe as 'brand identity'.

In fact, the *Post* article was one of several lengthy articles written by Klaw in defence of the Theatrical Syndicate. In 1904, he published 'The Theatrical Syndicate: The Other Side' in *Cosmopolitan*, another popular magazine with a circulation over 356,000.[21] Writing for an educated readership, but one not necessarily acquainted with the business of theatre, Klaw addressed accusations of 'commercialism' by reminding readers that since the 'theater in the United States is not a public institution', it therefore required private capital. While some claimed that the Syndicate dictated to the public, Klaw insisted that the theatre 'is governed by the rules and observances of all other commercial enterprises. It is not out to dictate to public taste. It is out to satisfy the public demand.'[22] In other words, the theatre was like the department store: customers came first. Klaw concluded the piece by once again outlining the efficiencies of the Syndicate's booking system: 'The theatrical syndicate has brought order out of chaos, legitimate profit out of ruinous rivalry.'[23] In Klaw's estimation, the system offered by the Syndicate was superior to the chaos of the previous system and any charges of commercialism failed to recognize that the American theatre was exactly that: a commercial enterprise.

Klaw's defence of the Syndicate attempted to reverse the equation between commercialism and artistic depravity that newspaper editors, critics, and other

Syndicate opponents perpetuated in print. In 1905 theatre critic William Winter complained about the emergence of 'the Department Store Theatre', which 'represents nothing but the fang of commercialism and the pot-banger of vulgar traffic'.[24] Other critics framed the fight against the Syndicate in pseudo-religious terms. In 1897, Harrison Grey Fiske, editor of the *New York Dramatic Mirror* and husband to star actress Minnie Maddern Fiske, urged readers to join him in a campaign against the 'smut and manipulators of unsavory merchandise'. Comparing this fight to a religious crusade, Fiske insisted that 'The salvation of the American theater lies in two things: The vigorous seed of rebellion that has been sown by the disinterested leaders of this crusade: the splendid missionary work of the press, and the internal weakness and rottenness of the unholy combination.'[25] Other critics went even further in their anti-Semitic rhetoric, venting their disgust at the 'usurpers of power, the Shylocks and the vampires who are at the throat of the theatrical world in this country'.[26] Newspaper caricaturists echoed this anti-Semitism in cartoon illustrations, representing the Jewish managers (five out of the six members of the Syndicate were Jewish) with grotesque physical features—large hooked noses, protruding stomachs.[27] Such Judaeophobic responses not only shaped the way the American public saw the members of the Syndicate but also, as noted earlier, influenced subsequent generations of theatre historians.

This is not to suggest that all attacks on the Syndicate were unfounded. Few could deny that the Syndicate's booking system was superior to the older, more haphazard system, which required local managers to travel yearly to New York in the quest for new productions. But many objected to its size and tactics. By 1909, the Syndicate either directly owned or had a controlling interest in at least 500 theatres across North America, most of them first-class theatres in prominent locations. With such an extensive network under their control, the Syndicate insisted that anyone who booked with them had to play in Syndicate-controlled theatres; they likewise demanded that any local manager who wished to use the Syndicate's services could *only* book attractions with them. The Syndicate's rivals objected to what they saw as its unscrupulous business practices, claiming that those who fell into disfavour with the Syndicate were rewarded with poor routing that required companies to travel long distances between stops, while those who refused to book with the Syndicate found themselves shut out of most first-class theatres in North America with little option but to play in second-rate houses or alternative venues.[28] In 1898 a group of actors led by Minnie Maddern Fiske and Nat Goodwin briefly revolted against the Syndicate, taking control of their own booking, but they discovered to their dismay that audiences would not follow them to the second- or third-rate venues they had booked.

The Syndicate's detractors further argued that by controlling theatrical booking throughout North America the Syndicate also determined the kind of theatre audiences saw. Although the Syndicate itself was not a producing organization, its members were. Not surprisingly, then, the shows produced by Klaw & Erlanger or Charles Frohman often received the best touring schedules

and enjoyed access to the choicest first-class venues. In 1907, a group of disgruntled theatre managers led by David Belasco and Lee Shubert filed a lawsuit against the Syndicate, accusing them of criminal conspiracy and restraint of trade. They argued that the Syndicate was a trust comparable to the oil trust or the ice trust and therefore illegal. After hearing the managers' testimony, the New York State grand jury came back with a decision indicting all six members of the Syndicate. But in June, Judge Otto Rosalsky overturned the grand jury decision. Referencing the 1899 New York State law, the judge observed that, 'In light of the lexicographer's definition of trade, commerce, play, entertainment, and theatres, it seems to me that plays and entertainments of the stage are not articles of or useful commodities of common use [i.e. a hairbrush, a pair of shoes], and that the business of owning, leasing, and controlling theatres is not trade, and that, therefore, the defendants did not commit acts injurious to trade or commerce.'[29] Rosalsky further commented that despite their complaints, neither Belasco nor Shubert seemed to have suffered much at the hands of the Syndicate. In fact, '[they] were actually able to and were owning and controlling many theatres' of their own, and in the case of the Shuberts, even ran their own rival booking agency. Unconvinced that the Syndicate had illegally restrained trade, Rosalsky dismissed the indictments against its members and 'virtually sustain[ed]' the defence claim that the complainants had been motivated by spite.[30]

Rosalsky's decision brought an end to certain attacks against the Syndicate (at least for a while). Emboldened by the dismissal, Klaw & Erlanger entertained plans to establish a world syndicate in vaudeville, much to the surprise and dismay of many of their opponents. This foray into vaudeville was brief—shortened by financial fallout from the Panic of 1907 and aggressive competition from the United Booking Office (UBO), vaudeville's Syndicate equivalent—yet it also had several lasting effects on the US theatre industry. As I detail more fully elsewhere, Klaw & Erlanger's vaudeville bid brought hundreds of European performers to the United States—dancers, singers, circus artists—many of whom remained to perform in vaudeville, musical comedy, and revue. Moreover, since Klaw & Erlanger had been willing to offer large salaries to performers as an inducement to cross the Atlantic, top acts could now demand much higher rates from the UBO or other managers. But since the salary increase did not trickle down to established or emerging performers, it inadvertently fuelled labour activism among vaudeville artists, who demanded better compensation for their talents.[31]

As theatre managers, booking agents, and members of the Syndicate, Klaw & Erlanger had a long-lasting effect on the development of US theatre from the mid-1890s to the end of the First World War. Ultimately, however, the Syndicate could not compete with the much nimbler organization led by Sam, Lee, and Jacob Shubert, three brothers from Syracuse, New York, who quickly established a chain to rival that controlled by the Syndicate. (See Chap. 8.) Whereas the Syndicate functioned as a loose conglomerate of interested parties who retained their individual interests and therefore did not share any long-term

goals, the Shuberts organized their business as a formal corporation. In cities where the Syndicate controlled the first-class theatre, the Shuberts set about building rival theatres, driving a huge theatrical building boom. Most significantly, the Shuberts adopted an 'open door' policy to theatrical booking, meaning that they welcomed non-Shubert productions into their theatres and similarly invited independent theatres to host Shubert productions in theirs. Although the Syndicate continued to maintain a strong grip on theatrical booking into the 1910s, the Shubert alternative was appealing to many.[32]

By 1916, the Syndicate could no longer contend with the Shuberts and it was formally dissolved. Klaw & Erlanger remained partners for another three years, running their booking agency and managing several productions, but ultimately parted ways in 1919. Following the dissolution of Klaw & Erlanger, Marc Klaw continued to work as a producer for several years before retiring in 1927. He died in 1936 at his home in Sussex, England, following a heart attack, at the age of 78.[33] For his part, Abe Erlanger maintained ownership of many theatres throughout the United States. When he died in 1930 at the age of 69, the *New York Times* estimated that 'he had amassed a fortune between $50,000,000 and $75,000,000 in the theatrical field'.[34] Despite these later successes, neither man achieved individually what Klaw & Erlanger had accomplished together. The powerhouse duo remade the landscape of commercial American theatre with their systematized booking system and their fierce belief that theatre *was* a business.

Notes

1. See Mary C. Henderson, *The New Amsterdam: The Biography of a Broadway Theatre* (New York: Hyperion/Disney Enterprises, 1997).
2. For a full list of Klaw & Erlanger's producing credits, see their entry in the Internet Broadway Database, http://ibdb.com/person.php?id=24393, accessed 17 January 2015.
3. Vincent Landro, 'Media Mania: The Demonizing of the Theatrical Syndicate', *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 13, no. 2 (2001): 23–50, at 23.
4. Mark Hodin, 'The Disavowal of Ethnicity: Legitimate Theatre and the Social Construction of Literary Value in Turn-of-the-Century America', *Theatre Journal* 52 (2000), 219. An important exception is Monroe Lippman's 'The Effect of the Theatrical Syndicate on Theatrical Art in America', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (April 1940): 275–82. One of the most influential accounts of the Syndicate comes from Alfred L. Bernheim's *The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750–1932* (1966; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968).
5. My own scholarship has also sought to look past the demonization of the Syndicate to consider the larger contributions of its members to theatrical production in North America and beyond. See *When*

Broadway Was the Runway: Theater, Fashion, and American Culture (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), and *Transatlantic Broadway: The Infrastructural Politics of Global Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

6. Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2; David Savran, *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Peter A. Davis, 'The Syndicate/Shubert War', in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), 147–57.
7. 'A. L. Erlanger Dies After Long Illness', *New York Times*, 8 March 1930; Henderson, *The New Amsterdam*, 54.
8. Henderson, *The New Amsterdam*, 54. For more detailed biographies of Klaw and Erlanger, see John Tenney, 'Marc Klaw', in *Immigrant Entrepreneurship: German-American Business Biographies, 1720 to the Present*, vol. 4, ed. Jeffrey Fear (German Historical Institute). Last modified 19 March 2014, http://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=178, accessed 15 January 2015.
9. Tenney, 'Marc Klaw'.
10. Henderson, *The New Amsterdam*, 54.
11. 'Marc Klaw Dies in England at 78', *New York Times*, 15 June 1936, 21; Henderson, *The New Amsterdam*, 54–5.
12. Henderson, *The New Amsterdam*, 54–5. These differences manifested themselves in appearance as well, with the tall, thin Klaw offering a striking visual counterpoint to Erlanger's short, large presence.
13. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 113.
14. Augustus Pitou, *Masters of the Show: As Seen in Retrospection By One Who Has Been Associated with the American Stage for Nearly Fifty Years* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1914), 138.
15. Ibid., 138.
16. Henderson, *The New Amsterdam*, 56.
17. Isaac F. Marcosson and Daniel Frohman, *Charles Frohman: Manager and Man* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1916), 186; Mark [sic] Klaw, 'The Theatrical Syndicate's Reply to Its Critics', *New York Times*, 16 March 1905, 36.
18. 'Merry Widow Making a Million', *New York Times*, 28 December 1907, 7. On the craze for Viennese operettas see Gerald Martin Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [1978]), 271–344.
19. Marc Klaw, 'The Theatrical Syndicate From the Inside—The Story of Its Growth and Profits', *The Saturday Evening Post*, 3 April 1909, 3.

20. William Everett, 'Musical of the Month: A History of *The Pink Lady*', Musical of the Month, New York Public Library, 8 May 2012, http://www.nypl.org/blog/2012/05/08/musical-month-history-pink-lady, accessed 29 August 2015.
21. James Lander, 'Magazines, News', in *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, ed. Stephen J. Vaughn (New York: Routledge, 2007), 284–7, at 285.
22. Klaw, 'The Theatrical Syndicate', 200.
23. Ibid., 199.
24. 'The Department Store Theatre', *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 17 June 1905, 10.
25. 'The Usher', *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 29 January 1898, 3.
26. 'It Makes the Blood Boil', *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 11 December 1897, 2.
27. Landro's article includes a number of these illustrations.
28. Bernheim's and Jack Poggi's studies offer a thorough analysis of the Syndicate's activities. Bernheim, *The Business*, and Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870–1967* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968 [1966]). See also John Frick, 'A Changing Theatre: New York and Beyond', in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, vol. 2, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
29. 'Theatrical Trust a Legal Combine', *New York Times*, 20 June 1907, 7.
30. Ibid. For more on how the threat of indictment led Klaw & Erlanger to make a bid for vaudeville, see Marlis Schweitzer, 'A Failed Attempt at World Domination: "Advanced Vaudeville", Financial Panic, and the Dream of a World Trust', *Theatre History Studies* 32 (2012): 53–79.
31. Schweitzer, 'A Failed Attempt', 70–2.
32. Davis, 'The Syndicate/Shubert War', 147–57.
33. 'Marc Klaw Dies in England at 78', 21.
34. 'A. L. Erlanger Dies', 1.

CHAPTER 8

Did the Shuberts Save Broadway? The Corporate Producers

Anthony Vickery

For a period of thirty years from the 1920s through the 1950s, the Shuberts were Broadway. There were originally three Shubert brothers: Lee (1873?–1953), Samuel S. (1876?–1905), and Jacob J. or J.J. (1878?–1963). While they did not drive innovation in the production of plays or musicals, they provided the theatres and resources—human and financial—that allowed the art form to flourish. In their drive to acquire theatres and property to build theatres in New York City, they pushed the Broadway theatre district to its present location in the area around Times Square.

Their active producing career lasted from their earliest days in New York in the late 1890s through Sam's early death in 1905 to the Wall Street Crash of 1929. During their first thirty years of operation they had to engage in a considerable amount of production to fill the theatres they acquired. After 1929, their production activities declined, for the two remaining Shubert brothers as well as John Shubert (1908–62), J.J.'s son and heir, did not engage in a significant amount of production. In the 1920s, the 'Messrs. Shubert (Lee and J.J.)', the Shuberts, or Lee Shubert alone produced 201 new plays, operettas, musicals, and revivals. In the 1930s, this number dropped to ninety-four and by the 1940s had declined to thirty-two. For the 1930s and 1940s, many of these productions were revivals of past successes that continued to tour, especially their operettas *The Student Prince* and *Blossom Time*.[1] In fact, one of the key Shubert production strategies was to quickly duplicate their successful shows and send them out on the road while the property was hot and

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then to retain the physical assets of the shows in warehouses to send out in the future or rent to other producers. While their productions did not change the way Broadway plays and musicals were produced, they exploited the invention of others and engaged in the proliferation of musical and dramatic successes across the United States and Canada.

Their true area of innovation came through organizing their business activities along the corporate model in order to control their operations. The crowning achievement of their organizational innovation was the creation of the first publicly listed live-theatre corporation in 1924, a time when both Broadway and America were booming. In the wake of the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the Depression that followed, theatres began to close as live performance venues and were in danger of being disposed of to non-theatrical interests. The Shuberts' business itself slipped into receivership, and while they desperately tried to restructure it, no solution could be arrived at to save the publicly listed Shubert Corporation, which had not yet completed its tenth year in business. Lee Shubert purchased the assets of the bankrupt Shubert Corporation, once again taking the Shubert empire private and preserving the majority of the properties that make up the Broadway district today as theatres. For the rest of their lives, J.J. and Lee would create few self-generated productions. They would invest in shows created by others and were content to own the majority of the theatres on Broadway. In the span of just under ten years (1924–33), the Shuberts' company shifted from a private, closely held company to a publicly listed, widely held corporation and back again to a private, closely held entity.

The Shubert vision (as a result of competition with the Syndicate) to centre their operations around Times Square and leave their name on the foundation and organization that operate today (see Chap. 29) provides their strongest legacy. Garson Kanin sums up the Shubert contribution:

> He [Lee specifically] held the theatre together, not only in New York but on the road, where he bought failing theatres for a song. It wouldn't have occurred to him to convert his theatres to other uses, even for a profit. Inherent in his makeup he was a shrewd businessman but he also had a genuine love of theatre as an institution, not only as a business. Lee Shubert was stagestruck, and the proof of it is the way he persevered during the receivership period, when he had every inducement to throw his hands up and dismantle the business.[2]

Lee Shubert also knew how much money was at stake during the receivership and likely became much more wealthy after the reorganization, but the product of his actions, whether intended or not, was to save the Broadway district in its present location and retain much of its form.

By using the corporate model, the Shuberts created the circumstances that allowed their companies to flourish and for the family name to live on Broadway long after the last Shubert left the organization. The Shubert companies would go through many changes over the years and their name would occasionally be dropped from the masthead (see below for the reorganization in 1933 as Select

Theatres), but either informally in the industry or the press or in the formal titles of the companies, the Shubert name would not disappear from Broadway.

Early Operations to 1905

The Shubert family arrived in the United States in 1881. Moving to Syracuse in upstate New York in 1882, father David was often unemployed.[3] The three boys had to enter the work world early on to help support the family. After a few odd jobs, Sam became involved with the Wieting Theatre in Syracuse, rising fairly quickly to become the assistant box office treasurer. The other two brothers followed Sam into the theatre business in entry-level positions. Sam's first coup as a producer happened when he gained the road rights to Charles Hoyt's *A Texas Steer* (1890) in 1894. Shortly after acquiring *A Texas Steer*, Sam added the road rights to Hoyt's *A Stranger in New York* (1897) and Hugh Morton and Gustave Kerker's *The Belle of New York* (1897). The tours of these companies were profitable and gave the Shubert brothers their first taste of success in the theatre business. For this tour, Sam had to get bookings via the Syndicate[4] and the offices of Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger—the partnership that would provide their strongest opposition during their rise to power in the first decade of the twentieth century (see Chap. 7). Building on the success of the road companies, the brothers began to develop their empire in upstate New York. In quick succession they acquired control of the Bastable Theatre and the Grand Opera House in Syracuse, the Cook Opera House in Rochester, and the Rand Opera House in Troy.

In 1900, Sam and Lee made their way to New York City while J.J. stayed upstate to look after their out-of-town operations. Sam at this point was unquestionably the leader of the Shubert business with Lee as his lieutenant. The first theatre lease they acquired in New York City was for the Herald Square Theatre on Broadway at 35th Street.[5] The brothers themselves did not have the personal funds to effect the expansion of their activities and had to rely on backers from outside the theatre; in this early period the businessmen Jesse Oberdorfer and Joseph W. Jacobs (who would work for many years as a Shubert executive) were essential to the enterprise. (During the periods that their corporations were privately held, the Shuberts proved adept at securing outside funds while maintaining personal control over their companies.) Until 1905, the Shuberts had to cooperate with the Syndicate by booking their productions into the Herald Square Theatre.[6] In addition to the Syndicate productions, though, the Shuberts produced their own shows, including the fabulously successful *A Chinese Honeymoon* (1902), which ran at their newly acquired Casino Theatre. The productions the Shuberts mounted during this early period were mostly comedy–farces, many of which included interpolated songs. This was the case for *A Chinese Honeymoon*, an import that had enjoyed a 1,000 performance run in London about the adventures of Simon Pineapple and his new bride in China (including an incognito emperor evoking memories of *The Mikado*, with which it was compared in the London press).[7]

In 1905, tragedy struck the fledgling business. Sam Shubert was killed in a railway accident while travelling to Pittsburgh to deal with the lease of the Duquesne Theatre.[8] Sam's death nearly ended the Shuberts' rise as the brothers were rumoured to be considering selling out to the Syndicate.[9] However, in the wake of Sam's death, J.J. moved to New York and became Lee's lieutenant and the Shuberts engaged in a programme of expansion.[10]

Sam S. and Lee Shubert, Incorporated and the Shubert Theatrical Company

Throughout their existence as Broadway producers and theatre owners, the Shuberts employed the corporate form to great advantage. In 1905, they created the first of their theatrical corporations, Sam S. and Lee Shubert, Incorporated, which was formed on 1 September, some four months after Sam's death. It was initially capitalized at $1,400,000 divided into $1,000,000 of common stock, consisting of 10,000 shares at a par value of $100, and $400,000 of preferred stock, consisting of 4,000 shares also at a par value of $100. The purpose of the corporation covers just over two pages in the articles of incorporation and allows the company great latitude in choosing activities. Included are the following statements about what they intended to do:

> To encourage and cultivate a taste for musical and dramatic art in the United States and elsewhere; to erect, purchase, lease, own, hold and maintain theatres, opera-houses and similar places of amusement and office buildings in connection therewith …
>
> To acquire, manage, direct or produce in the United States or elsewhere operas, dramas, stage plays, operettas, burlesques, vaudevilles, ballets, pantomimes, spectacular pieces, promenade and other concerts and other musical and dramatic performances and entertainments; to employ composers, librettists, playwrights, dramatists, singers, musicians, actors …
>
> To acquire, own, hold and dispose of plays, copyrights and dramatic and musical productions …
>
> To acquire all necessary costumes, scenery, properties, musical and dramatic libraries …
>
> To establish, acquire, maintain, manage, direct and develop booking agencies for the production and presentation of dramatic and operatic performances …[11]

In practice, Sam S. and Lee Shubert, Incorporated, held the theatres that the Shuberts themselves owned.

On 5 October 1905, only a month after founding Sam S. and Lee Shubert, Incorporated, the brothers founded the Shubert Theatrical Company. The initial capitalization of the company was $300,000 divided into 3,000 shares with

a par value of $100.[12] The most important subsidiary of the Shubert Theatrical Company was the Sam S. Shubert Booking Agency, which did all the bookings for the brothers. Shubert Theatrical Company productions played in Sam S. and Lee Shubert theatres. The two companies were likely kept separate by the brothers because Sam S. and Lee Shubert for the most part owned real estate assets and leases on theatres and therefore had a steady income stream while the Shubert Theatrical Company operated the productions and therefore had a more volatile income stream. Occasionally the brothers would form a combination company, but it would be 'sold' to the Shubert Theatrical Company.

At the same time the Shuberts were creating their first corporations, they also signed agreements with backers who had deeper pockets than Jacobs and Oberdorfer. In October 1905, the Shuberts announced a partnership between themselves and George B. Cox and Joseph L. Rhinock.[13] Cox was the Republican 'boss' of the city of Cincinnati, Ohio. While some of the money he used to form the partnership may have had dubious origins, it was readily available. Cox, in the early phase of the partnership, was always represented by Max C. Anderson. Rhinock was a member of Congress from Kentucky who was heavily involved in racetrack ownership and real estate speculation. Rhinock would be involved in real estate and theatre construction in cooperation with the brothers, while the two Shuberts would exclusively control the producing side of the operation.

In order to build theatres, the Shuberts would form a new company, either a corporation or limited partnership, to oversee the construction of the theatre and its operation once built. When the building company was formed, it would immediately sign a contract with the Sam S. Shubert Booking Agency to cover all bookings. All the stock in these theatre companies and ventures was held partly by their external partners and partly by either the Shubert Theatrical Company or Sam S. and Lee Shubert, Incorporated.

In this early era (prior to 1910), the Shuberts were very active producers. To expand their circuit, in addition to building theatres of their own in major centres, they engaged in creating booking contracts with other theatre owners. A theatre owner booking with the Shuberts had to be assured that they would receive a steady stream of productions to fill their theatre. For example, their profit and loss statements from the 1908–1909 season list twenty-one different Shubert-owned productions including three versions of the comedy *Girls* and two versions each of the murder mystery *The Witching Hour*, the standard melodrama *The Wolf*, and the comedy *The Blue Mouse*. The rest of their roster was made up of stars such as De Wolf Hopper, Lulu Glaser, and Eddie Foy and single companies of productions such as the operetta *Marcelle* or the comedy *The Road to Yesterday*.[14] According to Bernheim, the Shuberts had announced they would have sixty productions on the road in the 1909–1910 season of their own and forty from allied producers.[15] The Shubert brothers were never known for their innovative productions. An examination of their play listings from any particular season would show a great deal of duplication, just as in the 1908–1909 season.

As the number of theatres on the road increased, the number of productions the Shuberts (or the Syndicate) had to mount each season also increased. The answer to supply this need was the duplication of companies. When the Shuberts created a successful production, they immediately duplicated it up to four times to allow it to play multiple parts of the United States simultaneously. Since any given road company could only present performances in a single part of the country during a season (due to travel constraints), duplicate companies of a play would allow the Shuberts to cover all of the United States and Canada in a single season. The practice of duplication would allow the Shuberts to get a particular play in front of audiences in all sizes of markets much more quickly than they could through a single touring company. Of course, the practice of creating duplicate companies would be limited to plays without stars. Getting a company in front of an audience on the road quickly would lend more credence to the oft-used 'direct from New York' advertising copy, but more importantly would capitalize on any positive press coming from the main urban market of New York.

There were potential negative aspects to duplication of companies, however. Press reports would refer to the original Broadway cast, but audiences on the road would often see performers of much lower quality—especially if this was a third or fourth copy of the production, which tended to play smaller cities and towns. While scenery or lighting effects could be duplicated faithfully from one company to the next, there was a relatively limited pool of talented actors to cast in productions. The best actors did not want to spend a great deal of time on the road and especially did not want to spend long periods playing one-night-stands in the less-populated parts of the country. The duplication of companies and the resistance of the very best actors to touring meant that the standard of talent declined as more theatres were added to road circuits.

The history of the Shubert companies entered a new phase with the large-scale defection of former Syndicate allies to their side in 1910, marking the beginning of the end for the Syndicate. Up to 1910, the Shuberts had engaged in a successful publicity campaign promoting their concept of the 'Open Door'. They stated that they would book any act that applied for time even if it booked Shubert theatres in one city and another owner's theatres in another.[16] Between this positive publicity and the growing Shubert circuit (which by 1910 was composed of seventy theatres[17]), many of the larger circuits outside of New York, including John Cort's extensive Northwestern Theatrical Association and other circuits totalling approximately 1,200 theatres, left the Syndicate and began booking with the Shuberts.[18] These circuits were mostly composed of one-night-stand theatres, which provided the critical links between larger cities that in turn cut down on costly long-distance jumps—it was more cost effective to stop and play one night in a smaller venue than to spend the time travelling and not performing.[19]

The Shubert Theatrical Company of New Jersey

The Shuberts once again reorganized their companies in 1911 when they folded the Shubert Theatrical Company of New York (established in 1905) into the Shubert Theatrical Company of New Jersey. The articles of incorporation for the 1911 company were published in a booklet of over one hundred pages.[20] While its purpose stayed the same as its predecessor, the new corporation took control of a number of sub-leases and subsidiary companies that did not exist at the time of the original founding. Among the assets of the new corporation were stock holdings in fourteen other companies, including the Sam S. Shubert Booking Agency, five producing organizations, eight theatre maintenance companies, and one import company. The Theatrical Company and its subsidiaries also controlled the leases of sixty-eight theatres as well as seventy-two fully equipped road companies and 106 contracts with composers and authors for specific scripts and scores. The company also held contracts for over twenty-six named stars of some stature.

After the 1911 reorganization and in order to build more theatres in New York, the Shuberts began acquiring land north of 42nd Street. The farthest uptown they expanded was the corner of 50th Street and Broadway where they converted a horse exchange building into the Winter Garden Theatre. With the exception of the Lyric Theatre on 42nd Street, the majority of their theatres were between 44th and 50th, with the famous Shubert Alley running between the Booth and Shubert Theatres connecting 44th and 45th streets and providing a geographical centre to the Shubert empire. The Shuberts or allied interests did much of the construction in this area in the decade between 1913 and 1923.[21]

At the same time as the First World War, the Shuberts began to shift their attention more fully to Broadway as profits on the road declined. Several competitors to first-class legitimate theatre exacerbated the decline. The most obvious is cinema, which provided a spectacular form of entertainment at a lower admission cost. However, the rise of radio and the use of the automobile as entertainment also contributed to the decline, especially of the one-night cities.[22] The producers themselves were also responsible for the decline of the road by over-competition. Because the Shuberts and the Syndicate both had to have theatres in a city in order to compete, they both had to provide productions to fill those theatres. The proliferation of road productions, as mentioned above, caused great dissatisfaction among audience members because of their questionable quality, so road audiences often took up lower-cost alternatives instead of paying higher prices for an inferior theatrical product.

To acquire plays and musicals for their theatres, the Shuberts often looked to Europe. The production of *The Blue Mouse* mentioned above was acquired through their full-time European agent Gustav Amberg, who regularly submitted reports to the Shuberts on plays being performed in Europe. In the case of *The Blue Mouse*, the original script was given to Clyde Fitch for reworking, and a financially successful adaptation toured for multiple years.

The Shubert brothers themselves regularly travelled to Great Britain to acquire material from British authors.

The Shuberts, meanwhile, were beginning to be known for their revues. J.J.'s early revues were clearly modelled on Florenz Ziegfeld's *Follies*. The first Shubert-produced revue was *The Passing Show* (1912), and the Shuberts continued to produce annual versions until 1924.[23] *The Passing Show* initially differed from the *Follies* by including burlesques (parodies) of current Broadway hits.[24] J.J.'s later revues were inspired by George White's *Scandals* and Earl Carroll's *Vanities* and incorporated more racy subject matter. The second great series of Shubert revues was *Artists and Models*, first produced in 1923. Brooks McNamara sums up the approach of *Artists and Models* as 'light on costuming and even lighter on content'.[25] The Shuberts also created other revues such as *The Century Revue* or *Midnight Rounders* to fill their various venues, which included cabarets and rooftop gardens.[26]

In addition to revue, the Shuberts also specialized in producing sumptuous operettas. For this genre, they were following in the footsteps of the popular operetta *The Merry Widow* and Viennese operetta in general, which predated their most beloved productions of the teens and twenties. The 1920s saw two of their most successful operettas, *Blossom Time* (1921, adapted by Dorothy Donnelly and Sigmund Romberg from a European original) and *The Student Prince* (1924, adapted by Donnelly and Romberg from the Shubert-owned play *Old Heidelberg*, which was adapted from a European source and produced by the Shuberts in 1902).[27] These two productions in particular continued to tour long after their original runs on Broadway. The worn-out production elements from these two shows cemented the poor reputation of road companies (as the Shubert Company was still sending out copies of these productions into the 1940s and later).[28]

The Shubert Theatrical Corporation

The most remarkable capital structure created by the Shuberts was the publicly listed Shubert Theatrical Corporation of 1924. During the first half of the 1920s, the Shubert Theatrical Company was financially very successful; the only Syndicate member still operating was Abraham Erlanger and the Shuberts had come to dominate the theatre. By 1924, Lee Shubert especially had become interested in the idea of taking the Shubert enterprises public and listing them on the New York Stock Exchange. His models for this move were the movie studios that had recently become listed on the stock exchange, especially the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation.[29]

The original capitalization of the Shubert Theatrical Corporation consisted of $4,000,000 of 7 per cent bonds and just under $5,000,000 of capital stock. The stock was divided into 250,000 shares, of which the Shubert brothers themselves held 150,000 shares. The remaining 100,000 shares were divided into two groups. The company for future use held 60,000 shares and the remaining 40,000 were attached to the debentures as stock warrants that

bondholders could exchange for cash or bonds at a future date to acquire common stock. The actual number of shares the Shuberts were releasing in the initial public offering was 30,000 of the 150,000 they personally owned, which the underwriters were selling for $10 per share. At the same time that this first group of shares was offered, underwriters offered the entire $4,000,000 of debentures for sale to the public.[30] The Shuberts would remain the largest shareholder of the new corporation, and the agreement for the formation of the new company required them to maintain a management role for a minimum of twenty years and not engage in any competing business enterprises.

The new corporation handled its ninety-four theatres in major cities in various ways. It either wholly or partially owned ten of them outright. Forty-seven theatres would be controlled either wholly or in part through long-term leases. The company held an interest in the profits of twenty-nine theatres, while a final group of eight theatres was subleased to other operators. Additionally, the new company would hold a significant number of booking contracts (more than 750) with theatres in small stops ('one-night-stands'). Between the theatres in major centres and the booking contracts in smaller locations, the Shuberts had the largest circuit of theatres in the United States. Of the Shubert's ninety-four theatres, thirty were in New York City.[31]

The agreement listed twenty-four wholly owned Shubert productions as well as fifteen other productions in which the Shuberts held a partial share (these included shows either currently playing or planned for the next season). The list of productions reveals that the Shubert practice was still to duplicate successful companies (four companies of *Blossom Time* were listed) and to send previous years' New York successes on the road (such as various versions of *The Passing Show* and *Artists and Models*). The list of producing partners with whom they invested included some of the most prominent names on Broadway at the time, such as A. H. Woods and Richard Herndon. The list of stars the Shuberts had under contract was actually quite limited but did include the extremely famous Al Jolson (who received not only a high weekly salary but also 50 per cent of the net profits of the production in which he appeared).[32]

The new corporation held the extensive stock of scenery, props, and costumes that the Shuberts had acquired over the years, as well as warehouses and other property. William A. Brady (a Shubert partner in some production companies) appraised the Shuberts' physical production elements at $1,750,000.[33] His list, however, included many old sets and costumes of dubious value, a fact that was proven true when almost the entire value of this stock was written off when the company entered receivership. For nearly all Broadway productions, costumes and especially sets were disposed of at the end of the run, as the cost to store them (on the off-chance that they would be used again) was prohibitive. The Shuberts were notorious, though, for keeping every piece of scenery and costume and equipping their road companies with threadbare costumes and shoddy sets. Such production practices showed that the Shuberts wanted to maximize their investments in sets and costumes, even if the productions on

the road looked worn and underlines that profit, not a high artistic reputation, was the ultimate goal of their activities.

Until the 1929 crash, the new Shubert Theatrical Corporation generated profits for its shareholders. The corporation's profits peaked in 1926 at $2.3 million,[34] but declined steadily over the next three years. To further expand their business in 1927, the Shuberts issued new fifteen-year bonds with a total value of $7,500,000 and a 6 per cent coupon rate (these bonds retired the remaining 7 per cent bonds issued at the time of incorporation).[35] The main purpose for this new bond issue was to acquire more theatres and real estate. In the wake of the Stock Market Crash and the onset of the Great Depression, Shubert business fell quickly from profit to loss. In 1929–1930 the corporation lost $1.2 million and in 1930–1931, $1.6 million. The overall profit trajectory of the Shubert Corporation was already dropping from its high point in 1926 through the three years before the Stock Market Crash, which could indicate that the business was already in decline before the great calamity that would hasten its demise. In June 1931, the corporation was unable to pay the interest on its bonds and submitted a plan to segregate its real estate holdings into a separate company and issue new bonds and shares to the holders of the 1927 bonds.[36] The holders of the 1927 bonds did not subscribe to this plan in significant enough numbers, and the plan was abandoned in October 1931.

The Shubert Theatrical Corporation in Receivership

The company became so mired in its losses that it was forced into receivership in October 1931. Due to the failure of the plan noted above and the continuing losses of the company, which for the period from July to October 1931 was a further $1.1 million, Irving Trust Company and Lee Shubert were appointed as receivers for the company. In the wake of the receivership, Lee Shubert and a committee formulated a plan to recapitalize the company and continue operations. A new corporation would be formed mainly to operate the theatres of the old corporation that it would purchase when the old corporation's assets were auctioned.[37] The proposals put forward mostly concerned the tangible assets of the company, and there was little discussion of producing. On 5 April 1933 the reorganization committee met and abandoned the plan, since creditors and bondholders showed little interest in it.[38] The court had ordered the sale of the corporation's assets to take place on 24 February, but with the attempt at reorganization had moved the date to 17 March and finally to 7 April.

Select Theatres and Select Operating Corporation

After the abandonment of the reorganization plan, the assets of the bankrupt corporation were ordered liquidated. In 1932, the assets of the company were valued for liquidation at $491,500,[39] very close to the $400,000 that Lee Shubert eventually paid the next year. On the day of the sale, Shubert was the only one bidding for the assets of the company, and he was acting on

behalf of Select Theatres, a new corporation.[40] The price was the minimum set by the court for the sale. The assets he purchased on 7 April 1933 included equipment, productions, scripts, and production rights as well as twenty-eight theatres, including nine in New York. Many of the theatres owned by the old corporation were disaffirmed and returned to their owners (usually marginal properties that were either too old or had proven unprofitable) or had belonged to the Shuberts separate from the corporation and were again leased by the new company. Select Theatres held stock in the theatres while a second corporation, Select Operating Corporation, held other assets.

Select Theatres was mainly a holding company, and during the formation of the new Shubert company, William Klein, the Shubert's longtime lawyer, was sure to separate all of the theatres into discrete corporations. When Lee seemed to be on the verge of involving Select in a transaction Klein wrote on 6 May 1933:

> The Select Theatres Corporation and the Select Operating Corporation are wonderfully free today from any serious obligations, especially because we have organized all these various corporations and each theatre stands on its own bottom. There are no tangling alliances just at this moment between the individual corporations and the parent company.[41]

By maintaining the separation between individual theatres and especially between production activities and theatres, losses in one unit would not be able to pull the entire organization down.

Ultimately, none of the share and debt holders of the old corporation received back any of their investment. Once Shubert had paid off the costs of liquidation and receivership, no money remained. Lee Shubert did authorize a distribution of stock in Select Theatres to debt and shareholders, however, on the basis of ten shares of Select Common Stock for every $1,000 of debt or one share for every ten shares of Shubert Theatrical Corporation stock. Even with this distribution, the Shubert brothers themselves would remain the undisputed masters of the new company, with Lee Shubert as head and J.J. occupying an auxiliary position (mostly without a title). Taking their empire private at a bargain price and including only the very best assets of the entire company meant that the Shuberts emerged from this difficult period even stronger than they had been in the 1920s.

The ultimate innovation of the Shubert brothers was rooting the Broadway district in its present location and preserving the heart of the district during the Great Depression. To craft an environment that allowed for their success as theatre owners, the Shuberts were able to employ the corporate form of organization to allow for flexibility in funding and the ability to bring in outside investors without ceding control over their enterprises. In the area of production, making a profit generally overshadowed artistic pursuits. The Shuberts certainly left a mark for their splashy revues and lavish operettas that captured the glamour of the 1920s on the one hand and their multiple road tours, which all too often displayed their cost consciousness, on the other.

Notes

1. Listings under 'Messrs. Shubert (Lee and J.J.)', 'Lee Shubert', 'Shubert', and 'John Shubert', accessed 2 February 2015, http://www.ibdb.com.
2. Foster Hirsch, *The Boys from Syracuse: The Shuberts' Theatrical Empire* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 167.
3. Ibid., 9–10.
4. The Syndicate was formed in 1896 when the pre-existing partnerships of Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger, Charles Frohman and Al Hayman, and Sam Nixon and Fred Zimmerman agreed to pool the bookings in their theatres around the United States and Canada. The most important aspect of the Syndicate's business operations was the exclusive control they exerted over the theatres that agreed to book with them—those theatres were only allowed to book Syndicate productions and no independents. This policy would create difficulties for the Shuberts and would cause them to build their own circuit of theatres and allied organizations.
5. Jerry Stagg, *The Brothers Shubert* (New York: Random House, 1968), 19–25; Alfred Bernheim, *The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750–1932* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1932), 64; Brooks McNamara, *The Shuberts of Broadway* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8.
6. McNamara, *The Shuberts of Broadway*, 15; Stagg, *The Brothers Shubert*, 27–8.
7. McNamara *The Shuberts of Broadway*, 16.
8. Hirsch, *The Boys from Syracuse*, 48–9.
9. Ibid., 49–50.
10. There was said to be a meeting between Lee and J.J. and Abraham Erlanger where Erlanger insulted the memory of Sam, which caused the Shuberts to never forgive him and to pledge to out-compete the Syndicate in memory of Sam. Stagg, *The Brothers Shubert*, 69–70; Hirsch, *The Boys from Syracuse*, 53.
11. Shubert Corporation, Articles of Incorporation, 1 September 1905, 1–3. Shubert Archive.
12. Shubert Theatrical Company, Articles of Incorporation, 5 October 1905, 11. Shubert Archive.
13. Stagg, *The Brothers Shubert*, 74; Bernheim, *The Business of the Theatre*, 66.
14. Profit and Loss Statements, Shubert Theatrical Company, December 1908–May 1909. Shubert Archive.
15. Bernheim, *The Business of the Theatre*, 69.
16. McNamara notes that this phrase was taken from the recent Boxer Rebellion (McNamara, *The Shuberts of Broadway*, 22–5).
17. Bernheim, *The Business of the Theatre*, 70.

18. '1200 Theatres are Independent Now', *New York Times*, 8 May 1910, 13.
19. 'For example, Washington and New Orleans were at the time [of the formation of the Syndicate in 1896] two important cities in theatrical geography. Every company that planned a tour of the southeastern section of the country desired to present its wares at these points. But on account of the distance between them, an unbroken jump entailed an expenditure of money and a loss of time which seriously cut into profits. Consequently it was highly advisable, if not essential, for a touring company to break the jump by performances in the cities which lay along the way' (Bernheim, *The Business of the Theatre*, 50).
20. Shubert Theatrical Company of New Jersey, Articles of Incorporation, 1911. Shubert Archive.
21. Hirsch, *The Boys from Syracuse*, 81–3, 5, 106–7; Stagg, *The Brothers Shubert*, 102; McNamara, *The Shuberts of Broadway*, 81, 102–9.
22. Bernheim, *The Business of the Theatre*, 79–84.
23. For personnel, see ibdb.com.
24. McNamara, *The Shuberts of Broadway*, 91.
25. Ibid., 129.
26. Ibid., 120.
27. Hirsch, *The Boys from Syracuse*, 143–52.
28. Ibid., 193.
29. 'Ask to List 1,000,000 Goldwyn Shares', *New York Times*, 13 September 1922, 36.
30. Agreement between Messrs. Lee and J.J. Shubert and Messrs. J&W Seligman & Co. 21 June 1924, 45. Shubert Archive.
31. Ibid.
32. See Hirsch, *The Boys from Syracuse*, especially pp. 145–51, for a discussion of Jolson and the Shuberts.
33. The entire appraisal was included in Exhibit I of the incorporation document.
34. *Receiver's Report No. 1*, Gerson, Beesley & Hampton, Inc. Complainant against Shubert Theatre Corporation and Noclin Corporation Defendants, 25 November 1931. Shubert Archive.
35. 'Shubert Plans Financing', *New York Times*, 13 June 1927, 17.
36. 'Shuberts Propose Financing Plan', *New York Times*, 19 June 1931, 23.
37. The new company would have 100,000 shares of preferred stock and 1,000,000 shares of common stock. Holders of the bonds of the old company and creditors were allowed to exchange $1,051.45 of indebtedness for a unit consisting of one preferred share and eight common shares. For the shareholders of the old company, for each share they held they were allowed to purchase one unit of one preferred share and eight common shares for $12.50. The bondholders and creditors were also allowed to purchase additional shares on the same basis. Lee Shubert had already committed to purchasing $200,000 worth of

shares on the unit basis as above, but for the plan to become operative the company would have to receive additional subscriptions totalling $500,000 to fully recapitalize operations before 1 May 1933. If enough subscriptions were not received by that point or even earlier if the reorganization committee felt that the subscriptions would not be forthcoming the plan was to be abandoned (Reorganization of Shubert Theatre Corporation And Certain of Its Subsidiary Companies Plan and Agreement, 15 February 1933. Shubert Archive).

38. Minutes, Reorganization Committee, 5 April 1933. Shubert Archive.
39. Shubert Theatre Corporation Semi-Annual Statement 31 December 1930, Re: Shubert Theatre Corporation—Estimate of Realizable Value of Assets, 26 February 1932 report. Shubert Archive.
40. 'Shubert Regains Control', *New York Times*, 8 April 1933, 16.
41. William Klein, letter to Lee Shubert, 6 May 1933. Shubert Archive.

CHAPTER 9

Sam Harris: A Producing Patron of Innovation

Alisa Roost

Sam H. Harris (1872–1941) seems an unlikely man to define modern musical theatre, but his career as a producer does just that, at a time that musical theatre needed defining. In Rennold Wolf's evocative description, he was '[b]orn in Mulberry Street, on the East Side of poor parents'.[1] These humble origins led to a career that spanned decades of musical theatre in multiple incarnations, from minstrelsy (*The Cohan and Harris Minstrels*) through revues (*The Music Box Revues*) to satirical book musicals (*Of Thee I Sing*) and innovative approaches to storytelling (*Lady in the Dark*). Harris possessed an uncanny ability to assemble successful and innovative creative teams; as Jeffrey Magee asserts, 'Sam H. Harris, then, was the catalyst in bringing the collaborators together, and the bond that ensured a long-term association among them.'[2]

Harris's shows serve as a bridge from nineteenth-century shows, focusing more on the performer than the writer, to the integrated musical, privileging the creators above the performers. Above all, Harris championed writers: 'The man who can write, put a play together and turn out something of importance … It is he who conceives, visualizes, and contrives the piece. The producer, director, and actors in their ultimate function are only carrying out his ideas.'[3] As his obituary confirmed, 'Mr. Harris had no special formula for selecting and producing a hit show. The one thing he insisted on … was that

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the playwright was more important than either actors or producer. He was a playwright's producer.'[4] Ironically, it is this practice that led, in part, to Harris's near absence from current histories of the musical theatre, for he continually emphasized writers as the most important element of any show at the expense of his own contributions. While Harris produced about three-dozen musicals, plays with music, and musical revues, he also produced over ninety non-musical plays, melodramas, and farces, thus grounding his sensibility in scripts over spectacle.

Vaudeville and minstrelsy strongly influenced Harris's earlier works, especially those that he produced with the versatile George Michael Cohan. According to Cohan, he and Harris produced, owned, controlled, or were 'interested actively and financially' in 128 shows, most of which were not musicals.[5] Harris went on to produce the shows of Irving Berlin, one of the best-known songwriters of the United States, and the musicals and plays of George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, who wrote many non-musical plays and some of the most captivating book musicals of the Depression. Harris's innovation extended to eschewing strict genre definitions of musical theatre, preferring instead to find writers he trusted and give them free rein to produce their visions.

Harris's willingness to back an individual artist's vision came to typify his producing style, for Harris worked almost as a patron rather than a producer. He had little involvement in the rehearsal process, encouraging writers and the creative-staff to be independent and usually either holding a read-through before rehearsals began or attending a rehearsal about a week before opening. He typically worked with new writers after they had collaborated on a project with a writer he already supported. For example, Harris started working with Irving Berlin when Cohan brought him in to add songs for a revue; Harris afterwards produced Berlin's shows. After Berlin wrote songs for George S. Kaufman's *The Cocoanuts*, Harris then produced many of Kaufman's shows. Likewise, Moss Hart collaborated with Kaufman on *Once in a Lifetime*, and Harris produced much of Hart's subsequent work.

Harris, who seems to have added a middle initial without a middle name, frequently spoke of his 'up-by-your-bootstraps' origins and, like many, seemed to change details of his early life for better dramatic punch. Whatever narrative, appearance mattered to Harris. Perhaps he worked as a messenger-delivery boy and learned to dress as well as possible because one of his clients would summon three boys and then give the job to the best-dressed boy;[6] perhaps he decided to get into theatre because he ran 'one of the biggest steam laundries in New York',[7] noticed that actors had nice clothes, started talking with them, and learned about the profits in theatre. In other tellings, he sold cough drops and sang songs to generate interest and then sold subscriptions to a towel service that provided fresh hand towels for local businesses and parlayed that success into becoming a co-owner of the towel-service.[8] At one point Harris managed two boxers, but later when he spoke of them, he seemed to be most interested in the clothes they had worn. However, he cast one in a melodrama, his first play.

Harris's early involvement in theatre included co-producing two shows with Albert Woods in 1903 and 1904, and partnering with Sam Scribner to produce burlesque. He borrowed money to produce the patriotic, brash, fast-paced melodrama with music *Little Johnny Jones* in 1904,[9] and made his friend George M. Cohan a star. While Cohan is now known largely as a songwriter, he made his name as a performer; Bruce Kirle described Cohan as one of the very few male performers to have the presence of a great Broadway diva.[10] A newspaper at the time described the genesis of the Cohan-Harris partnership:

> Cohan decided he would be a star … He told Harris of his hopes and plans, and Harris sympathized heartily. 'Why don't you take hold of me yourself?' said George, suddenly, and Harris, after a minute's thought, declared nothing would please him better … Cohan's versatility and Harris' practicality and fertility of resource have made the firm an important Broadway factor.[11]

Cohan and Harris grew close as both business partners and friends, and they eventually married sisters.

George M. Cohan/Cohan & Harris

When George M. Cohan died in 1942, *The New York Times* proclaimed him 'the great song and dance man – perhaps the greatest in Broadway history'.[12] The original 'Yankee Doodle Dandy' who claims to have been 'born on the 4th of July' (although his baptismal certificate reveals 3 July 1878), the young George was the fourth of the Four Cohans, a relatively unknown touring vaudeville troupe. George's mother, Nellie, recounted their earlier days:

> It was a joke our pennilessness … I could sew adequately and thus the children were always well dressed. But lack of money always bothered us … It was a very hard life. Sometimes we didn't have streetcar fare and we carried the children for miles in our arms to the theater. Still, somehow, when we got to the theater, and we put the children to sleep in a drawer or a trunk, it was worth it.[13]

At twelve years of age, George played the title role in *Peck's Bad Boy* before returning to his family's act. While very talented on stage, his prodigious sense of how theatre should run often alienated producers. Cohan began to write songs, which he sold directly to publishers. At that time, songwriters had relatively little power. The fact that George's name appeared by itself on his early compositions is a testament to his skill at both songwriting and negotiation.

By 1898, George had taken over management of the Four Cohans and proved far more successful than his father at managing the commercial aspects of theatre. As he later recalled,

> My father was a very timid man, and always seemed to me to have a holy terror of talking business, especially with the theatrical managers. His quiet, gentle manner, and the way they used to take advantage of his let-well-enough-alone

> way of going along, was a thing which taught me that aggressiveness was a very necessary quality in dealing with the boys who were out to accumulate nickels and dimes.[14]

Amidst rampant discrimination against the Irish and anti-Semitism, Cohan and Harris celebrated Irish and Jewish Americans and welcomed them as paying customers. Cohan's inclusive patriotism delineated Americans by their sentimental patriotism, especially 'the patriotic pride of Irish assimilation'.[15] His First World War song, 'Over There' (which contributed to his receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor) articulated his disregard for social class and celebrated American perseverance, solidifying his lifelong practice of conflating 'patriotism and entertainment'.[16] However, Cohan & Harris's shows did not extend the idea of citizenship to black Americans, as their minstrel shows demonstrated. Cohan bragged in his autobiography that the *Cohan and Harris Minstrels* was one of the most expensive minstrel shows ever produced. Even in 1908 (with a new version it 1909), it was dated, but the racial implications were ignored.

Cohan's first foray onto Broadway, *The Governor's Son* (1901), expanded a vaudeville sketch into a full-length evening. Cohan crafted the book and score and also starred in the show. After finding success outside New York, Lou C. Behman, a vaudeville producer, planned to open the show at the Savoy Theatre just as the White Rats of America, a union for vaudeville men, was planning a strike.[17] Behman made it clear that if any member walked out, the entire show would 'stay out for good and all'.[18] The actors, meanwhile, thought they needed to 'prove our strength'.[19] Cohan was a member of the White Rats and successfully appealed to the union at the last minute that this show not be included in the strike. Although *The Governor's Son* opened on time, it ran for a disappointing thirty-two performances, something Cohan chalked up to the stress of the threatened strike (and twisting his ankle). It seems probable that this frustration caused Cohan significant stress, for he described the possibility of losing 'everything I've worked for all my life'.[20] The incident may have set the foundation for Cohan's antipathy towards actors' unions. While the disappointment in New York (and Cohan's difficult reputation) meant few vaudeville producers would employ him, his sister's husband, the performer/producer Fred Niblo, gave him another chance in *Running for Office* (1904), which also proved disappointing. Finally, the notoriously ruthless Abraham Erlanger, who ran the Theatrical Circuit, gave him yet another chance, and indeed Erlanger was one of the only producers Cohan worked with multiple times. Despite his success on the road, Cohan craved success in New York City, but only on his own terms. Harris proved his ideal producer.

Harris and Cohan's collaborations defined Harris's trusting producing style in that he enthusiastically supported Cohan without reservation. Harris was known for getting along well with everyone, and Cohan was no exception; in 1905 Harris told the *Sunday Telegraph* 'If anybody tells you George Cohan is a hard man to get along with, just deny it in my name, will you? He's one of

the most considerate stars I ever knew of. And one of the most generous. In writing a play, he gives everybody else a chance, instead of annexing all the fat for his own portion.'[21] The men's mutual interest in both musicals and non-musicals led to an emphasis on plays with music rather than revues with added plots.

Little Johnny Jones (1904), like many shows that Harris produced with Cohan, had a melodramatic element and featured patriotism as entertainment: 'What makes the Americans so proud of their country?' 'Other countries!'[22] Their shows emphasized an enthusiastic celebration of working-class, American, can-do-it initiative. Importantly in this context, *Little Johnny Jones* opened only two weeks after the Interbrough Rapid Transit Company opened the first subway line in New York, and the show is a cosmopolitan celebration of the hard-working American. This attitude is reflected in the songs, which revel in slang. Just as ragtime syncopated against a strict beat, slang syncopated against 'proper' grammar. Indeed 'You're a Grand Old Flag' was originally 'a grand old rag', punning the popularity of ragtime, but also emphasizing a down-to-earth patriotism of the every (white) man. (Their shows give little emphasis to female characters or people of colour.) Slang and ragtime intertwined for a marketable patriotism. The show focuses entirely on Cohan, featuring his stage persona and, more importantly for the development of Broadway musicals, includes songs meant to become popular outside the theatre. Cohan and Harris marketed Cohan's songs separately from the shows as a means of elevating Cohan's stardom. Songs like 'You're a Grand Old Flag', 'Yankee Doodle Boy', and 'Give My Regards to Broadway' qualify as standards, spreading Cohan's fame beyond the stage.

For *Little Johnny Jones*, Cohan and Harris developed an ingenious marketing strategy, which Cohan details with bravado in his autobiography. After poor reviews of his performance, he developed his own newspaper, which he advertised as 'the largest free circulation of any theatrical publication in the world'.[23] For several years, the paper wrote glowingly of Cohan and attacked the critics. 'Week after week I'd go after them. Week after week, they'd come back at me. This sort of thing went on for a couple of years before they got on to the fact that they had slipped me at least a million dollars of free advertising.'[24]

At the time, Broadway ran many shows for short periods of time. Most shows were polished on tour before they finally performed the most important market, New York. Long runs were not expected. *Little Johnny Jones* originally only ran for fifty-two performances, closing on Christmas Eve of 1904, but returned three times within two years. After the clear success of *Little Johnny Jones,* Harris took a back seat on Cohan's next venture.

It was Abraham Erlanger and Mark Klaw (see Chap. 7) who produced Cohan's next vehicle, *45 Minutes from Broadway*, in January 1906. Harris handled the day-to-day issues as the show's business manager. It is impossible to know the thought process behind this arrangement (although Cohan claims that allowing Erlanger and Klaw to produce the show was a trade for Erlanger agreeing to have a good time with other friends – Cohan connected

socially with producers, not other actors, which may have informed his significant battle with unions), but it seems possible that Harris sought to effectively apprentice with these veteran producers.

Popularity, a non-musical play written by George M. Cohan that was ultimately unsuccessful, appeared later in 1906; it marked a change in Cohan's theatrical career, for the new team of Cohan & Harris produced the play, and Cohan didn't perform in it. Their style became better defined, with Harris handling most of the financial elements of producing and Cohan handling the artistic side. As Rennold Wolf described the partnership, 'Harris is the executive of the firm. It is he who attends to the details of the office. Cohan frequently is not in evidence for weeks at a stretch, although during those periods he is usually at work on a new play … The big managerial strokes are executed by Harris.'[25] Cohan became quite adept as a script doctor; again, quoting Wolf, 'Among their most remunerative plays the majority were not successful in the beginning. Each [Harris and Cohan], however, instinctively finds the weak spot, and each – Cohan, of course, more than his partner – discovers the remedy.'[26]

Cohan & Harris produced forty shows between 1906 and the actors' strike of 1919. While they produced many comedies by a variety of authors, and musicals by Cohan, they only produced five musicals that Cohan did not help write: *The Red Widow* (1911), *Vera Violetta* (1911, for which Cohan wrote additional songs), *The Beauty Shop* (1914), *Going Up* (1917), and *The Royal Vagabond* (1919, for which Cohan wrote additional songs). Cohan directed several non-musical plays and often starred in both musicals and non-musical shows. In 1911, he signed one of the first recording contracts with Victor for seven of his songs, demonstrating his willingness to explore new technology to expand his career.

On New Year's Eve 1917, *The Cohan Revue* of 1918 opened. Staged by Cohan, with a book and score by Cohan, this show also included songs by Irving Berlin. The bitter actors' strike of 1919 brought about the end of the Cohan and Harris partnership (although Cohan would star in a Harris show in 1937). Harris accepted the demands of the fledgling Actors' Equity Association, but despite also being an actor, Cohan is one producer who never did.

Irving Berlin

When Jerome Kern was asked to describe Irving Berlin's (1888–1989) place in American music he replied, 'Irving Berlin has no place in American music – he is American music. Emotionally, he honestly absorbs the vibrations emanating from the people, manners and life of his time, and, in turn, gives these impressions back to the world – simplified, clarified and glorified.'[27] Born in Siberia to a poor Russian Jewish family, the young Irving and his family[28] fled their homeland and ultimately settled in New York City's Lower East Side. Money was scarce. Irving's father's job as a cantor brought in a paltry income, so Irving dropped out of school in the second grade to take odd jobs such as

selling newspapers and singing songs for extra tips. Berlin always seemed aware of the relationship between money and art: 'Popular songs should be what they are called. They should be songs and they should be popular.'[29]

In 1914 Irving Berlin joined with Victor Herbert, John Philip Sousa, and several other songwriters to found the American Society for Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). The organization redefined the financial landscape for songwriters and became an important safeguard for the economic rights of musical theatre composers and lyricists. While not directly related to producing, ASCAP had an impact on musicals and their creators for decades; popular songs could finance songwriters when royalties from shows were less generous.

In 1918, Irving Berlin wrote seven songs for *The Cohan Revue of 1918*. Harris and Berlin developed a partnership that continued throughout Harris's life, with Harris producing the vast majority of Berlin's shows. Harris proposed a theatre for Berlin if Berlin would create an intimate-styled revue, and subsequently built The Music Box to Berlin's specifications. Smaller than most Broadway venues with less than 900 seats, the theatre housed Berlin's *Music Box Revues* (1921–1924) and many of Harris's shows in the 1930s. Furthermore, Berlin contributed songs to several Harris-produced musicals of the 1930s.

Berlin also produced two musicals: *Yip Yap Yaphank* (1918), a revue Berlin created after he was drafted into the army that showcased his own songs (*Yip Yip Yaphank* had an official producer of 'Uncle Sam', but Uncle Sam seemed to be busy enough during the First World War to let Berlin handle the day-to-day production decisions), and *Miss Liberty* (1949), a musical featuring his own songs and a book by Moss Hart.

George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart

The stock market crash of 1929 ended many careers, but Harris's projects became far more innovative after the crash. Part of this came from his collaborations with George S. Kaufman (1888–1961), who had written sketches for the Music Box Revues and also had collaborated with the Marx Brothers on *The Cocoanuts* (1925), and with Moss Hart (1904–1991), a noted librettist and eventual director. Harris produced nineteen non-musical plays during the 1930s, but only six musicals, all of which had some sort of satirical content.

The United States had a long tradition of satire, especially in political comics, but no one had yet attempted a full-length book musical satire. Kaufman quipped that 'Satire is what closes on Saturday night', but Harris was willing to bet on Kaufman's experiments with the development of, essentially, a new genre and four full-length satires developed out of their collaboration: *Of Thee I Sing* (1930), *Let 'Em Eat Cake* (1933), *Face the Music* (1933), and *I'd Rather be Right* (1937). While Harris took a large financial and creative risk producing the Kaufman-directed musicals, it is clear that Harris was willing to experiment. In 1933, he told *The New York Herald Tribune*:

> I had made up my mind long before that the public was fed up on the conventional sort of musical comedy with love stories and songs about 'the moon, dear and you' and all that sort of rubbish. Here was something startlingly different and if there is one thing I have been sold on for two or three years it is that the theatre to live must produce novelties. It must break with the past completely.[30]

During the development of these shows, Kaufman experimented with how trenchantly the satire could cut and still achieve commercial viability, and Harris, true to his form as a patron-producer, trusted and supported his director and creative team.

Of Thee I Sing, with a book by Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, music by George Gershwin, and lyrics by Ira Gershwin, is a light-hearted, optimistic ribbing of partisan electoral politics and the general ineffectuality of government that became the most popular book musical of the Depression. Nevertheless, it was a truly daring production. In this (as in the Gershwins' other project of the time, *Porgy and Bess*) it is clear that all collaborators are experimenting with the limits of the form.

A year into the successful run, The New York Times reported that Harris was 'just a little disturbed at his own daring in bringing a lampoon of sacrosanct political life to Broadway'.[31] The actors joked about being arrested for ridiculing the president and vice president; Victor Moore said, 'I heard Hoover and a lot of other people are pretty sensitive about the dignity of the high offices of President and Vice President.'[32] But 'the savage jabs taken at things considered above burlesque on the stage'[33] proved popular. Even the ubiquitous 'Tired Business Man' enjoyed this innovative show:

> No one seemed to mind the absence of love duets and 'girl numbers', 'hot tunes' and salacious comedy. A few skeptics shook their heads and remarked that while the businesses might be big for a time it couldn't possibly hold up. Women wouldn't like it, they said, and that celebrated theatergoer, the Tired Business Man, would find it a little too intelligent and lacking in 'pep'.[34]

Harris's approach to publicity was as innovative as the writers' approach to the structure and score. *Of Thee I Sing* launched a perfume and make-up line and the performers appeared at a launch party for the cosmetics at the B. Altman department store. Perhaps most amusingly, Morrie Ryskind threatened to sue both the Democrats and Republicans for stealing their material, and newspapers covered the gimmick. *The New York World-Telegram* quoted Ryskind, 'It's gone too far … The citizens are beginning to take Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Hoover seriously.' Ryskind intended to stop them 'before the people of this great country are fooled into electing another president'.[35] When the France-America Society called for the musical's 'French Envoy to be impersonated more legitimately and less in the spirit of burlesque',[36] Harris also spun that for publicity.

Of Thee I Sing became the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize (although the Pulitzer committee excluded George Gershwin – indicating that the committee, at least, thought of this as a play with incidental music, not a musical). Its sequel, *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, revisited the same characters, but its raw and angry tone and the fact that the story nearly kills off one of the most beloved characters caused it to fail.

Face the Music satirized the art of producing musical theatre. A full-length musical with a libretto by Moss Hart and songs by Irving Berlin, the show focuses on how the New York police union tries to lose its ill-gotten gains by investing in a musical, with many plot-points Mel Brooks would later develop for *The Producers*. Whereas Max Bialystock, the protagonist of *The Producers*, wants to make money by producing a flop, the fictitious producer of *Face the Music*, Hal Reisman, aims to lose money so the investigators won't find evidence of the policemen's corruption. Both shows, however, delight in producing a terrible musical that eventually makes money, and both shows end with the main characters in prison producing a show (although Reisman also gets to produce his own trial).

Face the Music spoofs some of the producing tactics that Harris developed with *Of Thee I Sing*. For example, Reisman explores the relatively new area of product placement, trying to get Woolworths to invest in a musical that will feature all their products. Like Harris, Reisman revels in found-publicity, and even contrives it. Reisman adds nudity to his show and then conspires with the police; the cops raid the show, ensuring publicity, and then release the actors in time to make the next performances. While the fictitious producer is innovative and talented in marketing his show, *Face the Music* also satirizes the theatre itself. Actors are treated horribly – they are sold like hot dogs off of street carts, women in the chorus are clearly pushed for sexual favours, and a bad show is made popular through risqué content and masterful publicity.

I'd Rather Be Right (1937, book by Kaufman and Moss Hart, lyrics by Lorenz Hart, music by Richard Rodgers) was another political satire, this one starring George M. Cohan as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It was a meeting of the past and the future for Harris, for he reunited with one of his earliest collaborators in a genre-prodding show that, like *Of Thee I Sing*, concerned the American presidency, though this time it was the actual president who featured as a major character.

Harris's two other musicals from the 1930s did not involve Kaufman, through both offered new twists on established genres. *As Thousands Cheer* (1933, book by Moss Hart, songs by Irving Berlin) developed a new take on a musical revue, mimicking a newspaper to structure the show. The first musical to credit a black performer equally with white co-stars, *As Thousands Cheer* introduced Ethel Waters. In one scene, she played a wife whose husband was lynched; during the stunning and unsettling 'Supper Time', Waters's character tries to set the table and hide her pain from her children. It is an extraordinary leap from the *Cohan and Harris Minstrels* to a fully realized African

American character who suffers after her husband's lynching. *Jubilee* (1935, book by Moss Hart, songs by Cole Porter) played with operetta tropes and took as its basis the Silver Jubilee of King George V of England, though it concerned another royal family, the members of which decide to live incognito as commoners.

Harris's final musical, *Lady in the Dark* (1941, book by Moss Hart, lyrics by Ira Gershwin, music by Kurt Weill), was a highly experimental work that was essentially a non-musical play about psychotherapy with extended musical dream scenes. *Life Magazine* hailed it as 'a unique blend of serious drama, musical comedy, and pageantry'. Hart based the book on his own psychotherapy, but he kept the show engaging and dramatic: 'he has not only written the first effective play on a difficult theme, but also conceived of an entertainment which unites for the first time the widest variety of theatrical talent'.[37] bruce d. mcclung details Harris's involvement, which is better documented than other shows.[38] For *Lady in the Dark*, Harris had a read-through in his office before rehearsals began and focused on initial costs over weekly running costs. He did his best to pare down large expenses in the design phase and allowed relative freedom later in the process. There is no record of his visiting rehearsals during the last week, which was his reported custom early in his career. As with some of the musicals Harris produced in the 1930s, the libretto was published as a book (with red print for the sung dream sequences) and product tie-ins included perfumes and a fashion line.

Throughout his long career, Harris supported writers and directors in their innovative work. Moss Hart, who not only had the idea for *Lady in the Dark* but also wrote its book, oversaw much of its production, and directed its non-musical scenes, wrote to a friend: 'It's a very adventurous thing to have done, and I don't care much if it's an absolute failure … It's a most difficult play to do and quite likely to be a mess unless we have a bit of luck, but I look forward to all the difficulties with a good deal of eagerness.'[39] Few authors could realize a play they thought would need a bit of luck in order not to be a failure. Harris allowed artists the chance to dream differently and risk failure for an adventure. His constant focus on supporting the writer saw the American musical move in myriad new ways, ranging from patriotic musical comedies starring George M. Cohan and revues featuring the music of Irving Berlin to clever satirical musicals in the 1930s directed by George S. Kaufman and new ways of storytelling thanks to Moss Hart. Sam Harris truly was a producing patron of innovation.

Notes

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3. Lucius Beebe, 'Sam H. Harris, Entrepreneur of Satire', *New York Herald Tribune*, 18 September 1932.
4. 'Sam H. Harris, 69, Theatrical Producer, Dies', *New York Herald Tribune*, 4 July 1941.
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14. Cohan, *Twenty Years on Broadway*, 163–4.
15. Kirle, *Unfinished Show Business*, 56.
16. Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1995), 19.
17. While the White Rats excluded women, it did include actors who appeared in non-vaudeville shows mounted by vaudeville producers.
18. Cohan, *Twenty Years on Broadway*, 188.
19. Ibid., 189.
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21. 'Sam H. Harris Realizes His Ambition to Become a Broadway Manager', *Sunday Telegraph*, 22 October 1905 (New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Clippings Folder: T-CLP* Sam H. Harris).
22. George M. Cohan, *Little Johnny Jones* (Kindle Location 208). Kindle Edition.
23. Cohan, *Twenty Years on Broadway*, 199.
24. Ibid., 200.
25. Wolf, 'George M. Cohan's Partner', 147.
26. Ibid.
27. Quoted in Joseph McBridge, 'Irving Berlin Dies at 101', *Variety* (27 September 1989), 6.

28. The original family name was Beilin, which was changed to Baline upon arrival at Ellis Island.
29. Quoted in *Variety*, 6.
30. 'Harris Tells How He Came to Produce the Pulitzer Play', *New York Herald Tribune*, 8 May 1932.
31. 'Happy Birthday to "Of Thee I Sing": Broadway's Longest Run Show Has an Anniversary Cake and Eats It, Reminiscing the While', *New York Times*, 18 December 1932.
32. Ibid.
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CHAPTER 10

Florenz Ziegfeld Jr.'s 'Simple Idea': Girls and Music in Tastefully Extravagant Settings

Todd Decker

Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. (1867–1932) is perhaps the only producer whose name became a household name well beyond the precincts of Broadway. He never performed, wrote, directed, or designed for the theatre and yet Ziegfeld's creative imprint on a show was unmistakable in his time and can be described if not recreated or re-experienced today. In the thirteen years after his death in 1932, three lavish Hollywood films, all produced by MGM, put Ziegfeld's name in the title: *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936), *Ziegfeld Girl* (1941), and *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946). Each film, in different ways, offered tales of the New York stage while leveraging Ziegfeld's name to enhance lavish production values and indicate a certain kind of white female beauty. These celluloid myths, made under Hollywood's Production Code for a national audience, however, fail to capture the sexual energy, fantastic excess, and multi-modal network of amusements Ziegfeld represented at his Broadway height in the 1910s.

Ziegfeld arrived in New York from Chicago at the turn of the century, just as the theatre district was solidifying around Times Square and a newly liberal urban nightlife was flourishing in restaurants, cabarets, and dance halls. Exciting shifts in popular music (ragtime) and dance (the so-called dance craze) added energy to the moment, as did the ferment of racial and ethnic mixing occurring in the urban north-east. Ziegfeld solidified his reputation in the 1910s, when his series of summer-season revues, the *Ziegfeld Follies*, emerged as a special event on Broadway's calendar. And Ziegfeld's reach was

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national: from the start, he understood the importance of the road. His shows virtually always toured, taking New York casts to the major cities of the northeast and Midwest and sometimes beyond, carrying Ziegfeld's name along with it. The United States' involvement in the First World War allowed Ziegfeld to link mass entertainment to the assertive expression of patriotic sentiments: several *Follies* ended their first acts with the 'Star-Spangled Banner', guaranteeing a standing ovation.

But Ziegfeld struggled across the 1920s. The *Follies* lived to see robust competition and Ziegfeld's competitors proved more adept at tapping into new trends in popular music and dance. The rise of radio and the movies cut into Broadway's overall share of national attention as well. And Prohibition deeply affected his diversified entertainment interests. As the decade progressed, Ziegfeld's brand of lavish revue became increasingly old-fashioned and by the end of the 1920s, Ziegfeld himself was largely occupied with book shows. Among the musical comedies and operettas he produced are the long-running, well-remembered *Sally* (1920) and the difficult-to-classify *Show Boat* (1927), which has served many writers and scholars as a major reference point in Broadway history. The Stock Market Crash of 1929 initiated a swift decline in Ziegfeld's fortunes. By 1931, he was bankrupt; by 1932, he was dead at the age of 65.

Ziegfeld's revues, musical comedies, and operettas all reflected a love of large-scale, visually oriented entertainment meant to overwhelm the audience. He believed in the power of bigness and was unable to think small. Almost all his shows also celebrated a particular brand of white American womanhood: the Ziegfeld Girl forms a special legacy, powerfully demonstrating Ziegfeld's ability to create a mythic woman on the stage and in the press.

Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. was born in Chicago in 1867, the same year his father started a classical music conservatory. But the young Ziegfeld was resolutely oriented towards popular culture. At the age of 16 he left home with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, only to be quickly retrieved by his father. Ziegfeld established himself as a producer by successfully programming an entertainment venue called the Trocadero near the 1893 Chicago World's Fair (recreated in *Show Boat* act two). While scouring Europe for musical hall talent to play the Trocadero, Ziegfeld discovered the strong man Eugene Sandow (1867–1925), whom he brought to the United States and billed as 'the perfect man'. Sandow, who was a capable showman, displayed his muscled body *sans* tights (the nineteenth-century practice). Ziegfeld presented Sandow on stage in various feats of strength and invited Chicago society matrons to touch his muscles backstage if they made a gift to charity: some notable women did, making Sandow a sensation. Generating sexual energy between semi-naked performers and audience members would prove central to Ziegfeld's production strategies—although only in Sandow's case was the energy caused by a naked male body. Sandow and Ziegfeld toured the nation, putting the producer's name on the map and staking his initial production activities in New York.

For his first New York show, Ziegfeld revived a long-running play from the 1880s, *A Parlor Match*, with its original stars, and added popular songs ('Daisy Bell') and Anna Held, another European discovery whom he turned into a celebrity before she stepped foot on stage. The *Times* noted of Held, 'She would not be a "sensation" at all if the idea had not been ingeniously forced upon the public mind that she is … naughty.'[1] Selling the notion was Ziegfeld's doing. He famously announced she bathed in milk, then rejected select milk deliveries as insufficiently fresh, then had Held greet the press in a milk bath. Held had considerable charms if perhaps little real talent. Librettist Harry B. Smith commented, 'She sang mostly with her eyes and her shoulders.'[2] This was enough given the elaborate, often titillating settings Ziegfeld provided.

Vehicles for Held solidified the producer's reputation as 'a connoisseur of pulchritude' (again Smith's words).[3] *A Parisian Model* (1906) consolidated trends evident in earlier Held shows towards the suggestion of female nudity. The show's most famous moment had six girls enter in long cloaks to model for an artist. Stepping behind easels with strategically sized canvases, the girls dropped their cloaks. Ziegfeld cannily recognized how artistic pretensions, stereotypes of permissive French attitudes, and immobilized white women's bodies could move the American theatre towards a more direct use of sex. Ziegfeld's use of the stage as fashion parade also dates to the Held shows. For one number in *A Parisian Model*, Held wore a different dress for each of six choruses. Marlis Schweitzer describes a number from *The Little Duchess* (1901): the exotic and diminutive Held, flanked by twelve statuesque chorus girls—all thirteen women in dazzling gowns—appeared as 'the star of the show—a crown jewel within a setting of semi-precious stones'.[4] Two song titles from *Mam'selle Napoleon* (1903) spell out a connection cultivated to the end of Ziegfeld's career: 'The Stage and Fashion Hand in Hand' and 'The à la Mode Girl'. As with Sandow, Ziegfeld had Held tour the nation.

Ziegfeld's signature creation—the *Ziegfeld Follies* (1907–1925, 1927, 1931)—inserted the themes and strategies of the Held shows into Broadway and national theatre culture in a way that made Ziegfeld himself the central figure, turning the theatrical producer into an auteur *avant la lettre*. Initially just called the *Follies*, by 1911 Ziegfeld's signature was so evident he could put his name in—not merely above—the title. The playbill for the 1914 edition advised the show was 'Devised and produced under the personal direction of Florenz Ziegfeld', although what exactly he did in creative terms remains something of a mystery. His set designers, costumers, choreographers, and songwriters all take second billing in the history of the series. Descriptions of Ziegfeld's specific creative role often invoked matters of taste: *Follies* star Will Rogers summarized Ziegfeld's contribution as, 'He knew colors, and he knew beauty. He knew how to keep nudeness from being vulgar.'[5]

The annual *Follies* were, and remained in the most successful years, a seasonal offering, never intended to run in New York for more than two or three months. Playing during the summer, when many Broadway shows closed due to the heat, the *Follies* enjoyed less competition from other amusements and

promised a lavish, carefree, slightly scandalous experience. The first *Follies* opened in early July 1907—most later editions would open in June—and ran through late August. This was the pattern until the 1920s—a short Broadway run during the so-called 'Between Seasons' months, when most theatrical stars and producers took time off to rest and prepare the next season's shows. The first fifteen *Follies* averaged a respectable 105 performances. When the autumn season began to pick up in Manhattan, the *Follies* hit the road, taking the New York cast to major cities in the north-east, Midwest, and some years the West Coast. The *Follies* played Chicago, Boston, and Washington DC, but also Buffalo, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, St. Joseph (Missouri), Springfield (Ohio), and even Lincoln, Nebraska.[6] In New York and across the nation's urban centres, the *Follies* were a yearly special event in theatrical and social life, with opening night an extra special occasion. Like Lent or professional baseball, the *Follies* were a season: the urge to attend became ritualistic. As the *Times* reported on the opening of the tenth edition: 'In Broadway's calendar it is always a great occasion. Many count the days and pay preposterous prices so that afterward they may say that they attended the first night of the Follies … one of the few institutions in the American theater. They can be depended upon. They come every year with the new raspberries and last much longer.'[7]

In 1914, Ziegfeld described the appeal of the *Follies* as a direct response to public desire:

> It's all a simple idea. I believe people like to look at beautiful women, so I get beautiful women … Then I add some clever women, too, and some clever comedians. I dress the whole thing up as beautifully as modern stage craft can do it and people come to see it. I believe in beauty, and nothing is more beautiful than a beautiful woman. I make the very best possible display of them. It is human, and appeals. The *Follies* is built up around this appeal.[8]

As the *New York World* noted in 1918, the *Follies* were 'the most pretentious of New York's summer girl-and-music shows', with a 'pictorial richness' that 'has always been on an ascending scale of extravagance'.[9]

The *Follies* format was nurtured in an informal theatre space re-christened the Jardin de Paris and home to the first five editions. The Jardin de Paris sat atop the roof of Hammerstein's Olympia, a massive complex built in 1895 on Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets. As the first theatre located above 42nd Street, the Olympia helped initiate the final northwards movement of New York's theatre district up Broadway from Union Square to Herald Square to what came to be known as Times Square in 1904, the same year the subway system opened its central hub at 42nd Street. (The New Amsterdam Theater on 42nd Street opened in 1903 and would serve as the home of the *Follies* from the 1913 edition on.) By 1907, the year of the first *Follies*, the infrastructure for a new Broadway nightlife centred on Times Square was in place and rapidly expanding. The Jardin de Paris was ideally situated within this new district, offering a combination of food and drink and high-class entertainment,

with at least part of the seating at tables, like other Broadway roof gardens of the time '[anticipating] the modern nightclub in its combination of theater and restaurant, in a quasi open-air setting'.[10]

The attractions of the *Follies* at the Jardin were many. Beyond food and drink, an ad from 1908 sold the show in four words: 'Always cool. Smoking permitted.'[11] General admission table seating at $1 no doubt filled the house early and boosted bar tabs. And there were the girls—who not only displayed themselves at close range but also sang teasingly naughty songs, often offering frank invitations. A 1907 beach-themed number titled 'Come and Float Me, Freddie Dear' included the line 'Go as far as you like in the foam with me'. In 1908, the girls dressed up as taxi cabs sporting 'to hire' signs and sang 'Take Me Round in a Taxicab'. In 1909, the lyric to 'Linger, Longer, Lingerie', sung by women showing off their figures, ironically detailed how women without classic figures could use undergarments to enhance their assets. Getting close to the girls was part of the experience. They marched through the audience as feminine soldiers in 1907 and threw balls at the patrons for the baseball-themed finale in 1909 to a song suggestively titled 'Come On, Play Ball with Me, Dearie'. Flirtatious games of catch no doubt developed. Star Lillian Lorraine tossed roses to the crowd in 1910 as she flew above them in a mini-airplane singing 'Up, Up, Up in my Aeroplane', a song of sexual invitation sung from a boy's perspective. And when Mlle Davie performed Salome's scandalous 'Dance of the Seven Veils'—banned at the Metropolitan Opera—in the 1907 edition, 'a man suddenly ran down the aisle to shout that the cops were raiding the joint, and a squad did indeed heave into view. It turned out they were part of the show, and immediately joined Mll. Dazie in a kickline.'[12] Crossing of the footlights was central to Ziegfeld's aesthetic. Ziegfeld scholar Ann Ommen van der Merwe describes the 1910 edition as using 'the entire theater as performance space': the Jardin made possible and encouraged this approach.[13]

Ziegfeld moved the 1912 *Follies* to the 2,800-seat Moulin Rouge and, due to his success with other shows, opened the annual revue in October. (The Jardin never hosted another show: the success of the *Follies* and the viability of the space were linked.) Among Ziegfeld's 1912 successes was *Over the River*, a co-production with producer Charles Dillingham starring Eddie Foy. (Ziegfeld frequently entered into such star-driven deals as a means to diversify his slate of offerings.) Nightclub aesthetics defined by the *Follies* in the Jardin played a large part in *Over the River*, which was advertised as 'Real Cabaret on Stage' with 'much of the evening … given to dancing that ranged from "Turkey Trot to Tango"'.[14] In the following years, as the *Follies* at the New Amsterdam expanded in scale, Ziegfeld cultivated direct links to his own nightclub space located on the roof of the theatre.

From 1915 to 1922, Ziegfeld's *Midnight Frolics* offered an after-show experience on the roof of the New Amsterdam featuring table seating, food, drinks, dancing, and a one-hour show—a mini, after-hours *Follies*. The 1916 *Frolic* was described in the *New York Evening Mail* as a 'fleshy romp … filled with the joy of (cabaret) life'.[15]An elaborate staircase entrance, analogous to the

many staircases in the *Follies*, offered *Frolic* patrons the chance to make a grand entrance, reinforcing the role of the nightclub as a stage in itself. Ziegfeld billed the venue as 'The Meeting Place of the World'. With dancing before and after the show and during intermission, *Frolic* patrons could out try the new dances demonstrated in many *Follies* numbers. Indeed, for several years the act two finale of the *Follies* was an advertisement for the *Frolic*, featuring made-up dances to tunes like 'The Midnight Frolic Glide' and 'The Midnight Frolic Rag' or spotlighting the band currently playing the roof. Ziegfeld set a scene from his book show *Miss 1917* at the *Frolic*.

The *Frolics* also provided space for Ziegfeld to try out new collaborators. Ned Wayburn, who staged seven *Follies* editions, began his work for Ziegfeld at the *Frolic*, as did costume designer Lady Duff-Gordon and tableau creator Ali Ben Haggin. All three became signature contributors to the *Follies*. Major Ziegfeld stars Eddie Cantor and Will Rogers also first performed under the producer's imprimatur at the *Frolic*, moving into headliner positions in the *Follies* below. The *Follies* and the *Frolics* were both reviewed in the New York papers, which treated the two series as reciprocal expressions of Ziegfeld's producing prowess.

Ziegfeld's varied production activities in the 1910s created a diverse sphere of amusement in the burgeoning Times Square entertainment district—with patrons moving between stage and nightclub (in the New Amsterdam connected by an elevator), seeing new fashions and spectacles, dancing new dances, hearing new songs (added each week to the *Follies* to hone the show for its tour), enjoying new and familiar performers linked to the Ziegfeld name—all set within a new public nightlife centred on dancing and drinking. Removal of the final element—alcohol—with the onset of Prohibition spelled the end of the *Frolics* and the collapse of the *Follies*' seasonal model. Ziegfeld shuttered the *Frolic* in 1922, sending an expression of outrage to the *Times* by long telegraph (his preferred mode of communication):

> THE CLOSING OF THE MIDNIGHT FROLICS ROOF IS SYMBOLIC OF THE FACT THAT THE MOST PRIZED POSSESSION OF AMERICAN LIBERTY IS DEAD PATRIOTISM IS AT A LOW EBB WHEN AMERICAN RETURNING FROM ABROAD LOOK AT THE STATUE OF LIBERTY AND LAUGH OUT LOUD I AM QUITTING FOR A PRINCIPLE AND THAT PRINCIPLE IS MORE FAR REACHING THAN MOST PEOPLE KNOW.[16]

Without legal alcohol, the *Frolic* was economically unsustainable.

The enduring influence and memory of the *Follies* centres on two elements: visual splendour on a 'Ziegfeldian' scale and the figure of the Ziegfeld Girl, an embodiment of white American femininity shaped by the producer on-stage and in the press.

The move out of the Jardin into fully equipped theatres opened the door to ever larger effects. The addition of Joseph Urban as scenic designer in 1915

marked an important transition. Urban's designs for 1915—all in shades of blue—were the critical and audience hit of the edition. Of the 1916 *Follies*, on a Shakespearean theme, one critic noted he could barely see Juliet for Urban's lush balcony-scene setting and imagined 'the inevitable feud between Mr. Urban and the actors'.[17] Urban designed virtually every Ziegfeld production from 1915 on—including many *Frolics*—and all his work for other producers did not equal his output for Ziegfeld. Good ideas, like a broad staircase in Ziegfeld's stand-alone revue *The Century Girl* (1916), would find their way into the *Follies*. Urban used texture, paint, and light in stunning ways: for example phosphorescent paint and black light which could suddenly transform a stage picture (as in 'My Radium Girl', 1915 *Follies* and 'Lace-Land', 1922 *Follies*). Urban also excelled at exotic stage pictures: a Japanese garden complete with a gigantic bonsai cherry tree for the 1918 *Follies* or two evocations of royal courts—twelfth-century Persia and seventeenth-century Versailles—for the 1921 *Follies*. Composer Victor Herbert provided appropriately elevated ballet music for the latter two.

Preparing Urban's elaborate sets took time and Ziegfeld could not abide stage waits. The need for comics able to play speciality acts or sketches 'in one'—in front of a downstage curtain while the scenery was being changed—was part of the stagecraft of the *Follies*. Some editions featured more comics than others: the balance between spectacle and laughs varied from year to year. Ziegfeld's headliners were a diverse group. Fanny Brice emphasized her homely looks and awkward physicality. Often singing with a thick accent, Brice offered an ethnically marked, Jewish contrast to the white Ziegfeld Girls who defined what beauty meant at the *Follies*. She also offered torch songs such as 'My Man' (an English version of 'Mon Homme', introduced by Parisian cabaret singer Mistinguett in 1916, yet another Ziegfeld nod towards French entertainment). Eddie Cantor usually sang songs from the perspective of a sexually curious but intimidated little guy caught in narratives where women were the aggressors. Will Rogers offered 'Yankee Philosophy', riffing on the day's newspaper and leavening Urban and Ziegfeld's sophisticated visual conceits with supposed rural common sense. Bert Williams, the only black star Ziegfeld hired for the *Follies*, took marital discord as a recurring theme in his prominently featured speciality spots. Williams also appeared in sketches, usually playing stereotypical black roles such as a porter. The topic of race did not enter directly into Williams's appearances but the resonance of his presence on Broadway's most celebrated stage, and the opportunity to stage a comic dialogue between a black man and a white man—where the former was understood to be a star of equal or even greater rank—spoke powerfully. Simply including a black man in the *Follies*—a few times putting Williams on stage with the Ziegfeld Girls—was, in itself, a challenge to racial attitudes of the time.

The heart of the *Follies* was the Ziegfeld Girl. The goal of the *Follies*, articulated in a motto added for the 1922 edition, was 'Glorifying the American Girl'. Urban's settings provided the stage. Ziegfeld's own eye—famously—selected the girls. This creative task he publicly proclaimed as his own and,

as Linda Mizejewski notes, 'Even within the Ziegfeld enterprise, the chorines chosen by various musical directors for the road shows were not considered "real" Ziegfeld Girls, the ones hand-selected by Ziegfeld himself.'[18] Ziegfeld shrewdly framed his work choosing—and thereby defining—beauties in the press. In a 1916 profile, he noted: 'Personality is what I look for. Personality is the big item in a chorus girl. Personal magnetism, that intangible and indefinable something which sets one girl apart from another—that is what I try to get.'

Ziegfeld's taste then came into play in presenting these beauties on stage: without him they were lost. 'I study their looks and personality and dress them accordingly. That is my big point—the dress. When my girls leave me for other shows they don't show up at all. They aren't dressed properly.'[19]

In a series of articles in the early 1920s, Ziegfeld offered advice to America's women about how to be beautiful. He advised women to get plenty of sleep, to avoid eating rich foods late at night, to 'shun rouge and merely flirt with powder', to 'laugh heartily at least twenty times a day' as 'the world doesn't love a serious, sober beauty half as much as the one who is a burst of sunshine and merry laughter', and finally, he counselled that if a woman possessed genuine beauty 'she must forget that she is beautiful—and then perhaps there may be added to her beauty that yet more rare, inexplicable and mysterious quality of being fascinating'.[20] These attributes are reflected in the many individual women promoted in the press by Ziegfeld's active publicity department, which turned showgirls who did little more than walk and wear beautiful clothes in the *Follies* into figures of media attention. Indeed, upon Ziegfeld's death many newspapers reprinted collages of images of the showgirls who had been 'glorified' by the producer across his long career, treating his selection of American beauties as the quintessence of his accomplishment.

In the press, the Ziegfeld Girl was marketed to other women as a paragon of alluring feminine aspiration. On stage, she was presented for the delectation of the stereotypical 'Tired Business Man' (sometimes abbreviated 'T.B.M.') in the audience in a characteristic number seen in almost every *Follies*: the hymn to the Ziegfeld Girl with a sentimental lyric of high seriousness sung by a lone tenor. The earliest example, 'The Girl in Pink', dates to 1911. Irving Berlin's 'A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody', introduced by John Steel in 1919, is the most enduring. In its original staging, six girls appeared as the embodiments of famous semi-classical melodies.[21] Lyrical themes open to a variety of visual treatments were favoured for these hymns: 'A Girl for Each Month of the Year' (1915), 'My Lady of the Nile' (1916, accompanying a parade of characters from Shakespeare), 'In the Beautiful Garden of Girls' (1917, with girls dressed as flowers appearing from below—growing—by means of a trap door), and 'Songs I Can't Forget' (1922, with girls dressed as nostalgic popular tunes). The staging for the last such hymn—'Bring on the Follies Girls', the opening song for the final 1931 edition—climaxed with a naked girl hoisted high into the air.

The 1912 *Follies* paean to the Ziegfeld Girl, 'Beautiful Girl', tied a preference for American beauty to patriotism. This connection was regularly exploited for scenic splendour in act one finales from the start of the series to the end of the First World War, with Ziegfeld's large female choruses marshalled in stage pictures that celebrated American military might. For 1909's 'The Greatest Navy in the World', the girls wore ships on their heads, which appeared to sail in a sea of capes. Often these finales toyed with issues of gender in the military ('If Girlies Could Be Soldiers' from 1915). The lyric for Berlin's 'I'm Gonna Pin My Medal on the Girl I Left Behind' for 1918—'the most unabashedly patriotic of the series'—rhetorically linked the battleground and the home front.[22] The staging of the scene presented women as aviators and sailors. There was no other way as Ziegfeld never hired more than a small chorus of 'boys'.

The *Follies* offered topical humour, much of which would be lost on later audiences. But the show's treatment of Prohibition proves revealing. The 1919 edition spent some time on the question, with the Eighteenth Amendment going into effect the coming January. A sketch titled 'A Saloon of the Future', with Cantor as a waiter, had *Follies* girls representing non-alcoholic alternatives such as Coca-Cola, Sarsaparilla, Lemonade, and the Anheuser-Busch product Bevo. Paired songs by Berlin suggested different relationships between alcohol and the new syncopated music, jazz. Bert Williams's 'You Cannot Make Your Shimmy Shake on Tea' stated in no uncertain terms that without alcohol it would be impossible to do the latest dances. Dancer Marilyn Miller's feature, 'A Syncopated Cocktail', claimed just the opposite—a 'jazzy melody' could substitute just fine for any buzz a real cocktail might provide. In typical Ziegfeld fashion, the real substitute Miller's tune offered was sex: shaking 'your lingerie' would prove intoxicating on its own. At the other end of the Prohibition era, the 1931 *Follies* offered a comparative look at the past and the present. A song titled 'Broadway Reverie' introduced successive scenes recreating Rector's, a famous Broadway restaurant from the 1900s, and a speakeasy supposedly at the same location in 1931. Rector's hosted impersonations of celebrities of yesteryear who sang familiar old songs, including the early *Follies* hit 'Shine On, Harvest Moon'. The speakeasy featured perhaps the bitterest song Ziegfeld ever allowed in his otherwise almost uniformly good-natured, sentimental, or comic scores. 'Cigarettes, Cigars' was darkly interpreted by Ruth Etting as suggested by her recording of the tune. Broadway nightlife, in Ziegfeld's eyes, had only declined.

Ziegfeld diversified his offerings in the 1920s with mixed success. The *Follies* continued on a different timetable, with a more or less year-round presence at the New Amsterdam from June 1922 through September 1925. Changing an annual seasonal revue to a continuous schedule called for strategic rebranding, with autumn, winter, and summer editions. By this point, Ziegfeld had major competitors. Dancer George White left Ziegfeld to create his series of *Scandals* (thirteen editions, 1919–1939) which emphasized up-to-date music and dance. Earl Carroll's annual *Vanities* (eleven editions, 1923–1940) and the Shuberts' *Artists and Models* (five editions, 1923–1930) pushed the limits of

the revue's allowance for female nudity. Irving Berlin built the modest Music Box Theater to house his intimate, song-centred series of *Music Box Revues* (1921–1924). All these revues made the *Follies* look decidedly old-fashioned and Ziegfeld's penchant for including scenes saluting *Follies*' past could only add to this perception.

In the 1920s, Ziegfeld began producing musical comedies around stars he had nurtured in the *Follies*. The first of these was a huge success: *Sally*, starring the youthful Marilyn Miller, proved one of the signature musical shows of the decade, running 561 performances at the New Amsterdam. Critic Alexander Woollcott located the show's special nature in his review: *Sally* started out, he imagined, as 'a pretty little piece after the pattern and in the modest manner of *Irene* [a standard musical comedy]. Then, from sheer force of habit, [Ziegfeld] began to enroll comedians and dancers as for some pretentious revue, told Professor Urban to spare no pains and so gather about him such a splendor of curtains and settings and costumes as few theaters in the world dare dream up.'[23] The result was a Cinderella story on a massive scale, where Sally sings catchy theatre songs by Jerome Kern and dreams of starring in the *Follies* at the New Amsterdam. In act three, Sally—played by real *Follies* star Miller—almost literally did: Victor Herbert wrote a 'Butterfly Ballet' as *Sally*'s culmination, similar to many such *Follies* ballets performed in the same theatre. Woollcott concluded his review, when you 'rush for the subway at ten minutes to midnight. You think of Mr. Ziegfeld. He is that kind of producer. There are not many of them in the world.' A subsequent show for Miller, *Rosalie* (1928), played 335 performances, again at the New Amsterdam.

Blackface comic and singer Eddie Cantor, raised from the *Frolic* to the *Follies*, was the star attraction of *Kid Boots* (1923), which ran 479 performances, a long run for the mid-1920s. Like the average *Follies*, *Kid Boots* featured topical comic scenes, here spoofing bootleggers and the upper-class mania for golf. An interpolated song ('Dinah') scored as the show's hit. As with Miller, Cantor earned a follow-up book show, *Whoopee!* (1928), which lasted 407 performances at the New Amsterdam. The run ended when Ziegfeld sold the rights to Samuel Goldwyn, who turned *Whoopee!* into a colour film which remains a useful documentation of Ziegfeld's aesthetics, even though the Ziegfeld Girls are credited as Goldwyn Girls. In between *Kid Boots* and *Whoopee!*, Cantor served as the sole headliner for the 1927 *Follies*.

It is noteworthy that Miller and Cantor's shows in the New Amsterdam—a Ziegfeld-identified house—were especially big hits. Ziegfeld offerings elsewhere were not necessarily successful. Still, he made an effort to connect across productions. For example, comedian Ethel Shutta appeared simultaneously in both the spring edition of the 1925 *Follies* and Ziegfeld's book show *Louie the 14th*. Shutta was shuttled the sixteen blocks between theatres nightly by police escort, sirens sounding—an instance of Ziegfeld turning Broadway the street into an extension of the Broadway stage. One of Shutta's numbers in the *Follies* was 'Eddie, Be Good', staged with twenty-four chorus girls wearing Cantor

masks and copying his characteristic moves, advertising that other Ziegfeld offering *Kid Boots*.

In the late 1920s, Ziegfeld diversified further, producing operettas, a genre with which he had never been associated. Operetta was a vibrant and popular genre in the decade, as popular as the newer jazzy musical comedies. What operetta offered was great singing both by trained soloists and by huge choruses. Outside the requisite Irish tenor, the *Follies* had never been known for fine singing: its headliners were comedians. (A 1917 *Follies* review noted with surprise, 'The songs are really sung.'[24]) But there was a natural connection between Ziegfeld's signature scale and the operetta as a genre offering spectacle. Ziegfeld's initial efforts in the genre—*Rio Rita* (1927), *Show Boat* (1927), and *The Three Musketeers* (1928)—were not pure operettas by any measure: all three included elements of musical comedy and revue; even *Show Boat* had speciality dance acts and theatrical imitations straight out of vaudeville.

In 1927, Ziegfeld opened his own theatre—named the Ziegfeld, of course—located at 54th Street and Sixth Avenue, well to the north of Times Square, perhaps anticipating further northward expansion of the theatre district as in the past. Designed by Joseph Urban and financed by William Randolph Hearst, the Ziegfeld had a beautifully decorated, egg-shaped interior and especially spacious audience areas compared to the cramped lobbies typical of Broadway theatres built in the previous quarter century. A large exterior balcony facing the street integrated the audience into the passing theatre of New York street life. *Rio Rita* opened the house and *Show Boat* played there for nearly two years. The Ziegfeld was demolished in 1966.

The Stock Market Crash of October 1929 deeply impacted Ziegfeld. Expensive flops in his eponymous theatre exacerbated his financial situation: his last operetta, Noel Coward's *Bitter Sweet*, failed, as did the Miller vehicle *Smiles* (1930), which had the added attraction of Fred and Adele Astaire. The Ziegfeld Theatre was dark for fifteen of nineteen months beginning in June 1930. A final edition of the *Follies* played the Ziegfeld in 1931, opening in early summer—as of old—and defiantly offering grandly scaled entertainment. At his death in 1932, the press recognized Ziegfeld as a genius who had redefined the Broadway stage and shaped American culture.

Notes

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CHAPTER 11

Feather-Footed Impresario: The *Scandals* of George White

Maya Cantu

In 1920, thirteen years after the founding of his *Follies*, Florenz Ziegfeld—as Broadway's magisterial elder statesman—declared his Broadway revue a 'National Institution'. The same year also marked the second edition of a brash, youthful upstart. The new revue was called the *George White Scandals*, established in 1919 by a veteran of the *Follies*: a 28-year-old immigrant hoofer of Austrian Jewish descent and Napoleonic drive, determined to dance his way to the top of Ziegfeld's Broadway empire. Born Eassy White, the impresario who changed his name to George White shaped his *Scandals* into not only a frothier, more terpsichorean answer to the *Follies*, but a revue that helped define the heady vitality of the Jazz Age.

Featuring the syncopated rhythms of George Gershwin, as well as the team of Buddy DeSylva, Lew Brown, and Ray Henderson, the fast-paced *Scandals* (1919–1939) lived up to the moniker of a producer who was known in his vaudeville days as 'Swifty' White.[1] Owing much to his early training as a dancer, White infused his revues with snap and fleetness, while coordinating them with rigorous perfectionism. At the same time, White presented a less flamboyant public profile than Ziegfeld. In 1966, the *Scandals* star Harry Richman reminisced of White, 'He didn't look like a producer … When the great Ziegfeld walked into a room, you knew there was a producer there. George White was more like David Merrick, now the most prolific producer on Broadway—quiet and reserved, a man who sidled into a room … a man in a blue suit who might never have been noticed, and certainly never taken for a producer.'[2]

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With the *Scandals* and numerous other productions, the 'feather-footed impresario'[3] left a complex Broadway legacy. White and his associates freely appropriated African American culture, and falsely claimed to have invented such fast-kicking dances as the Charleston and the Black Bottom. At the same time, he carved a distinctive place in Broadway musical history as an astute showman and a tireless man of the theatre who was involved in all aspects of the *Scandals*' productions. White produced, staged, and co-wrote the books and sketches of all editions of his revue, as well as appearing in five editions.[4] 'Somebody's feet are moving practically all the time', noted the *Boston Daily Globe* of the 1919 *Scandals*.[5] Like the *Scandals*, White moved swiftly and decisively throughout his producing career, just as he had during a peripatetic childhood.

George White's Early Life and Career

Newspaper profiles of White in the 1920s mythologized the producer's rise as a quintessential Horatio Alger narrative, filled with hard-scrabble migrations and odd jobs. Born on 15 April 1891, White was one of six children of Austrian Jewish immigrants: garment manufacturer Hermann Weitz, and his wife, Lena Weitz (neé Alviel). The couple immigrated to America sometime between 1885 and 1893, settling in Delancey Street on the Lower East Side. Although White maintained that he was born in New York City, he may actually have been born in the former Austria-Hungary, just before his parents left for New York City.[6] When Eassy was 7 years old, his family relocated from New York to Toronto, where Eassy 'was certainly a *Toronto Daily Star* newsboy'.[7] At the age of 11, White ran away to Buffalo, followed by Detroit, where he worked as a bootblack (i.e. shining customers' shoes) and a newsboy, and then as a stable boy at the Kenilworth Race Track in Windsor, Ontario.[8] According to one 1921 *New York Times* profile, 'With only a few pennies in his possession, White rode from Cincinnati to New York in box-cars', soon finding work as a messenger boy for the New York Postal Telegraph on Murray Street.[9]

White's entrance into show business can be traced to a tough Bowery dance hall around 1905. At Piggy Donovan's on Canal Street, where White was sent to deliver a telegraph, the sight of a young African American hoofer named Sunny Swinton dancing for tips entranced the 13-year-old messenger boy and aspiring entertainer. Launching into his own dance, White was showered with pennies and nickels.[10] White teamed up with Swinton to play the rough, immigrant dance halls of the Bowery and Chinatown. Underscoring the racial tensions that would later mark White's productions of the *Scandals*, Woollcott—not without a caustic edge—described the team's debut:

> Up in the washroom the beaming Sunny Swinton and his wide-eyed protégé practiced a few steps together, and a little later all the patrons of the Chatham Club were pounding their approval of the new-born team … One of the dimes (White) saved out and gravely presented to the gratified colored boy, who was an

> artist and a dreamer, with not too good a head for figures. This, White explained firmly, was Sunny's salary, and furthermore, he added, if he found he could use him in the same capacity again on another night, he would be glad to reward him as handsomely … I think you must admit that it was then and there, in the gloaming behind the battered piano at the Chatham Club, that George White became a theatrical manager.[11]

Throughout the rest of the decade, White clambered up the show business ladder, with gigs in burlesque, vaudeville (with such routines as a 'clever dance on skis'),[12] and finally, the *Ziegfeld Follies.* Following the break-up of his partnership with Swinton, White performed for four years with Benny Ryan, where they appeared in vaudeville as 'The Dancing Dandies'. White next hoofed in a succession of Broadway revues, including the Al Jolson vehicle *La Belle Paree* (1911)—where White claimed to have developed the Turkey Trot, a ragtime hop-step—and in both the 1911 and 1915 editions of the *Ziegfeld Follies.*[13] In the latter show, he made his first appearance opposite Ann Pennington—the pint-size, dimpled-kneed dancer who would later come to embody flaming youth as 'a mainstay of the *Scandals*'.[14] While White would appear in Ziegfeld's revue *Miss 1917*, the Great Glorifier fired White when the latter demanded a raise of salary and suggested improvements on the production.[15]

Returning to the vaudeville stage, White nourished his own impresarial ambitions. During his time in the *Follies*, White had keenly observed the fabled 'Ziegfeld Touch', with its mixture of exquisite taste and *au courant* worldliness.[16] However, whereas Ziegfeld prioritized the statuesque beauty parades of his Glorified Girls, White foregrounded dancing virtuosity. Around 1918, White produced a 'miniature revue' in vaudeville, featuring eight dancing beauties. Following this smaller venture, White mounted a 'full-scale girlie and giggles revue', in which he hired four well-known Broadway showgirls and tirelessly drilled them as dancers.[17] In 1919, White would startle Broadway with his announcement of the first *Scandals*, and further stun naysayers by making the new revue an unlikely success.

Producing the *Scandals*: 1919 to 1939

The creation of the first *Scandals*, in 1919, illustrates White's resourcefulness and determination as a showman. Financed on approximately $47,000 (out of which White put up $12,000 in cash, and raised the rest of the capital in credit),[18] the show opened at the Liberty Theatre on 2 June 1919. The production drew mixed reviews—including a stinging pan from Burns Mantle, who wrote, 'The *Scandals of 1919* prove that a hoofer should stick to his dancing.'[19] As Pratt and Zimmerman recount, 'The legend is that George took over as director, told off the cast, worked with a pile of old joke books the very next night … and rewrote the whole show … By early July, reports were that *Scandals* had picked up surprising strength over the month, that the show was doing steady good business, and was making money.'[20] The show's under-

dog victory rattled White's former boss. Shortly after the *Scandals*' opening, Ziegfeld reportedly wired White, and offered Ann Pennington and him $2,000 to return to the *Follies*. In response, White supposedly wrote back that he would pay Ziegfeld and Billie Burke $3,000 to appear in the *Scandals*.[21]

Critics described early editions of the *Scandals* as emulating the pattern of the *Follies*, while, from the first edition on, praising the revue's youthful energy and dynamic choreography. The *Scandals of 1919* featured a typical girls-and-gags gallimaufry of topical sketch comedy (e.g. a travesty of Prohibition), speciality dances (the 'Scandalous One-Step', danced by La Sylphe),[22] and elaborate chorus girl numbers featuring the 'Fifty Beautiful Scandal Mongers'.[23] *Forum* noted of the fledgling revue, which featured Ann Pennington, George White, and no big stars: 'It is no worse than any other show—rather better than most, but not quite up to the standards set by Mr. Ziegfeld. This production excels chiefly for its dancing.'[24]

While the first *Scandals* were hampered by weak material, White significantly vitalized his revue with the addition of George Gershwin as the *Scandals*' lead composer, from 1920 through 1924.[25] Largely on the basis of Gershwin's music, the *Scandals of 1922* emerged as the first great edition in the series. Alexander Woollcott raved:

> It may be said of the new *Scandals* that they are nowhere near so fair to look upon as Mr. Ziegfeld's show, but being less majestic and concerned with piling beauty on beauty are, all told, a little more entertaining … It is first and last, a dancer's idea of an entertainment, this current hubbub at the Globe.[26]

The *Scandals of 1922* followed White's conviction that 'youth and enthusiasm and zest are the biggest kind of assets' in a revue.[27] Along these lines, White incorporated the music of American youth culture—jazz—as the signature sound of the *Scandals*. Described by theatre historian Lee Davis as a 'seminal revue', the *George White Scandals of 1922* left no doubt that the Roaring Twenties were underway.[28] Featuring Gershwin's music led by Paul Whiteman's jazz orchestra, the *Scandals of 1922* introduced 'I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise'. After vocalist Winnie Lightner delivered the number in front of a leather-framed, Art Deco staircase, Pearl Regay came on and danced with uninhibited glee.[29] Among the edition's other numbers were a 'Broadway burlesque' of Adam and Eve, and several W. C. Fields sketches (satirizing such national pastimes as baseball and the radio).[30]

However, Gershwin's 25-minute 'jazz opera', *Blue Monday Blues*, stood out as his most ambitious and influential work for the *Scandals of 1922*—despite the number being cut after opening night. Set in a Harlem dive bar, and anticipating *Porgy and Bess* (1935), *Blue Monday Blues* recounted a tragic love triangle, involving beautiful Vi, gambler Joe, and his jealous rival Walter.[31] Performed by actors in blackface, *Blue Monday Blues* opened the second act of the 1922 *Scandals* before White—a producer attuned to snappy Broadway pacing—decided to let go of the piece. According to Lee Davis, 'the sappily sentimental

libretto and plodding lyrics of Buddy DeSylva' failed to please audiences and convinced White that he should pull the work from the show immediately. At the same time, Gershwin's dynamic and inventive music for *Blue Monday Blues* greatly impressed Paul Whiteman.[32] White's experiment with *Blue Monday Blues* contributed to the collaboration that would eventually result in the legendary 1924 premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue* at Aeolian Hall, as part of Whiteman's *An Experiment in Modern Music* concert. At the same time that White brought together Gershwin and Whiteman, the impresario furthered the artistic ambition of the *Scandals*, with *Blue Monday Blues* as a 'solid testament to the forceful contemporariness of the Broadway revue'.[33]

In his career as a producer, White repeatedly drew upon the artistry of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1923, White made his debut as a producer of musical comedy with *Runnin' Wild*: a 1923 sequel to the epochal *Shuffle Along* (1921). Like the latter show, also written and performed by African American artists, *Runnin' Wild* starred the comic performers Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles (reprising their respective roles as Steve Jenkins and Sam Peck from *Shuffle Along*). Also set satirically in 'Jimtown, Dixieland'—with Jenkins and Peck now 'disguised as mediums' rather than running as mayoral candidates[34]—the musical comedy introduced composer James P. Johnson and lyricist Cecil Mack's 'Charleston' as the decade's definitive dance sensation.

Yet, increasingly throughout the 1920s, White exploitatively imported the innovations of black artists into the *Scandals*. White had—unsuccessfully—hoped to cut the 'Charleston' from *Runnin' Wild*, in order to premiere it in the *Scandals* instead as his own creation.[35] Ultimately, White did feature the 'Charleston' in the *George White Scandals of 1925*, while also taking credit the next year for the creation of the 'Black Bottom'. Rivalling the Charleston in popularity, the shimmying 'Black Bottom' was danced frenetically by Ann Pennington in the *Scandals of 1926*. That year, the composer Will Marion Cook penned a strongly worded letter 'to the editor of *The New York Times*', titled 'Spirituals and Jazz'[36]:

> I wish to take exception to one or two statements in the Sunday *Times* lauding George White and his *Scandals*. Among other accomplishments, Mr. White is credited with the creation of the 'Charleston' and the 'Black Bottom Dances'.
>
> I have the greatest respect for Mr. White, his genius as an organizer and a producer of reviews [sic]; but why do an injustice to the black folk of America by taking from them the credit of creating new and characteristic dances?
>
> … The 'Charleston' has been done in the South, especially in the little islands lying off Charleston, S.C., for little more than forty years to my knowledge. The dance reached New York five years ago … [and] was first staged in a real production by Frank Montgomery in *How Come* … Jimmy Johnson, a negro song writer, first conceived the idea of a Charleston song, and in his score for Miller and Lyles (in *Runnin' Wild*), wrote the famous 'Charleston', which was staged by Elida Webb, and the craze was on. It is doubtful if Mr. White even saw a 'Charleston' until he attended the final rehearsals of *Runnin' Wild*.

> … Messrs. White et al are great men and great producers. Why, with their immense flocks of dramatic and musical sheep, should they wish to reach out and grab our little ewe lamb of originality?'[37]

Amid the controversy about the true origin of the 'Charleston' and the 'Black Bottom', the 1926 *George White Scandals* emerged as an artistic high point of the 1920s Broadway revue.[38] The 1926 edition of the *Scandals* represented White at the height of his synthetic powers, as he melded his direct appropriations from African American artists with a brilliant jazz score by Henderson, Brown, and DeSylva; exquisite Art Deco designs by Erté of Paris[39]; inventive stage effects; and arguably the series' strongest cast, headlined by Willie and Eugene Howard, Harry Richman, Ann Pennington, and Frances Williams.[40] As the most commercially successful entry in the series, the production played 424 performances, while its opening night offered the breathtakingly expensive top ticket price of $55.[41] The edition also showcased White's 'inspired use of props, living or inanimate' (as described by Harry Richman), with such numbers as 'Give Me the Good Old Days'. Performed by Willie Howard and ensemble, the song featured a novel set: a detailed automat with 'different openings' out of which tumbled a succession of chorus girls (and, finally, a prop baby).[42]

Above all else, 'The Birth of the Blues' stood out as the show's musical and production highlight. The number illustrated White's flair as a youthful, modern showman who—alongside contemporaries like Gershwin, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and the cultural critic Gilbert Seldes (*The 7 Lively Arts*)—helped set the tempo of Jazz Age America. The number played out as a spectacular battle between the blues and the classics. As Robert Baral describes, 'The Birth of the Blues' unfolded upon a glittering staircase, flanked by *Scandals* girls costumed as angels. On one side of the stage, Harry Richman represented the blues, while supported by the sister act of Margaret and Dorothy McCarthy (who appeared as 'Memphis Blues' and 'St. Louis Blues', respectively). On the other side of the stage stood Willie and Eugene Howard, in a burlesque allegory of classical music, along with Marion Fairbanks as 'Traummerai' and Madeline Fairbanks as 'Schubert's Melody'. As the number segued into a passage from *Rhapsody in Blue*, White asserted the victory of Richman's 'Blues' team—and, by extension, the cultural dominance of the American lively arts.[43]

Throughout the remainder of the decade, White alternated between new editions of the *Scandals* (in 1928 and 1929) and book musicals. With the hits *Manhattan Mary* (1927) and *Flying High* (1930), as well as the unsuccessful *Melody* (1933), White broadened his range as a producer of musical comedy and operetta—likely in competition with Ziegfeld (who produced *Show Boat* in 1927 and *The Three Musketeers* in 1928). The most notable of these musical comedies was *Manhattan Mary*. Featuring a score by DeSylva, Brown, and Henderson, and a book by White and William K. Wells, *Manhattan Mary* dusted off an old-fashioned plot about a chorus girl named Mary Brennan (Ona Munson) who rises to Broadway stardom.

While formulaic on the surface, *Manhattan Mary*'s backstage Cinderella story tapped into White's own self-made, immigrant mythology. *Manhattan Mary* evoked the wave of Broadway 'Cinderella musicals' (e.g. 1919's *Irene* and 1920's *Sally*) that ran ubiquitously throughout the early 1920s, and that recounted the ascent of an honest and industrious (and often immigrant) working girl. At the same time, the producer cannily used *Manhattan Mary* as a marketing tool for the *Scandals*. Just as Ziegfeld's earlier *Sally* had featured a show-within-a-show *Follies*, *Manhattan Mary* offered a 'semi-*Scandals*' primed to generate ticket sales: 'Mr. White … conceived a highly promising idea about a young woman who fought her way into the *Scandals*, and thence climbed her way … into brilliant success. It was, to be sure, a scheme that involved occasional mention of Mr. White and the *Scandals*, but Mr. White, like Mr. Ziegfeld, does not consider self-promotion exactly bad showmanship.'[44] In conceiving the title character of Mary Brennan as an Irish American girl who 'makes good' through the *Scandals*, White (who also appeared as himself in *Manhattan Mary*) may have intended the musical as an autobiographical embellishment of his own legend.

Although the *Scandals* continued throughout the 1930s, the series' fortunes declined alongside the commercial dominance of the extravagant revue, 'in the days of falling dollars and crashing banks'.[45] The 1931 *Scandals*, featuring a 'slam-bang score'[46] by Brown and Henderson (but not DeSylva), held strong with both rave reviews and a run of 202 performances. Its highlights included Ethel Merman introducing the Depression-era anthem 'Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries'. Attempting to keep up with the popularity (and lower expense) of such 'intimate revues' as *The Little Show* (1929), White produced *George White Music Hall Varieties* in 1932. He also tried his fortunes in Hollywood, appearing as himself—and playing up his brash, streetwise charm—in both *George White's Scandals* (1934) and *George White's 1935 Scandals*. Produced by Twentieth Century-Fox, the films touted the billing: 'Entire Production, Conceived, Produced, and Directed by George White'. Back on Broadway, the *George White Scandals of 1935* featured a cavalcade of comics, including the Three Stooges and Bert Lahr, while the *Scandals of 1939* launched the stardom of Ann Miller, who hoofed to 'a heat-treated dance called the Mexiconga'.[47]

However, critics concurred that the *Scandals* had lost the dynamism and inventiveness of its editions in the 1920s. In the effort to repeat past successes, White—unpersuasively—reworked old formulas: 'For the first-act finale, the *Scandals (of 1939)* has the good taste to fall back on famous works by Jerome Kern and George Gershwin in a highly moral panegyric of Tin Pan Alley', noted Brooks Atkinson.[48] Another number—featuring the 'grass-skirt swish (of) the venerable beach in Waikiki'[49]—evoked the exotica of Gershwin's 'South Sea Isles' in the *Scandals of 1921*. With the revue form out-of-date in a war-panicked United States, Atkinson concluded, 'the first show of the new season is a routine frolic out of a tasteless past. Perhaps the jaded public that liked this stuff many years ago will still like it amid the alarms of today.'[50]

Though the *Scandals of 1939* managed 120 performances, White 'never managed to recapture the public interest for long', fading into semi-retirement.[51]

George White as Broadway Producer: Significance and Innovations

In many histories of the Broadway musical and revue, the *George White Scandals* has been evoked as a peppy also-ran to the magnificent *Ziegfeld Follies*. While White didn't cultivate as iconic or mythic a persona as that of Florenz Ziegfeld, he was nonetheless a highly distinctive impresario who made significant contributions to the Broadway revue, while helping to shape the form as a definitive cultural expression of the 1920s. As a producer, White's style blended Jazz Age speed, Art Deco opulence, and the streetwise instincts of a gambler, honed by the former 'Swifty' White's raffish apprenticeship 'on the docks and race tracks of half a dozen cities'.[52]

In contrast to the more aloof exquisiteness of the 'Ziegfeld Touch', White branded an accessible image as a hands-on man of the theatre who was involved in all aspects of production, from producing, staging, and choreographing the *Scandals* to co-writing the books for many editions. Presenting the picture of a fast-talking Broadway showman, with his slicked-back hair and blue serge suits, White even publicized himself as active in ticket-peddling; as Sidney Skolsky noted in *Times Square Tintypes*, 'His hobby is selling tickets in the box office. Someday he hopes to tell Ziegfeld there is "Standing Room Only".'[53] Not as flamboyant as Ziegfeld in terms of press,[54] and given less to elaborate publicity stunts (i.e. the legendary Anna Held 'milk bath'), White was nonetheless comparably extravagant: 'He spent money with a dizzying recklessness, was often broke, and was in and out of bankruptcy several times—he estimated he had made and lost four million dollars in his career, a clear three million by 1929.'[55]

In terms of choreography, White also differed from Ziegfeld, who delegated *Follies* dance direction to Julian Mitchell and, later, to the versatile Ned Wayburn. By contrast, White personally—and exhaustively—drilled his stars and chorines. As the producer told *The New York Times*, 'I train my choruses myself instead of having someone else put on the dances, as is customary in many cases in putting on a revue.'[56] White elaborated that a graceful walk was 'the first thing I look for in selecting chorus material. No matter how pretty a girl is, if she can't move well, she can't learn to dance, and isn't going to add much to the chorus. Also, if she hasn't that feeling for rhythm, she won't be able to wear costumes effectively.'[57] With his own dancer's sensitivity to precise timing, White fashioned the *Scandals* into a series that exemplified Gilbert Seldes's description of the revue form as 'correspond[ing] to those *de luxe* railway trains which are always exactly on time … The real tone of the revue [is] the steady, incorruptible purr of the dynamo.'[58]

White also carved an image as a star-maker, with a keen eye for selecting and fostering new talent. In 1920, White told *The New York Times*, 'In line with

their desire for stage novelties, they (the audience) also want to see new faces. And besides, it is much easier to handle so-called unknowns than many of the stage celebrities.'[59] From 1919 through 1939, the *Scandals* made stars of Willie and Eugene Howard, Harry Richman, Rudy Vallee, Helen Morgan, Eleanor Powell, and Ann Miller, and advanced the careers of showgirls Louise Brooks and Alice Faye,[60] even as it also featured regular appearances by star comedians like W. C. Fields. Writing of his time in the *Scandals* of 1926, Richman memorialized the producer, '[George White] was truly a remarkable producer. He knew how to pick people who could work well together, and he knew how to pick people to write for them', while noting: '[*The Scandals of 1926*] probably wouldn't have been as great if the performers hadn't been as attuned to each other as all of us were.'[61]

White's most enduring legacy as a Broadway producer involves his influential popularizing of American jazz through the medium of the *Scandals*. White deserves credit for cultivating the musical talent and Broadway careers of George Gershwin, as well as DeSylva, Brown, and Henderson. At the same time, his complex dance of cultural appreciation and appropriation with African American musicians and performers—dating back to his early dance hall partnership with Sunny Swinton—spanned the entirety of the *Scandals*. In presenting jazz-inspired works like *Blue Monday Blues* and songs like 'The Birth of the Blues', White's shows evoked the sounds of Harlem Renaissance, even while excluding—or, in the case of *Runnin' Wild*, taking credit from—the voices of black artists.

Similarly, White's career, both in vaudeville and with the *Scandals*, contributed to the cultural vitality of a multitude of new dances—from the ragtime Turkey Trot, to the Charleston in *Runnin' Wild* and the *Scandals of 1925*, and to the Black Bottom in the *Scandals of 1926*. As Pratt and Zimmerman observe, 'White claimed to have invented [all three dances]. Actually, what he did was to popularize them, since all three were gentrified and formalized in several stages from jook-joint dances and steps probably seen by George in the streets and theaters of Harlem.'[62] Arguably more so than any revue impresario of the 1920s, White was keenly attuned to rising musical and dance trends, and shrewdly imported them to his *Scandals* stage.

If White, who died of leukaemia at Los Angeles's Mount Sinai Hospital on 10 October 1968, was never the choreographic innovator he claimed, he was nevertheless an energetic codifier, whose cultural influence throughout the 1920s has long been understated. The most determinedly modern of the 1920s revue impresarios, White was never one to underestimate his talent, initiative, and powerful drive. As Skolsky wrote in *Times Square Tintypes*: 'Among his major hates are first nights, paper napkins, barbers with a selling complex, and crowds—except at his own shows.' Skolsky added, with mordant affection, 'When his ego rises, he modestly enough calls Broadway—the Great White Way—believing it was named after him.'[63] At the height of White's success, in the mid-1920s, even Ziegfeld might not have entirely disagreed.

Notes

1. Alexander Woollcott, 'The Rise of Swifty White', *Collier's*, 19 May 1928, 12.
2. Harry Richman, *A Hell of a Life* (New York: Duall, Sloan and Pearce, 1966), 121.
3. Woollcott, 'The Rise of Swifty White', 12.
4. White appeared in the 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, and 1929 editions of the *Scandals*.
5. '"*Scandals of 1919*" at the Colonial', *Boston Daily Globe*, 28 October 1919, 6.
6. Historians Betty Minaker Pratt and Arthur E. Zimmerman elaborate, 'If we were able to find the record of the arrival date of the Weitz family in North America, we could then say definitively whether Eassy/George was born in Austria or in the Lower East Side of New York City. That record has proven elusive and the whole family story has proven difficult to track because the patriarch's name wandered around from Hermann to Herman, Harris, Harry and Henry and from Weitz to Whites, White, Weicz and Whitz. In various documents, different family members gave their arrival date as any time between 1885 and 1893.' 'George White: *Toronto Star* Newsboy Builds a Stairway to Broadway (Part 1 of 2)', *Antique Phonograph News*, September–October 2010, 5, http://www.capsnews.org/apn2010-5.htm.
7. Ibid., 6.
8. Ibid., 7–8.
9. 'The Crowded Story of George White', *New York Times*, 31 July 1921, 62.
10. Woollcott, 'The Rise of Swifty White', 12.
11. Ibid., 49.
12. Pratt and Zimmerman, 'George White: *Toronto Star* Newsboy Builds a Stairway to Broadway (Part 2 of 2)', *Antique Phonograph News*, November–December 2010, 2, http://www.capsnews.org/apn2010-6.htm.
13. Ibid., 1.
14. Dorothy Parker, 'National Institutions', in *Dorothy Parker: Complete Broadway, 1918–1923*, ed. Kevin C. Fitzpatrick (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2014), 153.
15. Pratt and Zimmerman, 'George White: *Toronto Star* Newsboy Builds a Stairway to Broadway (Part 2 of 2)', 3.
16. Ethan Mordden, *Ziegfeld: The Man Who Invented Show Business* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 122.
17. Pratt and Zimmerman, 'George White: *Toronto Star* Newsboy Builds a Stairway to Broadway (Part 2 of 2)', 4.
18. Ibid., 6.

19. Sidney Skolsky, *Times Square Tintypes* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1930), 31.
20. Pratt and Zimmerman, 'George White: *Toronto Star* Newsboy Builds a Stairway to Broadway (Part 2 of 2)', 6.
21. Lee Davis, *Scandals and Follies* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2000), 155.
22. '"*Scandals of 1919*" at the Colonial', *Boston Daily Globe*, 28 October 1919, 6.
23. Pratt and Zimmerman, 'George White: *Toronto Star* Newsboy Builds a Stairway to Broadway (Part 2 of 2)', 6.
24. C. Courtenay Savage, 'The Theatre in Review', *Forum*, July 1919, 114.
25. George's songs in the *Scandals of 1922* featured lyrics by B. G. DeSylva, E. Ray Goetz, and Arthur Francis (then, the pseudonym of Ira Gershwin). George and Ira would only pair up as a lasting team with 1924's *Lady, Be Good!*
26. Alexander Woollcott, 'The Play: A Dancer's Revue', *New York Times*, 29 August 1922, 18.
27. George White, 'Inexperienced Girls Wanted for Chorus', *Baltimore Sun*, 21 October 1923, ARE2.
28. Davis, *Scandals and Follies*, 187.
29. Ibid., 188. Lightner also introduced a second Gershwin standard in the 1924 *Scandals*; she performed 'Somebody Loves Me' to a bevy of suitors including Romeo, Mark Antony, and silent film stars Harold Lloyd and William S. Hart.
30. Alexander Woollcott, 'The Play: A Dancer's Revue', *New York Times*, 29 August 1922, 18.
31. Howard Pollack, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 271.
32. According to Davis: 'Re-orchestrated by Ferde Grofé, *Blue Monday Blues* became *135th Street*, and under Whiteman's baton and urging, was performed at Carnegie Hall twice' (*Scandals and Follies*, 188).
33. Ibid.
34. Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle,* 3rd edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 430.
35. Jean Stearns and Marshall Winslow Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 146.
36. Cook was the composer of the milestone musicals *Clorindy, or the Origin of the Cake* Walk (1898) and *In Dahomey* (1903), the first full-length musical written and performed in a Broadway theatre by black artists, with a cast including Bert Williams and George Walker.
37. Will Marion Cook, 'Spirituals and Jazz', *New York Times*, 26 December 1926, X8.
38. Davis, *Scandals and Follies*, 233.

39. Erté (né Romain de Tirtoff), the Russian-born resident designer of the *Folies Bergère*, designed sets and costumes for seven editions of the *Scandals*, including every edition of the 1920s.
40. Davis, *Scandals and Follies*, 233.
41. '$55 for First Night Seats for *Scandals*', *New York Times*, 25 May 1925, 25.
42. Richman, *A Hell of a Life*, 130–1.
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45. Bosley Crowther, 'The Longest Way 'Round: Or How George White's "*Scandals*" Found the Shortest Way to Success', *New York Times*, 12 January 1936, X3.
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52. 'The Crowded Story of George White', *New York Times*, 31 July 1921, 62.
53. Skolsky, *Times Square Tintypes*, 30.
54. Baral, *Revue: The Great Broadway Period*, 144.
55. Pratt and Zimmerman, 'George White: *Toronto Star* Newsboy Builds a Stairway to Broadway (Part 2 of 2)', 8.
56. 'Inexperienced Girls Wanted for Chorus', *Baltimore Sun*, 21 October 1923, ARE2.
57. Ibid.
58. Gilbert Seldes, *The 7 Lively Arts* [1924] (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), 132.
59. 'George White, Producer', *New York Tribune*, 13 June 1920, B1.
60. The legendary Brooks made her Broadway debut as a showgirl in the *George White Scandals of 1924*; Faye, in the chorus of the *George White Scandals of 1931* (she also later co-starred in the films *George White's Scandals* [1934] and *George White's 1935 Scandals*).
61. Richman, *A Hell of a Life*, 129.
62. Pratt and Zimmerman, 'George White: *Toronto Star* Newsboy Builds a Stairway to Broadway (Part 2 of 2)', 1.
63. Skolsky, *Times Square Tintypes*, 32.

CHAPTER 12

Alexander A. Aarons and Vinton Freedley: The Smart Sophisticates

Jennifer Ashley Tepper and William A. Everett

Quintessential musical comedies of the 1920s and early 1930s were bright, crisp, and totally in tune with the times. Behind this enduring reputation was the producing team of Alexander A. Aarons and Vinton Freedley, whose works largely defined the era when it came to musical comedy. They brought their audiences zesty song-and-dance spectacles that exuded the smart effervescence and sophisticated charm of the previous decade's Princess Theatre musicals. Their shows almost always focused on upper-class characters who, while trying to exude dignity and grace, find themselves in unfamiliar situations and having to interact with people of lesser social standing. In order to bring their distinctive type of musical comedy to the theatre-going public, Aarons and Freedley assembled a dynamic cache of performers and creators and even erected a purpose-built theatre, the Alvin.

Alexander A. Aarons (1890–1943) was born in Philadelphia, the son of Broadway composer and producer Alfred E. Aarons and actress Josephine Hall. While his parents were working on musicals such as *The Military Maid* (1900), *Mam'selle 'Awkins* (1900), and *The Knickerbocker Girl* (1903), young Alex was absorbing everything around him. It was perhaps through this practical osmosis

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that the future producer learned how to listen and subsequently develop his celebrated ear for musical talent. The shows in which his parents appeared demonstrated varying approaches to staged musical humour, including visually engaging extravaganza and sharp-witted farce, and influenced the younger Aarons's approach to musical comedy.

Fred Astaire remembers meeting Aarons for the first time in 1921.[1] He and his sister Adele were somewhat depressed about appearing in *The Love Letter*, an unpopular musical that closed after thirty-one performances. One day, Fred decided to go shopping for a tie, and the man fitting him introduced himself as a fan. The pretentious salesman told his customer what he and Adele should do next: star in one of the intimate musical comedies that were becoming popular rather than another glamorous revue or sentimental operetta.

After an in-depth chat about the business, Fred asked him how he knew so much about Broadway. The salesman was of course Alex A. Aarons, who had a handful of co-production credits but had not yet produced a show on his own. He was working at a men's clothing store in order to make ends meet. Aarons confidently told his customer that he wanted his first musical as sole producer to be written by George and Ira Gershwin and to star Fred and Adele Astaire. Astaire and Aarons shook hands and Fred departed with a tie and renewed hope for his Broadway career.

Only four months later, on 21 February 1922, *For Goodness Sake* lit up the Lyric Theatre. Aarons fulfilled his dream in this, his first sole-produced musical, of casting Fred and Adele as the stars. His linked ambition for a Gershwin score was only partially realized, however. Since the brothers were already under contract with George White to create songs for the latest edition of his *Scandals*, George (Gershwin) was only able to write music for three songs and Ira provided lyrics for five. William Daly and Paul Lannin, both of whom were known as conductors and orchestrators, crafted most of the music, and Arthur Jackson served as lyricist.

For Goodness Sake was a musical farce with a zany, thin plot: a husband and wife are suspicious of each other's fidelity, so the husband stages a fake suicide, the wife gets wind of this and pretends to celebrate, and everyone comes together in the end for a wild song and dance. The Astaires did not play the disturbed married couple but rather starred in the saga's parallel romantic tale. The siblings, to Aarons's delight, stole the show. A highpoint of the production was 'All to Myself', the first Gershwin song that the Astaires performed on stage.[2] Importantly, one of the other actors in the production, Vinton Freedley, who was also a financial backer, met Aarons for the first time and thereafter became his producing partner.

Freedley (1891–1969), like Aarons, was born in Philadelphia, but to a socially prominent wealthy family. He graduated from Harvard and completed a law degree at the University of Pennsylvania before forsaking a life of society for one upon the wicked stage. At first a comic actor, Freedley performed in several plays on Broadway, including *Miss Millions* (1919), before his career-changing appearance as lawyer Jefferson Dangerfield in *For Goodness*

Sake. Adele Astaire said of him, 'Freedley was a rich man and thwarted actor. He wanted to be an actor but never quite made it, so he became a manager.'[3] This was a fortuitous twist of fate, for Freedley's stage experience informed his success as a producer, at least in part because he knew from experience how to treat actors, politely and with a firm hand. He also possessed the financial capital to underwrite productions.

In the decade following *For Goodness Sake*, Aarons and Freedley produced over a dozen Broadway shows. The team promoted a type of musical comedy that was youthful, witty, sometimes wacky, and eminently urbane. This came from their own backgrounds—Aarons in the world of musical comedy and farce and Freedley as a sophisticate and comic actor. It was a weighty blend of talents and temperaments that served both men extremely well.

Aarons and Freedley were considered the best-dressed producers in the business. This seems fair, considering Aarons's background in men's fashion and Freedley's wealth. The two men, though, possessed very different personalities. While Aarons was known to greet theatre professionals with a friendly clap on the back and a hearty hello, Freedley was more likely to shake hands and offer a highball. Their differences in manners contributed to their collaborative success—many felt that Aarons excelled at handling the talent and Freedley the finances, though both remained strongly involved with the on-stage and managerial aspects of their enterprise. It was Aarons, for example, who negotiated for the Astaires to appear in three Aarons–Freedley productions in London, *For Goodness Sake* (as *Stop Flirting*), *Lady, Be Good!*, and *Funny Face*.

Noted orchestrator Robert Russell Bennett, who worked with the producers several times, remembered their distinct personalities when under fire:

> The ends of two different 'run-throughs' gave a pretty complete idea of the contrast between them. I sat beside Freedley, who was suave and quite dignified at all times. This rehearsal was not a very successful one and I wondered when he would start to tear his hair out and kick things around, but he did nothing of the sort. At the final curtain he said quietly, 'Not quite right yet.'
>
> Aarons, at a dress rehearsal of another play, called the entire company on stage after the curtain and said, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I have just seen your dress rehearsal and I want to say that I have never before seen such a disgraceful performance in all my life. You all stink!' Whereupon he gave a vigorous nod of the head and his pince-nez landed on the floor.
>
> I imagine a good psychiatrist would tell you at once which of the two partners the entire troupe preferred to deal with, but it surprised me. Under his rather blunt surface Alex Aarons was pretty friendly and understanding. Vinton Freedley, by all accounts, was made of steel and ice.[4]

Their different approaches to dealing with people complemented and balanced each other. Freedley's legal training certainly played into this as well.

Aarons and Freedley's first musical as co-producers, *Lady, Be Good!*, opened on 1 December 1924, at the Liberty Theatre and became an immediate hit.[5] Aarons realized his earlier dream to produce a show with his two favourite pairs of siblings, the Gershwins and the Astaires. George and Ira Gershwin created the songs, and Fred and Adele Astaire starred in the snappy musical comedy. The plot involving a down-on-their-luck brother and sister dance team overflows with gleeful trappings and shenanigans, and ends in riches and a double wedding. The Astaires introduced 'Fascinatin' Rhythm' in the show, a song that quickly became a sensation and one of the iconic songs in the Great American Songbook.

Aarons had admired George Gershwin for a long time, and the two had a musical bond that transcended words. According to Ira Gershwin:

> There was a different kind of musical communication between George and his earliest Broadway producer. Alex Aarons was quite musical himself and had faith enough to sign George at nineteen for *La, La, Lucille* [a show Alex produced in 1919 with George B. Seitz under the watchful eye of his father]. Alex was fond at the time of at least twenty of George's tunes which had not yet been written up lyrically, so he had no means of calling for any one of them by numeral or title. But he could request what he wanted to hear this way: Whisking his hand across George's shoulder, he would say, 'Play me the one that goes like *that*.' Or: 'Play the tune that smells like an onion.' Or: '*You* know, the one that reminds me of the Staten Island ferry.' And so on … I met Alex a few weeks after George did and in Aarons's apartment heard five or six requests in this oblique manner.[6]

Aarons knew exactly what kind of Gershwin song could serve a particular need in a show, whether it was a sentimental ballad, a fast-paced syncopated song, or a bright waltz. He also possessed intuitive insights as to *who* would best sing this song, realizing the differences in performance styles between the likes of the Astaires, Gertrude Lawrence, and Ethel Merman. He and Freedley were known for making suggestions and even demands concerning the overall structure of a show, including where songs needed to be placed for their maximum theatrical effectiveness.[7] This direct involvement in the development of a show was one of their hallmarks, and their combination of talents in this regard contributed to the overall quality of their highly polished productions.

Aarons and Freedley's next musical also featured a Gershwin score. *Tip-Toes* opened at the Lyric on 28 December 1925. Its plot involves vaudevillians stranded in Florida, one of whom, the title character, romances a wealthy businessman—a now-stock character in Aarons and Freedley shows—played by Allen Kearns (Kearns would go on to play the romantic male leads in two later Aarons–Freedley–Gershwin shows, *Funny Face* and *Girl Crazy*).

Aarons and Freedley's collaboration with the Gershwins continued with *Oh, Kay!*, which opened on 8 November 1926, at the Imperial Theatre. The brothers created a classy score for the esteemed British actress Gertrude Lawrence, who was making her Broadway debut in a book musical with this

production. Aarons and Freedley supported her in this move to a dramatic role, since she came from a background in music hall and revue. The Gershwins created the wistful ballad 'Someone to Watch Over Me' especially for Lawrence; she brought the house down at every performance. The story concerns a bootlegging English Duke whose sister, Kay (played by Lawrence), becomes the love interest of the Long Island estate owner on whose land the booze is hidden.

Firmly established as a producing team, Aarons and Freedley opened their own theatre in 1927, cleverly calling it the 'Alvin', its name derived from combining the initial syllables of their first names. Located at 250 West 52nd Street and designed by Herbert J. Krapp, the house exuded the same grace and genteel refinement of the shows that appeared on its stage.

The Alvin opened its doors with *Funny Face* on 22 November 1927. Appropriately, given the history of its namesake producers, the show featured a score by the Gershwins and starred the Astaires. The plot concerned several teams of robbers trying to break into a safe, but what stood out were the string of glorious Gershwin tunes (including 'S' Wonderful', 'He Loves and She Loves', 'My One and Only', and 'Funny Face') and the irreproachable stars. In addition to the Astaires, the cast featured three of Broadway's best-known singing men, William Kent, Victor Moore, and Allen Kearns. But perhaps most significantly, especially considering the atmosphere of class that surrounded everything Aarons and Freedley did, it was in this show that Fred Astaire first donned his iconic top hat and tails when he danced before the men's chorus in 'High Hat'.

The Alvin and *Funny Face* both received strong reviews. Brooks Atkinson noted in the *New York Times*: 'The new Alvin Theatre … seems to have all the best features of the modern playhouse—even an old English lounge where refreshments may be had. The auditorium is decorated in pastel shades of blue and gray, with ivory and old gold decorations … If "Funny Face" had been less engrossing the audience might have had more time to appreciate the new theater.'[8]

The Alvin was more than a playhouse; it was the centre of Aarons and Freedley's world. Alex occupied the penthouse offices, and Vinton had the floor just below. Alex became so nervous on opening nights that he supposedly spent the entire performances in the men's room, feeling like he was going to throw up. Vinton had to stand in for both of them, greeting investors and congratulating actors.

Richard Rodgers must have been delighted when Aarons asked him and his then-partner Lorenz Hart to create a musical for the Alvin. Aarons and Freedley ended up producing two shows with scores by Rodgers and Hart, both in 1929. *Spring Is Here*, with a book by Owen Davis based on his play *Shotgun Wedding*, opened on 11 March. As Rodgers recounted, the plot was 'just one more bit of fluff dealing with flirtations among the "Tennis, anyone?" Long Island social set'.[9] The musical introduced what became a Rodgers and Hart standard, 'With a Song in My Heart'. The beloved song almost didn't

make it into the show. Aarons loved it and Freedley despised it. The producers feuded, swore at each other, and, according to Rodgers, nearly dissolved their partnership over the song.[10] Aarons won, as he did on most musical matters. The second musical, *Heads Up*, with a book by John McGowan and Paul Gerard Smith, opened on 11 November. It took place aboard a yacht that, unbeknownst to its wealthy owners, was being used by bootleggers. The show featured what would become another Rodgers and Hart hit, 'A Ship Without A Sail'.

Aarons and Freedley returned to the Gershwins in 1930 for one of the most important shows to grace the American musical stage: *Girl Crazy*. With a stunning score that presented such hits as 'Embraceable You', 'But Not for Me', and 'I Got Rhythm', the show featured Allen Kearns and 19-year-old Ginger Rogers as the romantic leads and introduced Ethel Merman to Broadway. Following the producers' emblematic plot design, the show involved a chic New Yorker who finds himself in the Wild West of Custerville, Arizona.

It was actually Freedley who discovered Merman. At the time she was working as a stenographer and singing at Brooklyn's Paramount Theatre.[11] Freedley, sensing something epic in her performance, asked her to come and sing for George Gershwin, who was similarly impressed. They put her in *Girl Crazy*, and a star was born.

Aarons and Freedley, meanwhile, were unhappy with the show's dance director, George Hale, and sought the advice of their friend Fred Astaire. The producers were especially concerned about 'Embraceable You', a feature for Kearns and Rogers. Astaire made several changes and additions to the number, which they had to rehearse on the thick-carpeted mezzanine, since all other spaces at the Alvin were already occupied. Hence, on an autumn afternoon in 1930, Fred Astaire danced for the first time with his legendary partner Ginger Rogers, with whom he would later make Hollywood history.[12]

The Great Depression was certainly taking its toll on live theatre. It was partially responsible for Aarons and Freedley's failed Rodgers and Hart shows in 1929, and in 1932, the producing team lost control of their namesake theatre. They only produced one more show together, *Pardon My English*, with a score by the Gershwins and a book by Herbert Fields, which opened on 20 January 1933, at the Majestic Theatre. The musical was supposed to be a vehicle for the English musical hall star Jack Buchanan, who would play a double role as German thug Golo Schmidt and his alter ego, wealthy Brit Michael Bramleigh. Buchanan couldn't master playing Schmidt, although his portrayal of Bramleigh was no problem. The situation became increasingly tense, and the producers finally had to replace Buchanan with comedian George Givot. The show was panned and lasted only forty-three performances.

After losing control of the Alvin Theatre and the failure of *Pardon My English,* Aarons and Freedley decided to dissolve their partnership. Aarons moved to Hollywood, where he eventually became a producer at RKO Pictures. Freedley continued to produce independently and among the later works he brought

to the stage were *Anything Goes* (1934) and *Red, Hot, and Blue* (1936) both starring his discovery Ethel Merman.

Aarons and Freedley knew how to craft musical comedies that sparkled with urbane sophistication and accentuated the talents of their stars. The team's success and reputation led not only to a namesake theatre but also to having their brand of musical comedy define the genre at its best.

Notes

1. This story appears in several sources, most recently in Kathleen Riley, *The Astaires: Fred and Adele* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 66.
2. Kathleen Riley, *The Astaires: Fred and Adele* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 67.
3. Helen Rayburn Collection (taped interviews), Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Mugar Memorial Library, Boston University; quoted in Riley, *The Astaires*, 68.
4. Robert Russell Bennett, in *'The Broadway Sound': The Autobiography and Selected Essays of Robert Russell Bennett*, ed. George J. Ferencz (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1999), 114.
5. Before this, the team produced Cosmo Hamilton's play *The New Poor*, which opened at the Playhouse Theatre on 7 January 1924 and closed after thirty-two performances. This comedy marked the official beginning of their joint enterprise.
6. Ira Gershwin, 'Which Came First?', *Saturday Review* (29 August 1959); reprinted in *The George Gershwin Reader*, ed. Robert Wyatt and John Andrew Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 61.
7. This was certainly the case with *Funny Face*. Edward Jabonski, *Gershwin: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1988; reprint edn., New York: Da Capo, 1998), 133.
8. J. Brooks Atkinson, 'The Play: Astaires and Others', *New York Times*, 23 November 1927.
9. Richard Rodgers, *Musical Stages: An Autobiography* (New York: Da Capo reprint, second edition, 2002 [originally published 1975]), 120.
10. Ibid., 122.
11. Caryl Flinn, *Brass Diva: The Life and Legends of Ethel Merman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 30.
12. Riley, *The Astaires*, 130–1.

CHAPTER 13

Coherency: Lew Fields, the Performer-Producer and Experimenter in Integration

Dominic Symonds

Born Moses Schoenfeld in the Lower East Side of New York on New Year's Day 1867, Lew Fields spent his formative years in the vibrant playground of the 'melting pot'. He would soon meet his long-term working partner Joe Weber (1867–1942) in the chaotic streets around the Bowery. Weber and Fields teamed up and performed their 'double Dutch act' from the age of 10: a combination of slapstick and satire with songs thrown in for good measure, and an observation of the people and lifestyles they saw around them. Their characters Mike and Meyer were European immigrants who garbled the English language while trying to concoct get-rich schemes and assimilate into American society. Weber and Fields managed their own affairs, as was the custom of the day. By 1885 they were playing Miner's Bowery Theater and working their way up through the vaudeville circuit. Not long after that, they were touring the country and appearing at Tony Pastor's celebrated Music Hall. By 1895, they had opened their own venue, the Weber and Fields Broadway Music Hall, becoming favourites with audiences and well-respected among fellow performers.

Despite humble beginnings, Fields's work was to develop throughout his lifetime of performing and producing to inform and influence a far more middle-brow performance form. Though seldom acknowledged as a major contributor to the Broadway musical, Fields played a formative part in nurturing ideas that would feed into the concept of integration. By 1904 he was primarily working as a producer, though thanks to his early performance work, he

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continued to be recognized as a bona fide star from a period before the great star-making industries of Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley developed.

The route to stardom in the 1890s was very different to the way to the top today. Nineteenth-century stardom relied on word of mouth, rumour, advance notices, and playbills. 'In 1890', write Fields's biographers, 'it was still possible for a successful actor to become a successful owner and manager based on his reputation and talent—the commodity he produced by himself.'[1] 'Advance men' would be sent out to the next touring venue to rehearse the resident supporting company, promote the show, and bring favourable notices from other towns on the itinerary. This primitive publicity machine worked. 'At the height of their fame', Richard Stott reports, Weber & Fields were making 'an incredible $4000 a week'.[2]

The partnership of Weber & Fields was quick to burn out, though. In 1904 the team split and Weber took over the running of the venue while Fields continued to perform. Although they revived their act regularly when the lucrative prospect of a reunion beckoned, they would now go their separate ways. Familiar with the cut and thrust of the industry, Fields fell into producing his own shows.

Fields and the Shuberts

As was the trend in the early years of the century, he announced his vision and intentions by taking over a venue and naming it after himself. The Lew Fields Theater at 254 West 42nd Street opened in 1904 with his new show, *It Happened in Nordland*. The show was a huge success and ran for 254 performances. It starred Fields alongside the matronly Marie Cahill, and the production team included Victor Herbert, Glen Macdonough, and director Julian Mitchell, representing Broadway's finest. With major stars in the leading roles, audiences might have expected a flimsy ensemble piece wrapped around the talents of the big names. Yet both Fields and Cahill respected the integrity of the book, and critics responded positively to what they saw as a 'unity of style and consistency' in the show.[3] That was a relative phrase; in terms of fashioning a coherent musical—which in fact would be central to Fields's long-term aspirations—this was a first attempt, and flawed, even if it promised things to come. As her contract allowed, Cahill interpolated four numbers, and before long Fields had shortened the show and double-billed it with a burlesque of David Belasco's *The Music Master*. His instinct was well honed; this was exactly the sort of entertainment to which audiences responded well. A mixture of old school vaudeville and the newer musical comedy reflected Fields's output for the foreseeable future.

Fields's role as both performer and producer was in some senses a throwback to the common nineteenth-century convention of performers managing their own affairs. Many of their vaudeville influences were performer-producers, and characters like Tony Pastor (1837–1908), one of the more successful, would become a household name and an important supporter of Weber and Fields

(see Chap. 1). As nineteenth-century practices moved to twentieth-century business models, in a transition that Mona Brooks sees characterizing 'the evolution of the American theatre management from "artistic" to "commercial"',[4] Lew Fields bucked the trend to preserve his status as actor-manager of his own stock company. He was old school, though complementing his approach were ideas that were as up-to-the-minute as anyone else's.

One advantage of performing in the shows he produced was his visceral understanding of the qualities to which audiences responded. To the average producer, a show's appeal could only be measured through box-office takings, newspaper reviews, and bums on seats. Fields, on the other hand, would experience as a performer how moments of a show worked with an audience: the thrill of a skit that 'went'; the discomfort of a joke that fell flat.

Fields's profile as a producer was undoubtedly lifted thanks to his relationship with the Shuberts (see Chap. 8), who took him on as a partner to produce 'highly successful summer revues'.[5] Originally, the partnership was equal, with Lew and his brother Charlie staking half the investment to balance the input of the Shubert brothers, Lee and J.J. This arrangement reflected not only financial investment, but also creative input. Younger brother J.J. had a passion for musical theatre, but had been struggling to make the sort of profits his brother Lee was used to. Although Lee indulged J.J.'s exploits, he realized it would be prudent to find him some assistance. 'The musicals J.J. had been supervising for over five years at the Casino had been poorly received for the most part and had failed to bring in the kind of money Fields's shows generated. More than once', writes Shubert biographer Foster Hirsch, 'Fields had been called in to doctor an ailing J.J. show.'[6]

As much as it was his producing (directing) ability that raised a show's prospects, it was also Fields's star status. One of the ways he exploited that was through producing shows which would allow him to take centre stage. Fields had established a brand, so for all that his style of performer-producing resembled a nineteenth-century model, his ability to capitalize on his own name as a commodity was key to his long-term success.[7]

Fields joined the brothers in 1906, a year after eldest brother Sam Shubert had died in a train crash, and immediately after Fields's own success with *It Happened in Nordland*. He promptly proceeded to score further successes with *About Town* (1906) and *The Girl Behind the Counter* (1907), blurring the boundaries between genres of musical comedy and revue. Fields performed in the shows with his usual 'Dutch' character act, though he didn't sing, instead interpolating his own sketches into the otherwise coherent musical comedy storylines. This way, he could excise them for use elsewhere as vaudeville sketches, while he could also be used to attract audiences thanks to his popularity.

As his work with the Shuberts continued he became the most prolific producer on Broadway, overseeing in the 1909–1910 season at least seven of the thirty-seven new musical productions.[8] His strategy was simple: he would compete with Florenz Ziegfeld's spectacular revue productions but would package their spectacle within the integrity of a coherent storyline. As Jason

Rubin remarks, 'Fields took the opulence of Ziegfeld's revue, reconciled it with the popular appeal of vaudeville, and merged them with the wit and farce of burlesque and the maturing audience's readiness for dramatic realism in a musical comedy context.'[9] These 'vaudeville-musicals'—*Old Dutch* (1909), *The Midnight Sons* (1909), *The Jolly Bachelors* (1910), *The Summer Widowers* (1910)—alternated with more conventional musical comedies such as *The Yankee Girl* (1910), operettas such as *The Rose of Algeria* (1909) and *The Prince of Bohemia* (1910), and occasional star vehicles, such as the Marie Dressler headliner, *Tillie's Nightmare* (1910). His admirable pretensions throughout were to create a new form, though old habits die hard. 'Although Fields was trying to break away from the influence of the Music Hall', writes Jason Rubin, 'to some degree he obviously still relied on its most attractive characteristics—spontaneity, thin plots, and star turns in a variety structure.'[10] Fighting increasingly for his shows to make their mark, he would lift their spectacle by throwing money at them, a costly way of loss-leading the already expensive propositions of musical theatre, and something that eventually soured his relationship with the Shuberts.

Despite Fields's artistic flair and popularity, his handling of finances left a lot to be desired. He was taken on originally because of his ability to produce 'lavish'[11] revues with their 'kaleidoscope of gorgeous theatrical effects'.[12] But these came at a price. In developing his shows for the Shuberts, 'Fields kept making them bigger and, to the horror of J.J. Shubert especially, more expensive.' As Jason Rubin reports, 'a running disagreement about these expenses permeated their business dealings'.[13] Eventually—and despite his support of Fields's theatrical know-how—Lee sided with his brother, bruising Fields's ego and their friendship by letting the old-timer go.

After seventeen vexing years, Fields was exhausted, and considerably in debt. He made several attempts to recoup the money, and realizing that he could generate significant cash by maximizing his profile as a performer, he often juggled producing work on one show while performing for someone else in another. Meanwhile, he borrowed heavily from other producers like Arthur Hammerstein to stave off the Shuberts' demands; but it was too much for his health, his pocket-book, and his temperament. In October 1925 he walked out on an engagement to perform with Joe Weber, and with the Shuberts chasing him for money, he collapsed in late 1926 whilst preparing for the opening night of *The Wild Rose*. His illness was officially announced as appendicitis, but in *Variety* at least it was recorded as nervous exhaustion.

Fields's Work with Herbert and the New Kids, Rodgers and Hart

As he arose from his sick-bed, his relationship with the Shuberts well and truly in the past, his return to producing seemed to be symbolically a return to health. Now he was on his own, using the financial investment of his foster son

Herbert Harris. One of his main decisions at this point was to stick with collaborators who were near and dear. Drawing towards him a coterie of people whom he knew well and respected, he created what became known as 'the family', who would work together closely throughout the next few years. Now, he turned to the youngsters who had been clamouring for their work to be produced—his own son Herb and Herb's close friends Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart.

Fields was, after all, a family man: happily married for almost fifty years, and the father of two girls and two boys, Frances, Joseph, Herbert, and Dorothy. He also took in his wife Rose's youngest brother after her mother died, and Herbert Harris grew up as the foster son of the family. Although at first critical of the ambition most of his children had to work in the theatre, he eventually relented and three of his offspring became celebrated themselves for their output: Joseph (1895–1966) went on to write libretti for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949), *Wonderful Town* (1953), and *Flower Drum Song* (1958); Herb (1897–1958) partnered Rodgers and Hart on hit shows including *Dearest Enemy* (1925) and *A Connecticut Yankee* (1927), years later writing the book for *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946); and Dorothy (1905–1974) became one of America's most well-loved lyricists, with song hits including 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Baby' (1928), 'On the Sunny Side of the Street' (1930), and the Oscar-winning 'The Way You Look Tonight' (1936). Herbert Harris, meanwhile, would finance Lew thanks to his profits from the perfume industry. As far as Lew was concerned, it was through his family connections that he enjoyed such a resurgence as a producer even after his bankruptcy and breakdown. 'In no small measure', write his biographers, 'Lew Fields owed his renaissance as a musical producer to the emergence of his son Herbert as a first-class librettist.'[14]

Herbert was just launching his career alongside the largely undiscovered Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart. Having rejected their historical American Revolution musical, *Dearest Enemy* (1925), Lew now embraced (if not took over) their more contemporary tale *The Girl Friend* (1926), a show brimming with the latest dance craze, the Charleston, and dealing with the popular, youthful world of competitive cycle racing. The show had great potential and boasted songs Lew knew would be infectious ('The Girl Friend', 'Blue Room'). Painfully long in tryouts, Lew came in as a script doctor and chopped around here and there, trimming the coherency of the plot and inserting hokum as he thought necessary. In the end, the show that emerged was a bit of a mess, and certainly not one of Fields, Rodgers, and Hart's finest. It worked with audiences, though, and with some careful nurturing Lew was able to sustain its run throughout the summer for an eventual 301 performances.

In this process, Lew's producing style became clear. First, he was hands-on in the rehearsal room despite having a nominal director in the team. Although approaching 60, his energy was unceasing, and reports marvel at the way he could keep up with young performers through the night. As shows headed towards their opening nights, rehearsals often went round the clock. Second,

since he no longer relied so much on bottom-line investors like the Shuberts, he was able to nurture a show through a slow start to eventually break even. This strategy had its risks and relied on the good will of his team. One method for keeping a show going with thin audiences was to ask his whole company to take pay cuts—what he called 'summer salaries'. Exploitative though this may have been, it often ensured the eventual success of a show. Third, he would have no qualms about doctoring a show or inserting something that he knew would have audience appeal—'Dad's old chestnuts',[15] as his daughter Dorothy reported: 'a blend of slapstick, satire and pathos, clever and fanciful stage effects, novel chorus routines, and brisk pacing'.[16]

But Fields's celebrity was key, enabling a regular supply of generous editorial attention in the press. 'If we cannot go back to the days when the two comedy geniuses of the '90s were busily engaged in carving a niche in the hall of fame', wrote the *Herald Tribune* of rehearsal sessions for *The Girl Friend*, 'we have been privileged in the last few weeks to see one of the old team busily engaged in the task of creating new stars.'[17] Fields clearly had a deep place in the public's heart and the press's focus, and this if nothing else enabled shows like *The Girl Friend* (1926) to get far more media profile than Rodgers and Hart at that stage would have been able to command themselves.

Following *The Girl Friend*, Lew and his 'family' enjoyed an unprecedented wave of success. *Peggy Ann* (1926) ran for 333 performances, an expressionist dream play based on his previous show *Tillie's Nightmare* (1910); *A Connecticut Yankee* (1927) musicalized Mark Twain's timeslip narrative of Arthurian England with a run of 418 performances; perhaps surprisingly, Fields got cold feet halfway through the production process for *Hit the Deck* (1927), the naval comedy scripted by Herbert but with a score by Vincent Youmans (which ran for 352 performances). Instead, he concentrated on opening yet another theatre, the Mansfield, in 1928. That launched the next Rodgers, Hart, and Fields show, another naval comedy called *Present Arms*. It failed to sustain the longevity of the previous productions, though it still notched up 155 performances.

As a producer, it is Fields's work with Herbert, Rodgers, Hart, and the 'family' that has left both the most sustained body of work and the most interesting creative legacy for the theatre. Richard Rodgers would eventually be recognized as one of the pioneers of the 'integrated musical', which he mastered with his later partner Oscar Hammerstein II. But the path towards that sort of integration can be seen in previous work produced by Fields.

Towards the Integrated Musical

Throughout his career, Fields was fascinated with the way that performance forms interacted on the stage, and in particular he had a passion for creating dramatic narratives incorporating music. Indeed, he had first discovered Rodgers and Hart when he included their early song 'Any Old Place With You' in his 1919 hit *A Lonely Romeo*. That was simply an interpolated vaudeville

number, reflecting one typical approach to inserting songs within a storyline. Yet it wasn't the only approach, and the instinct towards integration was very much alive in Fields's creative thoughts. As early as 1904—and despite evidence to the contrary in his shows—Fields regularly reflected on what he called 'coherency' in interviews: the sort of 'guying' familiar from vaudeville was on the way out, he affirmed; instead, '[Coherency] is my principle theory of what the public wants.'[18]

Indeed, his output during the early 1920s showed a commitment to the idea of coherency, exploring various models of 'integrating' song and drama. The 1924 Rodgers, Hart, and Fields play *The Melody Man*, for example, was constructed around a palette of songs, diegetic music, and background sound; set in the offices of a music publishing firm, there is plenty of opportunity for music to accompany and comment on the action. The first act in particular is textured by music; its denouement evokes poignancy as an elderly composer reflects on the sounds of his 'Dresden' piano sonata being 'jazzed up' to suit 1920s ears. Themes of ageing and the generation divide are magnified by the sound palette of the composition. Interestingly, the three collaborators on this production (Herbert Fields, Richard Rodgers, and Lorenz Hart, who ordinarily would write conventional musicals together) chose to work under the pseudonym Herbert Richard Lorenz, enacting their collaboration with a performative show of integration.[19]

In this respect, Fields's progressive thinking about integration was due as much to his collaboration with the younger generation as it was to his own ideas. Thanks to his profile, however, it was often Fields's words (rather than those of his collaborators) that were reported in the press. Speaking in 1920 about his production of *Poor Little Ritz Girl*, he confirmed his aspirations to revive the musical stage with a new form, 'a blend of the Princess Theatre intimate style of show and the revue type of production',[20] as he put it. The efforts of Rodgers and Hart to achieve this were considerable, though on this occasion, their carefully written dialogic sequences in the music were jettisoned from the show, and a new score by Sigmund Romberg was used.[21]

Perhaps the most ambitious production with which Fields was involved was the Rodgers, Hart, and Fields show *Chee-Chee* (1928), which came at the height of their 1920s success and followed *Present Arms* into the Mansfield. Basking in the afterglow of *The Girl Friend* (1926), *Peggy-Ann* (1926), and *A Connecticut Yankee* (1927), the team took on an unusual project, adapting Charles Pettit's salacious novel *The Son of the Grand Eunuch* to the stage. In this, they departed from even their own generally straightforward approach to writing by deliberately attempting a more motivic technique. A note in the program advised audiences that 'The musical numbers, some of them very short, are so interwoven with the story that it would be confusing for the audience to peruse a complete list.'[22] Accordingly, just six 'take-home tunes' were marketed for the show, while the rest of the score was compiled from four- and eight-bar snippets of song and characterizing melos in the style of leitmotif. Unfortunately, for very different reasons, the show was pulled, and any risky

tendencies Lew Fields had entertained were shelved as too controversial and potentially career-threatening for the ageing impresario.

In short, the problem with *Chee-Chee* concerned the salacious subject matter and the scandalous treatment of promiscuity in the storyline. This was typical fodder of the period, though something that made Lew Fields rather uncomfortable. He had always prided himself on the 'wholesome image'[23] of his clean, family-friendly shows, and even 'sought to preserve the rigid moral standards of the Victorian society he aspired to'.[24] Ultimately, the risqué tendencies of Broadway as the Roaring Twenties drew to a close emphasized the generation gap between Fields and his extended family. After what he saw as the debacle of *Chee-Chee*, he swiftly retrenched, closing ranks and working with his own family members and effectively stepping away from integrated innovations.

'In the end', suggest his biographers, his championing of 'coherency' was 'more a statement of what he aspired to than a prescription for change'.[25] Fields's tendencies towards hokum, slapstick, and guying were simply too strong to give over to a musico-dramatically coherent score; his weakness as a producer (perhaps because he was also a performer) was that he relentlessly acquiesced to the ego and antics of the star (usually himself).

His later years were quieter, though from time to time reunions with Joe Weber brought the old team back together. In particular, he embraced radio and recorded with Weber some of their old routines. After the Stock Market Crash, though, Lew's theatrical encounters more or less dried up. The family moved to California where the climate could benefit Lew's ailing health. Lew Fields died in his Beverley Hills home in 1941 at the age of 74.

Today Fields is remembered primarily for his Weber and Fields collaborations and his work as a performer. Yet in a distinguished career, it was just as much his influence as a producer that has left an impression on Broadway. Although his early attempts at 'coherency' have been overshadowed by the legacy of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Fields's unswerving commitment to 'artistic' rather than 'commercial' theatre—however compromised that sometimes may have been—undoubtedly shaped the approaches of subsequent practitioners in fashioning the integrated musical.

Notes

1. Armond Fields and L. Marc Fields, *From the Bowery to Broadway: Lew Fields and the Roots of American Popular Theatre* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 91.
2. Richard Stott, *Jolly Fellows: Male Milieus in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 268.
3. Jason Rubin, 'Lew Fields and the Development of the Broadway Musical' (PhD diss., New York University, 1991), 162.

4. Mona Rebecca Brooks, 'The Development of American Theatre Management Practices between 1830 and 1896' (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1981), 4–5.
5. Foster Hirsch, *The Boys from Syracuse: The Shuberts' Theatrical Empire* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 82.
6. Ibid.
7. As Hirsch reports, 'Fields had the experience, the prestige, the lingering affection of audiences who cherished memories of [his] shows […] J.J. had none of these assets' (Hirsch, *Boys from Syracuse*, 82).
8. *The Rose of Algeria*, *Old Dutch*, *The Jolly Bachelors*, *The Prince of Bohemia*, *The Yankee Girl*, *Tillie's Nightmare*, *The Summer Widowers*, *Up and Down Broadway.*
9. Rubin, 'Lew Fields', 199.
10. Ibid., 235.
11. Hirsch, *Boys from Syracuse*, 82.
12. Rubin, 'Lew Fields', 170.
13. Ibid.
14. Fields and Fields, *From the Bowery*, 449.
15. Samuel Marx and Jan Clayton, *Rodgers and Hart: Bewitched, Bothered and Bedevilled* (London: W. H. Allen, 1977), 99.
16. Fields and Fields, *From the Bowery*, 9.
17. Anonymous, *Herald Tribune*, 14 March 1926.
18. Fields and Fields, *From the Bowery*, 206.
19. For more on *The Melody Man* (also known as *The Jazz King*) see Dominic Symonds, *'We'll Have Manhattan': The Early Work of Rodgers and Hart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 55–63.
20. Colgate Baker, 'Lew Fields Tells Secret of "Poor Little Ritz Girl's" Success', *New York Review*, 7 August 1920.
21. For more on *Poor Little Ritz Girl* see Symonds, *'We'll Have Manhattan'*, 45–51.
22. *Chee-Chee* program (1928), Alvah Sulloway Sheet Music and Theater Program Collection, University of New Hampshire, 37. Rodgers also references this in *Musical Stages: An Autobiography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 118.
23. Fields and Fields, *From the Bowery*, 409.
24. Ibid., 247.
25. Ibid., 206–7.

CHAPTER 14

Firm Foundations: James Cassius Williamson and 'The Firm'

Frank Van Straten

For more than one hundred years the name J. C. Williamson dominated Australian theatre. It denoted, first, James Cassius Williamson (1844–1913), 'Handsome Jimmy', the charismatic American actor-manager who conquered the Australian colonies to become the country's most powerful theatrical entrepreneur, and, second, the eponymous enterprise that outlived him. Known as 'The Firm', it became the dominant force in Australian commercial theatre, operating a nation-wide chain of theatres and filling them with productions of international standard. Though Williamson and his successors embraced most forms of theatre, it is for their cavalcade of impeccably produced musicals that they are chiefly remembered.

James Cassius Williamson was born in Mercer, Pennsylvania, on 28 July 1844. He was only 11 when he saw his first play, *The Merchant of Venice*, and remained stage struck for the rest of his life. While he was still at school he joined a Milwaukee stock company and made his stage debut as Little Tom Bruce in the play *The Jibbenainosay*. At the age of 19 he began an eight-year engagement as the juvenile comedian in stock drama at Wallack's Theatre, one of New York's leading playhouses.

In 1871 Williamson became principal stock comedian at the prestigious California Theatre in gold-rich San Francisco, California. There he met and, in 1873, married actress Maggie Moore. Born Margaret Virginia Sullivan in San Francisco in 1851, Maggie's Irish-born parents had forsaken a new life in Australia to try their luck in the rush for Californian gold.

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At least at first, James and Maggie were a perfect match, on stage and off. And Williamson found them a perfect play, Clay M. Greene's quaint comedy melodrama *Struck Oil*. The management of the California refused to produce it, so Williamson staged it himself in Salt Lake City, Utah, in February 1874. He starred as Dutch-American shoemaker John Stofel and Maggie played his daughter, Lizzie. Critics were unenthusiastic, but audiences loved its homely humour.

Soon thereafter the Williamsons accepted an invitation to tour Australia under the management of the country's leading entrepreneur, Melbourne-based George Coppin. Before their departure, however, they finally presented *Struck Oil* at the California. 'It is wonderful to notice how Williamson revels in character parts', noted San Francisco's *Sunday Chronicle*. 'The critic must be very hard to please who can find fault in his treatment of such characters.'[1]

Struck Oil naturally had pride of place in the repertory the Williamsons brought to Australia. When it opened at the Theatre Royal in Melbourne on 1 August 1874, 30-year-old James Cassius Williamson did indeed strike oil. This time the critics and the public agreed. 'No actor who ever played on the Melbourne stage more completely lost himself in the character than Mr Williamson does', said the *Australasian Sketcher*. 'His acting stands out like a piece of high relief sculpture. Mrs Williamson's humour is inexhaustible, helped by contrast with the most genuine tenderness. The audience laughs and cries at the same moment'.[2] Over forty-three record-breaking nights, 93,000 tickets were sold—this in a city of 110,000 people. After similar successes in other Australian centres, the Williamsons went to London and back to the United States. Everywhere, *Struck Oil* continued to draw full houses. They returned to Australia in 1879.

In New York Williamson had seen the enthusiasm for Gilbert and Sullivan's first great success, *HMS Pinafore*, unauthorized versions of which were being presented by several 'pirate' producers. He realized that *Pinafore*'s cheeky 'Britishness' would have particular appeal for Australian audiences and that it would be an ideal vehicle to launch his new career as an entrepreneur. Though he and Maggie were hardly brilliant vocalists, he could play Sir Joseph Porter, with Maggie as Josephine. In April 1879, in return for a fee of £300, W. S. Gilbert granted him the exclusive right to produce *Pinafore* in Australia and New Zealand.[3] Williamson swiftly scuttled a flotilla of unauthorized Australian productions, leaving the way clear for his own production, which opened in Sydney on 15 November 1879, two weeks ahead of the first authorized New York performance. Williamson's judgement was correct: Australians loved *Pinafore*, and its success helped him persuade Richard D'Oyly Carte to grant him the Australasian rights to the entire Gilbert and Sullivan repertory, revivals of which were a lucrative feature of Williamson programming until the eventual expiration of the copyright.[4]

For the next thirty-two years, sometimes in partnership with George Musgrove and Arthur Garner (a liaison often grandly referred to as 'The Triumvirate'), Williamson headed a production organization that came to

dominate the Australian stage. They leased the best available theatres, filling them with the latest London and New York successes and importing the brightest stars to play in them.

In the early 1880s, to meet the growing demand for musical theatre, Williamson founded the Royal Comic Opera Company, a locally recruited touring company with a constantly expanding repertory of Gilbert and Sullivan, light opera, operettas, and musical comedies, principally sourced from George Edwardes's Gaiety Theatre in London. Its productions of *Paul Jones*, *La Mascotte*, *Dorothy*, *La Cigale*, and *Ma Mie Rosette* remained perennially popular. The company's principal soprano was the much-loved Nellie Stewart, later feted for her triumphs in pantomime in London and in the play *Sweet Nell of Old Drury*. In 1892 British actor Robert Courtneidge headed an Australian tour by Edwardes's Gaiety Company, under Williamson's auspices. In 1886 Williamson inaugurated his own chain of fine theatres, beginning with the Princess in Melbourne. It was—and still is—the country's most palatial playhouse.

Williamson and Maggie Moore separated in 1891. The split was bitter and both claimed rights to *Struck Oil*. Maggie married actor Harry Roberts and continued to revive *Struck Oil* for many years, much to her former husband's fury. He even contrived to write his autobiography without mentioning her name, but Maggie retained the loyalty of her fans. She retired in 1924 and died in San Francisco two years later.

A colonial land boom in the 1880s was followed in 1891 by a devastating depression and a drought. Theatre attendance plummeted and managements failed, but Williamson maintained his fortunes, largely through a hugely popular pantomime, *Djin-Djin*, which he co-wrote with his 'literary secretary' Bert Royle. His chief conductor, Léon Caron, composed the score. A dancer in this production, Mary Weir, became Williamson's second wife.

The depression forced Arthur Garner into bankruptcy and triggered an acrimonious split between Williamson and Musgrove. Williamson, now aged 56, moved his headquarters from Melbourne's Princess to the shabby nearby Alexandra Theatre. Lavishly refurbished and renamed Her Majesty's Theatre, it became the flagship of his new empire, which eventually included first-rate theatres in every Australian mainland state and throughout New Zealand. From 1904 he worked in financial partnership with his former secretary, George Tallis, and his legal adviser, Gustave Ramaciotti.

Williamson continued to import internationally known actors for his plays, but it was as a presenter of musicals that he was unrivalled. His first major hit, *Florodora*, was followed by favourites such as *San Toy*, *A Country Girl*, *A Waltz Dream*, and *Our Miss Gibbs*, often cast with local stars such as Florence Young and Carrie Moore. *The Merry Widow* first came to Australia in 1908, where it was sensationally popular and has been frequently restaged ever since.

When Ramaciotti retired in 1911, Williamson amalgamated his interests with his principal producing rival, Clarke and Meynell Pty Ltd, and became governing director of his last and largest company, J. C. Williamson Ltd, popu-

larly known thereafter as 'The Firm'. His business partners and joint managing directors were George Tallis, Clyde Meynell, and American actor-manager Hugh J. Ward.

Though Williamson specialized in musicals, he continued to stage quality drama, lavish pantomimes, and, occasionally, opera. In 1910 he presented the Australian premiere of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*; the following year he marked the fiftieth anniversary of his professional theatre debut by creating and touring the celebrated Melba–Williamson Grand Opera Company, giving Australians their first opportunity to hear the internationally famous Melbourne-born soprano Nellie Melba in fully staged operas. The company's repertory also included the local premieres of Saint-Saëns's *Samson and Delilah* and Puccini's *Tosca*.

Williamson was persuaded to return to the stage for a charity matinee at Her Majesty's Theatre in Sydney on 22 February 1913. It was his final curtain. James Cassius Williamson died in Paris on 6 July 1913.[5] He was buried in the Williamson family grave in Chicago's Oak Woods Cemetery. Williamson's biographer, Ian G. Dicker, noted the producer's 'diligence, initiative, integrity, generalship, handsome appearance, prepossessing charm, fine natural talent for comic character roles, and his ardent love of the theatre'.[6]

The Firm After Williamson

Under the chairmanship of George Tallis (1869–1948), The Firm continued to thrive, providing Australians with a giddying array of quality entertainment—serious and light drama, comedy, opera, ballet, pantomime, concert attractions, and, especially, musicals. It also expanded into film production; between 1915 and 1918 its studio in Melbourne made ten silent features, including several that were adapted from The Firm's stage successes.

In 1920 Tallis engineered an amalgamation with J. & N. Tait Ltd, a firm founded in 1903 by five brothers from Castlemaine in Victoria. Charles Tait (1868–1933) had established the entrepreneurial concert business and was later associated with Allan's music stores and music publishing; E. J. ('Ted') Tait (1878–1947) initially worked in administration for J. C. Williamson, but left to join his brothers in 1916; Nevin Tait (1876–1961) was involved in the brothers' early film and theatrical activities and later became The Firm's resident London representative; John Tait (1871–1955) was an astute financial manager; and Frank Tait (1883–1965), the youngest, was a hard-headed, dedicated man of the theatre, determined to maintain The Firm's standards and traditions. He was knighted in 1956. Though they were frequently in conflict with each other and with chairman George Tallis, the Tait brothers, collectively, came to dominate Australian commercial theatre for the next forty-five years.

The first major production under the Tallis–Tait amalgamation was the musical *Irene*, then Broadway's biggest hit. Its success was repeated when it opened at the Criterion Theatre in Sydney on 7 August 1920. In the 1920s

Williamson's brought local stars to the fore, including Dorothy Brunton and Gladys Moncrieff ('Our Glad') most notably in *The Maid of the Mountains* in 1921. In 1922 Australian-born London-based actor Oscar Asche toured in his greatest creation, the Arabian Nights extravaganza *Chu Chin Chow*. Also memorable in this period were Broadway classics such as *Sally*, *Rose Marie*, *The Student Prince*, *The Vagabond King*, *The Desert Song*, and *Show Boat*. Both Melba and the legendary Anna Pavlova toured twice for The Firm in the 1920s. Williamson's also operated the Tivoli vaudeville circuit from 1924 to 1929, offering a contrasting repertory. The Firm also expanded into radio, with studios in Sydney and Melbourne. Highlights from its musicals were frequently broadcast live and its stars featured prominently in the programming.

In 1928 The Firm extended its operations abroad, launching itself in London with an American comedy, *The Patsy*, which had done well in Australia, and a bright new Vivian Ellis musical, *Mr. Cinders*, but the advent of the 'talkies' eroded attendance. In 1940, after a lacklustre foray into New York with the drama *Josef Suss* (originally *Jew Suss*), The Firm abandoned further overseas ventures.

Like other Australian live theatre presenters, The Firm was hit hard by a combination of the Depression, the 'talkies', the popularity of radio, and the introduction of an entertainment tax levied on ticket sales. To make matters worse, the interior of His Majesty's in Melbourne was partially burnt out in 1929. The Theatre Royal in Melbourne and Her Majesty's and the Criterion in Sydney were sold and demolished. Nevertheless, unlike its rivals, The Firm survived the worst of the Depression, mainly by mounting revivals of vintage musicals and Gilbert and Sullivan, their warm familiarity providing audiences welcome respite during difficult times. George Tallis's services to theatre were recognized with a knighthood on 1922. He retired in 1931, but The Firm sailed on, ably guided by the five Tait brothers.

Rebuilt in Art Deco elegance, His Majesty's in Melbourne reopened in 1934 with the spectacular operetta *White Horse Inn*, complete with revolving stage and 'real' rain—all designed to demonstrate the theatre's technical virtuosity. It was followed by what was then a real rarity: an all-Australian musical. *Blue Mountain Melody* featured the glamorous local stars Cyril Ritchard and Madge Elliott, both fresh from successes in London. The 1930s saw tours by Hungarian comedian Oscar Denes, who starred in his two great successes, the operettas *Viktoria and Her Hussar* and *Ball at the Savoy*, and a revival of *The Desert Song* with the original Broadway 'Red Shadow', Robert Halliday. The decade also featured enormously influential tours by ballet companies created by Colonel de Basil from the remnants of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, and Australia's first ice spectacular, *Switzerland*.

Following an organizational upheaval in mid-1938, the Taits were temporarily sidelined, The Firm's production arm was renamed Australian and New Zealand Theatres Ltd, and a mercurial English producer, Ernest C. Rolls, became its managing director. His only attempt at a musical, Rodgers and Hart's *I Married an Angel*, proved disastrous; after little more than a year

Rolls was rolled and the Taits were back in control. The production company became J. C. Williamson Theatres Ltd, while J. C. Williamson Ltd managed the company's real estate.

During the Second World War The Firm again survived on revivals of favourite musicals and the ever-reliable Gilbert and Sullivan repertory. In 1941 young Scottish G&S soprano Viola Wilson became the second Mrs Frank Tait. *A Family of Brothers*, her insightful history of the Taits and the Williamson organization, was published in 1971.

In 1944 long-simmering tensions between The Firm and Actors Equity came to a head when Equity cast members walked out of productions in Melbourne and Sydney, refusing to work with non-Equity performers. Williamson's eventually surrendered, consenting to employ only Equity members.

From 1944 to 1961 Williamson's supported the Melbourne-based Borovansky Ballet, touring them throughout Australia and New Zealand and featuring them in two musicals, *The Dancing Years* and *Gay Rosalinda*, the latter a British reworking of *Die Fledermaus*. Founded by Czech dancer Edouard Borovansky, who had been a member of Pavlova's 1929 company, the Borovansky enterprise capitalized on the enthusiasm for ballet created by the Russian companies of the 1930s. It eventually evolved into today's internationally acclaimed Australian Ballet.

After the war *The Kiwis*, a New Zealand all-male army revue, proved enormously popular for The Firm. *Annie Get Your Gun*, the first of the big post-war musicals, reached Australia in 1947 with the ebullient locally based American Evie Hayes in the title role. Other major Broadway musicals followed: *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, *Kiss Me, Kate*, *Call Me Madam*, *Can-Can*, *Paint Your Wagon*, *Brigadoon*, *Song of Norway*, *Oliver!*, and many more, leading up to *My Fair Lady* in 1959. This show was so successful that two companies toured concurrently. For a few years from 1955 Williamson's pre-eminence in musical theatre was challenged by Melbourne entrepreneur Garnet H. Carroll, whose productions included *Kismet*, *The Sound of Music*, *The King and I*, *The Most Happy Fella*, and *West Side Story*, but his activities were hampered by limited touring options and his company did not survive long after Carroll's death in 1964.

The jaunty Australian musical *The Sentimental Bloke* drew huge crowds for The Firm in 1961, but locally originated shows were rare. The Firm did not regard itself as obligated to encourage local playwrights and composers. Instead it concentrated on reproducing Broadway and West End successes, using overseas directors and leading players who were usually little-known performers or former understudies. Williamson's promoted them as major stars, but for most of them, talented though they may have been, their Australian experiences were the highlights of their careers.

This began to change after 1956, when the introduction of television made local performers more recognizable and therefore 'saleable'. *The Pajama Game*, in 1957, was the first post-war Williamson musical to have an all-Australian cast. Soon locals such as Toni Lamond, Jill Perryman, Hayes Gordon, Gloria

Dawn, and Nancye Hayes earned star status in shows like *Sweet Charity* and *Funny Girl*. The Firm still occasionally imported overseas leads, but now they were genuine stars: Carole Cook for *Hello, Dolly!* (1965), Stephen Douglass for *I Do!, I Do!* (1969), Orson Bean for *Promises, Promises* (1970), Anna Neagle and Derek Nimmo for *Charlie Girl* (1971), and Cyd Charisse and Yvonne de Carlo for *No, No, Nanette* (1972).

In 1962 Williamson's staged *Camelot*. In an atypical move, the sets and costumes were not reproductions of the Broadway originals. Instead they were entrusted to the brilliant young Australian John Truscott (1936–1993), who went on to design the show in London and win two Academy Awards for his work on the subsequent film. In 1965 Williamson's presented Joan Sutherland and 30-year-old Luciano Pavarotti in an ambitious seven-opera repertory. Sir Frank Tait, the last of the remarkable brothers, died shortly after the Melbourne season. John McCallum, who had been joint managing director with Sir Frank since 1957, was now solely in charge of the production company but, strangely, was denied a seat on the parent board. He resigned soon thereafter. Despite its managerial difficulties, The Firm achieved notable successes with productions of *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1967 and *Man of La Mancha* in 1968.

The 1970s proved challenging. Her Majesty's Theatre in Sydney was destroyed by fire in 1970 and rebuilt in 1973. In 1971 Williamson–Edgley Theatres was formed, with entrepreneur Michael Edgley as managing director. This uncongenial partnership lasted a little over two years. In 1974, to mark the centenary of J. C. Williamson's arrival in Australia, The Firm mounted a new production of *Irene* with local star Julie Anthony in the title role, which she later reprised in London. But behind the scenes the self-styled 'largest theatrical management in the Southern Hemisphere' was in trouble. As another musical theatre luminary, Jill Perryman, so wittily put it: 'The Firm had become infirm'.[7]

Struggling under an inapposite board, The Firm had failed to adapt to changes in theatrical taste, to the emergence of leaner, nimbler entrepreneurs, and to competition from state-subsidized venues and companies. Furthermore it was burdened with a national circuit of ageing theatres that occupied valuable city real estate and demanded a constant stream of product—any product—to keep them open. The Firm's final major musicals were *Pippin*, *Gypsy*, *A Little Night Music*, and *The Wiz*. Ominously, the latter two failed to attract audiences.

In 1976, after an unsuccessful application to the Australian Industries Assistance Commission, the company was quietly wound up, its assets realized, and its theatres sold. Across Australia its vast permanent staff—stage crews, musicians, scenery and property makers, costumiers, front of house personnel, office workers—struggled to find new opportunities. The Firm's Melbourne archives were donated to the state-owned Victorian Arts Centre (now known as Arts Centre Melbourne). They document how James Cassius Williamson and his successors fostered and satisfied Australians' appetite for handsomely

presented live attractions in first-class theatres, thereby establishing a theatre-going tradition—and a hunger for musical theatre—that continues to flourish.

Following the demise of The Firm, entrepreneur Kenn Brodziak of Aztec Services obtained the rights to operate as J. C. Williamson Productions for several years, after which the trading name J. C. Williamson was subsumed by other enterprises. Nevertheless, it survives in the annual J. C. Williamson Award. Presented by Live Performance Australia, the country's peak industry body, this is Australian theatre's highest accolade. Honorees have included Kenn Brodziak, John McCallum, Googie Withers, Joan Sutherland, Barry Humphries, Nancye Hayes, Jill Perryman, and John Frost.

It is telling that many of the Award winners began their show business careers with The Firm. Particularly notable is John Frost. Now a Tony Award-winning producer, he got his start working as a dresser on *Mame* at The Firm's Her Majesty's Theatre in Adelaide in 1968. In a 2015 interview he explained his success: 'I just do what I think the public want to see'.[8] James Cassius Williamson would have known what he meant.

Notes

1. Untitled article, *Sunday Chronicle*, San Francisco, 5 April 1874, 1.
2. 'The Theatres', *Australasian Sketcher*, 5 September 1874, 91.
3. Ian G. Dicker, *JCW—A Short Biography of James Cassius Williamson* (Rose Bay, NSW: Elizabeth Tudor Press, 1974), 88.
4. Phillip Lawton and Maurice Jones, 'Gilbert and Sullivan', in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, ed. Philip Parsons (Sydney: Currency Press, 1995), 244.
5. The date is frequently incorrectly stated as 8 July 1913.
6. Dicker, *JCW—A Short Biography of James Cassius Williamson*, 194.
7. Jill Perryman, 'Commercial Theatre in 1978', *Performing Arts Yearbook of Australia* 1978 (Mosman, NSW: Showcast Publications, 1978), 125.
8. Sally Bennet, 'Bobby Darin Musical Made in Oz', *Herald Sun*, 27 May 2015, 51.

CHAPTER 15

Japanese Women's Popular Musicals: The Takarazuka Revue

Nobuko Anan

Sung lyrics and dance are a part of many types of traditional all-male Japanese musical theatre (e.g. bunraku, kabuki, noh). But for over a century now, the all-female Takarazuka Revue (*Takarazuka kagekidan*) has been performing Western-style musicals and revues in Japan. In January 2014, the company opened its 100th-anniversary year with a production titled *Nemuranai otoko Napoleon: ai to eikō no hate ni* (Napoleon, A Man Who Does Not Sleep: At the End of Love and Glory), written and directed by Koike Shūichirō,[1] one of the company's playwrights and directors, and with music by Gérard Presgurvic, a composer working in the film, pop music, and musical industry in France. The show typified Takarazuka's stylized Western historical romances set during a time of war or revolution. Tickets immediately sold out for the entire three-month run at the company's 2,500-seat home theatre, the Takarazuka Grand Theatre (*Takarazuka daigekijō*) in Takarazuka City, and its 2,000-seat Tokyo branch, the Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre (*Tokyo Takarazuka gekijō*).

Kobayashi Ichizō (1873–1957), a railway and department store tycoon, founded the Takarazuka Revue in 1913, and its first production took place in 1914 (the company considers the latter year as its inception). He founded the company in order to attract people to the spa near Takarazuka Station, the final stop of his Hankyū Railway connecting the urban area of industrial Osaka and this developing suburb. The company was one of several single-gender chorus groups that emerged in Japan around the time, but it soon developed into a

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musical and revue company influenced first by the French revue[2] and later by the American musical. Kobayashi was also the founder of what is now known as Hankyū Hanshin Holdings, which runs various divisions including real estate, hotels, department stores, publishing, and entertainment, in addition to transportation. The Takarazuka Revue is the key player of the entertainment division, which boasts the third largest sales in Hankyū Hanshin Holdings as of 2014.[3] The company performs more than a thousand times annually (as of 2008), and the annual audience attendance amounts to two and a half million, which is 10 per cent of the total attendance for all theatrical productions in Japan.[4] The Takarazuka Revue has its own theatres, cable channel, shops to sell its DVDs, books, magazines, and novelties, and a training school, the Takarazuka Music School.

The company's production is organized around its five troupes: Flower (*Hana*), Moon (*Tsuki*), Snow (*Yuki*), Star (*Hoshi*), and Cosmos (*Sora*). Each troupe, made up of eighty performers, has its own producer, who is in charge of casting in collaboration with directors and playwrights, liaising the troupe with the technical staff, and managing the budget allocated by the Hankyū group.[5] The performers come from the Takarazuka Music School, and since all graduates are allowed to join the company without an audition, the producers assign new graduates to a particular troupe and determine the parts that they have the ability to play.[6] Takarazuka producers must demonstrate the ability to work within the system created by Hankyū and ensure the smooth running of the shows. While Broadway producers might provide ideas for shows and raise funds, in the case of Takarazuka producers, Hankyū provides them with theatres, schedules, budgets, performers, and technical staff.[7] It is also the Takarazuka management, not the individual producers, that chooses the shows which each troupe will stage.[8] In this sense, the equivalent to the Broadway producer may be the Hankyū group and the Takarazuka management, for it is the Takarazuka Revue that owns the copyright of each production. Thus, even when the shows are financially successful, it is the company, not the producers as individuals, that receives credit for the success. Takarazuka producers, though, are guaranteed lifelong employment; even when their shows fail, they are not fired. This is quite rare in the entertainment industry, even in Japan.[9]

The Takarazuka Revue's unique business strategy is to be self-contained. The company maintains its own directors, scriptwriters,[10] choreographers, composers, costumers, orchestra, stage carpenters, and technical staff, in addition to performers. These employees belong exclusively to the company, which seldom hires anyone from outside, with only a few exceptions such as the aforementioned French artist, Gérard Presgurvic. Since producers, directors, playwrights, and performers all have secure employment, they do not have to leave their own individual marks on the show.

This containment strategy means the company can create consistent products that embody its aesthetics, which are identified as uniquely Takarazuka not only by theatre-goers but also by the wider Japanese public. Takarazuka shows boast gorgeous costumes, including the huge feather attached to the

back of the top stars in the revue finales; radiant lighting; props that look as though they were transported from fairy-tale castles; and, as will be discussed below, idealized male characters like those in romance novels, but performed by female actors. Another important characteristic of the Takarazuka shows is that they are set mostly in the Western past. The company provides its audience members with a dreamland into which they can momentarily escape from their everyday realities in contemporary Japan.

It is not only the settings but also the performance style that are inspired by the Western musical and revue. Earlier Takarazuka contributors include directors Kishida Tatsuya (1892–1944) and Shirai Tetsuzō (1900–1983), who were sent to study theatre in Europe and the United States by the company's founder, Kobayashi Ichizō. Their production of *Mon Paris* (1927), the first revue staged in Japan, introduced the hallmarks of the company, which continue to this day, including the Rockettes-style dance (kicking legs to the height of the eyes in a unison chorus line) performed at the end of the revue and staircases that span the entire stage width. Kobayashi aimed at creating a popular theatre, in his view, suited to the modern age and distinct from traditional Japanese theatre styles such as kabuki. Modernity at the time in Japan was typically understood as Westernization.

Takarazuka thus 'modernized' the musical theatre, but the 'modernization' of theatre also took place in other areas. For example, the realist staging of straight plays by the likes of Ibsen and Chekhov started around the same time as *Mon Paris*. To this day, the Japanese tend to see the West as culturally sophisticated, and Takarazuka keeps choosing Western countries as the settings for its shows with a few exceptions that are set in Japan. Most of the shows are Takarazuka originals scripted by its playwrights, but it also adapts Broadway and West End musicals such as *Oklahoma!*, *West Side Story*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Me and My Girl*, and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. It has also produced musical adaptations of Western literature such as *Gone With the Wind* and *The Red and the Black*, and manga (graphic novels) such as *Berusaiyu no bara* (The Rose of Versailles), which are set in the West.

Another specific characteristic of Takarazuka is that it is an all-female company that stages heterosexual romances. Each performer specializes in either male roles or female roles. The management assigns these roles based on 'both physical (but not genitalia) and sociopsychological criteria: namely, height, physique, facial shape, voice, personality, and to a certain extent, personal preference'.[11] In its earlier years, the company saw both female and male audience members from different generations, but in the 1930s, when it changed its repertoire from folk tales to romances (for unknown reasons), the male-role players' stage presence became more important, and the strict gender-role division was instigated. Following this, the proportion of female audience members increased.[12]

The system of gender specialization allows male-role players to focus on developing skills to perform male characters. The male-role players imitate the postures and movements of male actors, and even off stage, they refrain

from wearing feminine dresses to keep their body movements 'de-feminized'. Importantly, however, they do not attempt realistic portrayals of men in every aspect—they do not always flatten their breasts[13] and they wear heavy make-up like the female-role players, including red lipstick. Their appearance is thus not so much masculine as androgynous.

As of 1990, women made up more than 90 per cent of the audience,[14] and this remained constant as of 2008.[15] The majority of these women seem to be self-identified heterosexuals attracted to the 'ideal men' in the Takarazuka romances, who are suave, handsome, and willing to sacrifice everything for love. However, these 'ideal men'—men on the narrative level but androgyne on the visual—are performed by women, and as such, the company also appeals to queer sensibilities, although the management does not intend or acknowledge this.[16]

As a mainstream company, the management promotes the company's image of a wholesome dreamland for the female audience members.[17] While gentle, caring, and beautiful male characters in the shows are perceived by the female audience members to be different from their real-life Japanese counterparts, the romantic relationships portrayed in its shows do not challenge the stereotypical gender constructions in Japan—male characters are protective, and female characters are dependent on them. The company also implies that male-role players, while performing male characters, do not really violate the traditional gender boundary; they are performing a man only during a brief moment of their youth before marriage. Takarazuka performers are single, young women, and they must retire upon marriage. Even when their reason for retirement is not to marry but to pursue an acting career outside the company, male-role players cease to perform male characters after retirement; they become actresses.

It is therefore especially curious that the most popular production of the company is an unconventional romance titled *The Rose of Versailles* (first produced in 1974 and most recently [at the time of this writing] in 2015). Based on the girls' manga of the same title by Ikeda Riyoko about an aristocratic female soldier who fights against the royalists in the French Revolution, the show depicts her romantic relationship with her male subordinate, who lacks stereotypical masculine abilities such as fighting skills. It was an acquaintance of director/scriptwriter Ueda Shinji and a fan of the company who suggested the idea of adapting this manga for the stage. *The Rose of Versailles* was hugely popular among girls and women in the early 1970s, a time when the company's popularity was declining due to the rise of other media such as TV, film, and manga. Indeed, this manga shares many aspects with Takarazuka—a Western historical setting, characters in gorgeous dresses, and a woman performing a typically masculine role. However, it differs significantly from the company's typical plot concerning conventional romantic couples.[18] Despite this, Takarazuka's version broke the attendance record up to that point and instigated the troupe's post-war popularity. Its continuing popularity might be suggestive of the true appeal of Takarazuka, for as of 2014, *The Rose of*

Versailles has been performed more than 2,100 times, and attendance has exceeded five million.[19]

In its 101st year (2015), the Takarazuka Revue continues to attract a large audience. However, the company is facing a slight decline in its audience due to the decrease of the population in Japan. It has started to promote itself to tourists and also put significant emphasis on overseas tours. These tours started as early as 1938 to North America, Europe, and Southeast and East Asia, but until recently, the main purpose was international exchange. Now the company sees neighbouring Asia, especially Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan, where Japanese popular culture is widely consumed, as its important markets.[20] Its recent popularity in Taiwan is especially astonishing; during its first tour there in 2013, tickets were sold out for all twelve shows over nine days, and the total attendance was about 18,000.[21] Following this huge success, the company returned in August 2015, which recorded an even larger total attendance of 21,000, with all fourteen shows sold out.[22] Thus, although Takarazuka's management-based production approach originally intended to create consistent products for an audience at the end of a suburban train line, the wild popularity of these performances in Taiwan suggests that there is something about these all-female journeys into a Western dreamland of romance that can travel successfully outside of Japan.

Notes

1. In this chapter, I follow the Japanese name order for Japanese individuals, in which family name comes before given name (this does not apply for those who publish in English).
2. Due to the early influence of French revue, Takarazuka performers have been called Takarasiennes (*Takarajen'nu*), after Parisiennes.
3. Morishita Nobuo, *Moto Takarazuka sōshihainin ga kataru 'Takarazuka' no keiei senryaku* [Former General Manager Talks about Takarazuka's Business Strategies] (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2015), 90.
4. Azuma Sonoko, *Josei no homosōsharu na shinmitsusei o meguru bunka shakaigaku teki kōsatsu: 'Takarazuka' to 'yaoi' no media ron teki bunseki o tōshite* [An Examination of Female Homosocial Intimacy from a Perspective of Sociology of Culture: Through Media Analyses of 'Takarazuka' and 'Yaoi'] (PhD diss., Osaka University, 2010), 31–2; Makiko Yamanashi, *A History of the Takarazuka Revue Since 1914: Modernity, Girls' Culture, Japan Pop* (Leiden: Global Oriental, 2012), xxi.
5. Morishita, *Moto Takarazuka*, 51.
6. Ibid., 26.
7. Ibid., 96.
8. Ibid., 102–3.
9. Ibid., 104–7.

10. To be precise, directors usually write the scripts that they direct, and therefore, there is no distinction between these two roles in the company.
11. Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 11–12.
12. Kawasaki Kenko, *Takarazuka: shōhi shakai no supekutakuru* [Takarazuka: Spectacles of Consumer Society] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1999), 161, 175, 188.
13. I thank Azuma Sonoko for pointing this out.
14. Lori Brau, 'The Women's Theatre of Takarazuka', *The Drama Review* 34, no. 4 (1990), 80.
15. Leonie R. Stickland, *Gender Gymnastics: Performing and Consuming Japan's Takarazuka Revue* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific, 2008), 7. Audiences include various generations, and enthusiastic fans attend the show at least once or twice a month (Azuma, *Josei no homosōsharu*, 43).
16. Nobuko Anan, 'Two-Dimensional Imagination in Contemporary Japanese Women's Performance', *The Drama Review* 55, no. 4 (2011): 96–112; Anan, *Contemporary Japanese Women's Theatre and Visual Arts: Performing Girls' Aesthetics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 136–51.
17. 'Takarazuka kageki to wa? Hyakunen tsuzuku hanayakana butai no himitsu' [What is the Takarazuka Revue? Secrets to the Gorgeous Stage Lasting 100 Years] (2015), Takarazuka Revue Official Website, http://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/fun/about_takarazuka.html, accessed 26 August 2015.
18. For more discussion of *The Rose of Versailles*, both the original manga and the Takarazuka versions, see my monograph, *Contemporary Japanese Women's Theatre and Visual Arts*.
19. 'Takarazuka "Berubara", kankyaku 500 man nin toppa 2084 kai de' [The Audience Attendance of Takarazuka's *The Rose of Versailles* Has Exceeded Five Million in Its 2,084th Production], Asahi Digital, http://www.asahi.com/articles/ASG6W53Q6G6WUCLV00C.html, accessed 27 June 2014.
20. Morishita, *Moto Takarazuka*, 88.
21. 'Dai nikai Takarazuka kagekidan Taiwan kōen no jisshi ni tsuite' [About the Takarazuka Revue's Second Tour to Taiwan] (2014), Takarazuka Revue Official Website, http://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/news/detail/0d1b34b46632526356306bdadbdfb3c0.html, accessed 17 January 2015.
22. Segawa Nariko, 'Takarazuka Taiwan kōen: Taiwan ashigakari ni Ajia e mirai misue Takarazuka' [Takarazuka Shows in Taiwan: Taiwan as a Foothold in the Asian Market], *47 Topics* (2015), http://www.47news.jp/47topics/e/267998.php, accessed 24 August 2015.

Act 2. From the 1940s through the 1970s

Just as the Broadway musical had its proverbial 'Golden Age' (roughly defined as the era of Rodgers and Hammerstein and their contemporaries), so did the Broadway musical producer. Many of these legendary figures exuded larger-than-life personalities that they brought to their stylish and often lavish productions. Some came from the theatre industry itself, including Rodgers and Hammerstein and Harold Prince, while others entered the field from backgrounds in business and other lines of work.

For a number of the producers profiled in the pages that follow, producing was just one aspect of a multi-faceted creative career. Many complemented their producing activity with work as authors, directors, or entrepreneurs. This was also a time when businesses, both for-profit and not-for-profit, embraced the realm of musical theatre production, a reminder that musical theatre can mean both art and commerce.

Some mid-century musical producers were deeply involved with the creation of the artistic product, while others entrusted this work to collaborators and instead focused on the show's finances. Producing musicals increasingly became a money-making venture, with factors such as recouping investments quickly and recovering from flops becoming important features of a producer's life. Fresh paths for how to produce a musical were being explored, alongside new sources for revenue and innovative approaches to marketing.

The commercial arm became a vital component of producing musicals outside the English-speaking world. Imports of Broadway and West End successes appeared on international stages alongside domestic works. As the world became increasingly connected, so did the art of producing musical theatre.

CHAPTER 16

Refining the Tastes of Broadway Audiences: The Theatre Guild and American Musical Theatre

Claudia Wilsch Case

As the First World War and the year 1918 were drawing to an end, a group of New York theatre artists founded the Theatre Guild, a professional art theatre with roots in the Little Theatre Movement and commercial aspirations. Within a few years, the Guild emerged as America's most prominent commercial producer of artistically significant drama and began experimenting with musical theatre, starting with the satirical revue *The Garrick Gaieties*. By mid-century, the company had become a significant producer of musicals, staging Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's first collaboration, *Oklahoma!*, and premiering other major works by the duo.

The Theatre Guild was run collectively by a board of manager-shareholders, which until 1939 consisted of playwright-attorney Lawrence Langner, playwright-critic Theresa Helburn, director Philip Moeller, actress Helen Westley, designer Lee Simonson, and investment banker Maurice Wertheim. Several of the group's producers had studied theatre in university drama programs, including George Pierce Baker's famous English 47 Workshop at Harvard. Most of them had also been associated with the Washington Square Players, a staple of New York's art theatre scene of the 1910s. When the Guild was restructured in the late 1930s, Langner and Helburn took over as co-producers and added new collaborators, including Langner's wife Armina Marshall and, by the late 1950s, the couple's son Philip. The younger Langner

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had apprenticed at his parents' summer theatre, the Westport Country Playhouse in Connecticut, which until 1958 sometimes served as the Theatre Guild's tryout venue for plays and musicals that the company later produced in New York. Philip Langner and his wife Marilyn Clark Langner continue to manage the Guild's operations to the present day.

The producers of the Theatre Guild saw themselves as tastemakers and strove to achieve a higher standard in the American commercial theatre than what they had observed in the 1910s. Hoping to nurture sophisticated Broadway audiences, the Guild presented expertly staged, artistically ambitious drama, first at the Garrick Theatre on 35th Street, and later at its own Guild Theatre (now the August Wilson Theatre) on 52nd Street. Other Broadway houses were also used. The company financed its productions by gradually building a large local and national audience of subscribers, by occasionally drawing on its producers' personal funds, by attracting outside investors, and, in later years, by entering into arrangements with co-producers.

The Theatre Guild's early offerings consisted primarily of European plays, including work by Tolstoy, Shaw, Molnar, Kaiser, Toller, Claudel, Čapek, and Ibsen, although the company was also drawn to experimental American plays, as illustrated by its 1923 production of Elmer Rice's expressionist piece *The Adding Machine*. During the 1920s, the Guild's producers began building relationships with more American writers, including Sidney Howard, S. N. Behrman, and Eugene O'Neill. They also supported an experimental junior group, later known as the Theatre Guild Studio, which inspired the company's first involvement in producing musical theatre. Studio participants Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford, and Lee Strasberg would later become key members of the Group Theatre. Throughout its heyday, which lasted until the close of the 1962–1963 season, the Theatre Guild thrived as a producer of musicals, often combining material adapted from previously staged Guild plays with the skills of such directors as Philip Loeb or Rouben Mamoulian, and the talents of Agnes de Mille and other innovative choreographers.

In 1925, with the support of their mentors, Guild apprentices Loeb, Romney Brent, and Edith Meiser conceived *The Garrick Gaieties*, a clever intimate revue in the style of the Neighborhood Playhouse's *Grand Street Follies* (which had poked fun at the Theatre Guild on occasion), with musical numbers and skits burlesquing the Guild's shows and highbrow ambitions. The *Gaieties*, directed by Loeb, also mocked productions staged by other managements, commented on current events, and featured several songs by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart.[1] The duo, still at the beginning of their careers, contributed such tunes as 'April Fool', 'Sentimental Me', and 'Manhattan', as well as their one-act jazz opera 'The Joy Spreader', and collaborated with budding librettist Herbert Fields, who also choreographed *The Garrick Gaieties*. As the choreographer, Fields selected the chorus members, who 'didn't have to be beautiful', but had to have 'a sense of humor' to be able to convey the satirical nature of the production.[2] The description of the chorus in a 1925 program for the *Gaieties* demonstrates the tongue-in-cheek approach the show's creators adopted vis-

à-vis the conventional casting choices of traditional revues and the Theatre Guild's contrasting intellectualism: 'the girls are all college graduates and have undergone a course in the higher mathematics, which accounts for their keeping time so well'.[3] Emphasizing the performers' individuality, each program also listed the chorus members by name.

The Guild's producers, perceiving a market for an intellectually entertaining revue and impervious to being ridiculed from their own stage, extended the *Gaieties*' two scheduled performances to a full-fledged run and financed subsequent editions in 1926 and 1930. Loeb returned as the director of those productions. Rodgers and Hart again provided music and lyrics for the 1926 *Gaieties*, including the song 'Mountain Greenery', and, in collaboration with Fields, 'The Rose of Arizona', a burlesque of American musical comedies 'in the best traditional manner'.[4] As Brooks Atkinson noted in his *New York Times* review, 'The Rose of Arizona' was an apt critique of the genre: 'If the number confuses the audience for a few moments, and makes its point rather slowly, the fault lies partly with the American musical comedies here held up to ridicule. They are quite as grotesque as this sardonic travesty. And they are played quite as broadly as the principals and the mechanical chorus play this one.'[5] Rodgers and Hart did not work on the 1930 edition of *The Garrick Gaieties*, which reunited some of the show's other earlier collaborators and featured musical numbers by several new composers and lyricists, including Vernon Duke and E. Y. Harburg.

In the 1930s, the Theatre Guild continued probing the field of musical theatre, producing Lynn Riggs's Midwestern folk play with music, *Green Grow the Lilacs* (1931); a musical adaptation of Molière's comedy *The School for Husbands* (1933) by Arthur Guiterman, Lawrence Langner, and Edmond W. Rickett; the politically left-leaning satirical revue *Parade* (1935) by Paul Peters, George Sklar, and others; and George and Ira Gershwin's African American-themed folk opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935), which was adapted from DuBose and Dorothy Heyward's play *Porgy*, originally presented by the Guild in 1927. *The School for Husbands*, tested at the Westport Country Playhouse in the summer of 1932 under the title *The School for Lovers*, contained neoclassical-style music and a ballet, thus foreshadowing the inclusion of ballet in what would become the Theatre Guild's most famous musical theatre success ten years later, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* Langner not only collaborated on the script, but also directed the Molière adaptation. Fearing 'extreme embarrassment' and 'the disintegration of the organization', the board of managers, which voted on all projects considered for a Guild production, generally did not stage work written by company members, and *The School for Husbands*, which was well received by the critics, remained the only such example in the Theatre Guild's history.[6]

Parade, a revue dramatizing contemporary social and economic problems, which Peters and Sklar had originally created for the Theatre Union, one of several significant American political theatre companies founded during the Great Depression, was not a typical Theatre Guild offering, either. Philip Loeb,

having gained experience directing musical theatre with *The Garrick Gaieties*, staged the production. However, according to Brooks Atkinson, in the hands of commercial producers who lacked a strong commitment to revolutionary ideology, '*Parade* looks like a mechanical gesture promoted by nothing profounder than opportunism', and the show's only redeeming quality was the multi-faceted performance of pantomime-comedian Jimmy Savo.[7]

The script for *Porgy*, a love story set in an African American section of Charleston, South Carolina, was crafted from a novel by DuBose Heyward and incorporated traditional songs and spirituals evoking its locale. In 1927, Rouben Mamoulian, who had recently joined the Theatre Guild as a teacher at its short-lived acting school, directed the production. As Langner noted, Mamoulian was chosen after 'a number of well-known directors … fought shy of an all-colored cast'.[8] DuBose and Dorothy Heyward subsequently collaborated with George and Ira Gershwin on the play's 1935 operatic adaptation, which featured a score inspired by popular, folk, and jazz music and included recitative-style dialogue. Devised on a grand scale that required a large orchestra and eighty singers, *Porgy and Bess* could have found a home at the Metropolitan Opera, but the company would not have cast African American performers. The Theatre Guild production, directed, as *Porgy* had been, by Mamoulian, starred African American singers Todd Brown and Anne Wiggins, but had to be trimmed during previews to fit the more compact format of a Broadway musical.[9] As a work that, like its non-musical predecessor, challenged established casting practices, and as a uniquely American opera that sought an audience on Broadway, *Porgy and Bess* was a groundbreaking piece of musical theatre and a daring choice for producers in the 1930s, though its premiere was not a critical or financial success.

Green Grow the Lilacs, like *Porgy* a play with incidental music, was first staged for the Guild in 1931 by Herbert J. Biberman, a young director responsible for the Theatre Guild Studio's 1929 production of *Red Rust* by V. Kirchon and Alexander Ouspensky and the Guild's 1930 production of *Roar China* by S. Tretyakov. Riggs's play about hard scrabble life on the American frontier was later revived at the Westport Country Playhouse in 1940 under the direction of John Ford. The Theatre Guild subsequently commissioned Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II for their first joint undertaking, adapting *Green Grow the Lilacs* into a musical. Although the project was considered foolish by several Broadway insiders and had trouble attracting needed investors, *Oklahoma!*, depicting the farm girl Laurey's blossoming love for the cowboy Curly in the face of adversity, became a runaway hit in wartime America. The musical, which starred Alfred Drake and Joan Roberts, was again directed by Rouben Mamoulian and featured choreography by Agnes de Mille. The show skilfully used its music, lyrics, and choreography to advance its plot and give dimension to its characters. The chorus, defying previous patterns of musical comedy, entered late in the first act and, as it had functioned in *The Garrick Gaieties*, presented its members as three-dimensional characters rather than as two-dimensional dancing girls. Deepening Laurey's characterization, de Mille's

dream ballet 'Laurey Makes Up Her Mind' dramatizes the girl's conflicted relationship with Curly's rival Jud, who is later killed. In addition to being artistically significant, the show became the longest-running Broadway musical of its time, achieved international success, and provided handsome returns for those who did invest money in the production, including S. N. Behrman, Lee Shubert, and Max Gordon, to whom the Guild, desperate to raise capital, had offered '60 percent of profits instead of the usual 50 percent'.[10]

Echoing some of the sentiments expressed in Philip Barry's patriotic play *Liberty Jones*, 'an allegory of freedom in America', with music by Paul Bowles, which the Theatre Guild had produced in 1941, *Oklahoma!* conveyed a message of American optimism during trying times. After the success of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical, the Guild borrowed the folklore of its theme, the exclamation point of its title, and one of its leads, Alfred Drake, for its 1944 production of Walter Kerr's patriotic revue *Sing Out, Sweet Land!: A Salute to American Folk and Popular Music*. This collection of songs from Puritan days to contemporary times, which had attracted a considerable investment from John Byram of Paramount Pictures, was staged by Leon Leonidoff and included choreography by modern dance pioneers Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman.[11] Unlike *Oklahoma!*, however, both *Liberty Jones* and *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* were failures.

The Theatre Guild's next hit musical was another Rodgers and Hammerstein commission and the duo's second collaboration, *Carousel* (1945). Like *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel* was adapted from a script the company had previously produced. Staged by Frank Reicher for the Guild in 1921, Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnar's *Liliom*, a play about a carnival barker who is offered a chance to repent for his misdeeds after death, was revived at Westport twenty years later under the direction of Lee Strasberg. When, upon the Guild's request, Rodgers and Hammerstein transformed the foreign *Liliom* into 'an American musical folk play', they picked a New England setting and altered Molnar's bleak ending into a happy one, allowing the carnival worker, Billy Bigelow, to reconnect with his wife Julie and their daughter.[12] Helburn and Langner produced *Carousel* on a budget of $180,000 and once again hired Mamoulian to direct and de Mille to choreograph the show, which ran on Broadway for two years.[13]

Agnes de Mille also choreographed and directed the Theatre Guild production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's third musical, *Allegro* (1947), an early concept musical dramatizing a doctor's career from childhood to adulthood and using a Classical Greek-style chorus to comment on the action. Echoing *The Garrick Gaieties* by including the melody of the Rodgers and Hart song 'Mountain Greenery', *Allegro* nevertheless flopped. With rising production costs, it had become much more difficult to make a profit on Broadway after the Second World War. The Guild spent approximately $300,000 to stage *Allegro*, more than three times the roughly $84,000 it had invested in *Oklahoma!* four years earlier.[14]

By the early 1950s, Rodgers and Hammerstein had established themselves as producers in their own right and severed their professional relationship with the Theatre Guild. The company now turned to Betty Comden and Adolph Green, who at the beginning of their careers had appeared at Westport with the 1939 *Magazine Page* revue. In 1956, the Guild brought their show *Bells Are Ringing*, with music by Jule Styne, to Broadway. Starring Judy Holliday, this musical about the romantic adventures of an answering service operator was directed by Jerome Robbins and choreographed by Robbins and Bob Fosse. *Bells Are Ringing* ran on Broadway until 1959 and also had a London engagement.

The year 1957 saw the last of Theresa Helburn's work with the Guild before she passed away two years later. From the late 1950s onwards, the Langners increasingly relied on arrangements with co-producers and associate producers to stage Theatre Guild shows. In 1958, in collaboration with Frank Perry, the company capitalized on its earlier success with *Bells Are Ringing* by producing *A Party with Betty Comden & Adolph Green*, starring the duo in a collection of their own songs and sketches. In 1960, the Theatre Guild and Dore Schary, with associate producer Walter Reilly, presented *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, a successful musical about a tenacious frontier woman who hopes to climb the social ladder, played by Tammy Grimes and inspired by the real-life Brown. The production featured music and lyrics by Meredith Willson, a book by Richard Morris, and was staged by Schary and choreographed by Peter Gennaro. Schary, a screenwriter and movie producer, had become associated with the Guild in the late 1950s, and, beginning with his own play *Sunrise at Campobello* about Franklin Delano Roosevelt, both co-produced and directed several of the company's shows.

With Lawrence Langner's death during the 1962–1963 season, the Theatre Guild had lost both of its longest-serving producers. During the next three decades, eager to maintain a presence on Broadway despite high production costs, the Guild strove to stage shows that built on its Golden Age legacy. For the remainder of the 1960s, Armina Marshall and Philip Langner presented about one play or musical a year, some in collaboration with producer Joel Schenker, who joined the Guild management for a time. Schenker's last production with the company was the 1968 musical *Darling of the Day* with music and lyrics by Styne and Harburg and a book by Nunally Johnson. Based on Arnold Bennett's 1908 novel *Buried Alive* and its 1913 dramatic version, *The Great Adventure*, *Darling of the Day* tells the story of a painter who assumes the identity of his butler. Bennett's work was familiar to the Guild; the company had produced his play *What the Public Wants* in 1922 and a radio adaptation of *The Great Adventure* for *The Theatre Guild on the Air* in 1947. The musical, initially titled *Married Alive!*, was directed by Steven Vinaver and starred Patricia Routledge and Vincent Price. Tryouts on the road did not go well, with Vinaver and Nunally resigning from the project. The *New York Times* reported that Vinaver 'could not see eye to eye with the producers … about point-of-view and about revisions'.[15] Noel Willman was brought in to take over

as director and Roger Hirson to complete revisions of the script. At a final cost of $700,000, which was raised from 245 backers, including an investment of $150,000 by RCA Victor and combined personal contributions of $200,000 by the Langners and Schenker when expenses surpassed their initial $500,000 budget, *Darling of the Day* became, for a time, 'the biggest loser in Broadway history'. The show closed after less than a month in New York.[16]

Several years after the failure of *Darling of the Day*, Theatre Guild producers Armina Marshall, Philip Langner, and Marilyn Langner tried once again, unsuccessfully, to recapture some of the company's past successes through two new musical theatre productions. In 1975, the Guild, Jonathan Conrow, and associate producer Merle D. King presented *A Musical Jubilee* (1975), a revue billed as celebrating the development of American theatre music and the Broadway musical, beginning with songs from the American frontier. Devised by Marilyn Langner and Charles Burr, assembled by Max Wilk, and directed by Robert Tucker, the show featured stars from past Theatre Guild productions, including Tammy Grimes and John Raitt, and special guest Lillian Gish. *New York Times* critic Clive Barnes panned the revue for its choice 'to restrict the numbers to those written before World War II', presumably for copyright reasons, and for incorporating two British sketches when its focus was supposed to be the American theatre.[17]

In 1995, twenty years after its last musical theatre production and more than fifty years after the premiere of *Oklahoma!*, David Merrick collaborated with the Guild and executive producer Thomas Viertel on a project designed to build on the company's success with producing the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein. *State Fair* was a stage adaptation of the duo's 1945 film musical about a Midwestern family's visit to the Iowa State Fair, with a book by Louis Mattioli and Tom Briggs. The work also drew on material from the Phil Stong novel that had inspired the film and from the movie's 1962 remake. Co-directed by James Hammerstein, son of Oscar Hammerstein II, and Randy Skinner, who also served as choreographer, the show featured television actors John Davidson and Kathryn Crosby and Broadway actors Andrea McArdle and Donna McKechnie in its leading roles. The producers had raised $1.5 million for a pre-Broadway tour, which, fittingly, launched at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines.

After the musical, whose tryouts overlapped with the national tour of a successful Royal National Theatre and Lincoln Center Theater production of *Carousel*, received mixed reviews on the road, the Theatre Guild revised its advertising strategy. If *State Fair*'s marketing campaign had initially tried to evoke the Golden Age of Broadway musicals by announcing the production through 'a watercolor-backdrop-style painting of 1940s fun-seekers agog at the fair's wonders' that 'looked like a Theatre Guild poster from the '40s', the producers subsequently altered this approach to highlight the show's stars. Ultimately, the Guild turned to the Serino Coyne agency for a blue ribbon logo, symbolizing prize winners, that would be featured on last-minute publicity materials in a 'crash campaign' for the musical's New York run. By the

time the Broadway production, budgeted at $4.5 million, opened in March of 1996 (two weeks before a major revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*), *State Fair* was already rumoured to have lost $3.5 million on the road.[18] By October, *Variety*, speculating that the financial losses from its latest project had driven the company 'to ruin', reported that the Theatre Guild had abruptly vacated its New York office, leaving investors 'irate'.[19] While the Guild still exists under the management of Philip and Marilyn Langner and has on occasion participated in new theatrical ventures, including 'The Theatre Guild at Sea', a series of cruises featuring performances by current and former Broadway stars that lasted until the first decade of the twenty-first century, the company has not been responsible for a Broadway production since *State Fair*.

During Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn's lifetime, the Theatre Guild significantly shaped American musical theatre and the tastes of the theatre-going public. The Guild contributed its most innovative work when it forged relationships between such inspired theatre artists as Rodgers and Hammerstein, or Mamoulian and de Mille, and when it developed American-themed musical theatre pieces based on plays it had previously produced, including *Porgy and Bess*, *Oklahoma!*, and *Carousel*. By taking an active interest in the artistic qualities of the productions it financed, the Theatre Guild, during its heyday, stood out as a producing organization that valued the craft of creating musical theatre as much as a show's potential for profit. Once the Guild lost Langner and Helburn, it was no longer able to adapt to the changing conditions and rising costs of commercial producing, and, ultimately, lost its influence on American musical theatre.

Notes

1. For example, some editions of the 1925 *Garrick Gaieties* poked fun at A. H. Woods's production of Michael Arlen's 1925 play *The Green Hat* with the skit *The Green Derby*. Other editions mocked the Moscow Art Theatre's repertory of productions presented in New York in 1923 and 1924 by F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest with the skit *Uncle Seagull*. In order to keep its material current, the revue was updated periodically.
2. 'That Chorus', *The Garrick Gaieties* souvenir program, by the Theatre Guild Studio, directed by Philip Loeb, Garrick Theatre, New York, NY, [1926], Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 4.
3. *The Garrick Gaieties* program, by the Theatre Guild Studio, directed by Philip Loeb, Garrick Theatre, New York, NY, [1925], Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
4. *The Garrick Gaieties* program, by the Theatre Guild Studio, directed by Philip Loeb, Garrick Theatre, New York, NY, [1926], Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

5. Brooks Atkinson, 'Theatre Guild Cut-Ups', The Play, *New York Times*, 11 May 1926.
6. Lawrence Langner, *The Magic Curtain: The Story of a Life in Two Fields, Theatre and Invention, by the Founder of the Theatre Guild* (New York: Dutton, 1951), 117.
7. Brooks Atkinson, '*Parade* on the Left', *New York Times*, 26 May 1935.
8. Langner, *Magic Curtain*, 226.
9. Frederick S. Roffman, 'Opening Night Is Every Night This Week', *New York Times*, 19 September 1976.
10. Arthur Gelb, 'Economics of Two Hits', *New York Times*, 11 June 1961.
11. Sam Zolotow, 'New Guild Show Arriving Tonight', *New York Times*, 27 December 1944.
12. Langner, *Magic Curtain*, 390.
13. Ibid., 392.
14. Brooks Atkinson, 'Some Thoughts on Broadway Economics and Judging the Public's Taste', Curtain Going Up, *New York Times*, 31 August 1947; Gelb, 'Economics'.
15. Sam Zolotow, 'Incoming Musical Shifts Directors', *New York Times*, 27 December 1967.
16. '*Darling of the Day* a Costly Failure', *New York Times*, 23 February 1968; Harry Gilroy, 'A Musical Faces First 50 Critics', *New York Times*, 31 August 1967.
17. Clive Barnes, '*Musical Jubilee* and Its Stars Glisten', *New York Times*, 14 November 1996.
18. Glenn Collins, 'Improvisation Has Been Utterly Necessary for the Marketing of *State Fair*', Advertising, *New York Times*, 4 April 1996; Chris Jones, 'Broadway Flops Take Baggage on the Road', *Variety*, 3 March 1997, 73.
19. Greg Evans, 'Investors' Question: Guild's Deal Un-"Fair"?' *Variety*, 14 October 1996, 69.

CHAPTER 17

More than a Producer: 'George Abbott Presents'

Paul R. Laird

Among the longest careers in the history of Broadway is that of George Abbott (1887–1995), who, in addition to being a producer, was also an actor, writer, and director. In a 1939 profile in *Life* magazine, Alice Leone Moats described Abbott as 'undoubtedly the most amazing producer currently practicing in New York'.[1] Abbott, however, consistently combined his work as a producer with writing and directing, adding 'George Abbott Presents' on marquees starting in the mid-1930s. Among his productions were nine musicals between 1938 and 1951. While not a large number, Abbott's production of musicals corresponded with his being one of the most influential figures in musical comedy. He drew upon his experience as a director and producer of farces and brought an overriding concern for a speedy pace to his productions, editing out dialogue, songs, and dances that did not contribute to furthering the plot or bogged down the proceedings. In addition, Abbott mentored a number of younger figures who became significant in the musical theatre.

Abbott was born in Forestville, New York on 25 June 1887, growing up in the nearby town of Salamanca, where his father was twice elected mayor. Despite his father's prominence, his heavy drinking complicated Abbott's youth. The family moved to Cheyenne, Wyoming in 1898, during which time Abbott attended the Kearney Military Academy in Nebraska starting at age 13, an experience that Abbott reports was good for him.[2] After the family returned to New York, Abbott attended Hamburg High School, where he became captain of the football team and the school's finest actor while working a variety

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of jobs.[3] He saw his first play in Cheyenne and upon his return to Hamburg he took the trolley to Buffalo to sit in theatre balconies. Abbott unfortunately has little to say about what drew him to the art that became his life's work.[4] He graduated from Hamburg High School in 1907.

With the help of his high school principal, Abbott earned a scholarship to the University of Rochester, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts. Abbott considered academics 'incidental' and found his undergraduate experience to be 'mostly concerned with football, dramatics, and extra-curricular activities'.[5] While in college he continued to attend the theatre and tried to get a position as an usher. He began to consider a career as a playwright and wrote a 'ludicrously bad' three-act play, but then tried his hand at a farce called *Perfectly Harmless* that was produced by the University Dramatic Club. The show's success with local audiences encouraged Abbott's dreams.[6] Graduating in 1911, Abbott unsuccessfully applied for a scholarship to study at Harvard. He went to Boston anyway and won $100 in a one-act playwriting contest sponsored by the Bijou Theatre, which produced his play. The Bijou's owner hired Abbott as an assistant with a wide variety of duties, including running errands, writing, and acting. At Harvard he became a member of the well-known '47' playwright's workshop led by George Pierce Baker, a group named after his English 47 class. Among Baker's other students over the years were Philip Barry, John Mason Brown, Thomas Wolfe, and Eugene O'Neill.[7] Abbott found study with Baker 'inspiring', noting that 'he turned your whole thoughts and energies into the practical matter of how to make a show'.[8] Baker considered a good farce or melodrama to be as important as a tragedy, and his repeated mantra was 'Get the greatest emotional result from the given scene'.[9] Students wrote one-act plays and read them aloud for criticism. One that Abbott wrote there, *The Head of the Family*, was performed by the Harvard Dramatic Club in 1912. Abbott appreciated his continuing education in Boston and saw his work at the Bijou as 'a good transition from the theoretical to the pragmatic', but 'I knew that I must go to New York and see what would happen there'.[10]

After several fruitless interviews for acting jobs, he landed a role in *The Misleading Lady* in 1913, and proceeded to build a fine reputation as an ultra-masculine type. Except for a few later roles, his acting career went on until the mid-1920s. In about 1917 he married Ednah Levis, a woman that he had met before graduating from high school; she died in 1930.

While acting, Abbott continued writing plays, and through circulating his manuscripts he made valuable contacts. John Golden (1874–1955), a lyricist and producer, read some of Abbott's plays and offered encouragement. Golden hired Abbott as an assistant in his production office; Golden's producing partner at the time was Winchell Smith (*c.*1872–1933), an actor and playwright. One of the duties Golden assigned Abbott was to collaborate with playwright Austin Strong (1881–1952). In 1918, Abbott landed a role in *Daddies*, produced by David Belasco (1853–1931), an actor, writer, director, and producer whose work Abbott describes in some detail in his autobiography.[11] Abbott embraced Belasco as a model; like Belasco, Abbott eventually

owned his own production company that allowed him to pursue a multiplicity of projects with the excellent theatre people who worked for him.

It is misleading to consider production a separate profession in Abbott's career. He knew it was important and called for the hand of a professional, pointedly dismissing producers that he considered 'amateurs'.[12] For Abbott, however, producing appears to have represented a level of independence where he could write and direct what he wanted. As we consider his work as a producer of musicals, it becomes clear that the phrase 'George Abbott Presents' was perhaps the ultimate statement that he had 'made it' on Broadway. Abbott notes that he simply decided to dispense with working with other producers and do the job himself, though he did employ a business manager.[13]

Abbott's progression from actor and aspiring playwright to 'George Abbott Presents'—first accomplished with the play *Boy Meets Girl* in 1935—was made possible by the success of plays that he wrote and/or directed and his growing reputation as a 'play-doctor' for troubled productions. An important step was meeting Jed Harris, producer of *Love 'em and Leave 'em* (1926), which Abbott directed and co-wrote with John V. A. Weaver, and *Broadway* (1926), which Abbott co-wrote and co-directed with Philip Dunning, another important associate. Abbott produced three plays in a joint business with Dunning between 1932 and 1934, none very successful, but Abbott had at least a hand in directing all three and writing two of them. He worked with many other influential figures, such as producers Sam Harris and Billy Rose. In the 1930s Abbott became especially famous for farces that he variously wrote, directed, and produced, such as *Twentieth Century* (1932) and *Three Men on a Horse* (1935). The speedy pace of action that Abbott brought to such plays became one of his hallmarks as a director, also an important aspect of his later musical comedies. He did not believe that speed was an end in itself, writing: 'the one thing a play should not have, is just simple uncontrolled speed. The director who thinks that pace is just hurry makes a tragic mistake and produces a noisy, violent hodgepodge devoid of any illusion.'[14] Abbott also worked in Hollywood, directing eight films for Paramount between 1929 and 1931 and writing the screenplay for the epic *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930).

Abbott's work with musicals began through his association with Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, for whom he directed *Jumbo* (1935); co-wrote the book for *On Your Toes* (1936); directed, produced, and co-wrote the book for *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938); and directed and produced both *Too Many Girls* (1939) and *Pal Joey* (1940). Billy Rose produced *Jumbo* and Dwight D. Wiman (whom Abbott identified as 'another talented amateur'[15]) produced *On Your Toes*. When Abbott writes about his work on shows with Rodgers and Hart, it seems that producing was not his greatest concern; when he describes *Pal Joey*, for example, it is mostly about the writing and directing.[16]

In the winter and spring of 1939, Abbott's Broadway productions were on a roll. In March, he had three hit shows playing simultaneously—two plays and the musical *The Boys from Syracuse*—unprecedented for a single director/producer.[17]A reason that Abbott was able to have more than one show running

at a time was because of his fine team: Robert E. Griffith as his stage manager, Carl Fischer (his deceased wife's nephew) as business manager, and actors/assistant directors Garson Kanin, Edith Van Cleve, and Ezra Stone helping with casting, second companies, and maintaining running shows.[18] That summer was rough for Broadway shows because of competition from the New York World's Fair. One of the shows that fell victim to the doldrums was *The Boys from Syracuse*, which closed in early June. The summer of discontent forced the closing of all of Abbott's shows in early July, when for the first time since November 1935, he had nothing running on Broadway.

Abbott was the subject of the abovementioned profile in *Life* that October.[19] Author Alice Leone Moats described Abbott as '"an unphenomenal phenomenon," a genius with no lunatic streak'[20] who wore plain shirts, dark suits, did not smoke, and seldom drank or swore. He eschewed hiring stars, and if one of his shows failed it did not tend to be described as a *succès d'estime*: 'While it is true that Abbott's plays rarely contain poetry, high comedy or fine flights of histrionic art, this objection is scarcely more valid than the equally familiar one that Abbott's first nights lack chic.'[21] Moats compares his works to Hollywood B movies, and notes that Abbott cagily borrows ideas from other writers and artists, such as Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* in *The Boys from Syracuse*. The author described Abbott's style: 'The hallmarks of an Abbott show are pace and homely humor. He specializes in plays so packed with business, uproar and activity that the audience has no time to exercise its critical faculties.'[22] In a jibe at New Yorkers, Moats asserts that Abbott understands 'what will appeal to the hickishness which metropolitanites try so hard to hide'.[23] His schedule for each season included working in New York from early September to mid-January, wintering in Palm Springs, Florida, and then returning to the city in the spring to prepare another show and/or road companies.

Abbott's new musical for autumn 1939 was *Too Many Girls*, offered here as a case study of his work as a producer. Abbott, along with three production assistants, two stage managers, one dance director, two business managers, secretaries, two press agents, and an investment of $75,000, spent four months creating *Too Many Girls*.[24] His operation's size demonstrates Abbott's significant Broadway success in addition to underlining how work-intensive it was to open a new musical. The show required three months of full houses to earn back the investment.

The idea for the musical originated with Hollywood writer George Marion, Jr., who had written a script about an Argentinian (or otherwise Latin American) who could star in a musical but also pretend that he was a football player.[25] Lorenz Hart met Desi Arnaz, a perfect type for the role, remembered the script, and then piqued the interest of Rodgers and Abbott. The producer spent a week consulting with set designer Jo Mielziner and secured Raoul Pene Du Bois to design the costumes and Jerome Whyte to be in charge of the technical areas. Casting interviews proceeded with the assistance of Edith Van Cleve, Ezra Stone, and Robert Faulk, while choreographer Robert Alton found the dancers. Rodgers and Hart finished the songs by the end of August. For the

first ten days of rehearsals, Abbott worked with the actors and Alton with dancers, and then they joined forces. (Columnist John Chapman once reported that Abbott would meet with actors on the first day and let an assistant lead them for the first week while they learned their lines and business, another indication of how he used his production team.[26]) Four days before the cast of 100 went to New Haven for their first tryout, Whyte went with the technical crew to set up the show, and then *Too Many Girls* started its run there while Abbott honed it for New York. After New Haven, the production moved to Boston.[27] It was all part of Abbott's sizeable operation, which, according to his biography in the programme for *Too Many Girls*, employed 'several hundred players' throughout the year on Broadway and in touring productions.[28]

The show exemplified Abbott's casting philosophy of young, fresh faces with a minimal use of stars. In an overview concerning dance in the contemporary musical theatre, George Berswanger noted that *Too Many Girls* 'is a typical Abbott show, full of bright youngsters but without a veteran comic in the cast. It thus has to make its way by creating a mood and adhering to it throughout the evening.'[29] Berswanger praised the show's integration, stating 'Dialogue and song flow into movement',[30] but he took exception to the casting of Diosa Costello, a Puerto Rican dancer 'without large stage presence'[31] whom Abbott had found singing and dancing at the club La Conga alongside Desi Arnaz.[32] Other coverage clarified why Abbott had hired Costello, including photographs that emphasized her sultry exoticism. Berswanger believed that the dance element was a large part of the show's appeal: 'A musical comedy has managed for once to be all of one piece, thanks to a line of movement, planted in the beginning, which never breaks or wavers.'[33]

Continuing coverage of *Too Many Girls* through the winter and spring of 1939–1940 revealed sides of Abbott the producer, and the show's success. It opened in New York on 18 October and was a success with good reviews and excellent box office, including a $30,000 weekly gross while operating just below capacity in early November, an achievement called 'an exceptional gross for a musical without names'.[34] In February the *New York Journal-American* ran a story about stage manager Jerry Whyte and his staff of forty-eight for the show,[35] and stories later in the month found Abbott hoping that the show might run through the summer if the World's Fair did not once again paralyse Broadway. After the summer he wanted to take *Too Many Girls* on tour and to Chicago for an extended run.[36] The show achieved a $30,000 weekly gross again in late February.[37]

In March Abbott reduced the prices on seats because cheaper ones were selling better, something he had already done successfully with his straight plays.[38] On 22 April the show moved to the Broadway Theatre with its 1,000 seats on the floor, and there the top price would be $2.20, half what it had been at the Imperial Theatre. The original cast had returned (Eddie Bracken and Leila Ernst, two of the stars, had been in Hollywood for a film), and Harry Levant (brother of Oscar) was leading the same twenty-four-piece orchestra.[39] Abbott generated more publicity by announcing at the end of March that women in

the cast would be re-costumed with spring and summer fashions.[40] The show closed on 18 May after 249 performances.[41]

On 4 May an item had appeared in the *Mirror* stating that Abbott was headed to California to work on the film of *Too Many Girls*, taking Desi Arnaz and Eddie Bracken with him and leaving the remainder of the original cast in New York.[42] RKO had purchased the film rights for *Too Many Girls* for an undisclosed sum and paid Abbott $100,000 to write the screenplay and direct[43]; it was the first film for which Abbott served as both director and producer, but Abbott came to believe that a film producer 'is more or less a figurehead'.[44] Indeed, he found out how little control he had on *Too Many Girls* when RKO rejected his idea for bringing the whole Broadway cast to Hollywood to make the film; they wanted bankable film stars like Lucille Ball and Ann Miller.[45]

The next musical that Abbott produced was *Pal Joey* (1940), a major success with another Rodgers and Hart score. Abbott recalls that one of the show's better ideas came from designer Jo Mielziner when he suggested that the first act curtain rise on Joey's fantasy of a fabulous club that his new girlfriend would build for him. The set cost $10,000 to build at a time when a budget for an entire show was about $100,000.[46] Conversely, Rodgers describes an unexpected side of Abbott as producer in *Pal Joey*, noting that he suggested a royalty cut for Rodgers and Hart. The composer subsequently heard from choreographer Robert Alton that Abbott did not want to pay for two more chorus girls and from Mielziner that the producer had told him to keep the scenery costs down because the producer had little faith in the show. Abbott dropped these attitudes when Rodgers confronted him and suggested that he withdraw as producer. They finished a production that stayed true to the show's difficult nature, which is perhaps what spooked Abbott in the first place.[47]

Abbott admitted that the 1940s was not his best decade as a producer.[48] For the shows that he produced between 1941 and 1951, he took on additional roles, sharing some duties with collaborators. This output includes *Best Foot Forward* (1941, director, producer), *Beat the Band* (1942, director, producer, book writer), *Barefoot Baby With Cheek* (1947, producer, stage director), *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'* (1948, producer, director, choreographer), *Touch and Go* (1949, 'Presented by George Abbott' but produced by George Hall[49]), and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1951, producer, director, book writer).[50]

Best Foot Forward played for most of a year and was a work that Abbott co-produced with Richard Rodgers, who also helped oversee the music with a score by newcomers Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane.[51] Rodgers did the work without credit so that it would not appear that a rift with his partner Lorenz Hart was in the offing.

Abbott noted in his autobiography his own poor work as director and producer on the musical *Beat the Band*, which only ran sixty-seven performances. He lamented his initial evaluation of the show, his casting, and his failure to abandon the show when he should have realized that it did not work.[52] Abbott

even asked Rodgers to come and help when the show was doing poorly in Boston.

The final two major book musicals that Abbott produced were *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'* (1948) and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1951). The first, with music and lyrics by Hugh Martin and for which Abbott also carried credits for direction and co-choreographer with Jerome Robbins, was conceived for Nancy Walker, whom Abbott had directed in *On the Town* (1944). Moving to the serious story of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Abbott produced the show in association with Robert Fryer and laboured mightily to assemble his team. He co-wrote the book with Betty Smith, author of the novel, and eventually settled on Arthur Schwartz for the music (after asking others, including Leonard Bernstein[53]) and Dorothy Fields for the lyrics.

In the early 1950s Abbott directed *Wonderful Town* and *Me and Juliet* (both 1953) for other producers and then began to work fairly consistently as a director for producers Robert Griffith, his long-time stage manager (see Chap. 19), and Harold Prince, an assistant in Abbott's office (see Chap. 24), who had formed a production team. Abbott became interested in their first show, *The Pajama Game* (1954), which was highly successful. One should note that Abbott was 67 years old at the time that *The Pajama Game* was created; perhaps producing was one duty he no longer felt the need to do.

Profiles that appeared in the New York press in the 1940s and early 1950s help to summarize Abbott's efforts and legacy as a director and producer. In March 1944 Bert McCord of the *Herald Tribune* listed the many young actors who went on to significant careers and who Abbott had a hand in discovering through his musicals: Ronald Graham, Marcy Wescott, Desi Arnaz, Van Johnson, Leila Ernst, Mildred Law, Gene Kelly, June Havoc, Nancy Walker, June Allyson, Tommy Dix, Gil Stratton, Betty Anne Nyman, and Joan Caulfield.[54] Abbott also helped develop creative talents such as Betty Comden, Adolph Green, Leonard Bernstein, Robert Griffith, Harold Prince, Jerome Robbins, and Bob Fosse. He once addressed his interest in encouraging young talent: 'I have, I confess, developed through the years a Pygmalion complex: I have wanted to mold the young.'[55] Abbott also notes how the majority of his business associates, meaning those that he worked with as a producer, were also young.

Abbott once revealed to a columnist that bringing a show to Broadway as a producer might involve a hunch or friendship. In 1947 he stated: 'you don't always produce a show you're sure of. Sometimes it's a play you only have hopes for. And sometimes you produce a play because you like the author.'[56]

In a career spanning more than seven decades, Abbott performed many tasks on Broadway, producing being just one of them and usually performed in conjunction with other duties. This fluidity of roles was the subject of a humorous comment that Abbott published in 1951, a few days before *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* opened: 'Quite frequently, also, the producer himself becomes a director. He finds that whispering suggestions in the director's ear is an unsatisfactory outlet for his emotions, and that it is much more satisfying

to his ego to be able to shout the same thing to the actors.'[57] In this statement, Abbott suggested a fluidity of roles in the musical theatre, a condition that certainly applied to his own career. He was a writer of scripts rich in humour and distinctive characterization and a director who could prune the dead wood out of a show, leaving a taut structure that moved smoothly between scenes, never leaving the audience a chance to catch its collective breath. It is difficult to look at the nine musicals that he produced and find a singular line in his work.

Abbott was a producer of convenience, presenting his own shows so that he would not have to answer to others who perhaps knew less about the creative side than he did. He assembled a fine producing organization and let his team do their assignments, not projecting a flamboyant personality as a public face for the organization (as did producers like David Merrick). For George Abbott, the play, or the musical, was the thing: he created as an author and director and producing was the business side.

Notes

1. Alice Leone Moats, 'Hick On Broadway: New York Can't Sophisticate George Abbott, Maker of Hits', *Life*, 23 October 1939, 80.
2. George Abbott, *'Mister Abbott'* (New York: Random House, 1963), 29. Abbott's autobiography remains one of the few detailed accounts of his life. It is a candid account of his life, education, and work by a man unconcerned about the opinions of others.
3. Ibid., 40–1.
4. Ibid., 62–3.
5. Ibid., 56.
6. Ibid., 62.
7. John D. Leonard, 'George Pierce Baker: Prism for Genius: Writings by O'Neill, Wolfe Reflect Debt Owed to His Personal Influence', *The Harvard Crimson*, 6 November 1957.
8. Abbott, *'Mister Abbott'*, 65.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 73.
11. Ibid., 93–5.
12. Ibid., 118.
13. Ibid., 176.
14. Ibid., 264.
15. Ibid., 177.
16. Ibid., 195.
17. 'George Abbott Plays Rolling: Three Hit Shows Set A Record', *New York Enquirer*, 20 March 1939. The majority of the newspaper and magazine articles cited here were found in a George Abbott scrapbook from 1939 to 1940 and clippings files in the Billy Rose Collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Sometimes full information for citations was unavailable.

18. Abbott, *'Mister Abbott'*, 179.
19. Moats, 'Hick On Broadway', 80–5.
20. Ibid., 81.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 81–2.
23. Ibid., 82.
24. Unattributed article in scrapbook, 'Making a Musical: All You Need to Know is How—The Rest is Simple, as The Story of Abbott's "Too Many Girls" Reveals'.
25. Robert Pollack, 'How a Musical Comedy is Born', *Sunday Times*, 25 August 1939.
26. John Chapman, 'Mainly About Manhattan', *Daily News*. Date unavailable.
27. 'Making a Musical: All You Need to Know is How'.
28. George Abbott biography in *Playbill* for *Too Many Girls* (1939).
29. George Berswanger, 'Broadway on Its Toes', *Theatre Arts* (February 1940), 111.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 112.
32. Abbott, *'Mister Abbott'*, 193.
33. Berswanger, 'Broadway on Its Toes', 112.
34. 'B'way Up After Lagging; Hellz 28G, Loses Leadership to "Girls" $30,000; "Dinner" the Tops in Demand, $19,000', *Variety*, 8 November 1939.
35. 'The Man Who Isn't There', *New York Journal-American*, 18 February 1940.
36. 'Continuing "Girls"', *Variety*, 28 February 1940.
37. '3 Musicals At $30,000 Mark', *Variety*, 28 February 1940.
38. 'For "Too Many Girls" Price Scale Adjusted', *Tarrytown Press Record*, 22 March 1940. This story appeared in many newspapers, as demonstrated in Abbott's clippings scrapbook.
39. '"Too Many Girls" Cuts Prices in Half', *Women's Wear Daily*, 22 April 1940.
40. '"Too Many Girls" Re-Costumed', *New York Enquirer*, 1 April 1940.
41. http://www.imdb.com, accessed 13 February 2015.
42. 'Abbott Off To Do Movie Of Comedy', *New York Mirror*, 4 May 1940.
43. Burns Mantle, 'Picture Producers Are Spending Half Million for Plays', *Daily News*, 1 March 1940.
44. Abbott, *'Mister Abbott'*, 207.
45. Ibid., 196–7.
46. Ibid., 195.
47. Richard Rodgers, *Musical Stages: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1975), 199–200.
48. Abbott, *'Mister Abbott'*, 198.
49. Abbott states that he produced *Touch and Go* (Abbott, *'Mister Abbott'*, 279).

50. This list was generated from the *Internet Broadway Database*, http://www.ibdb.com, accessed 12 February 2015.
51. Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 208.
52. Abbott, *'Mister Abbott'*, 198.
53. Abbott wrote to Bernstein about writing the score for this show on 25 November 1949. See Nigel Simeone, ed., *The Leonard Bernstein Letters* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2013), letter 294.
54. Bert McCord, 'Exits and Entrances: Abbott's Actors', *New York Herald Tribune*, 12 March 1944.
55. Abbott, *'Mister Abbott'*, 270.
56. Mary Braggiotti, 'Famed Playwright-Producer Who Just Won't Be Labeled', *New York Post*, 30 June 1947.
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CHAPTER 18

Rodgers and Hammerstein: The Sound of Money

Valerie M. Joyce

Richard Rodgers (1902–1979) and Oscar Hammerstein II (1895–1960), as composer and lyricist, swept through Broadway in the 1940s with titanic force. However, their monumental artistic achievements, *Oklahoma!* (1943), *South Pacific* (1949), and *The Sound of Music* (1959) among them, often overshadow their highly successful careers as theatrical producers.

In his autobiography *Musical Stages*, Rodgers asserts that he became a producer for two reasons: 'The satisfaction of presenting something of quality and to make money'.[1] Although both men took great satisfaction in their art form and were intensely and creatively invested in quality productions, the 'R&H' producing entity was, according to Rodgers, a 'musical comedy house … inhabited by people who do their best to dispense entertainment for gain'.[2] Long beyond either man's lifespan, the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization continues the legacy the team created with their collaborators, some of the most innovative directors, choreographers, writers, and stars of the twentieth century.[3] By examining the way these professional collaborations evolved, this chapter traces Rodgers and Hammerstein's journey as producers, peeking behind the curtain to watch them rehearse and revise their working principles, cast and re-cast their personas, and choreograph their lasting impact on the genre.

As with many successful producers, *control* is R&H's singular production principle: control the product, control the publicity, control the copyright. Their legendary discipline and detailed attention controlled every aspect of

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production, from auditions, rehearsals, and tours to props, scenery, and make-up.[4] R&H controlled publicity in two ways: (1) through active pursuit, most evident in their continuous conversation with *The New York Times*'s readers, and (2) by establishing a solidly unified professional image. Hammerstein's nephew and biographer John Steele Gordon describes this carefully crafted image as 'ordinary all-American nice guys who had invented the modern musical play', which they utilized 'to celebrate the simple American virtues of life and love'.[5] This unified public image belied their strikingly divergent personas, which often emerged in professional interactions. Hammerstein wrote in the *New York Times* that he prized his role as a 'worker' in the theatre, 'very unbusinesslike, very emotional … stage-struck'.[6] Collaborators remember him as determined and passionate, but warm, sensitive, angelic, and personable. Rodgers, however, relished the role of empire builder and the kindest descriptions from close associates note he was petty and egocentric.[7] 'Petty' likely results from R&H's dogged control of copyrights and credits. Mary Rodgers recalls her father's intensity as he equated copyright with birthright, and this zealous inflexibility eventually soured many of the collaborations that built the R&H empire.[8] Rodgers and Hammerstein managed each aspect of their producing enterprise efficiently and profitably, utilizing their artistic expertise, shrewd business acumen, and financial clout to shape Broadway's production apparatus into a stronger, leaner, more resilient business model intended to survive the radically changing landscape of American entertainment in the mid-twentieth century.

Pre-R&H

A long line of theatre men welcomed Oscar Hammerstein II into the family on 12 July 1895.Grandfather and opera impresario Oscar Hammerstein I and his sons William and Arthur managed and produced on Broadway. Hammerstein II caught the Broadway bug early and, while attending Columbia with the intent to pursue a law degree, he spent much of his undergraduate time writing and performing in the Varsity Shows. Eventually, the theatre's enticements prevailed, and in 1917 he persuaded his uncle to hire him as an assistant stage manager for $20 a week.[9]

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Hammerstein II tallied over thirty Broadway and Hollywood credits, writing plays, libretti, and lyrics with Jerome Kern, Otto Harbach, Sigmund Romberg, Rudolf Friml, and Vincent Youmans, and staging several shows, including *Show Boat* in 1927. In the 1930s, after finding the lack of artistic control in Hollywood studio work frustrating, Hammerstein dropped the II and returned to New York, venturing further into the family business with ambitious plans to front four Broadway productions in 1938: *Knights of Song*, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, *Glorious Morning*, and Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach's *Gentleman Unafraid*.

Although *Gentleman Unafraid* never surfaced on Broadway, the other three plays opened in late 1938. Hammerstein staged *Knights of Song*, a musical com-

edy about Gilbert and Sullivan, which opened in October to mixed reviews and closed after sixteen performances.[10] In November Hammerstein co-produced *Where Do We Go From Here?* with Dwight Taylor. Brooks Atkinson's tepid review described the production as an 'amiable frolic', which closed after fifteen performances.[11] With associate producer Michael Hillman, Hammerstein then opened *Glorious Morning*. He had acquired the rights after seeing Jessica Tandy in the play in London. He personally staged the production but, unfortunately, the critics charged that his 'phlegmatic' direction enveloped the cast in 'monotony and gloom'. The *Brooklyn Eagle* critic went so far as to claim, 'It seems a trifle unpatriotic of Mr. Hammerstein to bring this *Glorious Morning* here from England when he has so many bad plays to choose from right at home. Certainly, a producer's first duty is to the incompetent dramatists of his own country.'[12] The production grossed $355 in its nine performances.[13] Though failures, these productions provided Hammerstein with artistic and financial experience that served him well when Richard Rodgers came calling in 1942.

Broadway culture also surrounded Rodgers, born 28 June 1902, from an early age. His parents adored musicals and operettas and provided full Broadway scores for him to play. Rodgers began composing his own work in his teens and he first met Hammerstein during this time at a Columbia Varsity Show, just before he met Lorenz Hart in 1919.

Rodgers and Hart's fruitful collaboration began immediately and, at the age of 17, Rodgers landed his first Broadway number, 'Any Old Place with You'. Legendary vaudeville comedian and producer (and father of future R&H collaborators Joseph, Herbert, and Dorothy Fields) Lew Fields placed their number in *A Lonely Romeo*. Fields also taught Rodgers his first lesson in the producer's absolute control, when he removed most of their songs from *Poor Little Ritz Girl* (1920) during the Boston tryout. Rodgers and Hart learned of the substitutions while sitting in the audience on opening night and, looking back through a storied career, Rodgers called the discovery 'the bitterest blow of my life'.[14] Rodgers and Hart's prolific writing career churned out hit musicals for over two decades, including *On Your Toes* (1936), *Babes in Arms* (1937), and *Pal Joey* (1942), and many more. They worked exclusively, but not steadily, as Hart's absences due to alcoholism and bouts with depression made the relationship challenging.[15]

After gaining artistic success on Broadway and in Hollywood, Rodgers determined that he would call his own shots financially. By 1938, *New Yorker* writer Margaret Case Harriman quoted Rodgers as asserting that being the producer made decisions simpler, noting that 'a quick conference with myself and the whole thing's decided'.[16] Even prior to holding the title 'producer', Rodgers controlled his shows' public relations with savvy. Responding to a 1938 *New York Times* complaint letter, Rodgers cleverly thanked the balcony patron for her 'constructive criticism' that Broadway orchestras drown out the words, while advertising that he had remedied this in his shows, *I Married an Angel* and *The Boys from Syracuse*. He assured his audience, 'The comfort and

enjoyment of the "poor folk" who sit in the balcony are of greater importance to us than those who sit in the orchestra seats, as they are the sustaining public of our shows.'[17]

In 1941, Rodgers gained experience as an 'unofficial production advisor' for the masterful George Abbott on *Best Foot Forward* and then scored as producer and composer of *By Jupiter* (1942) with Hart. Previewing what would become a hallmark of R&H productions, *New York Times* gossip pages noted the unusual financial structure of twenty-five backers who split the $90,000 investment for *By Jupiter*.[18] However, as Rodgers's producing career took flight, he continued to be tethered emotionally and artistically to Hart, whose long battle with alcoholism made work difficult. So, when the Theatre Guild invited Rodgers to adapt Lynn Riggs's *Green Grow the Lilacs* into what would become the 1943 smash hit *Oklahoma!*, he accepted the invitation and called on Oscar Hammerstein.

Rodgers and Hammerstein

Oklahoma! advanced the American musical genre, honing the aspects of the 'integrated musical' that both Rodgers and Hammerstein had developed separately in their earlier work. As burgeoning producers, the new team had also developed business acumen that they applied even before opening night. With confidence in their solid collaboration, they published the score themselves, hoping to advertise their new musical play and capitalize on its eventual popularity.[19] They approached veteran Broadway publisher Max Dreyfus to form Williamson Music, titled in tribute to their fathers, each named William.[20] Setting in motion their control of copyrights, a defining feature of the Rodgers and Hammerstein legacy, Williamson Music protected and managed the rights to and profits from all of their music in the form of sheet music, radio, television, recordings, and advertisements, a consolidation that made the team millions of dollars.[21]

As *Oklahoma!* lined the Williamson Music coffers, Rodgers and Hammerstein returned to working separately. Impresario Billy Rose produced *Carmen Jones*, Hammerstein's adaptation of Bizet's opera, and Rodgers produced a revised version of Rodgers and Hart's *A Connecticut Yankee*. Utilizing publicity to entice a new audience, he mused in the *New York Times* about their 'old girl's' new clothes and 'distinct 1943 rhythm', claiming, 'She goes in for jive talk occasionally, but in her more sentimental moments she still sings "My Heart Stood Still," and … we see that same warm smile. It's a good feeling.'[22] In his autobiography, Rodgers asserted that the production was an attempt to prevent Hart from 'destroying himself'.[23] Unfortunately, Hart's inevitable decline ended when he died shortly after the revision opened.

Facing future prospects and other collaborators, Rodgers convinced Hammerstein to cement their partnership in a production company while *Oklahoma!* continued playing to sell-out audiences.[24] The Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization first commissioned John Van Druten to adapt *I*

Remember Mama (1944). The production cost $75,000, ran for 714 performances, and made R&H over $500,000.[25]Though successful, both men hungered for the thrill that comes with artistic production and the Theatre Guild fed that desire, suggesting an adaptation of Ferenc Molnar's *Liliom*.[26] By 1945, Rodgers and Hammerstein had finished the musical *Carousel* and again basked in glowing reviews.

Simultaneously, the team also wrote the film musical *State Fair* (1945). This experience reopened their old Hollywood wounds from struggles against studio artistic control. In a letter to long-time collaborator Josh Logan, Rodgers describes 'extensive quarrels' with the overall production of *State Fair*. His eye for detail picked out the farm girl's provocative costume chosen on the studio's theory, 'if the woman's bosom is attractive to an audience, she will be ten times as attractive if her bosom is ten times as big'. He complains, 'They've taken a cute little kid and stuffed her out so that she follows her chest across the screen all evening.' With a wink he adds to his old chorus-girl hunting buddy, 'But don't get me wrong—I hate Hollywood'.[27] R&H's disappointment with *State Fair* motivated the duo to form their own film division when making *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* into movies.

With *Carousel* and *State Fair* providing chart-topping hits, Dorothy and Herbert Fields approached R&H to produce a musical starring Ethel Merman as Annie Oakley. They had written several light-hearted wartime hits and were ready to write a solid book musical after the *Oklahoma!* model. Shrewdly foreseeing great box office potential, R&H immediately agreed to back the appealing story and the bankable star, hiring Logan to direct and Jerome Kern (Hammerstein's collaborator and Rodgers's idol) to compose.[28]

To lure Kern away from his Hollywood movie career, Hammerstein suggested simultaneously reviving *Show Boat* on Broadway. After sealing both deals, Kern suddenly died in late 1945, leaving Hammerstein to limp along cutting scenes and songs and increasing dances, while Rodgers privately griped to director Rouben Mamoulian about Hammerstein's 'pre-occupation' with the details of the *Show Boat* revival.[29] Publicly, though, Hammerstein boasted in the *New York Times*, 'Not only must our 1945 production match Ziegfeld's; it must match the enhanced glamour of memory.'[30] This nostalgia lured in audiences, but also surely included painful memories of Kern, and Hammerstein looked forward to January's opening night.

Reunited and still poised to take their crack at the Oakley story, *Annie Get Your Gun* lacked a composer. In press clippings, Dorothy Fields fondly recalls the 'brilliant and astute' producers suggesting Irving Berlin, whose musical reputation boasted voicing the American soldier's thoughts and tapping into the nation's emotional state through two world wars.[31] Although Berlin had not yet written an integrated musical, Rodgers noted in a letter to Rouben Mamoulian that Berlin 'seem[ed] pleased to be working with a management that knows a little something about song problems and such little matters as projection and development on the stage of the individual numbers'.[32] Throughout *Annie Get Your Gun* rehearsals and out of town tryouts, R&H

were ever-present and hands-on producers, actively collaborating with Berlin and the Fieldses to help shape their brilliant material into the integrated musical comedy form.

Before opening *Annie Get Your Gun* on Broadway, R&H made the drastic financial decision to buck centuries-old theatrical traditions by refusing to sell benefit tickets for the run. R&H argued that so-called benefit performances had recently had little to do with charity, instead enacting a 'serious drain on the box-office, [a] gross misuse of the theatre, and an injustice to its regular patrons'. In a letter to the *New York Times*, they railed against 'party brokers' who were really speculators 'trafficking in tickets for profit'.[33] R&H would continue to innovate the big business of the musical theatre box office, but it is noteworthy that they chose to take this first risky gambit with material that did not bear the name 'Rodgers and Hammerstein'. Their unerring instincts as producers paid off, since this decision had little impact on sales and *Annie Get Your Gun* was a runaway hit with 1,147 performances, bested in the 1940s only by *Oklahoma!* with 2,212.

Biographers and collaborators have recognized that R&H valued public opinion and worked to always present a united professional front, obfuscating their equally hard-nosed self-interest in financial matters.[34] In the late 1940s, the very different roles each man would play in the more private producer/collaborator relationship emerged in their personal communications and negotiation tactics.

Both men wooed Rouben Mamoulian through letters and telegrams, hoping to secure him to direct Anita Loos's *Happy Birthday* (1946).[35] When negotiations stalled, Rodgers refused to bargain and devolved into the intractable and guarded man of legend. Hammerstein, the peacemaker, pledged enduring friendship and in a letter offered Mamoulian 'not the lowest price at which we think we can get you, but the highest price we think we can possibly afford'.[36] Even in private, Hammerstein never breaks from 'we' into 'I', regardless of personal cost. The parties never came to terms, but the successful production, featuring Helen Hayes, ran for 563 performances, netting R&H $75,000.[37]

R&H then shepherded Norman Krasna's play *John Loves Mary* to the stage in 1947.The show ran for 423 performances and grossed $225,000. Possibly to counter a growing reputation for opportunism and avarice, R&H permitted the Negro Actors' Repertory Academy's performance of *John Loves Mary* to benefit the Urban League. The *New York Times* took note that during their run, R&H generously offered use of the Music Box Theatre, the production's sets, and their stage manager. In a *New York Times* article, Hammerstein asserted that R&H's social conscience opposed the public's growing sense that 'commercial managers' had replaced the 'mythical glitter' of Broadway with an 'equally mythical stench' of vulgar greed. He denounced the 'academic knuckleheads' making such glib accusations, proudly asserting his 'worker' status and claiming he was 'stage-struck' over every piece he produced. He threatened a 'high and violent' temper towards anyone who might indicate that Broadway denotes all that is 'crass, shallow, and cheap in the theatre'.[38]

Other evidence from the period, however, makes a strong argument for the 'academic knuckleheads' position. Agnes De Mille, who worked intimately with R&H as choreographer and director of their early work, noted Rodgers's nervous tension as early as *Carousel*, remarking in an interview that he became 'power-driven and very jealous of his rights'.[39] She claimed that both men were 'manic' late in 1947 when they started rehearsing *Allegro* for the Theatre Guild.[40] Concurrently, R&H ruthlessly demanded controlling shares while negotiating for the rights to James Michener's novel *Tales of the South Pacific* with Logan and Leland Hayward. Logan, who had purchased the property and pitched the idea, claimed to be shocked by their tactics in his autobiography, but he acquiesced, desperate to make *South Pacific* with them. In persuading Hayward to sign, he recalled pleading, 'They're not the fairest, but they're the best'.[41]

With early success bolstering both finances and confidence, R&H's production machine expanded to include extensive talent scouting in New York and Los Angeles, with a standing casting call every Thursday. John Fearnley and Jerry Whyte, two R&H management fixtures, arranged Broadway calls while Leighton K. Brill scouted the Hollywood studios.[42] The stream of new talent tied to the R&H Organization, including John Raitt, Betta St. John, and Shirley Jones, inspired the team's writing while the performers earned their stripes in touring companies. R&H also attended Theatre Guild auditions, controlling casting for *Carousel*'s replacements and *Oklahoma*'s tours. In letters to Rouben Mamoulian, John Raitt, who toured in *Oklahoma!* before originating Billy Bigelow in *Carousel*, noted feeling 'cramped' during these auditions because of Rodgers, Hammerstein, and De Mille's presence.[43] He complained bitterly when the Theatre Guild promoted Iva Withers, a chorus girl who had cosied up to Rodgers, to play Julie Jordan.[44] In contrast, established stars like Mary Martin got to audition privately for R&H. The team had big plans for her and sent her out on the lucrative first national tour of *Annie Get Your Gun* while Merman continued to perform in New York.

When Merman's Broadway contract approached its end, R&H pressured her to continue, despite her exhaustion. Giving in to Rodgers's argument that the show would fail without her and the cast and crew would lose their jobs, she eventually agreed to another year with a vacation in the summer of 1948. As expected, the show faltered during her vacation. When Merman refused to return early, R&H threatened to close the show, prompting the cast to voluntarily take 50 per cent salary cuts. A leak to *The New York Times* blamed Miss Merman for causing the financial difficulty, launching years of bitter enmity between Rodgers and Merman.[45] The box office slump ended with Merman's return and, to their credit, R&H paid back the salary cuts in September, declaring in the *Times*, 'The show's paying off now and so are we'.[46]

When examining this portion of R&H's producing career, what emerges is the incredible pace at which Rodgers and Hammerstein churned out artistic masterpieces while meticulously overseeing casting, production quality, publicity, negotiations, and box office finances. In the six years between the openings

of *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific*, while also writing *Carmen Jones*, *Carousel*, and *Allegro*, R&H produced three revivals of their own work, premiered three hit plays, and ushered *Annie Get Your Gun* to fruition and a national tour. No wonder Richard Rodgers hid his liquor-bottle-a-day in his toilet—where else would he find the time to drink?

From 1949 to 1959, Rodgers and Hammerstein achieved their greatest artistic and financial success. Although the advent of television caused the Broadway economy to suffer, R&H remained united behind a homespun public image, forging changes in the industry. Rodgers noted, 'People have made a production of us and we can't live down the casting',[47] but *South Pacific* (1949) marked a major turning point for R&H since, for the first time, they produced their own original material. In his autobiography, Logan recalled that Hayward warned, 'They'll gobble us up for breakfast', as they began their association with the powerful R&H.[48] And, as predicted, gobble they did.

The well-known dispute among the collaborators hinged on credits, copyrights, and profits for *South Pacific*. Originally, Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Logan agreed to share credit equally as composer, writer/lyricist, and director. When Hammerstein needed Logan's assistance with the text, the parties agreed to equal author's credit. Subsequently, R&H demanded several shifts that publicly and financially minimized Logan's rightful credits. Hammerstein communicated these terms as a representative of the firm, rather than as a longtime friend and collaborator. Logan recalled Hammerstein's 'painfully stern' look as he stated:

> Now Dick and I must have the top one hundred percent credit with the lead-in 'A Musical Play By Rodgers and Hammerstein' … *Your* name and *mine* as the book authors will be below that, but with only sixty percent of the Rodgers and Hammerstein credit [and] your director's credit must be diminished as well … Of course, it goes without saying that you won't get anything whatsoever of the author's royalties … Josh, Rodgers and Hammerstein cannot and *will* not share a copyright. It's part of their financial structure. Including you would weaken our position. My partners feel this strongly.[49]

With little bargaining power, Logan continued his association with *South Pacific*, despite the merciless terms and lost future earnings.

After opening night, Rodgers wrote to *South Pacific* novelist James Michener, 'We have all participated in a tremendous success … that will surely make theatrical history.'[50] Rodgers's prediction proved correct: *South Pacific* ruled Broadway, Hammerstein, Logan, and Rodgers won the Pulitzer Prize, and the tour was a smash hit. In Cleveland, a woman actually wrote that she was dying of an incurable disease while pleading for a ticket to the sold-out run.[51] With this worldwide success, however, came drastic personal changes. As Logan notes, Rodgers transitioned at this point into a removed and steely 'monument'.[52]

R&H realized that producing another musical at this point would only divide their audience and therefore, their profits. Instead, in 1950, they agreed to produce three plays: *The Happy Time*, *The Heart of the Matter*, and *Burning Bright*.[53] Simultaneously, they began an extended argument against the mounting calls for a federally funded theatre via the *New York Times*. Their opening salvo on 1 January 1950 rebutted the imminent death of the theatre and praised commercial producers whose 'stage-struck hearts' pump the life-blood of the theatre.[54] Hammerstein put his lyrical style to use, pledging they would remain stalwarts, 'plodding through the cold swamp of failure, romping over the warm green meadow of success, never voluntarily deserting the only realm [we were] born to serve'.[55] However, playwright and Drama Guild President Moss Hart sought a more stable economic industry, calling their thinking 'romantic, dangerous, and unwise'. Hart insinuated that, with millions in *South Pacific* ticket sales across the nation, perhaps R&H's success deluded them into ignoring the 'recent dire warnings' on the American theatre's future.[56] While R&H's wild popularity may have kept them above the economic crisis Hart identified, the vehement manner in which they harnessed the public relations of this argument speaks to their concerns both with their image as producers and with the financial and artistic impact of a state-run art.

However, R&H could no longer ignore Moss Hart's dire warnings when, in quick succession, *The Happy Time* (1950) successfully opened but *The Heart of the Matter* closed out of town. Unused to failure, Rodgers bravely acknowledged to the *Times* that the play was 'better on paper than on the stage'.[57] In a move surely enacted to save face, R&H penned 'The Pleasures of Producing', taking control of their publicity by reminding readers of their current Broadway offerings and their past successes. In it they embrace the crowds who 'are laughing loudly and becoming emotionally involved' in *The Happy Time*, they fondly recall the 'stupefying number of details' that went into the 'deeply rewarding' *South Pacific*, and they wax poetic over the joys of 'taking a little blond girl and putting her in the lead of the [touring] company of *Oklahoma!*'[58] The producers also contradict Hart's accusations, listing their efforts 'to bring the theatrical industry as a whole into a more expedient economic balance' by instituting financial reforms, curbing out-of-town expenses, working with the Committee of Theatrical Producers, and leading the drive away from sole producers who 'peddled family jewels' and 'died broke'. Finally, they argue for financial reforms like inviting in 'outside capital' to 'maintain a vital and aggressive theatrical activity' that would allow the theatre industry to operate like other major American industries.[59]

Unfortunately, the cultural climate continued to unravel and *Burning Bright* (1950) was an unmitigated failure, running for thirteen performances and losing its entire $65,000 investment. R&H never again produced another author's work, though they denied that this decision resulted from their consecutive failures in 1950. Instead, Rodgers claimed in *Musical Stages* that, after taxes, they saw no financial reward for their strenuous efforts so they determined to utilize their experienced staff for their own work, rather than trusting fate.[60]

In 1951, R&H produced their next hit musical, *The King and I*. This time, however, they modelled their own proposed financial reform, inviting more than thirty backers to make a profit with them, including family members and collaborators Mary Martin, Joshua Logan, Theresa Helburn, and Lawrence Langer.[61] To offset the overwhelming presumption of success, they wrote a boyish and disarmingly charming opening night *New York Times* article, ending with: 'It is one thing to fall in love and become engaged to a girl, and quite another to bring her home to your family and subject her to their cool scrutiny … We're bringing her around to see you Thursday at eight o'clock, and all we can say is, we hope you like her.'[62] Their audience, feeling like part of the family, did like her for 1,246 performances on Broadway and many more in London and on tour. Although the reviews were not all raves, the producers and their backers scored both financially and artistically.

Over the next two years, the men separated for other artistic projects while their production company forged ahead, due mainly to Rodgers's obsession with their business interests. Biographer Frederick Nolan asserts that proactive publicity made them 'the most available composer and lyricist in theatrical history', with televised personal and professional celebrations that made Rodgers and Hammerstein a household name.[63] The unshakable R&H unity bolstered their 'nice guy' image. As De Mille notes in her autobiography, 'They refer to one another in all interviews, they make decisions jointly, their joint word is pledged on all deals. They receive joint and equal honors.'[64] This effective publicity campaign brought R&H into homes across the world and their profits were reported to have exploded during this period to 'well over $15,000,000 a year'.[65] However, increased scrutiny and a false sense of security likely played a part in the disappointing *Me and Juliet* (1953), which they rushed to the stage and closed after 358 performances.

Director George Abbott asserted R&H were 'a little too sure of themselves and perhaps did not try as hard as they should have' on *Me and Juliet*,[66] but it is also possible that their attention was diverted during the year-long anniversary celebration of *Oklahoma!* On 31 March 1953, theatre luminaries, government officials, and original cast members celebrated the musical's ten-year birthday with R&H and Agnes De Mille backstage in Washington DC, where the touring company was continuing its historic run.[67]Agnes De Mille later wrote to Rouben Mamoulian that the gathering was 'homy [*sic*]', like 'pictures of family groups where the great-grandparents gather with all their many descendants about them to demonstrate the growth of the soil and the fact that old people never die and other things'.[68] De Mille also noted the shockingly disappointing talent within the dancing company, calling the public performance 'one of the worst I have ever seen' and confessing she 'wanted to ask [Bambi Linn] to pick up her silk skirts and jump just so that the three-legged stool who replaced her could see what a dancer looked like in action'.[69]

The ten-year anniversary celebration continued with 'Rodgers and Hammerstein Week' ready to begin in New York City on 31 August 1953. Concurrently, R&H consolidated their copyrights by purchasing their early

Theatre Guild contracts for $850,000. The acquisition coincided with a gala reopening of *Oklahoma!* on Broadway, starring Barbara Cook as Ado Annie and Florence Henderson as Laurey.[70] This timing placed intense pressure on contract renegotiations between original director Rouben Mamoulian and R&H,[71] particularly when a shocked Mamoulian discovered production ads and posters had omitted his and De Mille's names entirely.[72]

During August, Mamoulian frantically besieged R&H corporate lawyer Howard Reinheimer, who now protected the team's carefully cultivated image by doing the negotiating dirty work. Mamoulian argued that the revival continued the tour with the same sets, costumes, staging, and stage manager that he had tuned-up just a month before. In a relentless torrent of communications, a disillusioned Mamoulian accused R&H of being 'maliciously evasive' and methodically plotting 'to deprive me of credits, benefits and rights', contemptuously claiming, 'It is hard for me to imagine that anyone can stoop so low morally.'[73] Realizing that bad publicity during their festival week provided his best leverage, Mamoulian fumed to his lawyer, 'I would welcome public knowledge of the outrage they are committing. It might do them good too, if the mask of hypocritical benevolence they are wearing is lifted a bit to allow the people a glimpse of their greedy overblown vanity and moral shabbiness.'[74] Ultimately, these negotiations reveal R&H's powerful status as controller of all copyrights. Their authority allowed them to institute a new advertising policy and to determine who they would pay and how they would credit their collaborators.[75]

Mamoulian's lengthy battle over credits and compensation forced the important legal articulation of the director's imprint on a musical and the technicalities of a revival versus a reproduction. In 1954, Rodgers asserted 'The Right to Revive', ostensibly to promote Abbott's *On Your Toes* revival, but also to argue the many issues at stake in R&H's dispute with Mamoulian.[76] Rodgers's article is one of the last in the long conversation with *New York Times* readers that characterized R&H's aggressive public relations campaign. After 1954, R&H rarely wrote articles and when they did the articles were primarily reminiscences of their earlier work.

Rather than a shift in attitude, this public relations change reflects a shift in focus, as R&H's uncompromising business practices continued unabated. Insisting on controlling interest in credit, billing, and profit with all collaborators, the team even passed on *Fanny*, a property they both loved, because they refused to produce with an up-and-coming David Merrick.[77] When Cy Feuer and Ernie Martin pitched the idea for *Pipe Dream* (1955), R&H bought them out, offering 50 per cent of the producers' profit. Nolan recounts that Feuer imagined they would all be very wealthy, but he later claimed, 'We turned it over to them and they destroyed it'.[78] *Pipe Dream* lived up to its name, running for only 246 performances and costing R&H dearly, since they financed the entire production without backers.[79] Hammerstein's lyrics for 'The Man I Used to Be' from *Pipe Dream* provide insight into his perspective on ambition at this late point in his career. As the character Doc mourns for happier days

when he was a 'lighthearted bum who thought he had the world by the tail', he warns his audience, 'You can never find the man you used to be'.[80]

Rodgers and Hammerstein pulled themselves from the nadir of their career by producing the film of *South Pacific* in 1958. Having experienced success with filming *Oklahoma!*, they confidently exerted artistic pressure on Logan to reshoot 'I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair' to more accurately capture the stage version's joyous verve.[81] Unfortunately, they could not control the damage from Logan's choice to tint the film with coloured gels. The picture, while deeply flawed, grossed the duo eighteen million dollars.

During the filming, Joseph Fields pitched the idea for *Flower Drum Song*, their next original musical. Negotiations with Fields were easy, which was fortunate since this time the producers struggled with director Gene Kelly's inexperience and their own personal illnesses during development and rehearsals. In the end, *Flower Drum Song* (1958) was their most successful production since *The King and I*, running for 601 performances and spawning a national tour, a London production, and a film.

Riding high, R&H dove into producing and writing the Mary Martin star vehicle *The Sound of Music* in 1959. This would be their most enduring success as producers and their final artistic collaboration, as Hammerstein was diagnosed with terminal cancer during the rehearsal period. Due to Hammerstein's health issues, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse maintained full credit for writing the book, a departure from all R&H productions since *South Pacific*. The collaboration remained amiable, though the same cannot be said of the relations between Rodgers and co-producer Richard Halliday, who was Martin's husband and an equally imposing presence.[82] Despite mixed reviews, including Kenneth Tynan's dubbing it R&H's 'Great Leap Backwards', the sentimentally sweet production ran for 1,443 performances in New York, toured the world, and conquered London with success that had eluded other R&H shows.[83] After Hammerstein's death, on 23 August 1960, the film version and soundtrack broke records, netting the R&H Organization millions.

Rodgers After Hammerstein

Rodgers continued to write, produce, and run the R&H organization with varying degrees of success after losing Hammerstein. He composed music and lyrics for *No Strings* (1962), which ran for 508 performances, but *Do I Hear a Waltz?* (1965) was an utter disaster. In interviews, librettist Arthur Laurents called Rodgers a controlling 'beast' who abused lyricist (and Hammerstein protégé) Stephen Sondheim publicly.[84] Rodgers lost most of his $450,000 investment and the production closed after 220 performances.

In 1966, Rodgers rebounded as President and Producing Director of the Music Theatre of Lincoln Center, producing a successful *Annie Get Your Gun* revival starring 57-year-old Ethel Merman.[85] Rodgers instinctively knew Merman's older, wiser, and direct-as-ever persona would appeal in this musical that critics asserted belonged to 'another era'.[86] Despite this success, Rodgers

griped in a *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* interview that he found it difficult to compete with original work in the new Broadway era of rock musicals with what he called 'feast or famine' economics. He refused to bend to rock influences for *Two by Two* (1970) and claimed that the show was 'murder' to produce.[87] With mixed reviews in the changing musical landscape, *Two by Two* landed with a dull thud and closed in less than a year, ending Rodgers's producing career.

Beyond shaping the integrated musical into a distinctly American genre, Rodgers and Hammerstein were a titanic force as producers because, as Gordon notes, they embraced the reality that 'the "show" is just half of "show business"'.[88] Until his death on 30 December 1979, Rodgers asserted that the business of successful productions had nothing to do with luck and little to do with joyous collaboration. Rather, presenting quality Broadway entertainment most often required blind ambition that broke hearts, backs, and banks.[89]

Throughout the legendary R&H career, the team's artistic expertise controlled the quality of every product. Their shrewd business acumen promoted a unified professional image of likable geniuses who valued ordinary American virtues, and their financial clout enabled them to control their copyrights and, ultimately, their legacy. Although their ambition unravelled many of their artistic relationships, R&H remained committed visionary theatre men focused on the future. By instituting financial innovations and establishing an organization to handle the publishing and licensing of their art,[90] R&H shaped Broadway's production apparatus into a stronger, leaner, more resilient business model that flourished despite the radically changing landscape of American entertainment across the twentieth century.

Notes

1. Richard Rodgers, *Musical Stages* (New York: Random House, 1975), 269.
2. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, 'The Pleasures of Producing', *New York Times*, 5 March 1950, 97; Rodgers, 'In Defense of Sense', *New York Times*, 29 June 1952.
3. In 2009 the Imagem Publishing Group purchased the RHO and R&H's licensing rights, but the existing management of RHO has remained intact. 'About Us', Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, http://www.rnh.com/news/918/Imagem-Music-Group-Buys-R-H, accessed 28 July 2015.
4. Agnes De Mille, 'R. and H.', in *The Richard Rodgers Reader*, ed. Geoffrey Block (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 125–6.
5. John Steele Gordon, 'Rodgers & Hammerstein, Inc.', *American Heritage* 41, no. 6 (1990), 20.
6. Oscar Hammerstein, 'Don't Blame it all on Broadway', *New York Times*, 7 September 1947, X1.

7. Gordon, 'Rodgers & Hammerstein, Inc.', 20. Logan's biography and the LOC collections of Agnes De Mille and Josh Logan are replete with this evidence.
8. 'About Us', http://www.rnh.com/our_history.html.
9. Frederick Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music* (New York: Applause, 2002), 33.
10. Reviews of *Knights of Song*: 'News of the Stage: Alvine's "Knights of Song" Due Here in October', *New York Times*, 17 March 1938, 16; 'Knights of Song Opening Tonight', *New York Times*, 17 October 1938, 15; Brooks Atkinson, 'The Play: W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan Are the Chief Characters of "Knights of Song"', *New York Times*, 18 October 1938, 29; 'News of the Stage', *New York Times*, 28 October 1938, 26.
11. Brooks Atkinson, 'The Play: Life Inside a College Fraternity House …', *New York Times*, 16 November 1938, 26.
12. Arthur Pollock, 'One Norman McGowan in a Lethargy of Protest Writes a Play …', *Brooklyn Eagle*, 28 November 1939, 4.
13. Brooks Atkinson, 'The Play: *Glorious Morning* a Tragedy of Religious Worship in a Totalitarian State', *New York Times*, 28 November 1938, 10. See also, Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 71–2.
14. Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 38.
15. While 'challenging' is possibly a ridiculous understatement, there are tomes dedicated to the Rodgers and Hart saga and catalogue, so I will leave the details to them.
16. Margaret Case Harriman, 'Words with Music: Rodgers and Hart', in *The Richard Rodgers Reader*, 66.
17. Richard Rodgers, 'From the Drama Mailbag', *New York Times*, 4 December 1938, X7.
18. 'Gossip of the Rialto', *New York Times*, 28 March 1943.
19. Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 234.
20. Ibid.
21. John Steele Gordon, 'My Uncle Oscar Hammerstein', *Commentary* (April 2011), 32. *Oklahoma!* was the first musical to have an original-cast album, four years before the LP was even developed. The album sold more than a million copies in the 78-rpm format alone. Williamson Music still exists, available at http://www.rnh.com/our_divisions.html.
22. Richard Rodgers, 'Mr. Rodgers' Yankee', *New York Times*, 21 November 1943, X1.
23. Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 230.
24. Ibid., 235.
25. Meryle Secrest, *Somewhere For Me* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 277.
26. Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 235–7.

27. Rodgers to Logan, 28 September 1945, box 34, folder 6, Joshua Logan Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as LOC).Twentieth Century Fox produced *State Fair*.
28. Ibid.
29. Hammerstein to Mamoulian, 15 January 1946; Rodgers to Mamoulian, 23 January 1946. Rouben Mamoulian Collection [general correspondence files], LOC (hereafter cited as MC/LOC); Oscar Hammerstein, 'The Old *Show Boat* and the New', *New York Times*, 30 December 1945, 19.
30. Hammerstein, 'The Old *Show Boat*'.
31. Dorothy Fields and Herbert Fields, 'Confessions of an Authors Team'. Undated clipping, Annie Get Your Gun file, Philadelphia Library Theatre Collection.
32. Rodgers to Mamoulian, 23 January 1946, MC/LOC.
33. Rodgers and Hammerstein, 'The Theatre and Theatre Parties', *New York Times*, 10 February 1946.
34. Biographers and collaborators from Secrest (*Somewhere For Me*, 305) to Gordon to Logan have commented on Oscar's equally self-interested mode.
35. Hammerstein to Mamoulian, 15 January 1946; Rodgers to Mamoulian, 23 January 1946, MC/LOC.
36. Hammerstein to Mamoulian, 30 March 1946. Loos confirms the producer's contrasting personas, writing to Mamoulian in late 1946. She never mentions Rodgers, but effuses, 'Oscar [is] ruling things like the inspired angel he is', MC/LOC.
37. Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*, 277.
38. Hammerstein, 'Don't Blame it All', X1.
39. Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*, 283.
40. Ibid. Many, however, also note mania in De Mille's behavior during this process.
41. Joshua Logan, *Josh: My Up and Down, In and Out Life* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1976), 267; Louis Calta, 'Show to be based on Michener Tale', *New York Times*, 19 February 1948, 28.
42. Richard Rodgers, 'Reflections on a Four-Year-Old', *New York Times*, 30 March 1947, X1; Michael Mok, 'Raiding Hollywood', *New York Times*, 4 May 1947, X3.
43. Raitt to Mamoulian, January 1946, MC/LOC.
44. Mamoulian to Raitt, 17 December 1945, MC/LOC; Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*, 300. Iva Withers is alleged to have announced in rehearsal that she slept with Rodgers.
45. Sam Zolotow, '*Annie* May Close Here Saturday', *New York Times*, 28 July 1948, 27; Bob Thomas, *I Got Rhythm! The Ethel Merman Story* (New York: Putnam & Sons, 1986), 102–3, 118. According to Thomas, Merman wanted one of the girls in *Call Me Madam* out of the chorus, but she was Rodgers's 'protégé'. When the stage manager took her

ultimatum to Rodgers he replied, 'Tell that bitch to go to hell'. Ethel retorted, 'You tell Richard Rodgers to go fuck himself' (97).

46. Louis Calta, 'Marden Theatre is Leased to ABC', *New York Times*, 28 September 1948.
47. Cleveland Armory, 'The Nicest Guys in Show Business', *Holiday* (February 1959): 91–9.
48. Logan, *Josh*, 273–9.
49. Ibid. If Logan's recollection is accurate, Hammerstein distances himself by referencing the corporation as 'their' structure, rather than 'our' and leaning on his partner*s*.
50. Rodgers to Michener, 14 April 1949, MC/LOC.
51. Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 225 and Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*, 321.
52. Logan, *Josh*, 281.
53. Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 268.
54. Rodgers and Hammerstein, 'An Optimistic Appraisal of our Theatre', *New York Times*, 1 January 1950, 47.
55. Ibid.
56. Louis Calta, 'Playwrights Seek Sounder Theatre', *New York Times*, 10 January 1950, 39.
57. Sam Zolotow, 'Heart of the Matter to Close', *New York Times*, 1 March 1950, 41; Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 269.
58. Rodgers and Hammerstein, 'The Pleasures of Producing'.
59. Ibid.
60. Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 269.
61. Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 204–5. Secrest asserts that for the first time in their careers, they did not need to depend on outside backers and financed the $300,000 on their own (*Somewhere For Me*, 311).
62. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, 'About *The King and I*', *New York Times*, 25 March 1951, 77.
63. Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 150.
64. De Mille, 'R. and H.', 126.
65. Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 150. See also, Arthur Gelb, 'Facts and Figures on a Gold Mine', *New York Times*, 29 March 1953, X1.
66. Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 150.
67. Gelb, 'Facts and Figures', X1.
68. DeMille to Mamoulian, 28 April 1953, Box 109 Folders 5 and 6, MC/LOC.
69. Ibid.
70. Sam Zolotow, 'Stage Team Gets Still More Kudos', *New York Times*, 31 August 1953, 22.
71. Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*, 331–2. Rodgers and Hammerstein Pictures, Inc. made *Oklahoma!* in 1954, but R&H sold the rights to *Carousel* and *The King and I* for 40 per cent of the profits.

72. Mabel Walker Willibrandt to Howard Reinheimer, telephone transcript, 20 August 1953; Mamoulian to Louis Nizer, 21 and 25 August 1953, MC/ LOC.
73. Mamoulian to Nizer, 1 September 1953; Mamoulian to R&H, telegram, 21 August 1953, MC/ LOC.
74. Mamoulian to Nizer, 22 August 1953, MC/ LOC.
75. Willibrandt to Reinheimer, telephone transcript, 22 August 1953, MC/ LOC. Nizer accused R&H of being 'petty' about credits in productions licensed abroad outside of Canada and England because they are not 'first class' productions as defined by the original Guild contract.
76. Richard Rodgers, 'The Right to Revive', *New York Times*, 10 October 1954, X1.
77. Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 150.
78. Ibid., 230.
79. Ibid., 234.
80. *Pipe Dream*, music by Richard Rodgers and book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on *Sweet Thursday* by John Steinbeck (New York: Viking Press, 1956), 70–1.
81. Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 239.
82. Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*, 349–50.
83. Ibid. Kenneth Tynan, 'A Case for Trappists', *New Yorker*, 28 November 1959.
84. 'Arthur Laurents', in *The Art of the American Musical: Conversations with the Creators*, ed. Jackson Bryer and Richard Davidson (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 142.
85. Thomas, *I Got Rhythm!*, 63. Rodgers tried to convince Merman to wear a chinstrap to appear younger.
86. Robert J. Williams, 'Ethel Merman Hits the Target in *Annie Get Your Gun* Musical', *Evening Bulletin*, 31 August 1966; Ernest Schier, '"Annie Get Your Gun" Revived', *Evening Bulletin*, 1 June 1966, G19.
87. Richard Rodgers, 'The Broadway Audience is Still There, Waiting for More Good Shows', *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 6 (1971):11–17, in *The Richard Rodgers Reader*, 326–30.
88. Gordon, 'Rodgers and Hammerstein Inc.', 20.
89. Rodgers, 'It Ain't Luck', *New York Times*, 1 August 1943, X1.
90. Gordon, 'Rodgers and Hammerstein Inc.', 20.

CHAPTER 19

The Nice One: The Productions of Robert Griffith

Michael Schwartz

Robert Griffith (1907–1961) was never the classic producer 'type'. A *Theatre Arts* article noted, 'In repose, Griffith could be typecast as a wise and kindly country lawyer.'[1] His point of view, personality, and work ethic set him apart from the flamboyant and often-explosive personalities involved with the shows that he co-produced in the 1950s. Musical book writer Michael Stewart, remembering Griffith's producing partnership with the considerably more excitable Harold [Hal] Prince, referred to the two as 'the nice one and the loud one'—Griffith was the former.[2] When asked why he wanted to be a producer, his answer was to the point: because it was 'fun'.[3] Griffith's view of producing, his projects, and his history provide a revealing glimpse into, and counterpoint to the often stormy world of theatre production in the 1950s. What set Griffith apart as a producer, and probably contributed to his success, was his extensive experience as a stage manager for legendary director George Abbott, his ability to save significant production costs, and his singularly calm demeanour in the decidedly uncalm world of theatre.

Gwen Verdon, who worked with Griffith on *Damn Yankees* as well as *New Girl in Town*, praised the producer for his calmness when rehearsals became chaotic and noted that his stage management skills often rescued troubled situations: 'He could run the show at the same time—change the cues … handle all the electricians, the whole crew, change … all the lights, and deal with the actors, deal with Mr. Abbott and in addition make sure all the changes in the script were typewritten.'[4] Griffith's major contributions to his shows might

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have been more 'craft' than 'art', but the art of the shows could not have blossomed without his care.

Griffith's productions included some of the most successful shows of the mid-twentieth century, including *The Pajama Game* (1954), *Damn Yankees* (1955), *West Side Story* (1957), and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fiorello!* (1960). While he tended to be overshadowed by his collaborators—the aforementioned George Abbott, his long-time mentor, and co-producer Prince, to whom Griffith in turn served as mentor—Griffith's producing savvy was admired, and envied, during his lifetime.

If Griffith was lucky as a producer, he was also someone who was well prepared for his luck. Born in Methuen, Massachusetts, he began in theatre as an actor, with small roles in such shows as Kaufman and Ferber's *Dinner at Eight* (1932) and Kaufman and Hart's *Merrily We Roll Along* (1934). Griffith turned to stage management shortly thereafter as a move towards directing, a goal he was never quite able to achieve.[5] George Abbott writes in his autobiography that Griffith was the assistant stage manager for the 1935 hit comedy *Three Men on a Horse*,[6] which Abbott co-authored and directed, and that the collaboration and friendship with Abbott continued until Griffith's death—Griffith's fatal heart attack occurred while the two were playing golf.

Griffith was Abbott's go-to stage manager for twenty years, or 'since before the flood' as one co-worker put it, and working under Abbott constituted the lion's share of Griffith's theatrical training once he left acting behind. Since Abbott was always referred to as 'Mr. Abbott', it is not insignificant that Griffith was one of the few people to refer to the director on a first-name basis—rendered, as the same co-worker noted, in Griffith's Massachusetts dialect as 'Jawge'.[7] When Griffith included his biography in the playbill for *Fiorello* in August 1960, he claimed the number of shows on which he worked with Abbott as 'countless', including the farces and musicals that added to Abbott's fame: *Boy Meets Girl* (1935), *Room Service* (1937), *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938), *Best Foot Forward* (1941), *Billion Dollar Baby* (1945), *Where's Charley?* (1948), and *Call Me Madam* (1950), among others.[8] When Griffith served as both stage manager and casting director for the revue *Touch and Go* (1949), he mentored the young assistant stage manager Harold Prince.[9] Prince would go on to build his own illustrious career as a producer and director, a career that began in partnership with Griffith.

Around 1950, Prince and Griffith discovered Richard Bissell's book *7½ Cents*, which concerned a labour dispute in a pajama factory, and Griffith approached Abbott with a surprising idea that would become *The Pajama Game*. As Abbott tells it: 'Bobby Griffith … wanted to become a producer. I must confess that I had not been aware of this; I, who had helped to forward the career of so many actors, had supposed that my stage manager was content to be just what he was.'[10] While Abbott's remarks might betray a certain lack of awareness of his friend's ambitions, the anecdote also highlights Griffith's quiet nature. Although Griffith's motivations to move into producing are a matter of conjecture—perhaps another move towards directing—it seems fair

to say that he found his 'fun' in watching, supporting, and contributing to the work of Abbott.

Griffith and Prince, with their then partner Frederick Brisson (who would leave them after *Damn Yankees*), gathered their money in classic producer fashion, that is, they hustled for it, and they got turned down a lot. As Abbott explained, they 'had a terrible time raising the money for this show. There were no big stars to sell, and with the exception of myself there was no one connected with the production who was at all well known.'[11] In fact, audiences were probably familiar with Eddie Foy, Jr., who played Hines; he had knocked around Broadway since the end of the 1920s. John Raitt, the male lead, had originated the role of Billy Bigelow in Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1945 hit *Carousel*, but had not found success in subsequent roles. Janice Page, the female lead, was a relative newcomer.

Furthermore, the subject matter, involving a possible strike at a garment factory, did not inspire enthusiasm, and Abbott himself was slow to warm to the idea, as were other potential collaborators and investors. The general feeling, Abbott explained, was 'that a garment factory and a strike was too serious and too controversial a subject for a jolly musical'.[12] Nevertheless, Abbott became a key collaborator as director and co-librettist (with novelist Bissell) once the title 'The Pajama Game' and a suitable subplot came to him on a walk up Fifth Avenue.[13] What primarily motivated Abbott, however, was most likely his great affection for Griffith.[14]

Griffith himself wryly recalled the difficulty of getting friends to back the show in a 1958 interview: 'Suddenly I couldn't reach my friends on the phone … I never knew, until then, how many of my friends were having trouble meeting tax payments'.[15] According to Abbott, the show had 134 investors altogether.[16] Fifteen of their backers were chorus girls from the next show Griffith stage-managed—*Wonderful Town*, which starred co-producer Brisson's wife Rosalind Russell. Griffith and Prince later rewarded the girls' loyalty by allowing them to invest in their subsequent shows.[17]

Griffith and Prince also found a unique way to save money for *The Pajama Game*'s production costs: they served as production stage managers. The do-it-yourself aesthetic of both men carried over into their subsequent productions; they eschewed production assistants. 'We're our own production assistants', Prince pointed out in an interview with the pair that he (rather typically) dominated.[18] It was also this attention to detail that led to Griffith and Prince's philosophy of working on one show at a time, a feature that Stephen Sondheim later praised with regard to *West Side Story*: 'Hal called me in a state of extravagant excitement to say that he and Bobby would come down to New York in the middle of their tryout to hear the score, which they did. They enthusiastically agreed to produce the show, adding, however, that they would give it no thought until *New Girl in Town* had opened. No matter how excited, they said, they would concentrate on only one show at a time—an indication of what good producers they were.'[19] That Prince made the call with 'extravagant excitement' was another indication that Prince seemed to dominate the public

face of the partnership. The story of *The Pajama Game* had a happy ending with an over 1,000-performance run. The same producing and creative team reunited with considerable and nearly equal success with *Damn Yankees* the following season.

Not all of Griffith's shows worked, however. Griffith and Prince's straight play projects failed outright: *A Swim in the Sea,* which closed in Philadelphia in 1958, and *A Call on Kuprin*, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's KGB drama that closed after twelve performances in June 1961.[20] In one of Griffith's final interviews, he admitted to becoming 'leery of doing straight plays' after *Kuprin* folded, noting that the large-cast, eight-set play was 'the kind of big-scale play that has become virtually prohibitive to do on Broadway any more'.[21] Griffith's disappointment over the performances of their last musical, *Tenderloin* (which ran about six months) as well as *Kuprin* led him to consider semi-retirement. He did not have the chance to consider the idea long; he died four days after *Kuprin* closed.

Taken as a whole, Griffith's record of return on investment as a producer was impressive. Arthur Gelb reported in the *New York Times* that Griffith and Prince paid their investors 342.5 per cent profit on *The Pajama Game*; 200 per cent on *Damn Yankees*; *New Girl in Town*, 24.08 per cent; *Fiorello*, 50 per cent; and *West Side Story*, 140 per cent. Colourful producer David Merrick was well aware of Griffith's success with managing budgets: 'There is too much overproduction on Broadway … I've been guilty of it myself … I could have raised $400,000 to do the show, but I knew Griffith and Prince have regularly shown it could be done for half.'[22] Griffith and Prince indeed contrasted starkly with Merrick's style of producing multiple shows at once in the hopes that a couple of them would succeed. For Griffith, there was a craftsman's pride in taking care of the details of his show until it was fully, in every sense of the word, produced.

Griffith's skill was especially notable in a time of economic turbulence for Broadway. The 1950s saw the rise of producing syndicates that would usurp the individual modest investor. As *New York Times* writer Murray Schumach explained in 1958, 'In recent years the theatre has seen the steady growth of angel flocks known as "syndicates." These syndicates may have as much as $500,000, drawn only from the rich … Theatre 200 and Theatrical Interest Plan [two such syndicates] have already compelled important producers to give them co-producer billing in exchange for large amounts of cash.'[23] While the days of the chorus girl contributing her savings were not entirely over, the face of theatrical production was changing.

An Actors' Equity strike took place in June 1960, the first since 1919, and the theatre outlook still looked unpromising the following year. In the weeks before the strike, Griffith and Prince notably supported their performers by giving the company of *Fiorello* a $10-per-week raise. The producers insisted this was not a move related to heated contract talks, but simply a way to share their good fortune with their players, a policy Griffith and Prince had held to since *Pajama Game*.[24] For Griffith, withholding good fortune from his com-

pany was never an option. Indeed, Griffith's generosity was well known on Broadway; as Prince comments in his memoir, 'He was generous, the delight of the panhandlers in front of the Lion's Club.'[25]

Towards the end of his life, Griffith expressed an opinion that would gain greater significance in the following decades: 'We have outpriced ourselves. People can't afford to go to the theatre. But there is a very hungry theatre audience.'[26] While Griffith was mostly philosophical with his use of 'we', he might have been thinking of the rising expenses of his own productions as well. Griffith's concerns about outpricing and costs point to what might be the heart of his theatrical artistry. At the time of Griffith's death in 1961, typical production costs for a musical ran from $300,000 to $500,000. It was a point of pride and simple common sense for Griffith that he and Prince never spent more than $260,000. 'We try to have the show designed early enough so that we can give the costume and scene building companies six months for the jobs. In this way, we eliminate costly overtime payments', Griffith noted in a quote consistent with a man who stage-managed his own productions when necessary.[27]

'Everyone liked Bobby and everyone wished him well for he had qualities of simple goodness that could be appreciated by all', Abbott wrote of his friend.[28] It is perhaps an unusual turn of events in the world of theatrical producing that a 'good' and 'nice' hard-working theatre pro would prove so successful and that someone so uninterested in personal publicity would prove so influential. Nevertheless, his contemporaries agreed that his skills, both practical and social, led to Griffith's rise to and consistent place in the upper echelon of theatrical producers: he knew the nuts and bolts of building a show through his long stage management experience, he kept his shows comparatively low-budget, and he kept calm. That a long-time stage manager, adept at organization and working with temperamental professionals, could use those same skills to become a great producer would make perfect sense to the no-nonsense Abbott, as well as to Prince. While Griffith never held the director's reins as he might originally have wished, his enjoyment of making theatre was appreciated during his lifetime and remains vibrant in the best of the shows that he helped bring to life.

Notes

1. John S. Wilson, 'Theatre Arts Gallery: Griffith and Prince', *Theatre Arts* (October 1960), 73.
2. Hal Prince, *Contradictions: Notes on Twenty-six Years in the Theatre* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1974), 82.
3. Gilbert Millstein, 'How to Produce a Play—Or How Not', *New York Times*, 15 January 1956, http://search.proquest.com/docview/113604889?accountid=11652, accessed 29 November 2014.
4. Carol Ilson, *Harold Prince: From 'Pajama Game' to 'Phantom of the Opera'* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 9.

5. Wilson, 'Theatre Arts Gallery: Griffith and Prince', 73. According to Hal Prince, the issue of directing caused the only serious rift between the two partners and long-time friends. Griffith did not want Prince to direct, unless they co-directed a production; Prince felt their styles would not mesh as co-directors. Prince did not have a great insight into why Griffith never directed, referring to the situation as his 'curious, quiet failure'. See Prince, *Contradictions*, 82.
6. George Abbott, *Mister Abbott* (New York: Random House, 1963), 175.
7. William Goldman, *The Season: A Candid Look at Broadway* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2000), 363.
8. 'Who's Who—Robert E. Griffith', *Playbill Vault. Fiorello!* playbill, 1 August 1960, http://www.playbillvault.com/Person/Detail/Whos_Who/3844/21353/Robert-E-Griffith/Fiorello, accessed 11 December 2014.
9. Prince, *Contradictions*, 5.
10. Abbott, *Mister Abbott*, 247–8.
11. Ibid., 250–1.
12. Ibid., 248.
13. Ibid.
14. Prince, *Contradictions*, 9.
15. Murray Schumach, 'Again the Angels Flutter over Broadway', *New York Times*, 28 September 1958, http://search.proquest.com/docview/114535219?accountid=11652, accessed 3 December 2014.
16. Abbott, *Mister Abbott*, 251.
17. Schumach, 'Again the Angels Flutter over Broadway'.
18. Wilson, 'Theatre Arts Gallery: Griffith and Prince', 73.
19. Stephen Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 30.
20. Prince gives a detailed account of the unfortunate fate of *A Swim in the Sea* in chapter 6 of *Contradictions*.
21. Arthur Gelb, 'Producers', *New York Times*, 5 June 1961, http://search.proquest.com/docview/115452601?accountid=11652, accessed 30 November 2014.
22. Gelb, 'Producers', 40. Merrick was referring to *Carnival*, which had opened on Broadway roughly two months before the article ran in the *New York Times*. The show would prove successful, running into January of 1963. Michael Stewart, who made the observation Harold Prince quotes regarding Prince and Griffith, was the book writer.
23. Schumach, 'Again the Angels Flutter over Broadway'.
24. A. H. Raskin, 'City Acts to Bar a Theatre Strike', *New York Times*, 13 May 1960, http://search.proquest.com/docview/114983769?accountid=11652, accessed 6 December 2014.
25. Prince, *Contradictions*, 82.

26. Sam Zolotow, 'Panel Considers Theatre Subsidy', *New York Times*, 14 March 1961, http://search.proquest.com/docview/115234264?accountid=11652, accessed 1 December 2014.
27. Gelb, 'Producers', 40.
28. Abbott, *Mister Abbott*, 267.

CHAPTER 20

The Sparkplug and the Engineer: Balancing Art and Business in the Collaboration of Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin

Dominic McHugh

Despite operating during an era best remembered for the productions of Rodgers and Hammerstein and David Merrick, the team of Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin was scarcely less successful. Impressively, their work as producers included more hits than flops: they were at the helm of the original Broadway productions of *Where's Charley*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Can-Can*, *Silk Stockings*, *The Boy Friend*, and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. Their occasional forays into screen work included the much-lauded movie adaptation of *Cabaret*, and they each had brief stints in other roles, including writing and direction. True, they also had their fair share of problems, including the disappointing movie adaptation of *A Chorus Line*, the troubled Liza Minnelli vehicle *The Act*, and a few short-lived musicals such as *Skyscraper* and *Walking Happy*. Worst of all, they spent considerable time and energy on developing *The Music Man* but passed on it not long before its premiere, thereby relinquishing one of the most popular and lucrative Broadway shows of the 1950s. Yet their work with Abe Burrows, Frank Loesser, and Cole Porter gave birth to some of the most important musical comedies of their period, and if they failed to sustain the success of their early collaborations, the commercial longevity of work such as *Guys and Dolls* and *How to Succeed*—as seen in numerous revivals—is a sign of their perception as producers.

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Both Feuer (1911–2006) and Martin (1919–1995) were dedicated to the arts from an early age. Cy Feuer was born Seymour Arnold Feuerman in Brooklyn, New York. He scarcely remembered his father, who died during Cy's childhood, but his mother's resolve and encouragement were a guiding force during his formative years. As a teenager, he became a professional trumpet player in order to make money, later training at Juilliard. He eventually became music director at Republic Pictures, where he hired Jule Styne and Frank Loesser as writers.[1] Feuer's junior by several years, Martin was born Ernest Harold Markowitz in Pittsburgh on 28 August 1919, and his family moved to Los Angeles when he was a child. He graduated from UCLA with a major in journalism and worked as a page boy at CBS radio, later becoming the head of programming for CBS.[2]

According to Feuer, the future producers met at a cocktail party in Los Angeles, where they talked of their mutual ambition to work on Broadway and redeem musical theatre from being 'a ridiculously silly art form'.[3] Their personal compatibility was instantly obvious to both of them: 'We were a custom-made match', commented Feuer. 'Ernie was tall; I was short. He was charming; I was blunt. He was Savile Row; I was Brooks Brothers. He was in his mid-twenties; I was ten years older. He was tough … well, I was tough, too. The perfect yin and yang.'[4] Their first project was an idea of Martin's: a musical based on George Gershwin's *An American in Paris*. But despite gaining permission from Ira Gershwin to attempt the musical, and the agreement of veteran Ray Bolger to star, they 'couldn't make it work'.[5] Then a suggestion from show business lawyer Howard Reinheimer led them to pursue the rights to the Victorian farce *Charley's Aunt*.[6] With Bolger's name attached, Feuer and Martin managed to acquire permission for the musical that became *Where's Charley?*, and in combining the talents of George Abbott (director and book) and Frank Loesser (score) they had found a winning formula (a veteran; a brilliant newcomer; an adaptation of a successful property). The show ran for 792 performances and returned to Broadway, again with Bolger as the lead, for a few weeks in early 1951.

As a duo, the division of labour between Feuer and Martin was not obvious from the outside, but by their own account Martin tended to initiate and run the business aspect of their projects while Feuer concentrated more on the artistic specifics: 'Ernie was the sparkplug, and I was the engineer', commented Feuer at the time of Martin's death.[7] This was true of their next show: Martin came upon the idea of creating a musical out of Damon Runyon's collection of stories called *Guys and Dolls*, and Feuer worked with their book writer, Jo Swerling (screenwriter of *It's a Wonderful Life*), on making the adaptation.[8] Loesser was again commissioned to write the score, and the Swerling–Loesser combination repeated the formula of new and established talent that had worked on *Where's Charley?* However, there were severe disagreements between Swerling and the producers and he was fired from the project, retaining credits and a percentage 'in spite of the fact that not one of his words ever appeared in the show'.[9] In his place, Feuer called in Abe Burrows, a classmate of his from high school,

who was chief writer on a successful radio show (*Duffy's Tavern*), and the two of them worked on the script.[10]

The outcome was a Broadway classic for all time, confirming the strength of the Feuer–Martin duo. They would work with Burrows again several times, including on two of Cole Porter's later musicals. *Can-Can* (1953) was Porter's first Broadway outing after the unsuccessful *Out of this World* (1950), and a letter from Feuer to Burrows reveals that during the show's development the producer felt the legendary composer was writing 'not too well'.[11] Various other specific comments in the letter reveal Feuer's deep involvement in critiquing the material before it was finished, a poignant reminder of the producer's role as an artistic collaborator. The reviews were mixed, but a run of two years (892 performances) represented another considerable success for Feuer and Martin. Two years later, they reunited with Porter for *Silk Stockings* (1955), a troubled production. The previews were delayed after 'major operations' were called for, and in a letter to a friend Porter predicted it was going to be 'a howling flop'.[12] George S. Kaufman, who was the book writer and director, was dismissed during the Boston tryout; several sources attribute him with referring to Feuer and Martin as 'Hitler rolled into two',[13] and Feuer admitted in his autobiography that he and Martin were 'rough and arrogant and went about our business as if we were on a sacred mission'.[14] Burrows was called in to the Boston tryout to make revisions, and in a letter to fellow writer Nunnally Johnson revealed that he was changing 'a lot of little things that George wasn't able to get to because of his physical condition'.[15] Yet the ruthlessness of the producers paid off: Feuer took over the direction, and after a much-extended tryout of several months, the show made it to Broadway with good reviews.

The fifth of their consecutive successes was quite different in origin: the Broadway transfer (1954) of Sandy Wilson's hit London show, *The Boy Friend* (1953). Feuer and Martin went to great lengths to preserve the British qualities of the original, paying for the London production to be filmed for reference purposes and recruiting the young Julie Andrews (in her Broadway debut) to play the lead role. Yet tensions in the production team led to Feuer again taking over the direction from the original director—this time, Vida Hope, who had directed the original London staging. There were also disagreements between the producers and Wilson, who wanted to restore a scene that had been cut in London.[16] Eventually, Feuer and Martin engaged a private detective to prevent Wilson from entering the theatre, and the frictions were reported in the *New York Times*.[17] Yet the producers had no regrets: 'They called me a monster', Feuer later commented. 'But the show went on, and it was a complete smash.'[18]

It was during this period that the producers approached Meredith Willson with the idea of creating a musical inspired by his autobiographical volume *And There I Stood With My Piccolo* (1948). A humorous account of Willson's childhood in Mason City, Iowa, and the early development of his career, *Piccolo* had proved an unlikely hit for a figure best known as a conductor and radio personality at that point. Willson credits Feuer and Martin with the idea for the show and in a later memoir, *But He Doesn't Know the Territory*, recounts

his extensive collaboration with Martin on the development of the show's structure, story, and score.[19] However, in 1956 Feuer and Martin decided to abandon the project, leaving it to rival producer Kermit Bloomgarden to see the project through to its successful premiere as *The Music Man* (1957). Other Feuer–Martin projects announced but shelved during the 1950s include a musical adaptation of Marcel Pagnol's *The Baker's Wife*, with a book by Burrows and score by Loesser,[20] and a musical for Henry Fonda, with a book by John Steinbeck.[21] Instead, Feuer and Martin focused on producing and writing the book for *Whoop-Up* (1958), which Feuer also directed. Despite a few attractive songs, the show was second-rate and a commercial flop, a rare lapse of judgement by the visionary team.

Nonetheless, Feuer and Martin were established as a strong presence on Broadway, and they branched out into new directions. In 1960, they took over management of the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre during a period when it was inhabited by the original production of *The Sound of Music* and later by an acclaimed production of *Hamlet* starring Richard Burton and directed by John Gielgud. Still, the musical remained their natural domain and they sold the theatre in 1965. Martin explained that 'Operating a single theater by persons who are essentially producers became a problem. We had to organize our producing affairs to operate the house.'[22] In 1961, the dream combination of Loesser and Burrows reunited with Feuer and Martin for *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, and it turned into the biggest success any of the four enjoyed on the stage. Running for 1,417 performances, the show's satirical look at office politics offered New York audiences a reflection of contemporary values, and the piece was awarded the 1962 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

If their other Broadway musicals of the 1960s offered less in terms of commercial opportunities, each project had ambition and interest. *Little Me*, for example, was conceived as a star vehicle—a rare example of that model in the Feuer–Martin canon—for Sid Caesar, who appeared in a remarkable seven roles. The production ran for a modest but profitable 257 performances: Feuer and Martin managed to curtail the costs during the tryouts, reducing the outlay from $500,000 to $400,000,[23] and they also set a Broadway record of $6.25 (as opposed to $5.75) for Saturday matinee ticket prices, causing a stir in the press.[24] Of note, the score by Cy Coleman and Carolyn Leigh was rich in invention, with 'I've Got Your Number' proving a hit for artists including Peggy Lee. Indeed, popular song was an important dimension of all the Feuer and Martin shows, indicating a clear taste for musical comedy, and it was logical that they turned to Sammy Cahn and Jimmy van Heusen, the team behind several Frank Sinatra chart-toppers, for two musicals in quick succession: *Skyscraper* (1965) and *Walking Happy* (1966). Following their established model, these new shows were based on established successful material: Elmer Rice's *Dream Girl* and Harold Brighouse's *Hobson's Choice*, respectively. Each underwent drastic change during the tryouts—'The players were kept off balance by the daily reorganization of material',[25] confessed Feuer of the struggling *Skyscraper*—and neither was a great success.

These productions indicated that Feuer and Martin's winning streak on Broadway was over, and they turned their attention to the movie version of Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret* (released in 1972). Ironically, Feuer never admired the acclaimed Broadway incarnation of the show—'my opinions about it then were lukewarm', he remarked—and he was a driving force behind the drastic reconception of the material for the screen, making almost all of the songs diegetic.[26] The film won a remarkable eight Academy Awards in an era when the movie musical had almost entirely collapsed as a commercially viable genre. However, they failed to apply the same brilliance to *Piaf: The Early Years* (1974), a biopic labelled 'frequently boring' by one reviewer,[27] and they soon returned to Broadway with a backstage musical, *The Act* (1977). To repeat a successful formula had been a trend earlier in their career (with the consecutive Cole Porter musicals, for instance), and here Feuer and Martin reunited Kander and Ebb with Liza Minnelli, following the triumph of *Cabaret*. Once again, Feuer and Martin were willing to be ruthless when needed: after damning reviews on the pre-Broadway tour, they replaced the director, Martin Scorsese (of Minnelli, Kander, and Ebb's *New York, New York*), with Broadway veteran Gower Champion, falsely citing Scorsese's asthma as the reason for his withdrawal ('It was handy, so we used it', Feuer admitted).[28] Even after major revisions, the show was critically condemned—John Simon's review in *New York Magazine* was headed 'Liza with a Zzzz'[29]—yet Feuer and Martin's bold decision to raise ticket prices to a record high of $25 (compared to $20 for the Zero Mostel revival of *Fiddler on the Roof* the previous season), on the basis of Minnelli's name, helped the show to balance the books.[30]

The Act was to be their last notable commercial success. From 1975 to 1980, Feuer and Martin took charge over the Los Angeles and San Francisco Civic Light Opera Association[31] from its founder Edwin Lester, overseeing a mixture of new works (including the pre-Broadway tryout of the aforementioned *The Act*) and popular revivals (including Debbie Reynolds in *Annie Get Your Gun*), but they did little for the company's fortunes and it closed a few years later. Finally, in 1985 the producers realized a long-held ambition to bring *A Chorus Line* to the screen, ten years after first (unsuccessfully) bidding for the movie rights to the Broadway hit. Years of contractual problems and changes of personnel meant that Feuer and Martin had to keep the costs low, based on 'hiring a low-price director [Richard Attenborough], using a no-name cast and shooting outside the jurisdiction of New York unions'.[32] The risk was responsible for the movie's mixed reviews, with the *New York Times* calling it 'fatally half-hearted', and it bombed.[33]

The film brought an end to Feuer and Martin's career together and acted as a reminder that their sympathies really lay in live performance. They were also astute in their early successes that they joined forces with a mixture of rising stars (Loesser, Burrows) and established figures at the end of their career (Kaufman, Porter). These 1950s and 1960s hits helped preserve musical comedy at a time when the tone of musicals on Broadway was turning more serious: they provided a strong counterpoint to works like *West Side Story*. Later on, they were

less successful in their choices, but in their heyday, intuition served them well, underpinning their style of producing: they seemed to sense the audience's needs and responded in a way that brought them commercial success. 'In contrast to motion pictures and television, the theater puts you in direct contact with the ticket buyer', observed Feuer. 'You can follow him right into the theater and watch his reaction to what you've done.'[34]

Notes

1. See Cy Feuer, *I Got the Show Right Here* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 32–6.
2. Mel Gussow, 'Ernest H. Martin dies', *New York Times*, 9 May 1995, http://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/09/obituaries/ernest-h-martin-dies-at-75-half-of-broadway-producing-team.html, accessed 19 May 2015.
3. Feuer, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 77.
4. Ibid., 76–7.
5. Of course, the idea would be taken to completion as a movie musical by the Arthur Freed Unit at MGM in 1951. In 2015, a stage version was mounted on Broadway, with a new book and numerous changes to the score.
6. Feuer, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 80.
7. Gussow, 'Ernest H. Martin dies'.
8. Feuer, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 113–14.
9. Ibid., 115.
10. Ibid., 119.
11. Letter from Cy Feuer to Abe Burrows, 7 July 1952, NYPL, Abe Burrows Papers, *T-Mss 2000-006, box 8 folder 3.
12. Letter from Cole Porter to an unidentified friend, 11 November 1954, Stanford University, Porter papers.
13. See for example Jack Viertel, 'Encores! A Mid-Century Celebration', http://www.playbill.com/features/article/encores-a-mid-century-celebration-173514, accessed 20 February 2015.
14. Feuer, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 208.
15. Letter from Abe Burrows to Nunnally Johnson, 15 January 1955, NYPL, Abe Burrows papers, *T-Mss 2000-006, box 9, folder 25.
16. Feuer, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 194–5.
17. Anon., 'American Producers of "Boy Friend" Bar Author, London Director From Theatre', *New York Times*, 27 September 1954, 17.
18. Jesse McKinley, 'An Early Birthday Party for a "Guys and Dolls" Guy', *New York Times*, 30 October 2000, E3.
19. Meredith Willson, *But He Doesn't Know the Territory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 15. Willson relates Feuer and Martin's contributions to the show at various points throughout the

text, drawing particular attention to Martin as a collaborator; Feuer is named as the director.

20. Louis Calta, 'Producer to Give "Baker's Wife" Next Season with Bert Lahr—Burrows to Write Book', *New York Times*, 14 February 1952, 25.
21. Sam Zolotow, 'Steinbeck Plans New Stage Chore', *New York Times*, 13 October 1952, 30.
22. See Sam Zolotow, 'Feuer and Martin sell Lunt-Fontanne Theater', *New York Times*, 10 March 1965.
23. Zolotow, 'Little Me Gives Backers a Bonus', *New York Times*, 23 October 1962, 40.
24. Zolotow, 'Show to Increase Prices of Tickets', *New York Times*, 27 June 1962, 41.
25. Zolotow, 'Skyscraper Had Many Revisions', *New York Times*, 16 November 1965, 57.
26. Feuer, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 239–40.
27. Eric Laursen, 'Boring', *Columbia Spectator*, 18 August 1982, 5.
28. Cliff Jahr, 'In "The Act," The Drama Backstage Is Not An Act', *New York Times*, 23 October 1977, 2.
29. John Simon, 'Liza with a Zzzz', *New York Magazine*, 14 November 1977, 89–92.
30. Louis Calta, '$25 Top for "The Act"', *New York Times*, 5 October 1977, 74.
31. The Los Angeles Civic Light Opera was founded in 1938 by Edwin Lester and later joined forces with the San Francisco Light Opera to co-present a mixture of post-Broadway tours, pre-Broadway tryouts, and revivals of popular works. It was a subscription company that thrived under Lester's stewardship but closed in 1987 after nearly a decade of financial difficulties.
32. Samuel G. Freedman, '"Chorus Line" vs. Hollywood—a saga', *New York Times*, 11 November 1984, 90.
33. Vincent Canby, 'A Chorus Line review', *New York Times*, 10 December 1985, http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?_r=1&res=9F01E5DB173BF933A25751C1A963948260, accessed 8 June 2015.
34. Anon., 'The Trouble With Broadway Is', *New York Times*, 19 January 1964, 5.

CHAPTER 21

Roger L. Stevens: The Great Facilitator

Karen Patricia Heath

Roger L. Stevens (1910–1998) was a risk-taker, an entrepreneur, and a self-made man.[1] His quiet, mumbling voice, casual dress sense, and unassuming appearance (tall, thin, balding, with something of a stoop) belied an exceptional business acumen and penchant for making deals. With a cigar in one hand, and a smattering of papers in the other, Stevens's life was a peripatetic one, as he ricocheted from task to task. Stevens was constantly on the lookout for the next new thing, and he delighted in acting as an angel and taking on inventive projects that nobody else would support. Over the course of his career, Stevens produced twenty different musicals—most notably *West Side Story* (1957), *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* (1976), and *Annie* (1977)—and arranged the financing for numerous plays, and even the occasional opera. He also served as the first Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (1965–1969) and as founding Chairman of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (1961–1988).

As a musical theatre producer, Stevens was hands off; he was not interested in seeking the limelight, and he preferred to work quietly behind the scenes.[2] He was, however, well read, highly confident in his own tastes, and he travelled regularly, both within the United States and to Europe, seeking out new theatrical opportunities. As his reputation grew, those he helped—such as Leonard Bernstein—consistently returned to Stevens to secure the funds necessary to put together new productions. For Stevens, 'great works of art' might only be created if individuals were allowed the freedom to endure 'many, many failures'.[3] Although the word 'flop' struck terror into most hearts, Stevens

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understood the importance of experimentation: creative talents gained experience, and without taking risks, no new venture would ever see the light of day.[4]

Roger Lacey Stevens was born in Detroit on 12 March 1910, and grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan. After a private education at Choate in Connecticut, Stevens was about to attend Harvard when his father hit financial troubles due to the Depression. Stevens gave up on his Ivy League dreams and instead entered the University of Michigan. His college education was short-lived however, and after a year of classes, he dropped out. A brief stint on a Ford production line (he was laid off) led him to change his political affiliation from the Republican to the Democratic Party, but it was his night shifts at a gas station that provided him with the time to read.[5] At first, Stevens worked with a schoolteacher at his boarding house: he began to appreciate the works of William Shakespeare and found himself drawn increasingly to the theatre.[6] Stevens was not personally gifted when it came to words and public speaking and he grew to appreciate the skill of those who had mastered the twin arts of writing and performance. In 1934, Stevens joined a Detroit real estate firm, and by the time he was 30, he had demonstrated a golden touch for property deals and amassed a small fortune. Stevens began to take regular trips to New York, where he invested small sums in a few plays. After the war, he took to trading in undervalued hotels and amassed another fortune. Still, Stevens felt that something was lacking in his life: he wanted to develop his cultural inclinations, but most real estate folk were not interested in discussing literary works.[7]

Stevens's first thought was to buy a theatre in New York City, a logical proposition, given his real estate interests. Stevens took advice from the producer Alfred de Liagre Jr., who suggested that it might be a better idea to start by investing in productions. In 1949, Stevens saw the Ann Arbor Drama Festival's *Twelfth Night* and decided to take the step up from angel to Broadway producer. To his mind, Shakespeare was a safe bet for a first attempt, and he was encouraged in this regard by the producer Michael Myerberg.[8] Despite the loss of his investments (the show received favourable reviews but not audience numbers), Stevens was quickly onto his next adventure—a revival of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1950). The production starred Jean Arthur and Boris Karloff, whilst a young Bernstein was brought in to write the music.[9] Stevens entered the scene when money problems plagued the venture—he pulled the financing together and signed on as co-producer. This was a pattern that Stevens was to follow throughout his producing career: he was always the man who could be relied on to take a risk and find the money to put on a promising show.

In spring 1950, Stevens joined the board of the non-profit American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA). It was in 1951, however, that he took his two biggest gambles, and in so doing, sealed his standing in both American theatre and real estate. That year, Stevens joined the elite Playwrights' Producing Company (PPC). Maxwell Anderson, S. N. Behrman, Sidney Howard, Elmer Rice, and Robert E. Sherwood founded the PPC in 1938 to promote the production of their plays. By 1951, only four members remained—Anderson, Rice, and Sherwood, plus John F. Wharton, a theatrical lawyer who represented

Stevens in his stage deals. It was through Wharton that Stevens was invited to join ANTA, first as financial adviser, then to solicit promising projects. By all accounts, Stevens's business acumen impressed the group: whenever the company was in a difficult spot, he would call up one of his rich realtor friends and offer to cut them in on a deal (usually shares plus opening night tickets).[10] That same year also saw Stevens cement his reputation in real estate when he put together a syndicate to buy the Empire State Building for $51.5 million, at the time the highest price ever paid for a single building.[11] This deal made Stevens a multi-millionaire and made possible further opportunities for him to invest significant sums in the theatre.

Given the censorious nature of the times—this was the height of McCarthyism—Broadway in general, and Stevens in particular, prospered throughout the mid-1950s. Lavish musicals were popular with audiences, and unlike Hollywood, the theatre remained relatively free from blacklisting.[12] As early as 1953, it was evident that Stevens had discovered a new confidence, and he set about founding a Broadway production company, Producers Theatre, Inc., with the producer Robert Whitehead and another stage-minded realtor, Robert W. Dowling.[13] Mostly Stevens backed plays, but his first financial gambit on a musical, Jerome Moross and John Latouche's *The Golden Apple* (1954), received excellent reviews and was the first musical to move from off Broadway to Broadway.[14] Although *The Golden Apple* ultimately failed and lost its investments, Stevens was not fazed. Nor was he too disheartened when *Once Upon a Tailor* (1955) closed within six days of opening. Stevens knew that not every production would be a hit, and he always looked to the future, rather than endlessly dissecting what went wrong.

Stevens's optimism and ability to keep trying began to pay off in 1957, when he scored his first major musical success with *West Side Story*. Stevens became involved when the producer, Cheryl Crawford, withdrew. When Bernstein, Jerome Robbins, Arthur Laurents, and Stephen Sondheim found themselves on a street corner in Manhattan, faced with the prospect of cutting their losses, somebody suggested they try Stevens. They all squashed into a phone booth and dialled his number.[15] Stevens answered favourably and set about arranging financing with the support of several of his real estate associates, plus a substantial investment of his own.[16] The backers became limited partners in the West Side Story Company set up by the show's producers, Robert Griffith and Harold Prince. Stevens organized the opening night party in New York and remained loyal throughout the show's two-year Broadway run. Although a critical success, the initial production only returned a very small profit, but fortunately, later recording sales, plus the movie, more than made up for it.

Stevens understood that successes such as *West Side Story* were never guaranteed and that most shows were 'lousy investments', but because he enjoyed such a good tax base, he could afford to end up out of pocket.[17] That was certainly the case with *Goldilocks* (1958), a musical with a book by Jean and Walter Kerr. Reviews were unspectacular, the production lost almost all of its investment, and the Kerrs hated the show so much that they refused to even mention

it again.[18] *Juno* (1959) also received unremarkable reviews and folded quickly. The problem was that these offerings struck audiences as outdated: Agnes de Mille choreographed both shows, and her work was by this point often considered to be too reminiscent of the 1940s.[19] *The Conquering Hero* (1961) was beset with similar problems. The show was not forward looking; instead it harkened back to the war years. To his credit, Stevens trusted his instincts, and if he thought that a production might have that elusive something, he took a chance on it. If a show failed to impress, he simply tried again.

Stevens's penchant for taking financial risks and putting money deals together (he had raised substantial sums for Democrat Adlai Stevenson's 1952 and 1956 presidential campaigns) brought him to the attention of President John F. Kennedy.[20] In 1961, Kennedy named Stevens chairman of a project to raise funds to build a national cultural centre on the Potomac, what would eventually become the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. After Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Stevens his Special Assistant on the Arts in 1964, and in 1965, named him the first Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, the new federal agency responsible for providing grants to artists and arts organizations.[21] In Johnson's view, Stevens was a safe pair of hands—he was a wealthy businessman who moved in the right political circles and was respected by Broadway.

Although Stevens was now part of the political establishment, he continued to invest in theatrical productions. In 1965, Stevens brought *Half a Sixpence*, a musical written for and starring Tommy Steele, over from London.[22] Stevens had always enjoyed British offerings, and he regularly unearthed new possibilities on his annual trip to the West End (with the assistance of leading producers such as Hugh 'Binkie' Beaumont, who was a good friend).[23] On this occasion, Stevens struck lucky, for the timing was just right (Lionel Bart's *Oliver!* [1960/1963] had recently captured audiences on both sides of the Atlantic). *Half a Sixpence* opened in New York to mostly excellent reviews, and although the show lost a third of its initial investment, this was eventually recouped on tour. But had Stevens backed the same production just a few years later, it is unlikely that his gambit would have succeeded. By 1968, the United States was losing a war in Vietnam, students were taking to the streets, and the old, traditional show tunes seemed hopelessly outdated when contrasted with the new, adult rock musicals such as the countercultural *Hair* with its seminal scene of full-frontal nudity.[24]

Stevens left the National Endowment for the Arts when President Richard M. Nixon entered the White House in 1969. Almost immediately, Stevens took up the Broadway producing game again with his old partner, Robert Whitehead.[25] Stevens did, however, remain Chairman of a Kennedy Center that was beset with financial, planning, and union problems. Still, on the opening night, when Maurice Peress conducted the premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* (1971) in the Opera House, the audience responded with thunderous applause. Although the reviews were not good (Harold Schonberg, writing in the *New York Times* termed it 'little more than fashionable kitsch') Stevens

had done the unthinkable: he had proved that there was an audience for theatre in the nation's capital.[26] Unfortunately for Stevens, as he was to repeatedly experience, what played well with civil servants, foreign dignitaries, and retired military in Washington, DC, did not always meet the expectations of the New York theatre critics. This was certainly the case with the Center's next musical offering, a revival of Kurt Weill's final musical, *Lost in the Stars*, in 1972. Stevens no doubt felt that Weill's music plus the subject matter (race relations in South Africa) was a topical bet, but the piece had not aged well.[27] The show met only divided reviews and ran for just thirty-nine performances before it folded.

Back on Broadway, the theatres were beginning to feel the pinch of harsh inflationary climes. The Great White Way was growing increasingly dirty and crime ridden, and New York City only escaped bankruptcy in 1975 with the help of a federal loan.[28] To remain open, playhouses turned to shows that had already proved popular.[29] This was the age of the great revival, and now that fewer Broadway productions were going out of town, Stevens saw an opportunity. He booked Bernstein and Alan Jay Lerner's *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* (1976) at the Kennedy Center for a tryout. These two had already experienced difficulties finding backers until Lerner turned to his childhood friend, John Paul Austin, Chairman of the Coca-Cola Company, who eventually underwrote the production to the tune of $900,000 (the first time a company not in the communications business acted as the sole backer for a Broadway show).[30] Bernstein then approached his old friend Stevens, who agreed to produce, alongside his old partner, Whitehead.[31] Critics, however, attacked the bicentennial musical mercilessly and complained that it offered only reductive portrayals of race relations, resulting in Coca-Cola eventually disavowing the whole project.[32] To be fair, such criticisms were directed at the country's bicentennial celebrations *in toto*—those constituencies who had, in the past, been disenfranchised by the nation's founding narratives now sought to utilize the whole year as an opportunity to contest the very nature of the United States itself.[33] With the benefit of hindsight, this was perhaps unsurprising, but it was hardly obvious to Stevens at the time.

If 1976 marked the biggest flop of Stevens's entire career, the following year proved much better. The nostalgia-driven *Annie* (1977) served to redeem both Stevens's reputation and the Kennedy Center's finances. Mike Nichols had seen the initial production at the Goodspeed Opera House in Connecticut, and although the critics panned it, he loved it.[34] When the show ran into trouble at rehearsals, Stevens stepped in and brought it to the Center, and subsequently to an appreciative President Jimmy Carter at the White House.[35] The feel-good story of cute little orphan Annie was just what audiences needed during the fiscal contractions of the late 1970s, and the demand for tickets was so strong that crowds jammed the Center's halls and overwhelmed the telephone lines.[36] *Annie* soon moved to New York to become the third longest-running Broadway musical of the 1970s, crossed the Atlantic to the West End, and spawned three different movies, making a tidy profit for the Kennedy Center along the way.

Given the growing mood of conservatism across the country, one might have expected star-studded productions, new works by established names, and revivals of tried-and-tested pieces to do particularly well in these years—but this was not always the case. Stevens's next musical project, Lerner's *Carmelina* (1979), met only bad reviews on Broadway and closed at a loss of over $1 million.[37] Again, Stevens came in at the last minute to help save a production with serious problems. First, producer Herman Levin walked away, and then choreographer Jerome Robbins backed out.[38] Throughout the following decade, Stevens continued to bring productions over from London to the Center, such as *Charlie and Algernon* (1980), starring Michael Crawford, but critics panned such offerings. *Hijinks!* (1980) did not do well either, nor did *Oh, Brother!* (1981), and the following year, Stevens's revival of Sam Harris's *Little Johnny Jones* (1982), starring Donny Osmond, ran for just one night on Broadway: the reviews were awful.[39] Although Stevens had some success with a revival of *On Your Toes* (1983)—this vintage piece won two Tonys, for Best Reproduction of a Play or Musical, and also individually, for the show's star, Natalia Makarova of the American Ballet Theatre—his luck did not hold. *When Hell Freezes Over, I'll Skate* (1984) again turned a loss for the Center.

The problem was that by the mid 1980s, American musical theatre was dominated by shows made overseas, and Stevens's offerings could not compete with the British- and French-flavoured mega-musicals of Andrew Lloyd Webber or Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil.[40] Audiences wanted to be entertained and became increasingly reluctant to part with their cash if this was not guaranteed, meaning that in 1984, the Center reported its first deficit, a loss of $1.9 million.[41] Blockbusters such as the dance-centric *Cats* (1981) brought new life to the musical theatre form, but this energy did not so easily translate into increased ticket sales at the Center. Stevens still managed to retain a good sense of humour though: his seventy-fifth birthday gala at the Center in 1985 was dedicated to ten of his shows that had flopped.[42]

In 1986, Stevens was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame, and two years later, in 1988, he stood down as Chairman of the Kennedy Center. Upon his departure, President Ronald Reagan presented him with both the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the National Medal of Arts.[43] With his work in the nation's capital done, Stevens went straight back to his first love—Broadway. His final musical theatre offering, a revival of *She Loves Me* (1993), saw Boyd Gaines win a Tony for Best Actor in a Musical. Although critics often viewed Stevens's earlier revivals as somewhat dated, this show's message of unsentimental romance remained fresh and pleasing to audiences and critics alike.[44] Stevens had managed to pull it off one last time.

When Stevens died in 1998 at the age of 87, the nation lost a great facilitator who for half a century had quietly and behind the scenes paved the financial way for hugely successful musicals that became much-loved national assets, including *West Side Story* (1957) and *Annie* (1977). Stevens had also served as founding Chairman of two of the nation's pre-eminent cultural institutions, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the National Endowment for

the Arts. But although Stevens contributed greatly to Broadway's boom years in the 1950s and did much to improve cultural life in Washington, DC, in the 1970s and 1980s, his greatest contribution came in the making and sealing of theatrical deals, in bringing the finances together. Stevens had no deep artistic theory *per se*; he was not one to talk about creative direction or a producing philosophy: that was not his style.[45] Stevens believed in the creative spirit and the ability of new talent to succeed, if only they were given the chance to try, to fail, and to try again. Stevens was the man who offered America that chance.

Notes

1. With thanks to Walter Zvonchenko of the Music Division at the Library of Congress who first introduced me to Stevens's papers, and also to Amanda Ray of American University for research assistance. The Music Division of the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, houses the Roger L. Stevens Collection. These papers document all aspects of Stevens's fifty-year careers in theatrical production, cultural affairs, and real estate, and consist of office files, correspondence and personal papers, calendars, records of telephone calls, posters, awards, photographs, playbills, newspaper clippings, contracts, videotapes, and books.
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CHAPTER 22

'He Could Get It for You Wholesale': The Producing Genius of David Merrick

Ryan McKinney

During the 1959–1960 Broadway theatre season, Broadway producer David Merrick (1911–2000) opened only one new musical, *Take Me Along*, based on Eugene O'Neil's *Ah, Wilderness!* A lone musical production was a rarity for an often-busy producer like Merrick yet logical since he was still managing the well-received productions of *Destry Rides Again* and *Gypsy* from the previous season. Among the cast members of *Take Me Along* was *The Honeymooners* star, Jackie Gleason, who had agreed to be a part of the production provided he received the highest weekly salary ever paid to a Broadway performer, which he did at $5,050 per week.[1] Shortly after the opening of the production, one that received mostly favourable reviews, Mr Gleason praised the show's producer, stating, 'Merrick is the most terrific producer I've ever known. What a showman. What a guy!' However, several months later, after numerous disagreements with Merrick, Gleason conversely stated, 'I can't stand David Merrick!'[2] The inherent contradiction in Gleason's two statements represents the duality at the centre of this chapter—an exploration of a scandalous and relentless Broadway producer but also one of a unique theatrical mind who brought America some of its most beloved theatrical treasures.

One of the most controversial figures of his time, David Merrick helped provide the American theatre with some of its most significant productions, including such musicals as *Gypsy*, *Do Re Mi*, *Carnival*, *Oliver!*, *110 in the Shade*,

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Hello, Dolly!, *I Do! I Do!*, *Promises, Promises*, *Sugar*, *Mack and Mabel*, *42nd Street*, and a 1990 revival of the Gershwins' *Oh, Kay!* Although his contributions rival those of most twenty-first century producers, the tales of Merrick's outrageous publicity stunts, ruthless hiring/firing practices, and fearless rivalry with theatre critics have garnered the majority of scholarly analysis, perhaps clouding a comprehensive assessment of Merrick's value and merits as a producer. Therefore, this survey of Merrick's producing career serves to examine the make-up of this theatrical legend and evaluate his talents as a producer of plays and musicals. While the more notorious moments of Merrick's career cannot be ignored, it is the hope here to work through the showmanship often associated with Merrick and in turn, focus on the producing techniques that brought him so much success. Throughout his career, Merrick built an arsenal of valuable skills such as the creation of a dynamic producing persona, the ability to select successful commodities, a trend of continually working with a few trusted artists, a strong financial savviness, and an unmatched mind for marketing and publicity, all of which helped Merrick navigate the terrain of commercial theatrical production in the twentieth century and in turn, can serve as valuable guides for contemporary producers.

David Merrick

David Merrick was born David Lee Margulois on 27 November 1911, in St. Louis, Missouri, the youngest child by ten years among the five children of parents Sam and Celia. His parents divorced when he was seven, only to remarry and then divorce again shortly thereafter. A period of time he once referred to as something akin to 'growing up on the set of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*',[3] David's early childhood was one of little stability, due, in part, to his mother's mental and emotional volatility. Accounts of David as a child describe a boy who was quiet and unassuming—a loner and an outsider, but a good student and hard worker.[4] It was during this time that David was first introduced to theatre, an interest that was fostered and encouraged by his Uncle Maurice, an avid theatre fan and amateur theatre director. Following his parents' divorce, David's mother became increasingly unstable and was committed to a state mental institution. After a period of being shuffled among the homes of his three sisters, David was taken in by his eldest sister Sadye, and her husband Samuel. Having no children of their own, they provided David with some semblance of a normal home life.[5] He graduated from St. Louis Central High School and attended Washington University, then St. Louis University, where he earned a Bachelor of Law degree in 1937. While at St. Louis University, he participated in the school's theatre productions and also attended outdoor summer performances at 'The Muny'—the St. Louis Municipal Opera. In the coming months, he met Lenore Beck, whom he married in 1938. After a brief career as a lawyer, various trips to New York to survey the theatre market, and one lucrative investment in the Broadway production of *The Male Animal*, the

couple moved to New York in 1940, aided by the financial security of Lenore's inheritance.

Shortly after the move east, David Merrick, who had by now legally changed his surname,[6] secured a job as an office assistant in the office of Broadway producer Herman Shumlin, which served as an apprenticeship for Merrick for most of the decade. In 1949, alongside Irving Jacobs, Merrick co-produced *Clutterbuck*, which recouped its investment and had a respectable nine-month run.[7] In 1954, Merrick produced (with Joshua Logan) the Harold Rome musical *Fanny*, which ran for over two years and 888 performances.[8] Merrick marked this production as the beginning of his career and the 'birth' of David Merrick.

Over the next forty-five years, Merrick produced some of Broadway's greatest hits, consisting of both plays and musicals. A lead producer behind the original productions of *Look Back in Anger*, *Jamaica*, *Destry Rides Again*, *Gypsy*, *Carnival*, *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*, *Oliver!*, *110 in the Shade*, *Hello Dolly!*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Sugar*, and *42nd Street*, Merrick's career sported one of the most successful track records in commercial theatre history. During the 1960–1961 Broadway season, he set a theatrical record by opening three productions in less than one week, resulting in six Merrick productions running concurrently within one block of each other.[9] Over the course of his career, his productions received thirty-two Best Play or Best Musical Tony Award nominations, seven of those nominations leading to wins. For the 1964 Tony Awards, both the Best Play and Best Musical Tony Awards went to shows produced by Merrick (*Hello, Dolly!* and *Luther*), and for the 1966 Tony Awards, three of the four plays nominated for Best Play were Merrick productions. The Tony Awards committee also recognized Merrick on two other occasions with special Tony Awards in 1961 and 1968.[10] Merrick suffered a stroke in 1983 that limited his speech, movement, and theatrical producing ventures. His final two productions were a 1990 revival of the Gershwins' *Oh, Kay!* with an all-black cast and a 1996 stage version of the 1945 Rogers and Hammerstein film *State Fair*, neither of which garnered tremendous success. All in all, he produced over ninety plays and musicals on Broadway, as well as touring, regional, and West End productions. Merrick died on 26 April 2000, in St George's Rest Home in London, England. In an article that appeared in the *New York Times* the day following Merrick's death, theatre critic Frank Rich noted the producer's unmatched success: 'His parallel record of productivity and profitability has been unmatched by any single impresario before or since in the history of New York's commercial theater.'[11]

Merrick and the Musicals

In her bio-bibliography of David Merrick, Barbara Lee Horn states 'Merrick's contribution to the musical theatre is legendary. As the producer of musicals, he was the most prolific in Broadway history. Starting with *Fanny* in 1954, in the next twenty-two years, he produced twenty-five musicals, which included

Carnival, *Gypsy*, *La Plume de Ma Tante*, *Oliver!* and *Hello, Dolly!*, which was perhaps his biggest success.'[12] Although he was also a producer of very successful non-musical works, Horn's statement speaks to Merrick's extraordinary track record within the commercial musical theatre, thus inviting an analysis of the various factors that contributed to Merrick's success in this specific genre.

Above all else, it appears that Merrick's producing compass was guided by his own love of theatre and his own personal tastes. Although there are numerous accounts of Merrick's tyranny, several colleagues attest to Merrick's deep fanaticism for the art of the theatre. Mark Bramble, who worked for Merrick as an office assistant and later as co-librettist on *42nd Street*, acknowledged Merrick's fierce nature but also recognized his love of theatre and felt that producing was not solely a business venture for him, but rather one that was motivated by a real internal need to produce theatre.[13] Karin Baker, who was the assistant to Gower Champion on the original Broadway production of *42nd Street* and helped supervise the Broadway, London, and touring productions after Champion's death through 1989, also commented on Merrick's love of theatre, 'If one of his shows was on its last legs or had failed to find a public, he quickly closed it, or came up with a scheme to keep it going where he would be talked about. He loved the attention, but more importantly, he loved, and had a passion for great theatre.'[14] Merrick himself also recognized this calling to the theatre, once remarking, 'I was stage-struck from the very start. I guess our Creator just reached down and said, you David Merrick, you are going to be a producer, and I've had a love affair with the theatre ever since.'[15]

In addition to a deep love for live theatre, Merrick had a strong artistic sense that informed his decisions and guided him through the challenging moments of commercial producing, such as a troubled out-of-town tryout or the total demise of a producing venture. In 1966, after a troubled tryout period for *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and despite an artistic team of heavy-hitters including Edward Albee, Mary Tyler Moore, and Richard Chamberlain, Merrick closed the production while it was in previews on Broadway and refunded $1 million in advance ticket sales. He knew 'he had made a miscalculation of epic proportions'[16] and that the show only would have resulted in 'an excruciatingly boring evening'.[17] However, this same instinct kept him with productions during troubled times. For example, when *42nd Street* was out of town (and struggling), Merrick bought out the musical's other two investors by doubling their initial investment of $180,000. Merrick was convinced that *42nd Street* was going to be a success and when it opened on Broadway in 1980, he was the sole investor in what would become a multi-million dollar enterprise.[18] Speaking more generally about this relationship between producing and personal taste, Merrick said, 'What I do is mostly my own taste. If I like something, I put it on … and if the critics don't [like it], well, they're wrong.'[19]

Lastly, and perhaps most significant, the tool that seemed to guide Merrick through several successful musical productions was actually a person, director Gower Champion (1919–1980). Merrick and Champion worked together on seven Broadway musicals—*Carnival* (1961), *Hello, Dolly!* (1964), *I Do! I Do!*

(1966), *The Happy Time* (1968), *Sugar* (1972), *Mack and Mabel* (1974), and *42nd Street* (1980).[20] Not only were many of these endeavours successful but Champion also staged what were probably Merrick's two greatest hits—*Hello, Dolly!* and *42nd Street*.

Although the artistic results of this partnership were often products of sheer beauty, the relationship itself was frequently mired in conflict and controversy. Champion and Merrick were both task-masters. While each of them wanted the best possible artistic product, they both wanted total control of the production and thought they each knew best how to achieve success.[21] However, unlike other professional relationships in Merrick's life, Champion was one of the few people who could and would stand up to Merrick. As Bob Merrill, composer-lyricist of *Carnival* stated, 'Gower was the only one Merrick couldn't eat up or spit out: he could out-Machiavelli David.'[22] During the rehearsals for *Hello, Dolly!*, Champion refused to continue unless Merrick, who kept interfering with Champion's directorial choices, was banned from entering the theatre. As a surprise to everyone, Merrick agreed. Conversely, during *42nd Street*, despite Champion's fierce objections, Merrick proceeded to hire an understudy for Wanda Richert (Champion's mistress), who was playing the lead role of Peggy Sawyer. Not only did Merrick hire the understudy, he also forced Champion to introduce her to the company before Champion could tell Richert of the new development.[23]

Despite these power struggles, the two did continuously work together over a period of two decades, a relationship that lasted longer than the majority of Merrick's marriages. The relationship was complex and tumultuous but reliable, and according to some of their associates, one rooted in mutual admiration.[24] In an interview with Champion's dance assistant on *42nd Street*, Karin Baker relayed this story that illustrates the relationship at its most successful:

> There is the famous story around the making of *The Fourposter* into a musical: When David Merrick was asked, 'Who thought of making *The Fourposter* into a musical?' His reply, 'Gower Champion.' 'And who thought of hiring Robert Preston and Mary Martin?' His reply, 'Gower Champion.' 'Well, who's idea was it to hire the composer and lyricist of *The Fantasticks* to do the score?' His response, 'Gower Champion.' The reviewer then asked, 'Well Mr. Merrick, what did you do?' His response … 'I hired Gower Champion.'[25]

There is no other director that Merrick worked with as regularly as Champion, indicating a level of trust and belief in the artistic output of the famed director-choreographer, a productivity which helped Merrick deliver quality musical theatre to American audiences.

Merrick and Money

In addition to strong artistic instincts for both material and personnel, Merrick's producing style, like that of many commercial producers, was centered around money, a commodity he had very little of as a child. Growing up poor, Merrick equated money with success, and it was success that he actively pursued.[26] As a producer, Merrick was smart about money, capital, tax shelters, and profit maximization. In 1940, shortly before moving to New York and after carefully studying the theatre markets, Merrick walked into producer Herman Shumlin's office and offered to invest $5,000 in Shumlin's new play. Merrick claimed that according to his research, Shumlin's project, *The Male Animal* by James Thurber and Elliott Nugent, had great prospects for commercial success. Merrick was right and his $5,000 investment garnered him a return of $20,000.[27] This marked Merrick's first foray into commercial theatre and was the first of many successful ventures.

Merrick also displayed skill for weighing the use of his own money versus that of investors. Merrick tended to invest his own money when he was certain of a show's success, as was the case with *42nd Street* and buying out his only two investors. However, when the production's prospects were uncertain, Merrick chose to primarily use his investors' money, as was the case with the pre-Broadway tour of *The Baker's Wife* in 1976, which was financed entirely by Motown Records and closed out-of-town in Washington, DC.[28] Merrick also created the 'David Merrick Arts Foundation', which, in addition to serving as a tax shelter for Merrick's profits, served as an entity to produce more experimental forms of theatre.[29] Rather than having to pay taxes on potential profits, Merrick was able to redirect money into the Foundation to help develop and produce less obviously commercial works. It was through the David Merrick Arts Foundation that he produced such historically significant works as *Luther*, *Arturo Ui*, *Inadmissible Evidence*, and *Marat/Sade*.

Merrick was also adept at bringing European imports to Broadway, plays and musicals that had already received initial productions and garnered some degree of success in England or France. Since these shows did not need to be built from the ground up, Merrick was able to operate more as a presenter and in turn, spend less money on these sorts of ventures. While this producing style helped bring several successful and important productions to Broadway audiences, it also garnered some criticism from his peers, who felt such actions made him uncreative and more of a 'packager' than an inventive producer.[30]

Regardless of the approach and the origin of his productions, it also appears that Merrick was heavily driven by the art of the gamble, a hobby he initially discovered as a child in St. Louis.[31] 'I don't think he ever thought about demographics', said Karin Baker, 'or produced a show with the sole idea of how much money it would make. *It was always the gamble* [italics mine] with something he loved and wanted to present. He loved being the only producer to go up on stage and receive his Tony Award.'[32] Kissell echoes this observation in *The Abominable Showman*:

> To be a producer you had to know how to gamble. Selecting shows was a gamble. Budgeting them was an even greater gamble. Casting them, choosing a director was a way of improving your odds. When *42nd Street* was trying out in Washington, Jerry Orbach came across Merrick backstage and invited him to a poker game in his room. Merrick gestured toward the wings and said, 'This is my poker game.'[33]

During his most productive decades of the 1950s and 1960s, Merrick's gambles, more often than not, were successful. Between 1954 and 1963, Merrick presented thirty-seven Broadway shows. Twenty-two were profitable ventures, and eleven were smash hits. On an investment of $7 million, Merrick grossed $115 million and gained a net profit of $14 million. By 1963, more than 600 theatrical artists (about 20 per cent of the industry's employed labour) were on his payroll.[34]

Merrick and Marketing

In addition to an acute business sense and a strong instinct for what was commercial and artistically viable, Merrick was notorious for his marketing and public relations strategies. Believing that the critics should not solely determine the success of a given production, Merrick developed strategies to drown out the critics and attract audiences despite lukewarm or even negative reviews. As Garth Drabinsky, former Livent producer stated, 'I was astonished at his degree of bravado. By and large he was right. He overcame negativity in the marketplace. Merrick was able to sustain a campaign and finally convince the public he was right and the media were wrong in many instances. There was the legacy.'[35] Merrick achieved this marketplace success through various strategies, including inventive marketing campaigns, highly theatrical publicity stunts, and taking on the critics in the press.

Merrick was a marketing genius, realizing that the power of an inventive campaign could save an otherwise unsuccessful commercial venture. Merrick used his marketing ingenuity from the onset with his first production, *Clutterbuck*, where he developed a series of illustrations that appeared in the newspapers, suggesting that the play was substantially sexier and more taboo than it actually was. This helped the production overcome mediocre reviews and achieve a nine-month run.[36] With Merrick's first major success, *Fanny*, he developed a campaign that placed a series of stickers on the walls and stalls of men's restrooms across the city that asked, 'Have You Seen Fanny?', in addition to creating an active television and radio campaign and taking out full-page ads in the *New York Times* and the *Herald Tribune*, an advertising first.[37] Furthermore, Merrick placed ads in out-of-town newspapers in cities like Atlanta, Chicago, and Houston to attract audience members who might be visiting New York City.[38]

In addition to legitimate marketing strategies, many of which have now become commonplace, Merrick was also adept at staging elaborate stunts to

garner needed publicity. Although the majority of the critics liked *Fanny*, the reviews lacked an enthusiasm for the production, therefore contributing to a slowing of tickets sales. In order to get some needed publicity for the production, Merrick commissioned a sculpture of the show's featured belly dancer and had it installed overnight in Central Park, a move that made the front page of many newspapers.[39] Even after *Stop the World—I Want to Get Off* received mostly positive reviews, Merrick ensured himself the coveted long line at the box office by only opening one box office window the next morning, forcing the line for tickets to wrap around the block.[40] And in order to shift the spotlight onto the largely unpopular *Look Back In Anger*, Merrick paid an actress $250 to play the part of an outraged audience member who, during a performance of the play, went up on stage and hit the lead actor with her umbrella. The stunt garnered attention in New York and out-of-town newspapers.[41] Most infamously, after a troubled tryout and development period, Merrick announced the news of Gower Champion's death (news he worked hard to keep secret throughout the day) from the stage of the Winter Garden Theatre at the end of the opening night performance of *42nd Street*. The theatre was filled with newspaper, radio, and television journalists, all of whom reported on the event the next day. When Tammy Grimes, one of the stars of the show, later told him that many found this particular stunt to be tasteless, Merrick stated that he realized that but he simply could not resist.[42]

Lastly, Merrick attempted to ensure the success of his productions by directly taking on the critics in the press. He was not only unafraid of angering them but also remained adamant that their opinions should not be the final word on a show. Merrick battled critics on their own newspaper turf by taking out full-page advertisements for his shows, a now commonplace practice that was then a rarity. He took this practice to extremes in a now-legendary fake theatre critic ad for his production of *Subways are for Sleeping*, which appeared in thousands of first edition copies of the *New York Herald Tribune* on Thursday, 4 January 1962.[43] Merrick disliked critics so much that when Stanley Kaufmann was the theatre critic for the *New York Times*, Merrick prevented him from attending a preview of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* by cancelling the performance, refunding the theatre-goers' money and announcing that there was 'a rat' loose in the theatre.[44] Although his tactics call morality and fairness into question, Merrick recognized the power of marketing and advertising. Now a multi-million dollar industry, Broadway marketing and advertising received a valuable push from the strategies of David Merrick, many of which succeeded in promoting his producing projects.

Merrick versus Margulois

Among Merrick's skill set for theatrical success was the ability to create a persona worthy of attention and headlines. David Merrick was his own theatrical creation—a larger-than-life, daring, unwavering, tenacious pioneer who 'was

born on November 4, 1954, the night my first big show, Fanny, opened on Broadway'.[45]

David Margulois had a challenging childhood in St. Louis, but it was during those years that David discovered pieces of the Merrick persona. First, during high school, he found a desire to compete. Margulois won his class presidency in high school and was also selected to be one of four commencement speakers at his high school graduation. As Kissel states, 'His eagerness to compete, to win, apparently triumphed over his natural discomfort with others.'[46] Second, in addition to a sense of competition, David began to develop three traits that would become his most useful: (1) a desire for money, (2) a need for power, and (3) a love of theatre. Years later, in 1966, Merrick appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, accompanied by a lengthy feature story that offers this reflection on the significance of his childhood:

> To escape the wretchedness of his childhood, David developed a will to power that was directed by three dominant ideas: money, status and theater. He kept himself in funds by running a paper route and doing odd jobs. He bought neat dark suits, 'the sort of clothes I imagined a gentleman would wear.' And in high school, where he was cast as 'a poet and a dreamer' in a play about a multimillionaire, David fell under the spell of the stage and one day remarked to a friend that he had decided to make a career in the theatre.[47]

In order to achieve this theatrical career, among other things, David needed to complete his education and earn money. After receiving his law degree, he married Lenore Beck, who had recently received a small inheritance, one that David used his newfound legal skills to protect.[48] With this financial security, David began to plant the seeds for a move to New York City and a name change to 'David Merrick'.

Upon moving to New York, David changed his last name to 'Merrick' (a combination of Margulois and Garrick, referring to the famed eighteenth-century actor, David Garrick)[49] and obtained a job as an office assistant in the office of Broadway producer, Herman Shumlin. Reports of Merrick during his apprentice years in the 1940s outline a quiet, unassuming, hard-working man who listened a lot and said very little, a stark contrast to the 'The Abominable Showman' that Broadway would come to know. Howard Kissel reflects on this version of Merrick in his interview with producer Herman Shumlin:

> Shumlin's overall memory of Merrick in those years was as 'a very sensitive person … In those days he spoke very little, when he had something to say it was very much to the point.' Shumlin continued to be aware that 'there is going on in him a considerable set of emotional conflicts involving his ego. I think David was in very great control of himself in that period—he *visibly* controlled himself—and his quietness was part of that deliberate control.'

Shumlin's observations, particularly those about control, speak directly to this idea of an invented persona; Merrick was presenting one version of himself on the outside, while another was percolating underneath.

It also seems that specific attention was paid to the physical appearance, the packaging, of Broadway producer David Merrick. As the 1966 *Time* magazine cover story states, 'he gleefully presents himself as the meanest man in town—as "the Abominable Showman," a bold, bad producer with a rubber leer, a big black Groucho Marx mustache and a tongue that can tirelessly slice baloney and burble ballyhoo about such Merrick productions as *Look Back in Anger*, *La Plume de Ma Tante*, *Gypsy* and *Luther*.'[50] Furthermore, when famed cartoonist Al Hirchfeld drew what was intended to be an unflattering version of this persona, depicting Merrick as a 'Grinch-like Santa Claus',[51] Merrick purchased the drawing and made it into his Christmas card that year.[52] Both of these accounts speak not only to the largeness of the Merrick persona but also the degree to which Merrick enjoyed this particular public perception. Though effective for getting results and garnering attention, Manny Azenberg, who worked as a company manager for Merrick, felt that David 'postured toward this persona' of a heartless producer because others feared it and it got him his desired results.[53]

Though effective and theatrical, the public persona of David Merrick was in contrast to the quiet child from St. Louis and the lonely man in New York who once remarked, 'I'm a loner. I have the soul of an alley cat.' As Frank Rich wrote in the aforementioned article following Merrick's death:

> But that lasting professional verdict still left unanswered the question of motive, which had obsessed Broadway for decades: What made Merrick run? For all the money he earned, and for all his efforts to keep every last dollar of it, there is no evidence that he enjoyed his fortune. He lived furtively, often in unpretentious Midtown apartments, and was not a party giver or goer. He frequently spoke of being depressed.[54]

As Rich states, a definitive answer to this question can never be obtained. But the contrast and duality therein seem fitting for a man who was full of contradictions—a producer who loved theatre so much but was despised by so many and a man who chose a collaborative art form as his career but had so few people close to him.

Legacy

Often remembered for outrageous publicity stunts and adversarial relationships with both artists and critics, David Merrick added a certain gravitas to the world of Broadway producing. Although lacking a soft bedside manner, he developed a valuable skill set that successfully guided him through more than four decades of Broadway productions. Born David Margulois in St. Louis, he reinvented himself as New Yorker David Merrick, a savvy, relentless, tireless

producer who helped introduce Broadway audiences to such musical theatre classics as *Carnival*, *Hello, Dolly!*, and *42nd Street*. Guided by a deep love of theatre and strong business instincts, Merrick produced both musicals and plays that he fervently believed in, both artistically and commercially, which, in turn, led him to fight for their respective successes. Merrick worked closely with an elite group of artists like Gower Champion, thus forging complicated but reliable theatrical relationships. Tapping into his legal knowledge and financial know-how, Merrick utilized investors' money, tax shelters, and a conservative spending philosophy to ensure numerous fiscal victories. He became well known for his cunning use of marketing and publicity and developed a series effective marketing strategies, attention-grabbing publicity stunts, and direct debates and feuds with the industry's leading theatre critics. Although a producer of both hits and flops, Merrick's tactics as a producer still garnered him an impressive track record in the riskiest of businesses. David Merrick was a true lover of the gamble and the thrill of the risk, the will to compete and the desire to win mercilessly drove him down a path of notorious theatre producing. Forever a complicated figure and often a despised one, Merrick's diverse tools as a producer are noteworthy within the context of theatre history, for many of them are still with us today.

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CHAPTER 23

Stuart Ostrow: Experiments in Independence

Elissa Harbert

Producer Stuart Ostrow (b. 1932) has used his vision, wit, and flexibility to bring such Tony-winning Broadway hits as *The Apple Tree*, *1776*, and *Pippin* to the stage. In addition to nurturing creative talent, Ostrow is an innovative producer, writer, thinker, and educator who has a penchant for conceiving new ideas for shows and then assembling the right team and promotion style to make them a reality. Whether bringing together teams with wildly opposing aesthetics or uniting collaborators who share a vision, Ostrow's work as a solo producer has been marked by experimentation.

Ostrow began his theatre career in the armed forces. In 1952, at the age of 20, he enlisted in the United States Air Force, where he took charge of producing and directing various company theatrical productions and weekly radio broadcasts. When his superior officers assigned him to produce a new morale-building National Stage Show, modelled after Irving Berlin's *This Is the Army* (1943), Ostrow boldly approached Frank Loesser to write it. Ostrow's charm and confidence won Loesser over, and he agreed to work with book writer Abe Burrows on a United States Air Force musical called *Conquest of the Air*.[1] Although the Air Force eventually cancelled the project due to a House Un-American Activities Committee investigation of Burrows, Ostrow and Loesser had established a friendship that would last the rest of Loesser's life and launch Ostrow's career.

After his release from the Air Force, Ostrow became Loesser's apprentice. His first job was finding, publishing, and promoting popular songs for Frank Music Corp., and his accomplishments included developing such hits as 'Unchained

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Melody' and 'Cry Me a River'. Learning rapidly from Loesser's steady stream of wit and wisdom, Ostrow quickly rose through the ranks to become the Vice President and General Manager of Frank Music Corp. and Frank Productions, Inc., which produced *The Most Happy Fella*, *The Music Man*, *Greenwillow*, and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* on Broadway.

An ambitious young man, Ostrow left Frank Music Corp. to direct and produce his first solo project, *We Take the Town* (1962), a musical about the Mexican Revolution, written by Matt Dubey and Harold Karr and starring Robert Preston as Pancho Villa. Columbia Records president Goddard Lieberson invested the entire capitalization. However, critics panned *We Take the Town* during tryouts in New Haven and Philadelphia, where it closed, never making it to opening night on Broadway.[2] But as Ostrow points out, during the farewell party he hosted for the cast and crew, composer Meredith Willson 'turned what should have been despair into hope' when he played the score of his newest musical, an adaptation of the film *Miracle on 34th Street*, for the partygoers.[3] Ostrow immediately had his next solo production: *Here's Love*, with book, music, and lyrics by Meredith Willson. Ostrow produced and directed *Here's Love*, which ran at the Shubert Theatre from 3 October 1963 to 25 July 1964, a total of 334 performances.

In the mid-1960s, Ostrow had an idea for an innovative new show: a triptych of three short musicals connected by a common cast and the shared theme of characters who get what they thought they wanted only to realize it would not make them happy after all. Ostrow came up with the concept because, as he wrote, 'television had reduced the audience's attention span to half-hour programming so why not dramatize one acts on stage without commercial interruption?'[4] He asked Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick to write it, and they began the process of selecting short stories and writing music and lyrics. Although Ostrow tried for a year to get Jerome Robbins to commit to directing the show, Robbins refused because he felt the three short stories did not 'coalesce into a theatrical unity'.[5] The project was well underway when Ostrow enlisted director Mike Nichols, an in-demand stage and screen director known for his expertise with comedy. Nichols made large structural changes and titled the triptych *The Apple Tree* (much sleeker than its working title, *Come Back! Go Away! I Love You!*). He changed the selection of short stories, so that in the final version they used works by Mark Twain, Frank R. Stockton, and Jules Feiffer. They cast Alan Alda and Barbara Harris as the leads for all three short stories, and Harris went on to win the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical. *The Apple Tree* opened on Broadway in 1966 and ran for 463 performances. It was also nominated for six other Tony Awards including Best Musical, but lost most of these to *Cabaret*. Like *We Take the Town*, the production history of *The Apple Tree* is full of conflicting creative visions and tense disagreement, but Ostrow mediated the creative friction to steer *The Apple Tree* to success.

Ostrow's next Broadway productions, *1776* (1969) and *Pippin* (1972), were the greatest successes of his career, and will be discussed in more detail below. Between these two hits, Ostrow conceived a production that would ultimately

fail, *Scratch* (1971), which he had envisioned as a collaboration between three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Archibald MacLeish and America's balladeer Bob Dylan, creative minds with a fifty-year age difference, to make a musical version of Stephen Vincent Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster*. On the heels of *1776*, which had appealed to audiences of all ages, Ostrow was hunting for talented young writers for musical theatre. He was impressed with Bob Dylan and believed him to be the key to producing 'a contemporary musical which would appeal to a new generation of theatregoers'.[6] Unfortunately, due to extensive difficulties with Dylan, the partnership dissolved and Ostrow ended up producing MacLeish's script as a songless straight play. Even though he knew that it wouldn't succeed as a play, Ostrow saw MacLeish's work through to the end as a way of honouring the 79-year-old luminary and repaying his trust. Although Ostrow had made a valiant attempt to salvage the project, it closed on Broadway after only four performances.

Another disappointing failure came when Ostrow wrote and produced his own play, *Stages* (1978), inspired by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's landmark study *On Death and Dying*. He wrote the play with the intention of turning it into a musical, but the morbid subject repelled each composer he approached. Eventually, it appeared that his only recourse was to produce it without songs, but it closed after only one performance on Broadway. Ostrow's desire to produce such unconventional material for Broadway plays reflects the general sense of experimentation and creative risks prevalent among many theatrical writers in the late 1960s and 1970s, and like many of the other efforts, these productions failed to please audiences or turn a profit in the commercial theatre.

Although he mostly gravitated towards musicals, Ostrow was equally at home with straight plays. He produced the Tony Award-winning plays *M. Butterfly* (1988) by David Henry Hwang, and *La Bête* (1991) by David Hirson, the son of *Pippin* book writer Roger O. Hirson.

Ostrow's dedication to fostering a bright future for American musicals led to his establishment of the Stuart Ostrow Foundation's Musical Theatre Lab in 1973, a groundbreaking professional non-profit workshop that has produced over forty experimental new works since its inception.[7] Its first production was *The Robber Bridegroom* by Robert Waldman and Alfred Uhry, which later appeared on Broadway, and was revived off Broadway in 2016 by the Roundabout Theater Company in association with Daryl Roth. Other notable works include *Really Rosie*, created by Maurice Sendak and Carole King, and *A Chorus Line*, which Michael Bennett and his collaborators developed for over a year in the St. Clement's Episcopal Church basement in Manhattan, the first home of the Musical Theatre Lab. The Lab stayed in the St. Clement's Church during 1974–1975, and then Roger Stevens offered to build it a new home on the Terrace floor of the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, where it thrived from 1976 until the funding dried up in 1981. At that point, Ostrow moved the program to Harvard University, but after only two show workshops in 1983–1984, they were forced to close due to lack of funding. Ostrow revived the Lab in 1994 when he accepted the Distinguished Professor of Theatre

Chair at the University of Houston, and since then they have produced many new workshop shows. Teaching and producing university theatre has allowed Ostrow time to reflect on the big picture of American musical theatre and publish several books: *A Producer's Broadway Journey* (1999), *Thank You Very Much: The Little Guide to Auditioning for the Musical Theater* (2002), and *Present at the Creation, Leaping in the Dark and Going Against the Grain: 1776, Pippin, M. Butterfly, La Bête, & Other Broadway Adventures* (2006).[8]

Ostrow proved his vision and courage when he agreed to produce *1776*, a labour of love about the writing and ratification of the Declaration of Independence, conceived by former history teacher and popular songwriter Sherman Edwards, who wrote the music and lyrics. After other producers turned Edwards away because they didn't want to take a risk on such an unlikely subject for a musical, Ostrow wholeheartedly took ownership of the project and immediately started helming its ship. His first order of business was to find a book writer to reshape and rewrite Edwards's conception. He made the wise decision to approach Peter Stone (1930–2003), an Academy Award-winning screenwriter (*Father Goose*, 1964) who went on to an impressive career writing musicals (including *Two By Two*, *The Will Rogers Follies*, *Woman of the Year*, and *Titanic*), television shows, and films, and who served as President of the Dramatists' Guild from 1981 to 1999. Stone often called *1776* a highlight of his career, and many hailed his book as one of the finest in musical theatre history.[9]

Ostrow assembled a cast and crew who shared the vision for this remarkable production. Although advance critics had speculated that its historical subject matter would not attract crowds, *1776*'s success was no surprise to Ostrow, Edwards, and Stone, who had always vehemently believed in its high quality and winning charm. In the end, *1776* not only took home three Tony Awards, for Best Musical, Best Director (Peter Hunt), and Best Supporting Actor (Ronald Holgate), but it also became a major hit with audiences, running for 1,217 performances.

To promote *1776*, Ostrow wanted to bring the past into the present to show audiences its relevance to their time. Ostrow and his team integrated a seemingly distant historical moment into the fabric of the present day with advertisements such as a *New York Times* ad featuring astronaut Neil Armstrong alongside the iconic hatching eaglet logo of *1776*, with the caption '1776–1976. The Eagle has landed. Welcome home.'

Due to its patriotic and historical subject matter, President Richard Nixon invited the company of *1776* to stage a performance at the White House in honour of George Washington's birthday on 22 February 1970. Although Nixon tried to censor several of the songs from the show for political reasons, Ostrow insisted that it be performed in full or not at all, and he got his way. The evening was a great success, making *1776* the first Broadway musical to be performed in full at the White House.[10]

Ostrow, Stone, and Edwards hoped to use *1776*'s progressive messages about war, race, and class inequality to bring about social change. In 1970, Ostrow

volunteered to serve on the Citizen's Committee to End the War in Vietnam, a group of business leaders and activists committed to spreading the word about George McGovern and Mark Hatfield's Congressional Amendment to End the War.[11] The Senators suggested that Citizen's Committee members take out ads in local newspapers encouraging their neighbours to contact their congressmen and urge them to vote for the Amendment. Because of Nixon's fondness for *1776* and the show's much-publicized White House performance, Ostrow feared that the public might believe the show to have a conservative bias, which could lead to a dwindling audience. To distance the show from the Nixon administration, he decided to assert the crew's liberal leanings publicly. Ostrow took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* on behalf of the entire cast and crew of *1776*.[12] The ad paired a large reproduction of John Trumbull's famous painting, *The Signing of the Declaration*, with an outline of the Amendment and its principles. Not only did this ad allow Ostrow to support a cause he and the company strongly believed in, but it also showed audiences wary of the flag-waving patriotism so out-of-favour during the Vietnam era that *1776* was not a conservative or blindly patriotic show.

Although concord and aesthetic unity among the creative team had made *1776* work in an integrated way, Ostrow took the opposite approach when managing *Pippin*. Ostrow decided to harness the fire of creative friction by counterbalancing Stephen Schwartz's naive earnestness with Bob Fosse's ironic *Weltschmerz*.[13] Schwartz, a composer-lyricist who would go on to enjoy immense success with such shows as *Godspell* (1971), *Children of Eden* (1991), and *Wicked* (2003), was a hippie in his early twenties when he first met Ostrow, and Ostrow claims he knew immediately that Schwartz was the fresh new talent he had been seeking to engage the younger generation.[14] However, Schwartz's version of *Pippin* felt childish and idealistic for the cynical 1970s, and Ostrow decided that the best way to add nuance and a hint of darkness would be to bring in Fosse to direct, choreograph, and add the dose of depravity that would make *Pippin* work. As a director and choreographer, Fosse's hits included *Damn Yankees* (1955), *Sweet Charity* (1966), and the film versions of *Cabaret* (1972) and *All That Jazz* (1979). As Ostrow explains, 'It wasn't until Bob Fosse said he would direct that the tone of the musical changed from a sincere, naïve, morality play to an anachronistic, cynical burlesque.'[15]

With Fosse on board as director and choreographer, Ostrow turned to financing and promoting this magical circus parable. He struck a deal with Roger Stevens: Stevens would invest $100,000, and *Pippin* would be the inaugural commercial production at the recently finished Kennedy Center Opera House in Washington, DC.[16] Ostrow secured the rest of the capital by pairing with Motown Records, who wanted 14-year-old Michael Jackson to sing Schwartz's 'Morning Glow' on his third solo record, *Music & Me* (1973). Jackson's album and the single were smash hits, which helped advance box office sales for *Pippin*.

Through Ostrow's enterprise, *Pippin* became the first Broadway musical to be advertised on television. The commercial featured Ben Vereen as the Leading

Player (a role for which he won a Tony Award) dancing Fosse's 'Manson Trio' choreography from 'Glory' with two other dancers in sexy metallic corsets. The narration cleverly announces, 'Here's a free minute from *Pippin*, Broadway's musical comedy sensation directed by Bob Fosse. You can see the other 119 minutes of *Pippin* live at the Imperial Theater without commercial interruption.'[17] The commercial had unexpected consequences. For one thing, it required that the exact staging from the commercial be maintained in live performances to satisfy consumers who expected the same dance they had seen on television. Also, despite the risqué choreography and dark subject, the musical attracted many children because the most affordable broadcast times were during Saturday morning cartoons.

Pippin was an immense popular success, enjoying a five-year run on Broadway. It also fared well critically, garnering eleven Tony Award nominations and winning five (all of its losses were to Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*). *Pippin* also turned out to be Ostrow's last Broadway hit. The next few decades found him branching out into writing, teaching, and taking big risks that often did not pan out. Through these disappointments and the various obstacles he encountered as a solo producer trying to create innovative new theatre, Ostrow came to feel like an outsider. In his 2006 memoir, he describes himself as 'a man who for some time now has felt radically separated from most of the ideas that seem to interest the Mafiosi of success and failure of the Great White Way'.[18] He rails against the Broadway establishment, who 'prefer to buy the future rather than undertake the labor of making it'. He expresses frustration at the increased commercialism and what he sees as the decrease in substance of theatre. In fact, he partly blames himself for having created the *Pippin* television commercial in 1973, admitting, 'The commercial was the first of its kind, and a minute of lightning in a bottle, but it never occurred to me it would change the way theatre was to be produced. From that moment on hucksters could sell musicals as soap, so long as their spot had glitter and hype. Never mind producing a great show, produce a great commercial! Everyone became a theatre impresario overnight.'[19]

Reflecting on his career, he understands that 'Being an independent producer makes the journey lonelier and tougher, but not tipping my soul to the system allows me to arrive at the end of the road with my integrity on.' Ostrow's clear vision, faith in his collaborators, dedication to the next generation of creative dramatists, and unwavering beliefs about what the theatre can and should be, make him a prime example of the alchemy that can occur when a talented producer is intricately involved in a show's creative process and promotion.

Notes

1. Stuart Ostrow Papers, 1955–2007, Box 17, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.

2. Stuart Ostrow, *Present at the Creation, Leaping in the Dark and Going Against the Grain: 1776, Pippin, M. Butterfly, La Bête, & Other Broadway Adventures* (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2006), 18.
3. Ibid., 19.
4. Ibid., 35.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 64.
7. Ibid., Chap. 15.
8. Stuart Ostrow, *A Producer's Broadway Journey* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999); Stuart Ostrow, *Thank You Very Much: The Little Guide to Auditioning for the Musical Theater*, Career Development Series (Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, 2002); Ostrow, *Present at the Creation*.
9. Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards, *1776: A Musical Play* (New York: Viking Press, 1970).
10. Nan Robertson, 'White House Is Host to "1776," Its First Full-Length Broadway Show', *New York Times*, 23 February 1970.
11. 'National Citizen's Committee for the Amendment to End the War', 28 July 1970, Box 1, Folder 3, Stuart Ostrow Papers.
12. Stuart Ostrow, 'Advertisement in Support of the Amendment to End the War', *New York Times*, 23 June 1970, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851–2007).
13. Ostrow, *Present at the Creation*, Chap. 7.
14. Ibid., 64.
15. Ibid., 65.
16. Stuart Ostrow Papers, 1955–2007, Box 27.
17. Video available via the NYC Film Archives at https://youtu.be/bo4Tz-4rkvs.
18. Ostrow, *Present at the Creation*, xiii.
19. Ibid., xv.

CHAPTER 24

Hal Prince: Artistry in Producing

Paul R. Laird

Harold S. ('Hal') Prince (b. 1928) has been a singular figure in the theatre, asking difficult questions and following his own muse. Known as a director and producer, the former role has always been his favourite because Prince is an artist who wants to help create a show, not just supervise other artists and raise money. And although many consider him an important innovator, Prince would rather think that he has spent his career 'just serving my own taste',[1] a wont that has led him to create musical theatre that addresses human weakness and distress. Prince wanted to be a playwright and director, not a producer, but he formed a production team with Robert Griffith (1907–1961), George Abbott's long-time stage manager, after both worked on *Wonderful Town*, and they were an immediate success. Directing became Prince's preferred role, but it needed to be on his own terms with shows that conveyed messages that interested him. An artistic and activist producer, Prince was also frugal, over-capitalizing productions and avoiding the big expense of star casting whenever possible. It is perhaps appropriate that a chapter examining his work as a producer is literally located in the middle of this volume, given his apprenticeship under Abbott and the mentorship he provided his collaborators as he progressed his own groundbreaking career as a showman, businessman, and artist.

Harold Smith Prince was born in New York City, son of stockbroker Milton A. Prince and the former Blanche Stern. His mother was interested in the theatre and took him to plays. Prince remembered: 'Theatre was always part of my life, and Saturday matinees and second balconies were a passionate hobby all through my school days.'[2] This obsession became clearer when Prince had a terrifying summer at the age of 14. He had trouble sleeping and was wor-

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ried that he could not return from theatrical fantasies that occupied his waking thoughts. He recovered when one night his father told him to stay up all night reading; the young man fell asleep.[3]

His education was at private schools. In 1944 he graduated from the Franklin School and entered the University of Pennsylvania, where he wrote, acted, and directed for the Penn Players, founded and managed the campus radio station, and wrote weekly adaptations of plays that he directed and acted in. He graduated in 1948 at the age of 20 with an A. B. in English.

Back in Manhattan and eager to work in theatre, Prince found a job in George Abbott's office in 1948. The famous director/producer (see Chap. 17) was impressed with the young man's enthusiasm and intelligence. Abbott sent him to his new television division, where Prince did some writing, but the unit proved unprofitable and Abbott closed it. Prince became second assistant stage manager for the musical *Touch and Go* in 1949–1950 at the request of Abbott's long-time stage manager Robert Griffith (see Chap. 19). Prince also performed varied tasks at Abbott's office during the day. Other stage managing followed and Prince wrote plays in his spare time, but he was drafted into the Army in late 1950. He was stationed in Stuttgart where he frequented a seedy nightclub called Maxim's that became a major influence when he directed *Cabaret* (1966); he also credits his army hitch as an opportunity for him to settle down a bit from his extreme nervousness and ambition, but journalists continued to describe Prince in that way well into the 1960s.[4] Upon his return to civilian life in October 1952 Abbott hired him right back and assigned him as stage manager for *Wonderful Town*.

Robert Griffith was production stage manager for *Wonderful Town*. He had watched Prince from the time that he began to work with Abbott. Griffith, two decades Prince's senior, saw something in the young man, and they formed their own production team. Griffith read Richard Bissell's novel *7½ Cents*, about a labour dispute at a pajama factory, and thought it would make a good musical. They purchased an option on the property and Abbott agreed to direct it. He allowed his employees, now producers, to work out of his offices without rent; they started paying when *The Pajama Game* became successful.[5] From the beginning of their partnership, Griffith and Prince served as their own experts in every phase of a show. They asked unknowns Richard Adler and Jerry Ross to write some songs on spec and then hired them for the score (with Frank Loesser on call in case he was needed[6]), and convinced Bissell to move with his family from Iowa to work on the script, which he ended up writing with Abbott. Griffith and Prince hired Jerome Robbins as assistant director and Bob Fosse as choreographer. The new producers had to raise money through auditions for backers where they described the show (minus mention of unions or strikes during the McCarthy era) and a quartet of actors from *Wonderful Town* sang some of the songs. Frederick Brisson (husband of Rosalind Russell) joined the production team, providing financing to get them started. He worked with them until 1957, when they started *West Side Story*. They raised $250,000 from 164 investors for *The Pajama Game* but only spent

$170,000, allowing them to return money to investors along with the reviews after the show opened.[7] (They over-capitalized most of their shows and continued this practice.) After fourteen weeks they repaid the expenses. When the show opened the frugal producers also stage managed. The show ran for 1,063 performances and won three Tony Awards, including Best Musical.

Their next project, *Damn Yankees*, was a suggestion by Albert Taylor to Abbott, who agreed to direct if Griffith, Prince, and Brisson produced it in association with Taylor. After the success of *The Pajama Game*, raising money was accomplished with phone calls. The producers capitalized *Damn Yankees* at $250,000 from 155 investors.[8] Griffith and Prince again hired Adler and Ross to write the score. Even after a successful opening night, Griffith and Prince worked with the director to shorten the show by twenty minutes and change the unpopular ending. A lesson for the producers came in their publicity, which had emphasized baseball connections. Business, however, was not booming after a month, so they redid the posters with Gwen Verdon in lingerie and stockings; the sex appeal helped to fill the theatre. Their third major lesson from this musical came when Griffith and Prince cast the popular comedian Bobby Clarke as the devil for the national tour. Clarke played the same comic character that he always portrayed and the show never ran as smoothly as it did in New York, proof to Griffith and Prince that stars are not crucial in a cast. *Damn Yankees* ran 1,019 performances and won seven Tonys, including Best Musical, but Prince thought that *The Pajama Game* was a better show.[9]

Prince continued to think that a show did not need stars. In an interview from 1962, when Prince was working on *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and Milton Berle demanded a large percentage to play the lead, he told the *New York Post* the following about stars: 'They run up the budget. They want big percentages. They're temperamental. Who needs them?'[10]

What Griffith and Prince thought about a show was important because they were activist producers who involved themselves in creative discussions. A typescript biography from their office on Prince from 1961 states: 'We never hesitated to impose our taste on our writers and composers—nobody ever asked us to take a back seat.'[11] Prince's artistic vision for his shows continued throughout his career. Martin Gottfried, writing about *Follies* in 1971 in the *New York Post*, stated the following about Prince: 'There are no musical producers more single-mindedly artistic than he.'[12]

For the next five years, Griffith and Prince had more successes than failures, producing a variety of shows, mostly musicals: *New Girl in Town* (1957), *West Side Story* (1957), the play *A Swim in the Sea* (1958, which closed in Philadelphia), *Fiorello!* (1959), *Tenderloin* (1960), and the play *A Call on Kuprin* (1961). Prince believed that their joint work benefited from Griffith's grasp of such issues as 'honest acting' and his ability to work with people, while Prince was better with the text, knowing the quality of material, and in judging and overseeing sets and costumes.[13]

Their next show, *New Girl in Town*, was Abbott's idea, an adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's serious play *Anna Christie*. It was an unusual choice for

Abbott, who served as director but was more associated with musical comedies. Gwen Verdon became Anna. MGM, who had considered making a film of the property, sold the rights to Griffith and Prince, and Bob Merrill had been working on the score. It did not seem like a dancing show—Prince insists that he, along with his fellow producer Griffith and director Abbott, agreed on this point—but when they ran into trouble while out-of-town in Boston with Verdon in the lead and Bob Fosse as choreographer, the solution to most problems became for Verdon to dance more.[14] Griffith and Prince kept tight reins on the budget and managed a run of 431 performances and a profit of $72,250 on a show that Prince came to believe should have been an opera.[15] In reference to *New Girl in Town* Prince states in his autobiography that shows should be budgeted so producers can make money with 60 per cent capacity of the theatre,[16] and this was an example where such practices paid off.

Griffith and Prince then rescued *West Side Story*. Cheryl Crawford was supposed to produce the show in cooperation with Roger L. Stevens, but she pulled out in April 1957 with rehearsals scheduled to start that summer. Lyricist Stephen Sondheim called Prince in Boston, where *New Girl in Town* was in tryouts. Prince arranged for him and Griffith to spend one day in New York to hear the score. When they returned to New York for the opening of *New Girl*, they raised the $300,000 capital for *West Side Story* in one week. Greg Lawrence reports, according to *West Side Story* assistant director Gerald Friedman, that having established themselves with the musical comedies *The Pajama Game* and *Damn Yankees*, Prince and Griffith wanted to produce a more artistic show.[17] Director Jerome Robbins, who prepared extensively before rehearsals and was reluctant to start them, proved to be a challenge. Griffith and Prince granted Robbins's demands for eight weeks of rehearsal—an extra four weeks—and hiring Peter Gennaro as co-choreographer.[18] Prince had to negotiate with Robbins, who demanded that he be relieved of choreographic duties.[19] These decisions by the producing team benefited *West Side Story*, with Gennaro contributing iconic choreography such as 'America', and collaborating with Griffith and Prince two years later as choreographer on *Fiorello!*

Managing *West Side Story*'s Broadway run bore some lessons. For example, after about eighteen months the producers cut prices to keep the show open until the tour started, and they began to sell-out again. Prince acknowledges that if they had cut prices sooner they might have run another six months in New York.[20] The national tour lasted less than a year and then they returned for six more months in New York. A dispute with the musicians' union shortened that run. The huge financial boon for *West Side Story* was the successful film, which also made the property an American icon. Prince's association with the work foreshadowed his later gravitation to serious projects.

Fiorello! was topical and a groundbreaking show in its time, but now is almost unknown. The show, however, won not only the Tony for Best Musical but also the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Griffith and Prince were at the centre of creating *Fiorello!* Arthur Penn pitched the idea to Prince, who with Griffith secured necessary permissions from Mayor LaGuardia's widow. The pro-

ducers hired Jerome Weidman to write the book and asked Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick for some songs on spec, hiring them after hearing a few. Abbott directed and wrote the book with Weidman. In *Contradictions*, Prince describes a fruitful collaboration.[21] Prince disliked what he viewed as an unnecessary subplot involving a policeman and a flapper, but those characters made room for the show's dances, which Gennaro choreographed. The critics raved, but the run was only 795 performances. Prince cited problems with a move between theatres followed by an eight-day actors' strike. Griffith and Prince still, however, managed a profit of more than a quarter of a million dollars.[22]

Griffith and Prince then took many of the same creators right into *Tenderloin*, their first disappointing musical, about a pastor in the late nineteenth century who wished to reform the famous racy New York neighbourhood of the title. Maurice Evans, whom Prince and Griffith wanted for the part, played the minister, but the Shakespearean actor was miscast. And, as Prince noted, what the pastor was trying to reform constituted the 'fun' part of the musical.[23] Griffith and Prince went to their usual backers and easily raised $350,000, but the show only ran 214 performances and they lost $92,400.[24] For Prince, the lesson of *Tenderloin* was that he did not want to do any more projects that were designed to be popular.[25]

The last joint project for Griffith and Prince was the play *A Call on Kuprin*, which failed. Less than a week after it closed, Griffith died from a heart attack. Prince lost a mentor, business associate, and good friend. There had been some tension late in the partnership because both Prince and Griffith wanted to direct, and Prince could not step over the senior figure. Griffith suggested that they co-direct, but Prince did not agree. Not long before his death, Griffith had decided to be less active and just advise Prince on projects.[26]

Prince went on a trip to Europe and met Judy Chaplin, whom he married a year later. He returned home and reorganized his office. Ruth Mitchell (*c.*1919–2000) became associate producer and worked with Prince into the 1990s. Carl Fischer, who had been general manager, became a partner who oversaw the business end. Annette Meyers was Prince's secretary and general assistant.[27] Prince's career as a producer after Griffith's death can be divided into two main parts: collaboration with Stephen Sondheim, with whom Prince produced and/or directed some of the most innovative shows in Broadway history; and his work outside of Sondheim's orbit.

With Griffith gone, Prince soon started directing, necessarily curtailing his production activities, duties that Ruth Mitchell assumed. Prince knew that he was ready to direct; as he told a reporter in 1962: 'I feel I've learned enough watching Abbott so long.'[28] One reason that Prince continued to produce was that he could hire himself as director,[29] and in that position he could influence even more profoundly the productions on which he worked.

In 1962, Prince directed his first musical, trying to save *A Family Affair*, a musical in trouble produced by Andrew Siff. Prince made extensive changes to the book, and then he directed Thornton Wilder's *The Matchmaker* for the Phoenix Repertory. When Abbott saw the latter he told Prince that his appren-

ticeship was over and it was time for him to direct on Broadway.[30] About this time producer David Merrick offered him *Hello, Dolly!* (1963), but Prince declined, partly because he did not like the score, in particular the title song—he could not understand why the waiters were so delirious to see Dolly, when in Wilder's original play she had never been to the restaurant before.[31]

Prince's next opportunity to direct on Broadway was *She Loves Me* (1963), an adaptation of the film *The Shop Around the Corner* that Bock and Harnick brought to Prince as a producer. They wanted Gower Champion to direct, but he was unavailable, so Prince also stepped into that role. Bock and Harnick stayed with Prince as director even when Champion became available. Joe Masteroff wrote the book. Prince considered it an intimate show and put it in a smaller house, making it difficult to earn the necessary weekly gross.[32] He also was in a hurry to do it and did not wait six months for Julie Andrews, who was interested, to star in it, signing Barbara Cook instead. *She Loves Me* was a frothy confection, a modest show in which none of the creative team, Prince included, showed off, and which proved problematic in a season of big, loud shows such as *Funny Girl* and *Hello, Dolly!* It ran 301 performances and lost money.

Fiddler on the Roof (1964) was the biggest hit that Prince ever produced. Bock and Harnick suggested it before *She Loves Me*, and Prince insisted they wait until Robbins could direct. Fred Coe later agreed to produce it, but he had a film project and Prince took over. He capitalized the show at $375,000, but Robbins's rich creativity pushed the costs up $75,000, which Prince paid out of pocket.[33] Robbins wanted Tom Bosley for Tevye, but Prince insisted on Zero Mostel, whom they hired on a nine-month contract, allowing them to release the star once he had become bored with the part (typical for Mostel) and wanted far more money, problems that Prince had anticipated. Boris Aronson designed the show and became one of Prince's most important associates. Robbins demanded eight weeks of rehearsal time and was again reluctant to start rehearsals, a problem that forced Prince to threaten a lawsuit.[34] The challenge of working with Robbins caused Prince and Mitchell to develop his rule of thumb on whether or not he would fund a new suggestion on future shows: she would ask Prince if he would fund that idea for Robbins, and they decided on that basis.[35] Prince showed his ability to watch expenses so that *Fiddler* would break even on the modest weekly gross of $47,000, which partly allowed its record-breaking run. As Richard Altman, the show's assistant director has stated, Prince 'was a savvy producer; he knew when to spend money and when and how to cut corners'.[36] Robbins made most of the artistic decisions, but Prince did not like the dance with which Robbins closed the show and they replaced it with 'Anatevka'. Prince also thought the show was too long and insisted on cuts.[37] Altman observed that during the Washington tryout, Prince 'assumed the role of outspoken creative producer', pushing writers to find every possible cut, especially in the 'book-heavy second act'.[38] Several cuts shortened the 'Chava Ballet', some made with Prince's insistence.[39] *Fiddler* became like a bank that helped pay for Prince's work for the next several years. With one highly successful show running into the next

decade, ensuring a steady income, Prince had the luxury of being able to take chances with other projects.

Prince's last show with Abbott as director was *Flora, The Red Menace* (1965), notable primarily as John Kander and Fred Ebb's first collaboration. Prince conceived the project and wanted to direct, but writer Robert Russell was having trouble with the book and Prince thought Abbott might help. Abbott collaborated on the book and directed, but Prince was unable to get Abbot to fix problems with tone in the political script.[40] In addition to turning to his usual investors and performing the producing duties he had become accustomed to when working with Abbott as a director, Prince supervised sets and costumes. Starring a young Liza Minnelli, the show ran only eighty-seven performances.

From this point on, the centre of Prince's career became directing: he never produced another show that he did not also direct. Ruth Mitchell made this possible. A former dancer, actor, and stage manager, Mitchell had been associated with Prince's office for years, and as his associate producer she supervised the making of scenery and costumes and oversaw the rehearsal schedule.[41] Mitchell also helped raise money, but this was not a problem because of Prince's rate of Broadway success; in a business where the majority of shows failed to turn a profit, Prince had far more hits than flops. Many who backed his shows did so for years. Mitchell's Broadway résumé places her as Prince's associate producer or assistant to the director on almost every production he worked on until the revival of *Show Boat* that he directed in 1994.

Prince and Mitchell's collaboration as producers began with *It's a Bird … It's a Plane … It's Superman* (1966). David Merrick had been working on the show but dropped it, and Prince and Mitchell came in on a show already written by Robert Benton and David Newman with a score by Charles Strouse and Lee Adams. Prince was excited about its campiness and old-fashioned humour. He apparently made little attempt to influence the show artistically, and later decided that perhaps they should have added some contemporary social commentary.[42] Anticipating the Pop Art fad when it was written, by the time the show made it to the stage, 'the fad had peaked'.[43] The show was not a popular success and lost its $400,000 investment.

Cabaret was the show with which Prince came into his own as a director. Broadway historians have credited him with bringing an inspired artistic vision to the production that helped make the cabaret's entertainment commentary on both the rise of Nazis as well as contemporary America. Prince's narrative of his own work in his autobiography changes in character with *Cabaret*; he also produced, but he deals almost exclusively with his director's role in leading the artistic decisions. Given the show's financial success (with a profit of over one million dollars) it is clear that Prince did his job as a producer, with Ruth Mitchell's assistance, but his heart was in the directing.

Cabaret placed him in demand as a director, although for the next fifteen years he mostly directed his own productions. For the artist in Prince it was ideal. As a producer he could indulge his desire for artistic innovation, while

also holding himself to a reasonable budget, a reality that Mitchell and Carl Fischer could reinforce. Prince seldom forgot that as a producer his first loyalty was to his investors, to whom he was supposed to return profits.[44]

This Prince did not manage to do with *Zorba*, which was conceived by actor Herschel Bernardi, who suggested the story (a best-selling novel and film) to writer Joseph Stein, and they brought it to Prince. He loved it and commissioned Kander and Ebb to write the score. Initial indications were excellent and they had a two million dollar advance sale. However, despite Prince's visually satisfying and theatrical staging, *Zorba* was deemed dull and dark, and closed after 305 performances.

Another show that Prince directed and produced was a revival of *Candide* that began in a small production in Brooklyn (1973) and went to Broadway (1974) in an unconventional, lively version with a new book by Hugh Wheeler. Prince ran the show like a carnival, rebuilding the Broadway Theatre into a space where action took place in and around the audience, and emphasizing the show's comic possibilities. It ran for 740 performances but failed to make a profit, partly because the musicians' union insisted that Prince employ twenty-five musicians when their new orchestration—worked on with at least some participation of the composer Leonard Bernstein—required only thirteen.[45] Prince paid seven musicians not to play and added five to the orchestra. He surely knew about contractual requirements for musicians in the Broadway Theatre, but had hoped for a waiver. It became yet another lesson in the economics of Broadway that Prince had begun to resent even in the 1960s.

Prince's Collaboration with Stephen Sondheim

Prince first worked with Sondheim on *West Side Story*. They were already friends, but this experience as two of the younger members of the show's creative team perhaps helped cement their joint vision of how serious stories could be approached in the musical theatre. Their friendship and shared sense of dramatic aesthetics made possible one of the more creative Broadway collaborations in the decades following the Second World War.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum came to Griffith and Prince before the former's death, corresponding with the time that Griffith wanted to slow down. The creators had been working with producer David Merrick but that effort stalled, so Robbins, then interested in directing the show, suggested that the creators—writers Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart, and composer/lyricist Sondheim—approach Griffith and Prince. Robbins later dropped out and Abbott directed, but Robbins famously re-entered the project while they were on the road, staging the opening 'Comedy Tonight' and fixing other segments. Given Robbins's history of identifying associates who were possible Communists before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and the fact that *Forum*'s star Zero Mostel had been blacklisted, this was not easy, but as producer Prince helped make it work.[46] It was another show that he produced while Abbott directed, and it benefited from the older

director's knowledge of farce. Among Prince's tasks was convincing the writers (with Abbott's agreement) that Zero Mostel should play the lead after they could not land Phil Silvers or Milton Berle.[47] It was also the first show for which Sondheim wrote music and lyrics. *Forum* ran 964 performances and won six Tonys.

Later in the 1960s, Prince began his concentrated collaboration with Sondheim. Combining Prince's artistic taste with Sondheim's unique genius and probing creative personality helped the duo turn out a series of shows that defined innovation in the musical theatre: *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd* (1979, which Prince only directed), and *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981). Much of Prince's innovation could be discerned in his work as a director, but the business side of his relationship with Sondheim on two shows offers a few telling glimpses into Prince's producing.

Company was lauded for its innovative nature as a 'plotless' show, among other reasons, but it was not a popular choice for the potential audience. Prince steered the show through perilous waters and with several savvy business decisions brought it in with a 28 per cent profit. It opened in April 1970 and won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, but it was too late for the Tonys that year. Prince had set the break-even point—what he perhaps considers the most important number related to producing shows—at just a bit below 60 per cent of the house, and for much of its run it operated at 60 per cent capacity. Business was poor in early 1971, but Prince thought the show might win the Tony for Best Musical. He started a touring company, and then when *Company* won the Tony, Broadway ticket sales went up to 80–90 per cent for several months, and then dropped back to 60 per cent. It closed on 1 January 1972 after 705 performances—seldom as a sell-out—and made a decent profit.[48]

Prince's role in the creation of *Company* as producer-director was huge, from taking part in the casting to providing an atmosphere where his collaborators could do their best work. Boris Aronson's acclaimed set was partly made possible by Prince's handling of the designer, who conceived his chrome and glass set as a symbol of modern New York City.[49] Aronson's wife Lisa said that Prince was an 'editor' who took what he liked from a collaborator's ideas and rejected what he did not think would work. Prince's own self-assuredness also made it possible for him to allow her husband to suggest surprises: 'He challenged people in a big way and helped them to come up with unexpected ideas', Mrs Aronson observed.[50] Prince also positively influenced the development of the show by convincing the lead actor, Dean Jones, who was going through a divorce and was unhappy in a show about marriage, to stay in the role until they opened in New York; Prince promised to replace him soon after the opening, and he did, with Larry Kert.[51]

Follies ran 522 performances, but the production lost $685,000 of the $800,000 investment.[52] The break-even point was a ruinous $85,000 per week, later cut to $79,000 when writers took royalty cuts. Prince produced the show lavishly in terms of scenery and costumes, but, as he noted: 'the money needed

to be spent … we spent it and you saw it and it couldn't have been done any other way'.[53] Many critics praised the show and Prince's dual role as producer/director. He worked from his own artistic inspiration and did not pander to the popular, and in *Follies* it failed to work. His involvement in the creative side was again extensive; for example, Sondheim credits Prince with deciding to embody past memories on stage rather than just talk about them, a huge part of the show's conception with all of the ghostly showgirls cavorting around.[54] He was becoming concerned about economics in the theatre and after *Follies* Prince started to talk 'crankily' about just directing and working with other producers.[55] The show's economics were daunting. Percentages owed on the gross in *Follies*, entirely representative of Broadway practice, included: producer, 1 per cent; author, 3 per cent; composer/lyricist, 4.5 per cent; director, 2.75 per cent; choreographer, 2.75 per cent; and theatre owner, 27 per cent[56]—and this was before paying any expenses. It took a brave producer to ignore popular taste.

After his experience with *Follies*, Prince needed a money-making show and so produced and directed *A Little Night Music*, the most traditional of the Prince/Sondheim collaborations. With his usual investors ageing and with the failure of *Follies*, Prince admits that he almost had to resort to backers' auditions for *A Little Night Music*, but he found some new investors.[57] The show was a modest commercial success, running 601 performances, and won six Tonys, including Best Musical. *Pacific Overtures* was, if anything, more innovative than *Follies*, and Prince was primarily responsible for the show's unusual concept, using elements of Japanese Kabuki theatre to stage the opening of Japan to the West.[58] While it was clear during the Boston tryout that the show would fail commercially, Prince nevertheless brought the musical to Broadway if only to introduce Sondheim's score, which remains a cult favourite. Sondheim began *Sweeney Todd* with another producer and Prince became director, again bringing his unique vision to unusual material. *Merrily We Roll Along* began with Prince trying to make a musical about young people, but with its challenging story that moved backwards in time, an unpleasant anti-hero, and one of the most complicated creative histories of any of Prince's shows, it may also have strayed too far from popular taste. *Merrily* ran just sixteen performances[59]; Prince's run as a producer was nearly over.

Conclusion

The musicals Prince produced after *Merrily* include *A Doll's Life* (1982), a sequel to Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and *Grind* (1985), a story involving African Americans in burlesque. Both had many producers willing to invest in a Prince-led show. One of his major acts as producer of *A Doll's Life* was pairing librettists Betty Comden and Adolph Green with composer Larry Grossman, a new team that took much of Prince's 'time and diplomacy'.[60] The show ran only five performances. *Grind* required a five million dollar budget that was difficult to raise; Prince resented the many backers' auditions.[61] That and other

problems on a show that ran only seventy-one performances led Prince to close his production office, which he had considered prior to producing *Grind*.[62]

Prince, who had already directed *Evita* (1979) with huge success, now directed exclusively, including: *The Phantom of the Opera* (London, 1987; New York, 1988), collaborating with composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and producer Cameron Mackintosh; *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1993) with a book by Terrence McNally, score by Kander and Ebb, and produced by Garth Drabinsky's Livent (see Chap. 41); and *Parade* (1998) with a book by Alfred Uhry, score by Jason Robert Brown, and produced by Lincoln Center Theater in association with Livent.

Prince enjoyed enormous success as a producer between 1954 and the late 1970s and his name remains unsullied as the personification of taste and artistic success in the Broadway musical. In 1972, an article in *Forbes Magazine* reported: 'A Prince musical is often neither cheerful nor even particularly tuneful, but it is entertaining, fast-moving, visually and musically exciting, even intellectually stimulating.'[63] In the same article, Sondheim said, 'His talent is the ability to handle unconventional material in terms of truly popular theater.'[64] Indeed, as a theatrical artist and producer Prince has played a major role in the maturation of the American musical theatre into a genre that can make serious topics soar across the footlights, enrapturing an audience with the same power that one can experience in a musical comedy.

Notes

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3. Carol Ilson, *Harold Prince from 'Pajama Game' to 'Phantom of the Opera'* (Ann Arbor, MI and London: UMI Research Press, 1989), 6.
4. Hal Prince, *Contradictions: Notes on Twenty-six Years in the Theatre* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1974), 6–7. Prince actually says that the two-year hitch 'tranquilized' him. In an unattributed article in *The New York Times* ('Successful Showman: Harold Smith Prince', 9 June 1964), he elaborated, saying the Army '… made me more rational, less nervous, more adult'. The same year, in an article by Sidney Fields, 'Only Human: Prince of Broadway', *Daily News*, 26 December 1964, Fields described Prince as 'hyper-active'.
5. Prince, *Contradictions*, 9.
6. Greg Lawrence, *Dance with Demons: The Life of Jerome Robbins* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2001), 220.
7. Prince, *Contradictions*, 12–13.

8. Hobe Morrison, 'Hal Prince's 20-Year Box Office Ratio of 85% Profit; Some Still Potential', *Variety*, 13 February 1974, for capitalization, and, Ilson, *Harold Prince*, 22, for number of investors.
9. Prince, *Contradictions*, 20.
10. Frances Herridge, 'Across the Footlights: Hal Prince, Enthusiastic Showman', *New York Post*, 6 June 1962.
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16. Ibid., 25.
17. Lawrence, *Dance with Demons*, 249.
18. Elizabeth A. Wells, *'West Side Story': Cultural Perspectives on an American Musical* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2011), 38.
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21. Ibid., 52.
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23. Prince, *Contradictions*, 68.
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25. Ibid., 69.
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29. Prince, *Contradictions*, 116.
30. Thomas Buckley, 'Prince Versus Prince', *New York Times*, 21 April 1963.
31. Bryer and Davison, *The Art of the American Musical*, 169.
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33. Ibid., 107.
34. Richard Altman with Mervyn Kaufman, *The Making of a Musical: 'Fiddler on the Roof'* (New York: Crown, 1971), 96–7.
35. Ibid., 96.
36. Ibid., 23.
37. Ilson, *Harold Prince*, 104.
38. Altman, *The Making of a Musical*, 63.
39. Ibid., 11.
40. Prince, *Contradictions*, 119.
41. Jerry Tallmer, 'At Home with Ruth Mitchell', *New York Post*, 8 June 1974, 33.

42. Prince, *Contradictions*, 122.
43. Ibid., 123.
44. 'Making a Business of Show Business', 26.
45. Ilson, *Harold Prince*, 217, 222.
46. Lawrence, *Dance with Demons*, 308ff.
47. Prince, *Contradictions*, 92.
48. 'Making a Business of Show Business', 25.
49. Ilson, *Harold Prince*, 165–8.
50. Ibid., 168.
51. Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co.*, 2nd edition, updated (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 127–8.
52. Prince, *Contradictions*, 169.
53. Zadan, *Sondheim & Co.*, 138.
54. Ibid., 136.
55. Gottfried, 'Will Failure Spoil Harold Prince?', 40.
56. 'Making a Business of Show Business', 24.
57. Zadan, *Sonheim & Co.*, 184.
58. Ibid., 210.
59. Ibid., 269–85.
60. Jeremy Gerard, 'Will Ibsen's "Doll" Come to Life on the Musical Stage?', *New York Times*, 19 September 1982, 8H.
61. Ilson, *Harold Prince*, 329.
62. Ibid., 327–33.
63. 'Making a Business of Show Business', 21.
64. Ibid.

CHAPTER 25

Korean Musical Theatre's Past: Yegrin and the Politics of 1960s Musical Theatre

Ji Hyon (Kayla) Yuh

In summarizing the formation, development, and localization of musical theatre in South Korea, Yegrin holds significance as the first theatre company specifically dedicated to creating original Korean musicals. Yegrin's greatest accomplishment is generally considered to be *Saljjagi Obseoye* (Sweet, Come to Me Stealthily) from 1966, one of the first Korean musicals to be created by local talents.[1] As one of the earliest cultural institutions established in post-war Korea, Yegrin Akdan was founded in October 1961, a few months after the military coup that began Park Jung Hee's eighteen-year military dictatorship. A neologism that combined words for 'old' with 'to miss' or 'to paint', the term 'Yegrin' indicates the vision of the company: to remember the past and move forward towards tomorrow. 'Akdan', on the other hand, literally means a band or an orchestra and reflects Yegrin's initial productions that were not American-style musicals but rather large-scale variety shows with elements of both Korean and Western performance styles in terms of music and dance.

Despite its inception as a private company, Yegrin's funding, development, operations, and contributions to the Korean musical were in fact heavily influenced by the country's political agenda. In this sense, Yegrin's history reflects the political, economic, and socio-cultural changes that South Korea experienced during the 1960s. Moreover, Yegrin's operations reveal musical theatre's position in Korea vis-à-vis the government's project of establishing Korea's politico-socio-cultural identity in the world after Korea's establishment as a modern nation.

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The initial direction of the company came from the impetus behind its creation. Although funded by private companies, Yegrin's formation was part of the government's project to rebuild the nation's cultural foundation and to compete with the lavish performances that North Korea offered at the time. Kim Jong Pil, then head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), mobilized his political power to gather enough sponsors from private sectors to finance Yegrin Akdan. He placed Jang Tae Hwa, then president of *Seoul Newspaper*, as president and Kim Saeng Ryeo, conductor of Yegrin Akdan's orchestra, as company manager. While there was a significant level of artistry associated with the company, Kim Jong Pil's heavy involvement signifies that Yegrin Akdan was intended from its very beginning to be South Korea's means to culturally upstage North Korea's propagandistic cultural offerings.[2]

Yegrin Akdan's inaugural production, a Korean-style variety show called *Samcheonman'ui Hyangyeon* (A Feast for 30 Million), opened on 13 January 1962.[3] It was created as a performance piece without dialogue and featured about 300 singers, dancers, and musicians. Based on a loose theme that was encapsulated in the title, it included a wide variety of dance and musical numbers drawn from both Korean and Western traditions. Yegrin Akdan produced five more shows of a similar kind in the next two years, including *Bom Janchi* (Spring Festival, 1962), *Owol'ui Chan'ga* (The Paean of May, 1962), *Yeoreumbam'ui Ggoom* (Summer Night's Dream, 1962), *Chuseoknori* (The Autumn Full Moon Revelry, 1962), and *Heungbu and Nolbu* (The Brothers Heungbu and Nolbu, 1963). Most of them were not very popular with the public, as evinced by poor ticket sales and negative critiques that noted the lack of clarity and focus in the shows' structure and genre.[4] The lack of public support and subsequent financial difficulties served as the official rationale for the first closing of Yegrin Akdan in May 1963, soon after the last performance of *Heungbu and Nolbu*.[5]

Additional reasons for the company's disbandment were political and internal. The most direct concerned Kim Jong Pil, the mastermind of the inauguration of the first chapter of Yegrin. Kim was forced to step down from his position as the head of KCIA by those who felt threatened by his growing political power. The decline in Kim's political status also meant a weakening of the support from the sponsors he had assembled. At the same time, Yegrin's leadership was itself fighting about the company's target audience; financial supporters wanted the general public while the staff favoured the social elite. Performers were also upset. They did not respect the theatrically minded director's staging: members of chorus were not used to choreographed movements while singing, and dancers were not used to wearing particular types of costumes.[6] Between the irreconcilable tensions and the significantly weakened support from the corporates and political partners Yegrin had no choice but to close its doors.

However, after a three-year hiatus, Yegrin Akdan was reborn in 1966, thanks to the efforts of its original founder, Kim Jong Pil.[7] The second phase of Yegrin Akdan was also politically fraught as it continued to compete with North Korea

and tried to placate the public in the midst of a series of unsettling incidents within and outside Korea, such as sporadic acts of terrorism from North Korea, domestic angst against the dictatorship, and South Korea's participation in the Vietnam War.[8] Considering the circumstances, Park Yong Gu, the newly appointed company manager of Yegrin Akdan, persuaded Kim that the new Yegrin Akdan should only produce American-style musical theatre, which was very different from the first company's mission.

Park was already familiar with American-style musicals before joining the company. According to Park, American musical theatre's 'vitality', derived from African American jazz rhythms, was key in competing against North Korea's large-scale shows that could impress audiences with stage spectacle and grandeur. While it is difficult to know exactly what he meant by the term 'vitality', one can assume that he was thinking of the improvisation and freedom associated with jazz and the sarcastic humour in shows such as *The King and I* (1951) and *My Fair Lady* (1956), both of which he mentioned as examples of American musicals. Park further argued that North Korea would never adopt American cultural forms, at least not officially and openly, given their antagonism towards the United States and its principles.[9]

With Park's clear vision and determination, the direction and specific operations of this phase of the company differed significantly from those of the first phase. Park ordered all Yegrin Akdan's productions to be publicized and branded as 'Yegrin Musicals' as a way of declaring the beginning of the Korean tradition of musical theatre and claiming the legacy that Yegrin Akdan was to establish in years to come. In order to localize this foreign form, Park created a company research team whose goal was to collect Korean folk tales and legends to use as source material for an original Korean musical. At the same time, the research team organized the first ever in-house symposium on musical theatre in May 1966. The first day of this two-day symposium was dedicated to discussing ways in which traditional performances could be modernized, and the second day was dedicated to talking about the feasibility of creating a Korean-style musical. William H. Quiety, a professor and priest at Sogang University who had produced an amateur musical with his students, gave a keynote address in which he spoke about the conventions of American musicals and what Korean creators could do to work with the different cultural contexts. The participants concluded that American and British musicals could not be anything more than reference points for Koreans and that Koreans needed to develop their own materials to appeal to Korean audiences.[10]

Following these ideas, Park Yong Gu and the research team chose the source for Yegrin Akdan's first original musical, *Saljjagi Obseoye* (Sweet, Come to Me Stealthily): a folk tale titled *Baebijang Jeon* (The Story of Baebijang) that pokes fun at the hypocrisy of aristocrats while telling a love story of a courtesan and an aristocrat that overcomes a class barrier. After selecting the tale, Park contacted Kim Young Su, a novelist with experience writing radio plays, to create the script for the musical. Kim crafted the musical's book, his first for a

musical, while Park penned all the lyrics. Choi Chang Kwon, whose training was in classical music, composed the score.

Park was fully cognizant of the Korean musical's genesis and its place in popular culture. He saw the centrality of the musical's middle-class audience and the importance of grabbing the attention and interests of this demographic to firmly establish the genre in Korea. Park cast Patty Kim, who had already developed her career and popularity as a pop singer, in a major role and further capitalized on Kim's popularity by having her record her character's main song before the show opened. He aired the recording on radio programs, hoping that the middle-class demographic who had access to radio would want to come and see the show. Park's ingenious plan worked, for the theme song's popularity provided a powerful boost to ticket sales during the show's initial production, which was almost sold out for its three-day run at the Seoul Civic Center, a 3,000-seat venue. Park also increased the satirical humor towards the aristocrats, as he believed that it was one of the vital elements in the tradition of American musical theatre.[11]

Park's vision paid off. Audiences and critics delighted in the success of *Sweet, Come To Me*. The musical was seen to herald a new era of musical theatre, and it served as a model of how to capture Korean sensibilities through music, story, and pathos and also successfully adapt the Western form of musical theatre for Korean audiences. Two relatively well-received new musicals followed the popular inaugural production, *Kkotnimi, Kkotnimi, Kkotnimi* (The Prettiest Bride in the World, 1967) and *Dae Chunhyang Jeon* (The Grand Story of Chunhyang, 1968).The first act of *Kkotnimi* … tells a story of a country girl who gets married at an early age and still holds on to her fairy-tale innocence. In the second act, she finds herself in the big city. At first she finds it scary and confusing but manages to see its humane side. Her goal is to lead the audience into the same kind of hope. *Dae Chunhyang Jeon* is based on one of the most widely known folk tales. It concerns Chunhyang, the daughter of a courtesan, and Mongryong, the son of an aristocrat, who are in love. Kim Hee Jo, who was trained in Korean traditional music, wrote the music, and Kim Baek Bong, a master in Korean traditional dance, choreographed the show, thereby creating a musical that has stronger Korean sensibilities aurally and visually, than its predecessors.[12]

However, these successes did not guarantee a long-lasting operation, for new leadership replaced the company's administrators and directors in 1968. The reason behind the change was not clear, but according to Park Man Kyu, who wrote the librettos for *Kkotnimi* … and *Dae Chunhyang Jeon*, it was a decision that came from Kim Jong Pil, who remained as a supervisor of the company's operations. According to Park, Kim did not agree with the tone of Yegrin Akdan's productions, despite their successes.[13] Without much explanation, Kim appointed Kim Kyeong Ok, a playwright/director who also worked for the government, as the new company manager.

The company's third phase, under the leadership of Kim Kyeong Ok, lasted only about a year (1968). Yegrin Akdan dropped 'Akdan' from its name and

began calling their productions 'Gamugeuk' (Song and Dance Theatre), instead of 'musicals'. This reflected the ambivalent attitudes that many people had towards Western (American) cultural influences at the time. As indicated by these changes, Yegrin's first and foremost vision during this phase was to modernize Korean traditional arts to provide public entertainment without resorting to American styles. Following this dictate, they created *Jeong'i Heureunae* (Affections Overflow), a Korean-style variety show in multiple sections with an almost non-existent plot. Kim's waning political status, however, significantly undermined the company to the point that Yegrin had to close again after its first and only production.

The fourth and fifth phases were the roughest times for Yegrin, but many who had been previously involved with Yegrin Akdan rallied and tried to carry on with the company's legacy. During the fourth—or interim—phase, which lasted about a year over 1969 and 1970, former members of Yegrin travelled across the country, bringing smaller-sized entertainment to remote places under the name Yegrin Gidongdae (Yegrin Task Force). The fifth phase, which began with Park Yong Gu's return as company manager in 1970, featured a revival of *Sweet, Come To Me*, but the company had problems raising enough funds and finding an audience.

Yegrin's operations during the sixth incarnation, which began in 1971 with a new set of financial sponsors, started with a successful national tour of an eighty-minute musical titled *Hwaryeohan Sanha* (Magnificent Mountains and Rivers).The musical told the story of a soldier who falls into a gambling habit after completing his military duty but manages to break free from it with the help of a devoted woman. The show was allegedly written and performed within fifteen days, and considering the short time given for its preparation, the success of the tour revealed not only the talents of the creators and performers but also the thirst for new entertainment from people living outside Seoul.

Yegrin also broadcast a weekly musical series on television in 1971.While it was a commendable effort, it was bound to be limited as there was no director who knew the medium of television and the genre of musical theatre well enough to make a musical series work on television. That July Yegrin created another original big-budgeted production, *Badayeo Malhara* (Speaketh Thou, O'Sea!). Based on the historical figure Jang Bogo, a Korean seaman and great merchant from the eighth and ninth centuries whose business expanded to Japan and China, the musical was conceived as a way to instil nationalism among Koreans while continuing to compete with North Korean theatrical extravaganzas. Moreover, the announcement for the production included specific plans to take the work on an overseas tour to about ten cities. The tour never materialized. In January 1973 it was announced that the government's Culture and Public Policies Bureau would take over Yegrin and its activities, thereby putting an end to the use of the name 'Yegrin'.

The company that was first established in 1961 and was dissolved and reformed at least five times eventually merged with the National Theatre of Korea under the name Gungnip Gamudan (National Song and Dance Troupe).

The name was changed to National Yegrin Performing Arts Company in 1977 and then to Seoul Sirip Gamudan (Seoul Municipal Song and Dance Troupe) in the same year. In 1999, Seoul Sirip Gamudan became Seoul Musical Company. Although the term Yegrin is no longer affiliated with a theatre company, the Seoul Musical Festival grants the Yegrin Musical Award to an outstanding original work. Yegrin's tumultuous history reflects South Korea's cultural and socio-political climates as a new nation and further reveals how musicals can hold a prestigious position as a genre that embodies the often-contentious political and artistic desires of individuals and a nation.

Notes

1. *Sweet, Come to Me* is not the first original Korean musical, for other less successful, poorly archived, and underdeveloped productions preceded it, including *Shrimp Fishing* (1965) and *The Carnival Note* (1966), both of which were produced by Je Sam Geukjang (The Third Company). Based on the 1963 play *Shrimp* by Jeon Se Gwon, a satirical black comedy on the failed attempts of society's embezzlers, *Shrimp Fishing* added a love story with slightly more developed characters. With an underdeveloped score and plot, *Shrimp Fishing* ended up being a flop, despite the buzz that it was the first genuine effort to create an original Korean musical. *The Carnival Note* was a story of love and conflict set on a college campus. Unlike *Shrimp Fishing*, *The Carnival Note* received positive reviews from critics and the public as the earliest commendable attempt at creating a Korean original musical before *Sweet, Come to Me*.
2. Yoo In Kyung, *Hanguk myujikeolui segye: Jeontonggwa hyeonksin* (The World of Korean Musicals: Tradition and Innovation) (Seoul: Yeongeukgwa Ingan, 2009), 191; Kim Sung Hee, *Hanguk Hyeondaegeukeui Hyeongseonggwa Jaengjeon* (The Formation and Issues of Korean Modern Drama) (Seoul: Yeongeukgwa Ingan, 2007), 383.
3. Kim, *Hanguk Hyeondaegeukeui*, 370.
4. Quoted in Yoo, *Hanguk myujikeolui segye*, 194.
5. Park Man Kyu states that the production of *Heungbu and Nolbu* was in November 1963, and the first chapter of Yegrin ended in November instead of May. Park Man Kyu, *Hanguk mujikeolsa* (The History of Korean Musicals Since 1941) (Seoul: Hanul Academy, 2011), 202.
6. Ibid., 201–2.
7. During the three years, many members of the first phase of Yegrin helped in the formation of short-lived Seoul Minsok Gageukdan (Seoul Ethnic Music Drama Company) and Arirang Minsok Yesuldan (Arirang Ethnic Art Company). Of these two, which were in existence for a little less than a year, Arirang Minsok Yesuldan merits further mention as it organized international touring productions of Korean-style variety

shows. The company travelled to Hawaii and major cities in the United States, Canada, and Europe until 1967. For more, see You In Hwa, *Chumgwa Geudeul—Woorisidae Majimak Chungguneul Gieokada* (Chum and Them: Remembering the Last Dancers of Our Years) (Seoul Dongasia, 2005).

8. Yoo, *Hanguk myujikeolui segye*, 196.
9. Korean National Arts Archive Suryusanbang (KNAA), ed., *Yesulsa gusul chongseo 1: Park Yong-gu, hanbando leunesangseu'ui gihwoekja* (Oral Interviews on the History Arts 1: Park Yong Gu, the Producer of Renaissance in Korean Peninsula) (Seoul: Korean National Arts Archive, 2014), 419.
10. Park, *Hanguk mujikeolsa*, 205.
11. Ibid., 423.
12. Ibid., 219, 224.
13. Ibid., 253.

CHAPTER 26

Joseph Papp and the Public Theater

Elizabeth L. Wollman

'Joseph Papp has been the most important producer in New York theater, period, for most of his 35-year-long career', Frank Rich wrote in the *New York Times* shortly before Papp died at the age of 70 of prostate cancer, on 31 October 1991. 'In recent seasons, as the other most significant producers of his generation stopped producing altogether (Harold Prince), left New York (Roger Stevens), died (Richard Barr) or reduced their output to a trickle (David Merrick), Mr. Papp has been the only giant left in the field.'[1] Papp's impact on the American theatre—and in particular the ways in which the non-profit and for-profit realms interact and benefit one another—was paradigm-shifting, and his influence on this front continues to resonate in the decades since his death.

Born at home in Williamsburg, Brooklyn to Eastern European Jewish immigrants Shmuel and Yetta Papirovsky on 22 June 1921, Joseph and his siblings, Rhoda, Anna, and Phillip, were raised in extraordinary poverty. Papp's father, a warm and loving man, was a trunk-maker. His mother, who was emotionally distant and probably chronically depressed, worked long hours to keep her home and children clean. The family enjoyed few luxuries, often went hungry, and moved frequently from tenement to tenement because they could not cover rent.

When his father lost his job during the Depression, Joe helped his family by working odd jobs. Through his teens, he plucked chickens, shined shoes, sold food from a cart, cleaned apartments, and delivered newspapers, telegrams, and groceries. He never stopped attending school, however. While never a good student, he credited his English teachers for introducing him to Shakespeare, whose works he was instantly drawn to.[2]

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Papp enlisted in the Navy in 1942. While in boot camp in Maryland, he began organizing variety shows for his fellow servicemen. These were performed in the barracks, until an officer invited him to stage and emcee larger, more formalized productions in the camp's theatre. Through the war, wherever Papp was transferred, he was asked to oversee theatrical entertainment for the troops.

When the war ended, Papp moved to Hollywood and enrolled in classes at the left-leaning Actors Laboratory. The four years he spent with the Actors Lab taught him 'how theaters work', and thus served as the official beginning of his career. 'I learned there has to be a single idea by which a theater operates', he recalled. 'Some people think I do a lot of different things, but it all comes out of one basic concept, which is to try to reach the highest number of people, particularly those who ordinarily would not go to the theater, with quality work.'[3]

After the Lab closed, Papp returned to New York where, in 1951, he became a television stage manager for CBS. Obsessed with the idea of starting a theatre, he began when not at work to scout around for plays to produce, ideally for little or no money. In 1952, he staged three lesser-known Sean O'Casey plays at the Yugoslav-American Hall and in 1953 secured a theatre in the Emmanuel Presbyterian Church on the Lower East Side. Papp convinced friends and colleagues from the theatre and television worlds to help renovate the dilapidated space, and to salvage and help install discarded lighting, sound, and stage equipment.

By 1954, Papp was presenting free Shakespeare plays at the church. His company passed a hat during performances and got chartered as a tax-exempt educational organization by the state. By 1956, with permission from the Parks Department, he moved the company—now called the Shakespeare Theatre Workshop—to the East River Park Amphitheater, where it presented *Julius Caesar* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. The actors, including Roscoe Lee Brown and Colleen Dewhurst, worked for free while Papp appealed to city and state departments for money, and to critics for mention in the city's newspapers. A glowing write-up in the *New York Times* by esteemed drama critic Brooks Atkinson in late summer 1956 brought recognition to the struggling company, and allowed Papp to focus more seriously on fundraising.[4]

By summer 1957, permission from Mayor Wagner's office and funds from foundations and private donors allowed the New York Shakespeare Festival to secure a used flatbed truck, which was outfitted with a wooden stage. Papp and his company toured the borough's many parks, performing *Romeo and Juliet* on the truck-bed for free. Since the equipment on the truck was starting to fall apart by summer's end, Papp decided to leave the truck parked at its final stop: Central Park, near Belvedere Castle. 'I just squatted there and assumed it was all right', he remembered. 'Anyway nobody had the equipment to move that damn stage out of there; nobody was strong enough. We were there to stay.'[5] As autumn set in, Papp was able to secure a theatre—the Heckscher, on 104th Street and Fifth Avenue—for use during the colder months.

In 1958, Papp was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Under oath, he denied affiliation with the Communist Party after 1955, and invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination when asked about his activities before then. When his testimony cost him his job at CBS, he pursued arbitration and won, only to resign from the position in order to devote himself full-time to the Shakespeare Festival.[6]

As the Festival grew, so did Papp's reputation as a stubborn, combative man with enormous talents for promotion and risk. One of his earliest battles was also one of his most famous. In 1959, he and the extraordinarily powerful Robert Moses, then the city's parks commissioner, clashed over the Shakespeare Festival's summer residence in Central Park. Moses, citing unsanitary conditions and the damage of park areas, attempted to rid Central Park of Papp and his free Shakespeare, arguing that, at the very least, the Shakespeare Festival needed to charge admission to free the city of undue financial burden. Papp went to the courts and the press, where he was painted as 'the cultural benefactor of the masses' and Moses as an elitist villain. When Papp won this very public battle, Moses requisitioned city funds to build an 1,800-seat amphitheatre on the site where the Mobile Shakespeare Unit stood.[7] The Delacorte, named for philanthropist George Delacorte, opened in summer 1962 with *The Merchant of Venice*, starring George C. Scott and James Earl Jones.

The Public's board began advocating for a permanent, year-round home around 1964, and after an extensive search, Papp came across the Astor Library on Lafayette Street in the East Village. Built in 1854, the library had become the home of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in 1920. Long empty, in serious disrepair, and located in what was then a terrible neighbourhood, the enormous building was purchased by the Shakespeare Festival in 1966, with a plan to convert it into a six-theatre venue.

With renovations underway, Papp set about selecting an inaugural show for the new space. Initially planning to choose a Shakespeare play, Papp ran into the actor Gerome Ragni on a train from New Haven to New York. Ragni described a musical that he and fellow actor James Rado were writing, about hippies in Greenwich Village. Despite concerns among his staff, Papp chose their musical, *Hair*, to be the inaugural production, provided Rado and Ragni find a composer who could set their lyrics to music. Galt MacDermot, a Canadian composer who had recently relocated to New York, was brought aboard to write the score. Gerald Freeman signed on as director, Ming Cho Lee as set designer, and Theoni Aldredge as costume designer. Together, they managed to organize the 'extraordinarily misshapen, totally unfocused, weird' script, the oppositional playwrights, and the cast of young, inexperienced, and frequently stoned actors into a workable production.[8]

When it opened in 1967 for an eight-week run at the 275-seat Anspacher Theater in the Lafayette building, *Hair: An American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* was a commercial success that critics hailed as a revolution in structure and in sound. The show introduced numerous theatergoers to major innovations taking place off Broadway, and was the first stage musical to successfully

blend contemporary music with standard Broadway fare. In many respects, it also set the tone for the new Public Theater, and cemented Papp's approach to new works. More a series of ideas and short scenes than a fully-formed piece when Papp chose it as the inaugural production, *Hair* was musically and theatrically innovative, risky, and provocative. A diversely cast, loosely plotted anti-war rock musical that focused on a band of hippies, espoused myriad left-leaning social and political causes, and ended with the death in Viet Nam of one of its central characters, *Hair* benefited from Papp's trust in and protection of his playwrights, his interest in contemporary social issues, his desire to work with minority artists and to diversify casting, and his willingness to take risks on unfinished or unpolished if promising new works. *Hair* exemplified his belief in theatre as 'a social force, not just an entertainment', as well as his seemingly conflicting interests in the theatrical avant-garde and mass accessibility.[9]

With *Hair*, however, Papp made a memorably costly misstep. When the successful run ended at the Public, the board encouraged Papp to move *Hair* to a new venue for an open-ended run. Papp was unwilling to delay a production of *Hamlet* that was scheduled for the Anspacher once *Hair* closed; he was also convinced that *Hair* didn't belong on Broadway, which he viewed as crassly commercial and contradictory to the Public's artistic goals. Thus, when the young Chicago businessman Michael Butler requested the rights to *Hair* once it closed at the Anspacher, Papp, 'not knowing very much about rights', sold them to him. When *Hair* reopened on Broadway to enormous critical and commercial success, the Public, which could have benefited enormously from the money the musical generated, never saw a cent.

The loss was particularly painful for a non-profit organization that had been working for so long to establish itself. It was a mistake Papp and his associate producer, Bernard Gersten, vowed never to make again.[10] In the years following *Hair*, Papp remained an outspoken critic of Broadway, but became more willing to use it to generate income in support of smaller, edgier work.

Through his career, then, Papp 'not only gave Broadway the hit musicals to which it is addicted—a role never contemplated by the early Off Broadway movement—but he also supplied it' with the riskier fare on which off Broadway built its reputation. Through the late 1960s and 1970s, the Public became a regular presence on Broadway, with shows as far-ranging as John Guare and Galt MacDermot's rock-musical version of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1971), Jason Miller's Pulitzer Prize-winning *That Championship Season (1972)*, and Ntozake Shange's choreo-poem *for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf* (1976).[11] Yet no Broadway transfer was more successful than the Marvin Hamlisch/Edward Kleban musical *A Chorus Line* (1975), which ran for 6,137 performances, becoming for its time the longest-running musical in Broadway history.

A Chorus Line began as a tape-recorded all-night rap session held in January 1974 among about twenty-five 'gypsies', or Broadway chorus dancers who regularly move from musical to musical without necessarily breaking through to stardom. While questions later circulated regarding whose idea it was to

build a musical from the tapes, it was the choreographer and director Michael Bennett who brought the project to Papp's attention. Papp, who had been eager to produce a show about New York at a time when the city's finances and reputation were struggling, was moved by the stories on the tapes. He offered Bennett unlimited access to workshop space at the Public and a stipend of $100 a week per participant in exchange for the rights to produce the resultant musical.[12] Months of developing, honing, and rehearsal ensued.

The entire run of *A Chorus Line* sold out almost immediately when the musical opened at the Public in April 1975. The musical reopened at the Shubert Theater on Broadway that July, and remained there until 1990. In the process, it won a number of Tony and Drama Desk awards, as well as the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Both in original production and in subsequent tours and revivals, *A Chorus Line* generated millions of dollars, a significant percentage of which was placed in a reserve fund that continues to be a significant source of income for the Public Theater. As the celebrated press agent Merle Debuskey noted, 'If *Chorus Line* had never been under the Shakespeare Festival's imprimatur, the Shakespeare Festival would never have been the Shakespeare Festival it's become, and Joe Papp would never be what Joe Papp became.'[13]

In the years following *A Chorus Line*, Papp continued to produce new works, as well as Shakespeare plays and other classics; transfer commercial hits to Broadway; support new and established playwrights; and exercise his continued interest in theatre with socio-political themes. In the mid-1980s, the Public worked with Larry Kramer to hone and produce *The Normal Heart*, one of the first plays to confront the AIDS epidemic; Papp also produced *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, Wallace Shawn's highly controversial meditation on liberal passivity and the moral rot at the core of the most civilized cultures. He remained hotly outspoken throughout his career, abruptly severing contracts or quitting projects he deemed questionable or unworthy, and, a year before he died, refusing grants from the National Endowment for the Arts because of that institution's obscenity restrictions.[14] While often openly derisive of the glitz and polish of New York theatre's commercial realm, he nevertheless struck functional relationships with many Broadway denizens, which allowed all parties to benefit mutually from one another. His practice of transferring shows to Broadway in support of smaller, less commercial productions has been emulated by numerous contemporary non-profits, including Manhattan Theatre Club, Second Stage, Atlantic Theater Company, and Roundabout Theatre Company.

Diagnosed with cancer in 1987, Papp died on 31 October 1991. He was succeeded at the Public by director JoAnne Akalaitis. Playwright George C. Wolfe replaced Akalaitis in 1993. Wolfe was followed in 2004 by Oskar Eustis. In the years since Papp's death, the Public Theater has retained his mission and held dearly to his spirit, naming a cabaret in the Lafayette building Joe's Pub, keeping free Shakespeare on offer at the Delacorte each summer, and providing space and support for a wide diversity of artists. The Public has continued to develop, produce, and transfer innovative and important new musicals in the years since Papp's death; these include *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk*

(1995), *Caroline, or Change* (2003), *Passing Strange* (2007), *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* (2010), *Fun Home* (2013), and *Hamilton* (2015)[15] (see Chap. 37). The desire to preserve Papp's legacy is understandable: at the time of his death, he was largely recognized as one of the most influential producers in the history of the American theatre.

Notes

1. Frank Rich, 'The Last of the One-Man Shows: Without Producers Like Joseph Papp, the Theater Cannot Thrive in New York, on or Off Broadway', *New York Times*, 22 September 1991, H1.
2. Helen Epstein, *Joe Papp: An American Life* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 43–4.
3. Kenneth Turan and Joseph Papp, *Free For All: Joe Papp, the Public, and the Greatest Theater Story Ever Told* (New York: Random House, 2010), 40–1.
4. Brooks Atkinson, '"Shrew" in a Park: Shakespeare Farce Is Well Produced in the East River Amphitheatre', *New York Times*, 26 August 1956, X1.
5. Turan and Papp, *Free For All*, 111.
6. Iris Dorbian, 'Joseph Papp', in *Great Producers: Visionaries of the American Theater* (New York: Allworth Press, 2008), 61.
7. Mel Gussow, 'A Playwright's Invention Named Papp', *New York Times*, 9 November 1975, 92.
8. Turan and Papp, *Free For All*, 188.
9. Mervyn Rothstein. 'Joseph Papp, Theater's Champion, Dies', *New York Times*, 1 November 1991, D19.
10. Gersten, who was fired by Papp after a falling-out in 1978, would take his experience to Lincoln Center Theater, where he assumed the role of Executive Producer in 1985.
11. Rich, 'The Last of the One-Man Shows', 7.
12. Epstein, *Joe Papp*, 320.
13. Turan and Papp, *Free For All*, 391.
14. Rothstein, 'Joseph Papp, Theater's Champion, Dies', D19.
15. Years listed in parentheses refer to dates the productions opened at the Public.

CHAPTER 27

Giora Godik: The 'Showporter' Turned Artistic Producer

Shiraz Biggie

'*Ata Ohev at Yaffo*!' (You love Yaffo!) Rosa from the original Israeli musical *Kazablan* sings. *Kazablan*'s original producer, Giora Godik (1921–1977), banked on the will of the Israeli theatre-going public to love Yaffo, the ancient port area from which Tel Aviv grew, the Alhambra Theatre he opened there, and the Broadway-style shows that he produced. More recently the Alhambra has functioned as a Scientology centre, but during the 1960s, it was the main venue in which impresario Giora Godik produced an array of commercial musical theatre hits (and failures). It was here that he encouraged the Israeli public to attend a new commercial theatre based on the Broadway style and to expect a new level of technological advances in stagecraft. Additionally, Godik was responsible through the late 1950s and early 1960s for bringing over an array of major world performance talent to Israel. These cultural tour stops provided a significant boost to the new country's morale. Godik's lavish, often self-funded, musical theatre productions were a cultural high for a country still in its infancy that sought to establish itself on equal cultural footing with the rest of the Western world.

Godik arrived in Israel in April 1948, just prior to the official establishment of the state. He was born on the Polish–Russian border in 1921 to a theatrical family, which included his father, Wladyslow Godik, who had performed in Eastern European theatres as a contemporary of Yiddish actors such as Pesach Burstein.[1] Giora Godik studied law and had an army background, serving with the Polish artillery during the Second World War.[2] He and his wife, Emma, sur-

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vived the war and upon arriving in Israel, Godik immediately joined the Israeli Defense Forces and remained with the army until 1955, when he was discharged at the rank of *rav seren*.[3] It was through the army that Godik got to know several of the Israeli performers whose careers he would later help promote. Newly released, he opened a small artist management office and began collecting Hebrew performers, including Yaffa Yarkoni. He also became interested in bringing artists from abroad to perform in Israel, starting with Yma Sumac in 1957. In 1958 he presented a double bill of The Platters and the Hebrew songs sung by another of Israel's well-known folk song singers, Shoshanna Damari.[4] Over the next handful of years he would present many of the major performers of the music world, including Louis Armstrong, Harry Belafonte, Portuguese singer Amália Rodrigues, child star Joselito, Frank Sinatra, and Cliff Richard. According to Ari Davidovich's documentary, *Waiting for Godik*, Godik chose Cliff Richard on the basis of being better-known and easier to promote over The Beatles, whose band name was translated as 'roaches' in Hebrew.[5] Though differing stories attempt to explain why The Beatles never played as a group in Israel, despite a proposed appearance in 1965, one of the major reasons seems to be that Godik was savvy enough to make sure that if he didn't present the group, none of his rivals would either.[6]

In 1960 Godik arranged for Marlene Dietrich to visit Israel. As part of this visit, twenty-five Israeli dancers were hired to perform with her, though she brought her own band, at the time the 'largest jazz orchestra ever in Israel', as well as her musical director Burt Bacharach.[7] Dietrich had apparently personally called Godik to arrange the visit, forgoing the usual fee in exchange for having her expenses paid.[8] Dietrich arrived from a recent tour of Germany, a tour fraught with mixed reception, and she was particularly interested in performing in Israel.[9] Despite Godik warning her not to sing in German on the Israeli stage, she asked the audiences' permission and sang nine songs.[10] At nearly the same time as Dietrich's concert, Godik was also overseeing a visit from the Harlem Globetrotters, a testament to his varied interests.[11]

According to Davidovich, 'He opened the cultural borders of Israel … he put Israel on the map and if today we can see a group like The Red Hot Chili Peppers, then Godik has some part of that.'[12] Godik was equally determined to put Israel on the map for its theatrical production. Godik is best remembered in the country as the person who brought a new level of production values to Israel, considered to be in the Broadway style, as a result of innovations in lighting and sound such as the country's first electronic dimmers. Godik was enamoured of USculture and given the frequency with which movie musicals arrived from Hollywood, he saw an opening in Israel to bring such material to the stage. In 1961 he became involved with the European tour of *West Side Story*, bringing the English-language production to Israel in what was the first example of the Broadway musical style to be performed there. While Godik had entertainment industry contacts worldwide, how he became involved with *West Side Story* is unclear. As one of the biggest names in entertainment, by this point he may have met Leonard Bernstein during some of his trips to Israel. As

a destination for a tour, Israel was much too isolated and so it was added as a stop on a major tour that included Paris and Berlin. The German press quoted Godik on *West Side Story*'s appeal. 'The viewers are convinced that they are in the movies', he observed.[13] Israeli journalists were impressed by the luxury of the tour, explaining that the new American style of theatre, the musical, 'is a cheerful comedy, the main thing is not the plot, but songs and dances within the framework of sets and costumes'.[14]

Godik was not, however, satisfied with just presenting a musical that was already out on tour, Godik wanted to create an Israeli version of musical theatre, first via translation and later in an entirely original form. He was convinced of the musical's potential appeal for a broader Israeli public. As he wrote in 1966:

> The public, and particularly those who were not among the steady theatre-goers, found in the musical theatre a natural continuation to the folk theatre of the past; along with the dedicated theatre-fans, from whose spiritual world the stage is an unseparable [*sic*] part, this new public has found its way to the startling and magical world of the musical theatre.[15]

Music had long been a part of Yiddish and later Hebrew theatrical productions, but Godik aimed to approach things in a different way. What was most groundbreaking was his decision to mount the production as a purely commercial venture and create his own theatrical company. While there had been commercial theatre ventures earlier in the history of theatre in Israel, none were on the scale of Godik's eventual empire.[16] Godik correctly identified that the public would soon flock to the form and he was willing to take massive financial chances on large casts and designs. In 1962, Habima presented *Irma La Douce* in a small production, but the Hebrew language musical wouldn't fully arrive until Godik produced *My Fair Lady* in 1964, taking his first step from entertainment importer to full artistic producer.

The production of *My Fair Lady* has taken on a legendary status in Israeli theatre history. Dan Almagor, one of the show's translators, has written extensively on the process of translating Eliza to a Hebrew-speaking audience. Almagor worked to make the show appeal to an Israeli audience. Switching the circumstances of the play to reflect an Israeli story was rejected; instead Almagor created lyrics for Eliza based on children's language and those learning to speak Hebrew.[17] The show produced a breakout star in the unknown Rivkah Raz, who would go on to perform in other Godik productions. It also created a new outlet for Israeli dancers and singers who were cast via an audition process, though the design, choreography, and direction all came by way of New York. Godik worked the publicity for this production masterfully creating excitement that hadn't been seen, 'since the opening night of the *Dybbuk*'.[18] *The Dybbuk* had been the production to put Habima on the world map as the first artistically successful Hebrew language theatre in 1918. *The Dybbuk* remained in their repertoire for decades and became the impossible bar by which all

other theatrical productions were judged in Israel. *My Fair Lady* opened on 6 February 1964 on the Habima Theatre's main stage in Tel Aviv while the theatre's primary repertory company was on tour in the United States. Ticket sales soared and, upon the resident company's return, Godik chose to take the next step in the creation of a musical theatre empire by reopening the show in what had been an abandoned movie palace, the Alhambra. From then on the Giora Godik Theatre—Godik's new production company—and the Alhambra became synonymous as Godik worked to keep it full, a feat for such a small country and a large hall with approximately 1,000 seats.

Godik's next production was a misstep; he chose to produce *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1965). Although the show had been popular in New York, the subject matter was not suited to Israel. Corporate America was far removed from the average Israeli theatre-goer's experience, despite the increasing presence of advertisements for cars, liquor, and cigarettes in the playbills of various shows at the Alhambra. In a country still promoting its founding mythologies, based on the value of hard work and a connection to the land, the story of J. Pierrepont Finch's smooth talking and ladder-climbing did not resonate. It was the only one of Godik's early productions not to record a cast album.[19] Godik decided on his own what to produce and on the basis of his intuition. Commenting on his single-mindedness, when asked whether he consulted his advisers, he admitted, 'I have a lawyer who is against everything I do.'[20]

Godik was known as an authoritarian throughout the entire production process. While he sent out scouts to find talent and shows throughout the world, he didn't always listen to them. Translator Dan Almagor has recounted his attempt to convince Godik of *Fiddler on the Roof*'s viability for an Israeli audience even before the production had opened on Broadway, but Godik was initially uninterested in the source material that featured the Old Country.[21] It was after the failure of *How to Succeed* that Godik turned his attention to Almagor's suggestion, which was now an enormous hit in New York. It proved the same for Godik, with a translation by Almagor. Since *Fiddler on the Roof* opened in Israel in 1965, presented in Hebrew and later on translated from the Hebrew script back to the original Yiddish of the source material, the musical has come to be remembered by Israelis as if it was a piece created just for them.[22] The initial critical reaction was, however, much less positive, with critics in two of the major newspapers, Naham Ben Ami of *Ma'ariv* and Hayim Gamzu of *Ha'aretz* questioning the sentimentality of the treatment of the Sholem Aleichem source material in the musical.[23] The show was sent on tour to other major Israeli centres (Haifa and Jerusalem), with the goal of sending it to Paris and London as well, while *My Fair Lady* returned to play the stage of the Alhambra at the same time.[24] *Fiddler* tapped into a growing interest in the Yiddish heritage of the Ashkenazi Jews. Actively repressed through much of the 1950s, with the distance of the 1960s, the Yiddish language and Yiddish theatre had gained greater traction.[25] While *Fiddler on the Roof* continued its successful run, Godik chose to produce *The King and I*, with Rivka Raz in the

title role of Anna and Aric Lavie as the King, running in repertory or while *Fiddler* went on tour in Israel. It was a hit, running through 1966. With *The King and I*, Godik continued the process of using a Hebrew translation and Israeli actors, but importing Joe Mielziner's and Irene Sharaff's designs and bringing James Hammerstein (son of Oscar Hammerstein II and stage manager of other Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals) over to direct the production. Portions of the translated lyrics were even included in the dual language (English and Hebrew) souvenir program, to assist the audience in enjoying the score.[26] Among the translators who helped with the lyrics was a young Naomi Shemer, who would achieve her greatest Israeli songwriting credit only two years later with 'Yerushalayim Shel Zahav' (Jerusalem of Gold). In his program notes, Godik mentions the difficulties the production faced in creating the 'atmosphere, (that of the Far East,) the adjustment of the huge scenery and the three hundred exotic costumes—not one identical to the other'.[27] Whether anyone was critically aware of how the colonialist themes might apply to Israel's diverse populations (particularly in a pre-1967 context) has not been recorded. It was the technical elements that were of the utmost importance to Godik and he wanted his audience to know what an achievement it was for the Israeli stage to produce something on such a scale:

> In order for this world to be truly magical and sustain its 'magic world' label, both artistic as well as technical standards must be stricktly [*sic*] maintained. This is not an easy job, since not only skill and technique is required, but it is the combination of art and craftsmanship which make it so difficult.[28]

It was with *The King and I* that Godik felt he had reached the point where the musical was at the level he had aimed for. The skill of the actors and dancers auditioning for his shows had improved dramatically, the technical training of stagehands was in place, and he felt he had an audience ready for a new and original venture.

Displeased with criticism that he was receiving that he was only a 'showporter' (a play on words for the Israeli word for impresario) who presented foreign material, Godik decided to pursue the idea of an original Israeli musical.[29] He found the potential in *Kazablan*, a play by Yigal Mossinsohn that had been presented a decade earlier (1954), dealing with the plight of a Moroccan Jew and tensions that continued to plague Israel between Ashkenazi Jews of European origin and the multitude of Jews who arrived from North Africa and the Middle East. In *Kazablan*, Godik created yet another superstar of Jewish theatre and song in the lead actor of Yehoram Gaon. *Kazablan*, with music by Dov Seltzer and lyrics by Dan Almagor, Amos Ettinger, and Haim Heffer, was a direct copy of the styles of the various American musicals Godik was involved with. The score and story were in many ways a recreation of *West Side Story* for an Israeli audience with echoes of the kind of production numbers that made *Fiddler on the Roof* so successful and popular. The complicated story of the original play was watered down to a boy-meets-girl love story between the

Mizrahi immigrant, Kazablan, and an Ashkenazi girl. It went on to be filmed and distributed worldwide in 1974, earning two Golden Globe nominations (Best Foreign Picture and Best Song). Songs from the musical, such as 'Rosa' and 'Kol Ha-Kavod' (All the Respect) became staples of Israeli popular song.[30] *Kazablan*'s original production ran at the Alhambra for more than 600 performances, a record at the time.

Godik's other major original Israeli success came with the musical *I Like Mike* in 1968. The source material was also a play from the 1950s, this time by well-known playwright Aharon Megged. It had been filmed in 1960, but achieved greater popularity in Israel in its new musical form with songs by Haim Heffer and Dov Seltzer. The cast album was a best-seller. It was another successful collaboration for Godik with director Joel Silberg. The story of *I Like Mike* was fitting for the country that had just come out of a difficult war and was still on a nationalistic high. It was another boy-meets-girl love story, this time between an American Jew who comes to Israel and becomes enamoured of a Kibbutz girl who is interested in moving to the United States. Mike, the titular character, falls in love not only with the girl, but also the land of Israel.

Godik continued to present both original material and imported material, including runs of *Man of La Mancha* (1966), *Oliver!* (1966), *Hello, Dolly!* (1968), and *The Witch* (based on a Yiddish operetta by Avram Goldfadn, 1970). He also turned his attention to straight plays, presenting Neil Simon's *Barefoot in the Park* (1965), among others. In that production's program materials, an introductory note from Godik explains how his new straight theatre would differ from the other theatres in Israel by casting different actors in each play according to the play's needs, following a commercial model.[31] However, his commercial model ended up proving unsuccessful as the 1970s came. Israel's post-1967 economy had taken a hit and audiences were harder to come by. Although he continued to present material and continued to float plans for European tours that never panned out, Godik was going into deep debt with both governmental and private sources. No one knew the extent of his debts, including his wife and colleagues. Godik owed money to the government, his promoters, and even the owner of the kiosk around the block. He had taken huge chances on each production, investing his own funds, and while he had a keen artistic sense, he did not always make the wisest business choices in pursuit of the perfect product.

Godik was known not only for his reliance on his own intuition but also for his attention to detail. Not only did he make decisions on his own on what to produce, but he also was intimately involved with the production process. In the early technical rehearsal stages of *Kazablan* he reportedly threw out the original set design by Aryeh Navon, at great cost, because it was drab and brown and too reminiscent of the shtetl and not like the bright coloured and sunny Mediterranean Yafo that he wanted the audience to envision. One of the actors in *The King and I* recalled an incident wherein Godik came to the dressing rooms following a performance, angry that the show had run over by twelve minutes. He then demanded that the cast repeat the show right then

with only himself in the audience.[32] He was proud 'in being a "commercial theatre" since it is the last word of the two which counts for us'.[33] However, between changing economic factors and unwise business moves in the theatre, this attention to detail and strict artistic management did not translate profitably to the financial realm. The end of his career was sudden and fast. In 1972, his theatrical empire, employing more than 150 people, collapsed overnight.

In the middle of July 1972, Giora Godik fled Israel. Up until the day before, he had been discussing with Dan Almagor the possibility of a new musical based on *Othello* and starring Yehoram Gaon as a Druze Othello figure. The precise details that led to his financial ruin are difficult to piece together. His theatrical company was built almost exclusively from his own funds but he had been taking loans from various sources including the government and his publicist. Godik lived large, with an interest in cars and an expensive penthouse, but also made missteps in the stock market as well as poor choices in productions. Demands for the repayment of money he owed led to the issuing of an arrest warrant. For a time Godik simply disappeared. He resurfaced in Frankfurt, selling hotdogs. He was joined by his wife and over the next few years opened several fast food locations with the intention of paying back his debts. Potential plans for a return to Israel were never realized as he died of cancer in 1977, at the age of 56. In *Waiting for Godik*, Ari Davidovich implies that some of the blame for his downfall must be shouldered by all those whose major careers he made possible, and those who he helped to profit from the entertainment business but who did not step forward to help him when his own career plummeted.[34]

Waiting for Godik opens with Godik's reflections on the difficulty of being a producer and his advice for opening nights that, 'a producer should get a hotel room' and avoid being at the theatre. His career, as both 'showporter' of foreign material and as artistic producer of some of the most loved Israeli theatrical properties of the 1960s achieved the highest of highs and ended in the lowest of lows. Godik was the most well-known impresario of the 1960s, though his reputation suffered following his financial collapse. Though Kohansky lauds him as a theatrical manager more important than any artistic director, and he is one of the few Israeli individuals mentioned in *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, other major volumes relating to Israeli theatre ignore his contributions to Israeli theatrical culture.[35] *Kazablan* was revived in November 2012 by the Cameri Theatre and three years later was still running. With the production's opening, as well as the documentary film on his life by Ari Davidovich that was broadcast on Israeli national television, renewed interest in the legacy of Giora Godik surfaced. Videos on YouTube from his theatrical employees, detailing how he affected their lives and their respect for Godik, have helped to rehabilitate a legacy that ended in disaster.[36] Musicals from abroad and the occasional Israeli original have continued to be produced, but the heyday of the commercial Broadway production remains synonymous with the 1960s, Giora Godik, and the Alhambra.

Notes

1. Pesach Burstein, Lillian Lux Burstein, and Gershon Freidlin, *What a Life!: The Autobiography of Pesach'ke Burstein, Yiddish Matinee Idol* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 118.
2. A fact he was proud enough to boast of in the German-language *West Side Story* program.
3. Roughly equivalent to a Major in the US Army.
4. Giora Godik, *ha-Plaṭers = The Platters : [program]* (Tel Aviv: Giora Godiḳ, 1958). While the Platters songs are detailed in the program along with introductory pages about the group and their producer, Damari's songs are not listed. The overall evening was no doubt a fascinating combination of sound.
5. Ari Davidovich, *Waiting for Godik* (Hypermedia Films, 2007).
6. Noya Kohavi, 'Why Was 1965 Beatles Concert in Israel Really Canceled?', *Haaretz*, 25 August 2008, http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/2.209/why-was-1965-beatles-concert-in-israel-really-canceled-1.252637. Paul McCartney eventually played in Israel as part of the country's sixtieth anniversary celebrations in 2008.
7. 'Marlene Dietrich Will Come Next Week', *Ma'ariv*, 4 June 1960.
8. Davidovich, *Waiting for Godik*. Her expenses were more than the fee would have been.
9. Marlene Dietrich, *Marlene Dietrich's ABC*, rev. edn. (New York: Ungar, 1984). See entries on Germany (65) and Israel (73).
10. Meyer Wolfe Weisgal, *Meyer Weisgal … So Far: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1971), 318. See also *Burt Bacharach on Marlene Dietrich, Shuni Amphi Israel*, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ny7JTJT_MRw, accessed 14 September 2005.
11. 'World Champions of Basketball Coming to Israel', *Heruth*, 5 July 1960.
12. *Ari Davidovich and Muli Shapira on Giora Godik*, Nice Time With Muli Shapira (Galai Tzahal Radio, 2012), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWJhVrInAsY&feature=youtube_gdata_player, accessed 14 September 2015.
13. Steiler Zahn, 'Theater', *Der Spiegel*, 21 June 1961, http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-43364760.html, accessed 23 December 2015.
14. A. Ben-Meir, 'The Play "West Side Story"', *Cherut*, 24 February 1961.
15. Richard King, I. Rodgers et al., *ha-Melekh ya-ani : [program]* (Tel Aviv: Giyora Godiḳ, 1966).
16. Mendel Kohansky, *The Hebrew Theatre, Its First Fifty Years* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1969), 239.
17. Dan Almagor, 'The Rain in Spain', http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfa-archive/1998/pages/the%20rain%20in%20spain.aspx, accessed 30 September 2015.
18. Davidovich, *Waiting for Godik*.

19. Nielsen Business Media Inc, '"I Like Mike" Musical Track To Be Issued by CBS Israel', 2 March 1968.
20. Davidovich, *Waiting for Godik*.
21. For full details on *Fiddler on the Roof* in Israel see Alisa Solomon, *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof* (New York: Macmillan, 2013).
22. Richard King, I. Rodgers et al., *ha-Melekh ṿa-ani : [program]*. My own mother and grandmother needed extensive convincing that the musical was not originally written in Hebrew.
23. Kohansky, *The Hebrew Theatre*, 243.
24. Chava Novak, 'Fiddler on the Roof—Abroad', *Davar*, 13 September 1965.
25. Kohansky, *The Hebrew Theatre*, 248.
26. Richard Rodgers et al., *The King and I*, *ha-Melekh ṿa-ani : [program]* (Tel Aviv: Giyora Godiḳ, 1966).
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. There was interest among other theatrical companies at the same time to produce a non-translated Hebrew language musical, primarily with state-sponsored Cameri Theatre's *Shlomo Hamelekh v'Shalmai Hasandlar/King Solomon and Shalmai the Cobbler* (1964).
30. For more on the connection between musicals of the period and popular song see Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
31. Neil Simon et al., *Barefoot in the Park*, *Yeḥefim ba-parḳ : [program]* (Tel Aviv: Giyora Godiḳ, 1965).
32. Davidovich, *Waiting for Godik*.
33. Rodgers et al., *ha-Melekh ṿa-ani*.
34. Ibid.
35. Kohansky, *The Hebrew Theatre*, 243; Don Rubin, ed., *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, Volume 1 (London: Routledge 1994), 499. See, for an example of recent work on Israel, Linda Ben-Zvi, ed., *Theater in Israel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).
36. Eduard Edel, *Giora Godik*, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDm4MGT3Pq8, accessed 14 September 2015.

CHAPTER 28

The West End (and Broadway) Head East: Tōhō International and Gekidan Shiki

Kevin J. Wetmore Jr.

Japanese musicals are a hybrid, imported form of performance that share some characteristics with their Western inspirations and counterparts, but also significant differences. The organizations which produce stage musicals, entertainment conglomerate Tōhō and Gekidan Shiki, the latter claiming to be the world's largest producer of musicals, have three aspects in common. First, Japanese musicals are produced by resident companies of performers, in which actors have been trained by the company and all productions are cast from within the permanent group. It is rare for the individual actor to be hired to perform in a production who is not already a member of the company. Instead, corporate-owned performance companies have a production system already in place. Second, there has been a tension between imported musicals and national identity from the origins of Japanese musicals to the present, and this tension is felt by artists, critics, and audience, as will be described below. Third, related to the first, musicals grew out of a larger corporate culture and remain firmly connected to the larger corporate culture of Japan: Japan produces musicals because the railway corporations of the early twentieth century owned both cinema and live performance entertainment conglomerates. This culture continues to influence the production of Japanese musicals, as Tōhō is still owned and operated by the same corporation that began as a railway conglomerate.

Like all modern Japanese theatre, musicals are produced by a company, not independent producers. The performers are all under contract to the company

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and by extension the corporation. The company programmes its performance season months and sometimes years in advance. As a result, even popular shows do not extend their runs, as other productions are already planned for the space, actors, and technicians. Successful shows are revived later, frequently multiple times, allowing audiences to see them again and again, sometimes with years in between the performances. As Thomas Haven notes, 'There is little place in Japanese society for out-of-work actors and actresses trying to latch onto a part while waiting on tables or living on welfare.'[1] One is either a member of a company or not, there are no open auditions and it is rare to bring in a guest star, who might not be available for subsequent runs of a show. Even when Gekidan Shiki attempted to experiment with open auditions for *A Chorus Line* in 1979, all but one or two roles went to contracted Shiki players.[2] Similarly, and especially with Shiki, the actors are expected to promote and market the productions. The members of the acting company have approached corporations, banks, and hospitals to sell blocks of tickets in order to guarantee large audiences.[3] The company's efforts and identity take priority over the individual's, and although there are star actors, the company's identity is the primary selling point for all productions.

Since the introduction of foreign musicals in Japan, one of the key issues for the producing organizations and the artists has been the transculturation of musicals (and indeed, all Western drama) into a Japanese milieu. Both critics and artists perceived a tension between foreign forms and Japanese translations and adaptations. Aaron Gerow considers the challenge in terms of film musicals and his questions are also relevant to stage musicals: 'What is a musical and do Japanese examples fit the definition?' Or, how can Japan make musicals 'when the form, if not the concept' itself, seems 'intimately tied with the West'.[4] Gerow observes that 'many desire a "true Japanese musical"—a purity of Japaneseness and genre'.[5] Nagasawa Keiju's observations regarding film musicals are also true of their stage counterpart: the producers of musicals did not spend much time studying American musical structure, development, or history, and thus failed to understand how to transculturate the musical into Japan.[6] It would not be until the 1960s, after the war, that Japanese stage musicals achieved critical and popular success. Left-wing activist and composer Izumi Taku (1930–1992) wrote two musicals modelled after the American form in 1960 to be performed by Rōon (an abbreviation of Kinrōsha Ongaku Kyōkai, the Worker's Music Council, which sponsored concerts and other music events for its members), some songs from which are still popular today.[7] In the wake of Izumi's musicals, a debate again broke out among cultural critics about the significance of Broadway-style musicals to Japanese theatre. The major response to the debate was Kikuta Kazuo's development of Tōhō Myūjikaru as a viable Japanese musical theatre producer.

Tōhō Musicals (Tōhō Myūjikaru)

Japanese musicals literally developed and grew out of the expansion of Japan's railroad corporations. Tōhō is part of the corporate conglomerate Hankyu Company, an electrical railway corporation.[8] Kobayashi Ichizō (1873–1957), founder of Hankyu, was also the founder of the Takarazuka (see Nobuko Anan, Chap. 15 in this volume), which began staging musical plays in 1912. In 1932 Kobayashi founded the Tokyo Takarazuka Corporation, or Tōhō for short. He wanted to build theatres in all of Japan's major cities. As an entrepreneur, however, he also saw a number of opportunities to make money from the newly emerging entertainments of cinema and modern, Western-style theatre. So influential was he in theatre and cinema that many referred to him as 'the Japanese Ziegfield', according to Jennifer Robertson.[9]

In 1935, Kobayashi purchased P.C.L. and the J.O. Company, adding a motion picture division to Tōhō P.C.L. (Photo Chemical Laboratories), founded in 1929 by Yasuji Uemura to develop film, added a sound studio and began making films, introducing the cinematic musical comedy to Japanese film production:

> Most of P.C.L.'s early films were musical comedies. This served two functions: it demonstrated the company's technical superiority over its rivals and also because these early efforts were financed by record companies wanting to promote their most popular singers, a symbiotic tradition which continues at the studio (and later at all the majors) to this day.[10]

Simultaneously, the J.O. Company (named after founder Osawa Yoshio and Jenkins, a recording system) began producing films in Kyoto. Kobayashi combined the two into the Tōhō Motion Picture Company Ltd.[11]The parent company now controlled a good deal of film and live theatre throughout Japan.

Because Japanese musical theatre production has been so rooted in Japanese corporate culture, decisions are made not necessarily by the producers but by the heads of the larger corporate entity. Since its origins, Tōhō musicals have been part of a larger corporation. The nuts and bolts of production at Tōhō follow the larger model of the *keiretsu* (corporate group). Tōhō is part of the Hankyu Hanshin Toho Group, a *keiretsu* that still maintains control over a large number of railway corporations and other travel businesses, film and related media corporations, and even banks. Artists who work for Tōhō work exclusively for Tōhō, and the larger *keiretsu*'s business interests often overlap and allow for synergy. Actors, writers, directors, musicians, and others involved in the creation of live theatre are expected to be loyal to the larger corporation as well and are also expected to participate in the marketing of the show, the selling of tickets, and even going to other branches of the *keiretsu* to sell group tickets.

The American-style musical truly emerged and was established in Japan during the Occupation, from 1945 to 1952. Tōhō realized that the American

occupiers were hostile towards kabuki and other indigenous drama, and that these types of productions were both being censored and were not profitable, and so committed to producing modern drama and other entertainments that would meet with the approval of the American censors (and, in theory, thus allow for a profit). Producer and Imperial Garden Theatre president Hata Toyokichi (1892–1956) began staging small-scale musicals (mostly revues) featuring former Takarazuka star Koshiji Fubuki (1924–1980).[12] In 1955, Kikuta Kazuo (1908–1973), at the request of Kobayashi Ichizo (not a theatre producer but a railroad and cinema magnate), initiated the *Tōhō Myūjikaru* (Tōhō Musicals), a series of popular, original performances at the Takarazuka. Kobayashi sought to extend the entertainment division of his *keiretsu*. Kikuta primarily had been a screenwriter, playwright, and director before the war, but became the director of the board for Tōhō in 1956, the first major producer of Broadway musicals in Japan, and the man behind the first musical adaptation of *Gone with the Wind*.

Tōhō's cinema division began producing popular movie musicals in the 1950s. Hibari Misora (who was a freelance actress), with Chiemi Eri and Izumi Yukimura (who were contract players for Tōhō) performed in a series of musicals known as *Sannin Musume* (Three Young Girls), which were all box office hits.[13] As in the theatre, the same roster of performers, writers, and directors worked on the majority of the company's musicals, Kozo Saeki and Toshie Sugie becoming known as directors of movie musicals.[14] The films taught audiences the tropes and techniques of musical comedy.

But it was the release of the film adaptation of *West Side Story* (1961) in Japan that finally generated huge interest in musicals.[15] Tōhō rapidly seized on musicals in the 1960s, having both the capital and international connections to secure rights to perform foreign hits in Japan, in Japanese, with Japanese casts. In 1963 at the Tokyo Takarazuka, under Kikuta Kazuo, Tōhō produced *My Fair Lady*, Japan's first all-Japanese cast musical; its success was considered proof that Japanese audiences could accept an all-Japanese cast in a musical set in a foreign land.[16] In that same year, Tōhō broke ground on a new flagship theatre. Previously, plays had been presented at the Imperial Garden Theatre, founded in 1911 in the Marunouchi commercial district in Tokyo's Chiyoda City. In 1966, Tōhō finally opened its new venue, the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo's upscale Ginza district, which now serves as the central musical hub for the Tōhō musical empire.

Kazuto Ohira, better known for his work in film and as the manager of Tōhō's cinemas in Los Angeles and New York City, was instrumental in bringing *My Fair Lady* to Japan and was credited along with Kikuta with pioneering the production of American musicals in Japan. The system put in place now serves as a pipeline from Takarazuka to Tōhō, allowing actresses to train with the Takarazuka, then, upon their retirement from performing in all-female productions, transfer to Tōhō in order to perform in musicals, film, and television, all sponsored by the entertainment giant.

In 1966, Kikuta Kazuo secured permission from Stephen Mitchell (Margaret Mitchell's brother and executor) to develop a musical adaptation of *Gone with the Wind*, with a script by Kikuta and incidental music by composer Koseki Yūji. On 3 November 1966, *Scaretto* (Scarlett) premiered, running for 197 performances at the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo.[17] It was based on the first half of the story and began, like the novel, at Tara, the O'Hara family plantation, just before war was declared, and ended with the destruction of Atlanta. Kotoda Chieko argues that the final scene was not only the highlight of the production but something only Tōhō, with its cinema division, could have achieved:

> The most remarkable scene was the escape from Atlanta. Itō Kisaku, the art director, used a backscreen. The famous Tsuburaya Eiji, who directed *Gojira*, made a miniature of the set of the play at Tōhō Studios and filmed it while it burned. In front of the screen, which was placed at the rear of the stage, Rhett Butler, Scarlett, Melanie and Prissy rode across the stage in a wagon drawn by real horses.[18]

This special effect is an example of the *keiretsu*/corporate culture of Tōhō at work: the cinema studio produces an effect to be used by the live theatre division of the company.

The second half of *Gone with the Wind*, which covered the escape from Atlanta to the end of the novel and Rhett's final, haunting line, was performed in the summer of 1967. Kikuta then combined the two halves into a shorter single work called 'The Final Version'. Tōhō hired Harold Rome, Broadway composer and lyricist, to write the songs for this final version. His wife, author Florence Rome, went with him to Japan and wrote a book about the making of the musical, *The Scarlett Letters*.[19] Noted American musical theatre director Joe Layton was hired to direct this production.

After the show closed in Tokyo in 1970, an English-language version of the Kikuta and Rome musical opened at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in London, again directed by Joe Layton and with a book adapted by Horton Foote. It ran from May 1972 to April 1973. Kikuta died in April of 1973, and so Tōhō revived the Tokyo production in April and May of 1974. Both Tōhō and the Takarazuka have revived the show, since renamed *Kaze to tomo ni sarinu* (Gone with the Wind), many times. Tōhō made several attempts to present the musical in the United States, including in Los Angeles in 1973, in a version that toured to San Francisco but never opened a production on Broadway, its ultimate goal.[20] A 1976 revision of *Scarlett* toured to Dallas, San Francisco, Miami, and Kansas City, but once again failed to make it to Broadway.

By this point in its history, Tōhō had well established its dominance in the market. By 1975, musicals were so profitable for Tōhō that it closed its *Kabuki* division (leaving Shochiku as the only major corporation still producing *Kabuki* in Tokyo) in order to focus solely on musicals.[21] Rōen (an acronym for Kinrōsha Engeki Kyōkai, Workers' Theatre Association) had been slow to

add musicals to the list of events for its members, but in 1976 added *West Side Story*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Man of La Mancha*, which were among the highest ranked events by members.[22] Rōen's acceptance of Tōhō as a producer from whom it would purchase large numbers of tickets to multiple productions cemented Tōhō's status as a respectable producer of commercial theatre.

World renowned avant-garde director Suzuki Tadashi directed *Sweeney Todd* for Tōhō in 1981, just two years after its New York premiere. The libretto was translated by Kurahashi and Kai Marie. *Asahi Shimbun* theatre critic Senda Akihiko noted that Tokyo audiences were 'not impressed' by the play, although he saw connections between the play and the work of kabuki playwright Tsuruya Namboku (1755–1829), who wrote horrific plays about murder and ghosts.[23] In a subsequent revival, Senda argued that the production fared better as the title character was 'a man of the people' and 'very Japanese'.[24] The initial production, however, suggests that not every musical would be welcomed into Japan with open arms—to be successful transplants needed to resonate on some level with Japanese culture. That the show was revived despite a lukewarm reception also speaks to the Japanese musical theatre corporate culture: properties are mounted in regular rotation, with hits programmed for longer runs, and revived when space can be found in the extensive production calendar, but never extended. (Shiki, a theatre owner and producer, is an exception, running productions for years and touring them to its multiple venues, as discussed below.) Most Japanese musical theatre productions are karaoke musicals, performed with pre-recorded backing tracks rather than a live orchestra. Senda Akihiko took Tōhō to task for the 'low level of musicianship' in the *Man of La Mancha* orchestra, when live music was offered instead of a recording.[25]

Successful Tōhō shows are remounted regularly, even for decades after the original premiere. As a result, actors may find themselves starring multiple times over the course of a career in roles that they made famous, performing in new musicals in between remounts, all for the same corporation, planned out years in advance. Matsumoto Kōshirō's IX starred in the Japanese premiere of *Man of La Mancha*, for example, in 1969, a production reaching its 1,000th performance in a 2002 revival, with subsequent performances starring Kōshirō in 2005, 2008–2009, 2012, and 2015.[26] Kōshirō, as he is known, is a kabuki actor who has achieved cross-over success in Tōhō musicals, even playing his signature role of Don Quixote in English, on Broadway, for ten weeks.[27] Tōhō continues to regularly present Japanese-language productions of American and British musicals, reviving *Man of La Mancha* and *My Fair Lady*, as well as *The Sound of Music*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *A Chorus Line*, *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon*, and many others.

Tōhō also makes film versions of their original stage musicals (such as *Elisabeth*) as well as original film musicals not based on stage musicals.[28] Productions of *Jekyll and Hyde*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Jersey Boys*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Miss Saigon*, among others, were scheduled for 2016, with a revival of *Les Misérables* opening in 2017.

Tōhō is able to perform these musicals because of its relationships with other producing organizations, including Vereinigte Bühnen Wien, Cameron Mackintosh, and Stage Entertainment. Tōhō's rival, Shiki Gekidan, works with Disney and Andrew Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Group (see relevant chapters in this volume). These relationships are not, however, entirely exclusive, as Tōhō performs some of Webber's early works, such as *Jesus Christ Superstar*. We might read these relationships as an extended version of the *keiretsu*—companies which maintain exclusive relationships to the benefit and profitability of all. For Tōhō, like many musical theatre producers, it is very much show *business*.

Gekidan Shiki

Gekidan Shiki (literally 'Four Seasons Theatre Company', known popularly as 'Shiki'), headquartered in Yokohama, was founded in 1953 by Asari Keita (1933–) as a *Shingeki* company of ten members staging Western dramas in translation, mainly French plays by Jean Giradoux and Jean Anouilh, then expanding to include plays by Shakespeare, Molière, and Racine.[29] Asari also served as one of two managers of the Nissei Gekijō, a 1,300-seat theatre in the Hibiya district of Tokyo named after the Japanese Life Insurance Company, which owned the building that housed it.[30] The touring Broadway production of *West Side Story* performed at the Nissei Gekijō in 1964, and Asari realized musicals were the form his nascent company should embrace.

Within Japan, Shiki, like Tōhō, became a tremendously successful producing organization.[31] The original ten-member company has now grown into a producing organization of over a thousand employees producing over three thousand performances in nine theatre spaces, including five in Tokyo and large theatres in Nayoga, Osaka, Kyoto, and Fukuoka. Their shows are seen by millions each year, earning billions of yen for the company. Like Tōhō, Shiki follows a corporate model of musical production. Musicals are cast using company members trained in the company training programme; they then tour, performing for set dates at company-owned venues. New musicals, especially popular ones, are then added to the regular repertory, revived every few years, frequently with the same casts.

In 1964, Shiki's first original musical, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, premiered and proved a hit. By 1969 Shiki had left behind European dramas in order to focus on musicals. Asari announced that the company's goal was to train actors to perform musicals at the same standard as New York and London.[32] The training programme went hand-in-hand with the company's production programme, aimed at educating performers and audiences to accept Japanese musicals (both imported and original) as the equal of Broadway and the West End. Part of this process was both presenting popular Western musicals soon after their original premieres in the United States and London while also attempting innovative interpretations.

In 1973, Shiki premiered the kabuki *Jesus Christ Superstar* in which the Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice musical was presented using techniques from the kabuki. While audiences found it unusual and thought-provoking, they preferred more straightforward presentations of American and British musicals than ones that had been 'Japanified'. The kabuki *Superstar* toured to London as part of a Japan Festival in 1991, the first time the production was seen outside of Japan. In 1983, ten years after *Superstar* premiered, the Japanese premiere of *Cats* (just two years after its London opening) was a huge hit for Shiki. It ran for a year in a new theatre in the Shinjuku area of Tokyo, then toured to Osaka for a year, Nagoya for a year, followed by seven months in Fukuoka and eleven months in Sapporo.[33] Unlike Tōhō, Shiki ran shows so long as they remained popular. A rapid string of hits followed: *Phantom of the Opera* in 1988, *Beauty and the Beast* in 1995, *The Lion King* in 1998, and *Mamma Mia!* in 2002, all of which had extended runs and toured Shiki's theatres throughout Japan.

As a result, Shiki is often charged (like Broadway and the West End) with the over-commercialization of theatre.[34] *Asahi Shimbun* theatre critic Senda Akihiko argued in the 1980s (speaking of Tōhō and Shiki) that musical theatre is a 'conservative world' in Japanese culture, and that audiences prefer American-style performance and presentation over innovation and experiment.[35] Senda stated that Tōhō and Shiki were much like McDonald's—offering familiar foreign products that audiences go to knowing they will get exactly what they expect and will not be challenged aesthetically or politically. This situation appears to be changing, especially with the advent of other musical-producing companies in Japan.

Shiki has also developed and produced original Japanese musicals: *Yume Kara sameta yume* (A Dream within a Dream, 1987) was based on a popular novel by Akagawa Jirō; *Yuta no fushigi na nakama tachi* (Yuta and Enchanting Friends, 1989), also based on a novel by Miura Tetsuo; and the most popular, *Ri Kōran* (1991) written by composer Miki Takashi and directed by Asari Keita, based on the life of Yamaguchi Yoshiko, an actress during the Sino-Japanese War.[36]

Ri Kōran, along with *Ikoku no Oka* (An Exotic Hill, 2001), which concerns prisoners of war in Siberia, and *Southern Cross* (2004), which narrates a story of Japanese soldiers falsely accused of war crimes, together form the 'Showa Trilogy'.[37] Shiki's original musicals tend to take Japanese history as their subject matter. These musicals tend not to play outside Asia, although the Showa Trilogy has successfully toured to China and Korea.

Other Producing Organizations

Other, smaller producing organizations have begun to appear in Japan since the late 1960s. In 1969 Higashi Yutaka (1945–2000) founded the Tokyo Kid Brothers in order to produce his own original musicals, such as *The Golden Bat* (1969, which toured to La Mama in New York City in 1970) and *The*

Moon is East, The Sun is West (1972).[38] Shin Ongaku-za (New Music Theatre, founded 1988) creates new musicals, often based on literary originals, including several children's classics such as *Hoshi no ōjisama* (The Little Prince, 1993, based on the book by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry). Gekidan Furusato Caravan (Theatre Company Hometown Caravan, founded 1983) stages original musicals about Japanese life written by artistic director Ishizuka Katsuhiko. Musical-za (Musical Theatre) was created by librettist Hamanaka Toru and composer Yamaguchi Hideya to produce original musicals about contemporary topics. Other groups, such as Gekidan Shinkansen (Bullet Train Theatre Group) and Caramel Box, blend pop music and multi-media live performance influenced by manga and anime in musicals aimed at the millennial generation.

Most notably, Amon Miyamoto (1958–) is the founding artistic director of the Kanagawa Art Theatre. He is often named as the foremost director of musicals in Japan and by assuming the artistic directorship of KAT in 2011, has also gained recognition as a producer. He first achieved international notice with his production of *I Got Merman* (1987), a bio-musical about Ethel Merman in which three actresses play the title character and which he also wrote and directed. Miyamoto has become an internationally acclaimed director of musicals and was the first Japanese to direct on Broadway, with the Tony-nominated *Pacific Overtures*, performed in 2004 in both Japanese and English, and in the West End (*The Fantasticks*, 2010). He has also directed Japanese productions of *Sweeney Todd* and *A Little Night Music*, making him one of the foremost Japanese interpreters of Sondheim's work.[39]

These companies appear to be able to do what Tōhō and Shiki cannot, because they do not follow the larger *keiretsu*, or corporate, model of making theatre. Tōhō and Shiki, as large corporations, must maintain a certain profit level in order to sustain the musical theatre production divisions of their organizations, and as such are both risk-averse and tend to favour productions that have built-in audiences. While the actors in the companies are expected to sell group tickets to various social organizations, schools, and other corporations, these marketing and sales practices are also employed by the smaller producing organizations, which, without Tōhō and Shiki's overheads, can afford to take more risks in terms of material and in terms of experimental staging. These newer organizations, however, are only able to take risks and experiment because Tōhō and Shiki paved the way to make musicals a staple of Japanese popular culture.

From its introduction in the early 1960s to Tōhō and Gekidan Shiki's contemporary blockbusters, the stage musical in Japan has grown and developed into a cultural powerhouse. More people see Shiki's productions each year than see kabuki. While the Japanese musical production system differs significantly from its Western counterparts, inasmuch as the means of production is rooted in a permanent corporate structure, the result demonstrates that Shiki has clearly met its goal of producing musicals perceived by Japanese audiences as on a par with Broadway or West End standards, both in terms of quality and quantity of productions. Tōhō, particularly thanks to the training ground

provided by the Takarazuka, also presents high quality, popular musical theatre performances. While the critical debates about the 'Japaneseness' of musical theatre have vanished, and audiences have clearly accepted the Japanese musical (both Japanese-language productions of foreign musicals and original, domestic musicals), it is also clear that the corporate structure that first generated the Japanese industry continues to sustain the musical in the twenty-first century.[40]

Notes

1. Thomas R. H. Havens, *Artist and Patron in Postwar Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 179.
2. Ibid., 178.
3. Ibid., 144.
4. Aaron Gerow, 'Japan', in *The International Film Musical*, ed. Corey K. Creekmur and Linda Y. Mokdad (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 158.
5. Ibid.
6. Nagasawa Keiku, '1964—nen no myūjikarufibā' (1964—The Year of Musical Fever) in *Utaebatengoku: Nippon kayōeigaderakkusu—Chi no maki*, ed. Sasaki Atsushi and Tanji Fumihiko (Tokyo: Media Factory, 1999), 31; cited in Gerow, 'Japan', 157.
7. Brian Powell, *Japan's Modern Theatre: A Century of Continuity and Change* (London: Japan Library, 2002), 168; Wajima Yūsuke, 'The Birth of Euka', in *Made in Japan: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Mitsui Tōru (London: Routledge, 2014), 73.
8. Included in Hankyu's group of companies is Umeda Arts, another producer of musicals, which gave the 2015 world premiere of *The Prince of Broadway*, the Japanese musical about Harold Prince. See Chaps. 1 and 51 in this volume.
9. Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 217.
10. Stuart Galbraith IV, *The Toho Studios Story: A History and Complete Filmography* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), ix.
11. Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 81–3.
12. Paul Griffith, Ronald Cavaye, and Akihiko Senda, *A Guide to the Japanese Stage: From Traditional to Cutting Edge* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2004), 247.
13. Galbraith, *The Toho Studios Story*, xi.
14. Ibid., xi.
15. Powell, *Japan's Modern Theatre*, 168.
16. Havens, *Artist and Patron in Postwar Japan*, 173.
17. William Pratt, *Scarlett Fever* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 263.

18. Kotodo Chieko, 'Meisaku "Kaze to tomi ni sarinu" Jōenshi' (The Literary Masterpiece *Gone with the Wind*: A Stage History), *Kaze to tomo ni sarinu*, National Theatre programme, May 2003, 65–7. Translation mine.
19. While Rome's book evinces the casual racism of the time, it is also the most complete portrait of Kikuta Kazuo in English and contains a detailed picture of the process behind creating musicals in Japan, as well as useful information about Tōhō's stable of musical performers at the time. See Florence Rome, *The Scarlet Letters* (New York: Random House, 1971).
20. Pratt, *Scarlett Fever*, 264. For a much more detailed history of the production, see Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., 'From *Scaretto* to *Kaze to tomo ni sarinu*: Musical Adaptations of *Gone with the Wind* in Japan', in *Modern Japanese Theatre and Performance*, ed. David Jortner, Keiko McDonald, and Kevin J. Wetmore (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2006), 278–93.
21. By the early 1980s, Tōhō and Shochiku were responsible for over 50 per cent of all live performances in Japan (Havens, *Artist and Patron in Postwar Japan*, 169).
22. Havens, *Artist and Patron in Postwar Japan*, 155.
23. Senda Akihiko, *The Voyage of Contemporary Japanese Theatre*, trans. J. Thomas Rimer (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 100.
24. Ibid., 171.
25. Ibid., 202.
26. Griffith, Cavaye, and Senda, *A Guide to the Japanese Stage*, 248.
27. An example that might be better known to Western audiences is Katsuta Shigekatsu, better known in the United States as 'Chairman Kaga' from *Iron Chef*. Before playing the millionaire who built 'Kitchen Studium', Katsuta was one of Japan's biggest musical stars, beginning his career with Gekidan Shiki playing Jesus in *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) and Tony in *West Side Story* (1974). He left Shiki in 1980, but returned in 1987 to play Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* and the eponymous *Jekyll and Hyde*. He occasionally plays these roles in revivals, most recently in 2011. See his official website: http://www.office-k3.com/kaga/.
28. For more on Tōhō's film musicals, see Galbraith, *The Toho Studios Story* and Gerow, 'Japan', 157–70.
29. Powell, *Japan's Modern Theatre*, 191.
30. It did not hurt that Asari was the son of a Nissei top executive at the time (Havens, *Artist and Patron in Postwar Japan*, 52).
31. For more on current productions, see each company's website. Shiki has an English-language site: http://www.shiki.jp/en/; but Tōhō only offers information on current productions in Japanese: https://www.toho.co.jp/stage/.
32. Powell, *Japan's Modern Theatre*, 192.

33. Griffith, Cavaye, and Senda, *A Guide to the Japanese Stage*, 248. For a full history of the relationship between Shiki and Andrew Lloyd Webber see Abe Yasushi, *Gekidan shiki musicals: asari keita to roido webā* (Shiki Company Musicals: Asari Keita and Lloyd Webber) (Tokyo: Hinodeshuppan, 1996).
34. Powell, *Japan's Modern Theatre*, 192.
35. Senda, *The Voyage of Contemporary Japanese Theatre*, 172. Thomas R. H. Havens's chapter on this period is entitled 'Playing Safe' (*Artist and Patron in Postwar Japan*, 144). It would seem the critical consensus is that musical producers and their middle-class audiences tend to be more conservative.
36. Griffith, Cavaye, and Senda, *A Guide to the Japanese Stage*, 249.
37. Mel Atkey, *A Million Miles from Broadway: Musical Theatre beyond New York and London* (Delta, BC: Friendly Song Books, 2012), 203.
38. Ibid. See also Senda, *The Voyage of Contemporary Japanese Theatre*, 19; Barbara Thornbury, *America's Japan and Japan's Performing Arts: Cultural Mobility and Exchange in New York, 1952–2011* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 110–11; and Donald Richie, *A Lateral View: Essays on Culture and Style in Contemporary Japan* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1992), 141–2.
39. Atkey, *A Million Miles from Broadway*, 204–5.
40. See Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., 'Interlude: Post-War Musicals and Commercial Theatre', in *A History of Japanese Theatre*, ed. Jonah Salz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 285–88.

Act 3. Since the 1970s

As the Broadway industry struggled with economic changes in the 1970s that contributed both to the urban crisis in New York City and to the closing down of the road for once-lucrative touring productions, musical theatre producers needed to find new models of producing as well as new sources of funding. Off-Broadway and regional theatres such as the Public and the La Jolla Playhouse began replacing the traditional out-of-town tryout with workshops and regional development. Corporations such as Disney have become active as musical theatre producers, seeking to synergize a range of products for mass distribution.

Simultaneously, globalization contributed an expanded marketplace for musical theatre, and as chapters discussing the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Russia, the Philippines, and South Korea illustrate, Broadway is now one of many musical theatre industries. The mega-musicals produced by Cameron Mackintosh and Andrew Lloyd Webber not only supply these industries but have supported the development of producing networks that now see producers collaborating across Europe and between Europe and Asia.

A major tool employed by producers everywhere since the 1970s has been musical theatre branding, inspired by the marketing of blockbuster films such as *Star Wars* and refined by Cameron Mackintosh through iconic logo design. A Stage Entertainment or Disney-branded musical conveys a clear message to its consumers, with the producer's brand often usurping any star casting or creative team members. While the musical theatre market and the number of investors required to fund new musical theatre productions have both expanded, producers are nevertheless increasingly concerned with engaging their audiences and providing a full-service experience. Social media and audience demographic research are important and essential tools for producers to promote their musicals to all segments of their potential audience.

CHAPTER 29

The Shubert Organization: One Singular Sensation, Now and Forever

Mark E. Swartz

The Shubert Organization, Inc., is the current incarnation of the theatre business that the three Shubert brothers—Lee (Levi), Sam, and J.J. (Jacob J.)—first established in Syracuse, New York, at the end of the 1890s. It is responsible for helping usher in the era of the mega-musical during the 1980s, for spearheading the clean-up and revitalization of the Times Square Theatre District, and for introducing computerization into the process of buying and selling tickets to Broadway shows. After Lee's death in 1953, and J.J.'s a decade later, Lawrence Shubert Lawrence, Jr. (1916–1992), grand-nephew of the brothers, was appointed by the Shubert board to head the company. In June of 1972, however, the board replaced him with a triumvirate of board members: Gerald Schoenfeld (1924–2008), Bernard B. Jacobs (1916–1996), and Irving Goldman (1910–1983).

Gerald Schoenfeld began his association with the Shuberts in 1949 when, fresh out of New York University law school, he took a job with Shubert's lawyers Klein and Weir. In 1950 the US government brought an anti-trust case against the company charging that it violated the Sherman Anti-Trust Act by conspiring to restrain trade in its producing, booking, and presenting of legitimate theatrical attractions. Schoenfeld was assigned to do the leg-work in the case, and in so doing received a thorough education not only in Shubert history but also in the business of the theatre. In 1957 Schoenfeld became head counsel for the tempestuous J.J. He brought in his friend, Columbia University Law School graduate Bernard B. Jacobs, to assist him. Jacobs adapted quickly,

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Shubert Archive, New York, NY, USA

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and before long, he and Schoenfeld were operating on an equal footing. They were appointed to The Shubert Foundation Board in 1971.

Irving Goldman, the third member of the triumvirate, began as an errand boy for a paint company before establishing his own paint supply business in 1938. The Shuberts were among his biggest clients, and it was through a friendship with Lawrence Shubert Lawrence, Jr., that he became a Foundation board member.

When Schoenfeld, Jacobs, and Goldman assumed control of Shubert operations, years of company mismanagement, as well as the effect of the economic recession that was ravaging New York City in general and the Times Square Theatre District in particular, had clearly taken their toll on the business. The company had ended fiscal year 1971–1972 with a $500,000 loss. Meanwhile, in December 1972, Lawrence Shubert Lawrence, Jr. filed a lawsuit declaring that the 'triumvirate' was guilty of 'unlawful self-aggrandizement' and requesting that his successors be removed from office, that new board elections be held, and that a full financial accounting of all involved parties be undertaken. The court ruled against Lawrence the following spring. In 1975, after a nearly year-long investigation, Goldman resigned when he was indicted on charges of bribery, grand larceny, conspiracy, and perjury, arising primarily out of his role as Mayor Abraham Beame's Cultural Affairs Commissioner.

Besieged, it seemed, on all quarters, Schoenfeld and Jacobs realized that things needed to change quickly. As Jacobs would tell the *New York Times* in December 1972: 'We are fighting for more than just the survival of the Shubert theatres. We are fighting for the survival of the American legitimate theatre. If the Shubert business does not survive, there won't be any American theatre.'[1] Schoenfeld and Jacobs created a blueprint that would come to define the company into the twenty-first century.

First, they determined that they needed to gain better control and oversight of all business operations. They consolidated twenty-three Shubert-operated companies under one umbrella to be known as The Shubert Organization, Inc. Next, they began to address ways to attract a steady stream of product to fill their venues. They wanted to get Shubert back into the producing game, first by investing in more productions and then gradually getting to a place where they would once again put together shows from the ground up, just as Sam, Lee, and J.J. had done in their prime. They also wished to reverse Shubert's reputation in much of the theatre industry that the company was unsympathetic to the needs of producers, authors, composers, etc., and could be difficult to do business with. This would require more flexibility on their part and a willingness to collaborate more with their peers. They assumed pivotal roles in the League of American Theatres and Producers (now The Broadway League) and advocated industry-wide initiatives such as the TKTS discount ticket booth in Duffy Square.

Schoenfeld and Jacobs also took a serious look at improving the audience's experience of attending the theatre. Closest to home was the fact that many

of Shubert's playhouses had been neglected and were looking shabby. They remedied this with systematic renovation of the theatres.

Harder to resolve, but no less important, was the squalid state of Times Square and the theatre district in the 1970s. Crime was rampant, the sex industry thrived, and trash overflowed into the streets and sidewalks. Schoenfeld embarked on a personal campaign to rehabilitate what he called 'the urban environment' by rallying community residents and leaders, the police force, the press, local politicians, and finally Mayor Beame to address ways to improve safety, sanitation, and, crucially, public perception.

Finally, something needed to be done to facilitate the purchase of tickets. Shubert box offices began accepting credit cards, and it became possible to reserve tickets by telephone. Later, Shubert would become a crucial player in the development of computerized ticketing by creating Telecharge, a full-service ticketing company that now operates worldwide.

Shubert had not produced a show since the 1961 flop *Julia, Jake and Uncle Joe* when Stuart Ostrow, producer of an upcoming new musical called *Pippin* that had been scheduled to run at Shubert's Imperial Theatre beginning in the autumn of 1972, informed them that he was $50,000 short of capital needed to open the show. He asked them to consider investing. Hesitant not only because $50,000 was a lot of money for the shaky company, but because it was the first time that the two men would make an investment in a production, they nevertheless decided to take the plunge. But to minimize their risk, they sold $40,000 off to other investors. *Pippin* turned out to be a huge hit that ran for four and a half years. The production's success boosted their confidence and was to be the first in a long line of investment in musicals that would include *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Lorelei* (1974), *The Magic Show* (1974), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Godspell* (1976), *Ain't Misbehavin'* (1978), *Dancin'* (1978), *The Act* (1978), *The Prince of Grand Street* (1978), *Zoot Suit* (1979), *A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine* (1980), *Dreamgirls* (1981), *Cats* (1982), *Little Shop of Horrors* (1982), *The Tap Dance Kid* (1983), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Harrigan 'n Hart* (1985), *Song and Dance* (1985), *Big Deal* (1986), *Roza* (1987), *Chess* (1988), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1988), *City of Angels* (1989), *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* (1989), *Once on This Island* (1990), *Miss Saigon* (1991), *Falsettos* (1992), *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1993), *Passion* (1994), and *Sunset Boulevard* (1994).

In some cases Shubert's involvement was purely financial, in others it took on producing responsibilities. As Schoenfeld explained, 'When we function as producers, we are executive producers. We insist on financial control, and in most cases we do not seek investors.'[2] Usually, however, Shubert would take on partners that were other big producers or corporate entities. This became the norm especially as production costs of musicals rose dramatically throughout the 1980s. Among Shubert's biggest partners at the time were Capital Cities/ABC, Inc., and Suntory International.

When it comes to determining the type of show Shubert wanted to bring to the stage, Schoenfeld remarked, 'When we produce a show, we do it because we

like the material … We look at who the creative people are, and who the other producers are. We subordinate our reactions on a creative level if a Michael Bennett, or Hal Prince or Bob Fosse is involved.'[3] With time, Schoenfeld and Jacobs became adept at selecting the right shows to produce, invest in, or book. A typical Schoenfeld and Jacobs show would be one that had somewhat of a proven track record by dint of either the artistic personnel involved (director, performer, designers, producer) or a previous successful run in London or off Broadway. They also sought out quality productions and rarely booked shows just for the sake of filling their venues.

In his posthumously published memoir, *Mr. Broadway: The Inside Story of the Shuberts, the Shows, and the Stars*, Schoenfeld explained further:

> We invest in a show because we think it may be a hit, of course, but also because we may have a theatre we want to fill. By investing, we're encouraging the producers to bring the show to us. Or even if we don't think we have a hit show on our hands, we might invest because we need to fill a theatre temporarily as we wait for a show we really want to arrive. It's never wise to leave a house dark …
>
> For musicals we read the script, listen to the score, and attend a showcase, workshop, or backers' audition in which the cast performs. We seldom commission the writing of a musical. The author's agent generally solicits us to produce a musical.
>
> Selecting shows we wish to book is not a scientific process. We evaluate the producer, script, general manager, cast, and press agent and assure ourselves that the necessary financing is in place to produce it. We follow a show through the rehearsal process, out-of-town engagements, if any, and previews in New York, often conferring with the producer and director. We evaluate the creative team's skills and the track record of the producer, the director, and the designers. Each show we book is a multimillion-dollar investment. If it's a hit, we might earn that amount. If it's a flop, we need to book another show as soon as possible.[4]

Acting as producer as opposed to investor, of course, affords more influence in the final form and content of a given production. Yet Schoenfeld and Jacobs were mindful, especially in their early years, that their real expertise was in legal and diplomatic matters, not in artistic creation. This is apparent in Schoenfeld's assertion that:

> We can't exercise artistic control over a production. No producer can. First, a script can't be changed without the author's consent. That doesn't mean that you can't try to cajole, inveigle or persuade, but an author doesn't have to listen. Second, the director is going to control what's going on. You can fire the director, but then you have to make a settlement with him. You try to avoid that by going with real generals in the first place: Hal Prince, Mike Nichols, people like that. Obviously, with them, you're not going to do more than make suggestions. To think that you're going to exercise artistic control is silly. I've had arguments—no question about it. Sometimes I've talked my head off. But one thing about this business is that many people can tell you what's wrong with a show, but not everyone can fix it.[5]

By 1976, Shubert was back on its feet and on its way to a very prosperous future. In terms of quantity, a greater amount of Shubert show production/investment would be in straight plays. This was mainly because the financial outlay for these was significantly less than that required for musical productions, and also because more than half of Shubert's playhouses were generally considered better suited for straight plays than for larger musicals. Nonetheless, Schoenfeld and Jacobs recognized that 'Broadway audiences want musicals most of all.'[6]

Probably the show most crucial to Shubert's financial recovery and one of its most important streams of income during Schoenfeld and Jacob's first decade at the head of the company was *A Chorus Line* (1975). Originally produced by Joseph Papp off Broadway at the Public Theater, Schoenfeld and Jacobs booked it into their flagship Shubert Theatre for a Broadway run. Though not an investor in the show, Shubert benefited greatly from its overwhelming critical and box-office success. It ran for nearly fifteen years, and for an extended period it sold out. The musical's touring productions also played Shubert Theatres in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles. In addition, the 'buzz' it created and its sold-out status had a spillover effect throughout Broadway. More and more people were coming back to the theatre. As Bernard Jacobs noted in 1979, 'If there had been no *Chorus Line*, the whole picture would have been different.'[7]

No less important was the friendship that developed between Jacobs and the show's director/choreographer Michael Bennett. With a keen eye for recognizing promising talent and an ability to nurture creativity, Jacobs would become Bennett's mentor and father-figure. Their relationship would lead to the 1981 Shubert-produced hit, *Dreamgirls*.

The idea for *Dreamgirls* originated with author Tom Eyen and composer Henry Krieger in the late 1970s. Given its first workshop at the Public Theater, it was conceived as a backstage musical that focused on three childhood friends who find great success performing together. In 1980 Eyen pitched the show to Bennett who decided to mount another workshop. The project went through two additional workshops before Shubert was invited to see it along with a select group of backers and theatre insiders. Schoenfeld recalled: 'He [Bennett] put actors on chairs on the stage of the Shubert Theatre and performed the show with just the accompaniment of a piano. It was thrilling, and we immediately agreed to produce it.'[8] Ultimately they partnered with Bennett, Bob Avian, and Geffen Records on the $3.5 million production which ran for 1,521 performances on Broadway and won six Tony Awards.

Shubert would work with Bennett one more time, but the collaboration would not end happily. The pop opera *Chess*, composed by ABBA alumni Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson along with lyricist Tim Rice, was successfully released as a concept record album in 1984. Shubert acquired the stage rights to the work which centred around a world-championship chess match during the Cold War. Bernard Jacobs wanted Michael Bennett to direct the world premiere in London and then transfer it to Broadway. The director completed the

design phase and fully cast the show before he was forced to drop the project due to illness in early 1986. Schoenfeld and Jacobs decided to bring in Trevor Nunn with whom they had previously worked, but his concept of the musical differed from Bennett's. Jacobs noted that:

> Trevor saw *Chess* as being about the most important issue of our time, the relationship between East and West. Michael, no matter what it was about, was interested in making a musical of the work. Michael cast the show with the best dancers in London, which put Trevor at an enormous disadvantage, as they were precisely the sort of people that under normal circumstances Trevor would not have employed. You had the clash of two extremes: a person who believes that theatre is about a story, a book, content, and a person who believes that you balance the content with scenic effects, design, and most important of all, choreography. Michael would have told the story through choreography.[9]

Chess opened in London to mixed reviews, but it ran for nearly three years, and its score remains highly regarded. The creators and producers decided to revamp the show before exporting it to Broadway, and hired playwright Richard Nelson to work on the book. When the revised show finally premiered at the Imperial Theatre on 28 April 1988, it was poorly received. A series of behind-the-scenes setbacks along with some problems involving Nunn seemed to have doomed the show before it even opened. It closed on 25 June 1988, at a total loss of $6.1 million. Schoenfeld, however, never lost faith in *Chess* and believed that some day with the right revisions to its book, the show would find the success it deserved.

Another musical that originated in London, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* (1981), would become the most successful show presented during Schoenfeld and Jacobs's years at Shubert's helm. It was originally produced by Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh, who had first met Schoenfeld and Jacobs when he was still a fledgling producer in 1976. Much as in the case of Michael Bennett, Jacobs was impressed with the young producer's abilities, and a bond formed between the two. When Lloyd Webber tapped Mackintosh to co-produce *Cats* in London, it was only natural that the latter would consider Shubert as a possible partner for an American transfer.

It was not immediately apparent that *Cats* would succeed. Sung through, with no real plot, it consisted of T. S. Eliot's book of poems, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939) set to Andrew Lloyd Webber's music. Lloyd Webber had already had significant success in both the U.K. and the United States with *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970, London; 1971, Broadway) and *Evita* (1978, London; 1979 Broadway), but this would be his first score written without his previous collaborator, lyricist Tim Rice. It is generally considered to be the first of the British mega-musicals that would dominate both Broadway and the West End during the 1980s and early 1990s (i.e. *Les Misérables* [1985, London; 1987, Broadway], *The Phantom of the Opera* [1986, London; 1988, Broadway], and *Miss Saigon* [1989, London; 1991, Broadway]). Staged 'envi-

ronmentally' in a theatre transformed into a junkyard sized to a cat's perspective, the show featured lavishly costumed performers who danced and leapt across the stage and into the audience. Theatre-goers were captivated.

At Mackintosh's request, Schoenfeld and Jacobs saw the show in previews in London. While other producers evidently felt that a musical about singing cats was not a good prospect for the United States, Schoenfeld and Jacobs saw the potential. Agreeing to take on the role of co-producers along with Lloyd Webber, Mackintosh, and David Geffen, Schoenfeld and Jacobs booked the show into their Winter Garden Theatre for September 1982. The original US capitalization was $3.9 million, but it ultimately cost $5.2 million.[10] No matter, though. *Cats* would become a juggernaut. By the time it closed in September 2000, it had played 7,485 performances and had become the longest running Broadway musical to date. More than ten million people saw it on Broadway alone, and millions more saw one of its many touring companies. It won seven Tony Awards, including one for Best Musical, as well as a Grammy Award for Best Show Album. The Broadway run had gross ticket revenues in excess of $400 million. And the show's four producers were not the only ones who benefited. A 1997 study by Audience Research and Analysis reported that the Broadway company of *Cats* contributed more than $3.12 billion to New York City's economy and more than $115 million in state and local taxes.[11]

In 1983, anxious to work with Stephen Sondheim, whom they considered a genius, Schoenfeld and Jacobs attended a workshop of the composer's *Sunday in the Park with George*. The musical was inspired by the life of artist Georges Seurat and his 1884 masterpiece *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. What they saw was unfinished—only the first act as Sondheim and his collaborator, librettist, and director James Lapine, were struggling with the second act—but they 'were knocked out anyway and agreed to produce it.'[12] Nonetheless, Shubert and its producing partner Emanuel Azenberg decided to book the show into the Booth Theatre, the Shubert Organization's smallest venue and an unusual choice for a musical with an eighteen-member cast. Schoenfeld remembered that he and Jacobs 'were holding their breath' during the rehearsal period, and that there was indeed negative word-of-mouth during previews in April 1984. Sondheim and Lapine worked feverishly up until the actual opening on 2 May at which point Schoenfeld felt that 'we had one of the greatest first acts of a musical ever written, plus a brand-new second act with beautiful new songs and dialogue.'[13] Critical reaction to the show was mixed, with most people admiring its originality and artistic aims. The show ran for 604 performances and became only the sixth musical to win a Pulitzer Prize.

Ten years later, Shubert would reunite with Sondheim and Lapine to produce *Passion*, a musical based on Ettore Scola's film *Passione d'amore* (1981) which was in turn based on Iginio Ugo Tarchetti's nineteenth-century novel *Fosca*. It tells the tragic story of Fosca, a sickly and physically unattractive woman romantically obsessed with a handsome young soldier who is having an affair with a married woman who has a child. Like *Sunday in the Park*, *Passion* had a difficult rehearsal and preview period. In fact, the show's official premiere at

Shubert's Plymouth Theatre was pushed forward two weeks to allow for more changes to staging and content. The biggest sticking point was the central figure of Fosca, whose grotesqueness was so excessively depicted in dialogue, action, and appearance, that audiences were consistently laughing at moments not meant to be funny. Schoenfeld believed that Sondheim and Lapine were not addressing this problem fast enough. In his eyes, changes needed to be made quickly. He wondered, 'How much more could this woman do to make herself repugnant? So as each escalation took place, the audience responded with disbelieving laughter.' Fosca should be 'someone you could believe was ultimately loveable.'[14] By the time the musical opened it received some very positive reviews. Despite the fact that it went on to win four Tony Awards including one for Best Musical, audiences never really warmed to it, and the production closed after only 280 performances.

Two other musical theatre 'giants' that Schoenfeld and Jacobs supported were Bob Fosse and Jerome Robbins. After dipping their toes in the water with Fosse's *Pippin* in 1972, they were approached by the director/choreographer's agent, Sam Cohn, in 1977, to produce *Dancin'*, a bookless musical with dance numbers staged by Fosse to a score of existing songs. Schoenfeld and Jacobs did not know anything about the work, other than that it would be a Fosse creation. Though, as Schoenfeld put it, Fosse had a reputation of being 'a grumpy, dark, and difficult man … what made him special was that he had his own distinct signature choreography, and it was brilliant.'[15] Without hesitation, Shubert opted to become involved. The show was a tremendous success. It garnered numerous awards, played on Broadway for 1,774 performances, and toured successfully.

The Shubert Organization's next collaboration with Fosse, *Big Deal* (1986), was not so fortunate. Fosse wrote, directed, and choreographed this musical based on the 1958 film *Big Deal on Madonna Street*, an Italian farce based on the misadventures of some small-town crooks. This time producers and creator clashed on several points. The show tried out in Boston where, for one thing, Fosse wanted the *mise-en-scène* to look like a Reginald Marsh painting. Schoenfeld liked the idea, but found the resulting stage picture too dark. Fosse refused to add more light. There were also problems with the sound, and Schoenfeld suggested hiring a new sound designer. This time the director agreed, but once in rehearsals in New York, Fosse was again complaining about the sound, and about the color scheme of The Shubert Organization's newly restored Broadway Theatre. Schoenfeld and Jacobs were finding Fosse increasingly difficult to deal with. Ultimately poor reviews and lacklustre sales doomed the show which closed after only sixty-nine performances. The director believed Shubert did not give the show enough of a chance and never forgave the producers for closing it too soon.

In *Mr. Broadway*, Schoenfeld wrote, 'If Bob Fosse was difficult, Jerry Robbins was downright impossible.'[16] Schoenfeld and Jacobs had produced Robbins's 1976 revival of *Fiddler on the Roof* with Zero Mostel, but it was not until they agreed to produce *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* in 1989 that they really came to

know the man and his working methods. Robbins's lawyer first approached them in 1986 to ask for Shubert's support in a project to reconstruct select dance numbers from several of the choreographer's classic Broadway shows. He wanted carte blanche to do whatever he wanted, at his own time and pace, without even promising that the end result would materialize into a Broadway show. Schoenfeld and Jacobs agreed.

Eventually, the problem of compensation for the many composers, lyricists, designers, etc. whose work was featured in all of the dances that Robbins was recreating had to be settled before the choreographer's project could go any farther commercially. Once that was settled, the long process of shaping the dances into a viable Broadway show commenced. Robbins was demanding and expenses kept rising, but Schoenfeld and Jacobs agreed to keep their creative input to a minimum. It was three years from original concept before *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* opened at the Shubert's Imperial Theatre on 26 February, 1989. The musical ran for 633 performances on Broadway and won a Best Musical Tony Award before playing a limited run at the Shubert Theatre in Los Angeles. From there, the show played several dates in Japan. Ultimately, however, steep production costs meant that the show never recouped. Schoenfeld stated, 'Despite all the angst dealing with Jerry, he was worth it. I have never seen anyone merely glance at a stage and absorb it all in a few seconds. Everything was in his grasp … he was definitely in a class by himself.'[17]

After serving as president of The Shubert Foundation and The Shubert Organization for twenty-four years, Bernard Jacobs died on 27 August 1996. At his passing, long-time Shubert board member (and former president of Columbia University) Michael I. Sovern assumed the title of president of the Foundation, while Philip J. Smith became president of the Organization. Smith had begun his association with Shubert in 1957 as assistant treasurer of the Majestic Theatre box office. He went on to become the treasurer of the company's flagship theatre, the Shubert, and served as assistant to the company's general manager Norman Light. When Schoenfeld and Jacobs took over in 1972, Smith headed Theatre Operations, where he was in charge of booking shows into Shubert houses. In time, he became a close associate and valuable assistant to Bernard B. Jacobs.

Schoenfeld and Jacobs had made quite a team. Each man had his particular strengths, and they perfectly complemented each other. Like any two people they had their share of disagreements, but never held any animosity towards each other. Like brothers, they became generally known through the theatre industry as 'The Shuberts'. Jacob's death hit Schoenfeld hard. The personal and professional loss was profound. Nonetheless, the 72-year-old Schoenfeld was determined to carry on.

In 2000 Schoenfeld saw the musical *Le Passe Muraille* (*The Man Who Walks Through Walls*) in Paris. It told the story of an unassuming clerk named Dusoleil who, through his miraculous ability to pass through walls, uses that force for good and to win the affections of the woman he loves. It featured a score by Michel Legrand, the composer of the movies *Summer of '42*, *The*

Thomas Crown Affair, and *Yentl*, and a libretto by French novelist Didier Van Cauwelaert. Schoenfeld acquired the rights to produce it in the United States and engaged Jeremy Sams to adapt the libretto. Re-titled *Amour* and directed by James Lapine, the show's whimsical narrative was possibly too French for American audiences, and it closed after forty-eight performances. This intimate show would remain one of Schoenfeld's favorites, and he was extremely gratified when a pared-down production was a great success at the Goodspeed Opera House in 2006.

In 2004 The Shubert Organization's board of directors (except for Mr. Schoenfeld) formally proposed renaming the adjacent Plymouth and Royale Theatres, two of the company's most prestigious playhouses, in honor of Gerald Schoenfeld and Bernard B. Jacobs respectively. An official, star-studded celebration on 9 May 2005 marked the unveiling of the two theatres' new marquees. Although the re-christening met with some resistance from those who felt it was merely for 'the aggrandizement of current and former executives',[18] the board felt strongly that it wanted to pay lasting tribute to the work that these two men had done to revitalize not just The Shubert Organization but also Broadway and the theatre district in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Schoenfeld's final musical project on Broadway was *Passing Strange*, a semi-autobiographical rock musical by Stew and Heidi Rodewald that had originally opened at the Public Theater in May 2007. When he first saw it, he thought that the show, which was a hit with both critics and theatre-goers, should be brought to Broadway. Another seasoned producer, Liz McCann, felt the same way. They decided to co-produce, and the musical opened at Shubert's Belasco Theatre on 28 February 2008. Despite receiving enthusiastic reviews, it had trouble finding an audience. Schoenfeld thought that if the show could win the Tony Award for Best Musical, it would receive the boost it needed, but money needed to be raised to keep the musical going. Whereas in the past he had always advised other producers in a similar dilemma to 'never chase a show with additional funds; just close it,'[19] he truly believed in this production. As a result, he and the Shubert board decided to invest additional funds and to promote the show heavily. In the end, *Passing Strange* did not take home the Best Musical Tony and closed after a respectable, but money-losing, run of 185 performances. Schoenfeld noted that it would take him a 'long time to get over the loss' of the Tony but took consolation in remembering that in previous seasons *Dreamgirls* lost to *Nine*, and *Sunday in the Park with George* lost to *La Cage Aux Folles*.[20] Also, celebrated filmmaker Spike Lee was such a fan of the production that he filmed it for theatrical release.

Gerald Schoenfeld died on 25 November 2008. On 2 December 2008, Philip J. Smith and Robert E. Wankel became co-chief executive officers of The Shubert Organization, Inc. In addition, Smith was named chairman of the board of both The Shubert Foundation and The Shubert Organization. Wankel was elected to the board of directors of both The Foundation and The Organization and was named president of The Organization.

At Shubert for almost forty years, Wankel previously served in various roles from comptroller to chief financial officer to executive vice-president. He has been a guiding force in financial operations, creative projects, commercial real estate, Shubert ticketing services, and Telecharge.

With Smith and Wankel at the helm, the level of investment and co-producing has picked up pace. Aside from many straight plays, Shubert has been involved in numerous musicals including *The Scottsboro Boys* (2010), *Hugh Jackman, Back on Broadway* (2011), *Sister Act* (2011), *Nice Work if You Can Get It* (2012), *Once* (2012), *The Bridges of Madison County* (2014), *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2014), *Rocky* (2014), *Doctor Zhivago* (2015), *School of Rock the Musical* (2015), and *The Visit* (2015).

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CHAPTER 30

Emanuel Azenberg's Life in Theatre: 'Happiness Is Equilibrium. Shift Your Weight'

Sarah Taylor Ellis

Emanuel Azenberg, better known simply as 'Manny', is a man of philosophical wisdom culled from the theatrical canon. He often quotes the line, 'Happiness is equilibrium. Shift your weight', from Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing* (1984)—one of his many Tony Award-winning productions.[1] With over 215 Broadway credits to his name as producer, general manager, and creative consultant, Azenberg's work has been honoured with more than forty-nine Tonys and 150 Tony nominations, and in 2012, he received his own Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre.[2] Key to his success has been a constant striving for a Stoppardian work/life balance and his cultivation of significant relationships with friends and family, box office folk, and playwrights. One of Broadway's last independent producers, Azenberg passionately produces plays and musicals that he believes are 'about something'.[3]

'I do a play if it moves me', Azenberg says. 'First is the visceral reaction. Then comes the intellectual reaction. Then there's a fraudulent part of me that says, "Will this make me look good?" Economics come only then. I mean, where were the economics in "Sunday in the Park?" In "Master Harold?" In "Joe Egg?"'[4] In the twenty-first century, economics are often the primary consideration in whether or not to produce; since many millions of dollars are now necessary to mount a Broadway production, it is not unusual to see dozens of names listed in the Playbill as 'producers'. 'Being a producer [nowadays] is somewhere between being a patron of the arts and having a need for recognition', says Azenberg. 'Because if your name is on the Playbill with 33 people,

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you can walk around at a cocktail party and say, "Yes, I'm a producer of 'The Book of Mormon'".'[5] Yet Azenberg preserves a different value system, striking a delicate balance between art and economics in his production choices. 'You try to maintain that equilibrium of money and art', he says, 'which Broadway always was, way back in the Gershwin, Cole Porter, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams days. Nobody talked about the money, although that's what they wanted. But art came out of it.'[6]

Emanuel Azenberg was born on 22 January 1934, in the Bronx, New York, to Joshua Charles Azenberg, the manager of a Labor Zionist organization, and Hannah Kleiman Azenberg. Back when theatre tickets cost '90 cents and $1.20 and $1.80', Azenberg recalls attending Broadway shows on a regular basis. His uncle Wolfe Barzell was a Yiddish theatre performer who successfully 'moved uptown'; Azenberg remembers seeing Barzell as a rabbi in *Skipper Next to God* (1948), after which 'I met John Garfield.[7] I went backstage. And I somehow must have thought, "If you can make a living doing this you don't have to work"', he says.[8] Yet theatre was never an *escape* for Azenberg; rather, he believes that 'the matrix of our moral sensibility' lies in the arts.[9] His most galvanizing theatrical experience may have been seeing the original production of *Death of a Salesman* at the age of 16. 'I remember being overwhelmed, even though I didn't know what it was about', he says. 'I was just moved, and everyone I knew who saw it just walked around sad.'[10]

Azenberg won a theatre award at Bronx Science High School and graduated from New York University (the old University Heights campus) before serving in the army as a first lieutenant with the 25th US infantry. When he returned to civilian life, he planned to 'actually [enjoy] the day' by embarking upon a theatrical career, although he had no ambitions to produce at first.[11] 'I didn't even know what [producers] did', Azenberg recalls. 'They seemed to be a strange group of people, producers. And they couldn't define their job, which I needed. What do you do? You get up in the morning and you do this, and then you do this. Like in the army. At least you knew what the hell you were doing.'[12]

In 1959, Azenberg became assistant company manager for *The Legend of Lizzie*, a legendarily short-lived play. 'It ran for two nights', Azenberg says. But it launched him into three-and-a-half years of work for renowned producer David Merrick on twenty-two Broadway shows, as well as several years of work with Merrick's prodigious rival Alexander H. Cohen. In 1966, Azenberg teamed up with Eugene Wolsk to produce a Broadway show of his own: *The Lion in Winter* starring Robert Preston and Rosemary Harris, which was followed closely by *Mark Twain Tonight!* starring Hal Holbrook.[13]

Azenberg found that he had a knack with people, a necessary skill for a producer. The Shuberts, who have partnered with Azenberg on numerous Broadway productions, consider him an expert not only in budgeting and managing, but also in handling everyday relations with cast, crew, and creative team.[14] From his early years, Azenberg placed the creators at the forefront of each production. 'Theatre is about the writer', he declares.[15] 'Joe Papp didn't

write the play. Manny Azenberg didn't write the play. Tom Stoppard, [Athol] Fugard, Neil Simon, they deserve the credit. I think that's true.'[16]

Azenberg's low-profile approach to producing has meant lifelong friendships and theatrical alliances with popular playwrights such as Neil Simon. In fact, Azenberg first met Simon in the Broadway Show League in 1963: '[Robert] Redford … recruited me on the team, and I met Neil Simon because he played second base and I played shortstop', Azenberg remembers. 'It had nothing to do with the theater or education.'[17] After a quiet friendship for many years, Simon approached Azenberg in 1972 to produce his new play *The Sunshine Boys.*[18] The following year, Azenberg formed Iron Mountain Productions, and his collaboration with Simon thrived for thirty-five years. 'There's a line in one of Neil's plays [*Broadway Bound*] where the grandfather turns to the two young writers and says, "Remember, it has to be about something." These plays were about something', Azenberg says.[19]

According to Simon, 'Playwrights are very fragile. [But] we don't have to be pampered. We need to be talked to in a very honest and intelligent way. And Manny has always been able to do that with me.'[20] '[We have] a very healthy collaboration', Azenberg corroborates. 'Real trust. Never a piece of paper, by the way. No lawyers, no nothing.'[21] Azenberg's support and honesty also mean he refuses to intrude on the creative process or to act as a *show doctor*. Quite simply, the producer's responsibility is to create an atmosphere conducive to creativity.[22] 'The creators are the writers, the composers, the painters, the sculptors. There can only be one painter; the rest of us are framers', he believes.[23]

While Azenberg has primarily produced straight plays by the likes of Neil Simon, Tom Stoppard, and Athol Fugard, he also has an impressive track record with musicals. The original Broadway production of *Ain't Misbehavin'* (1978) placed African American contributions to American music and dance in the spotlight—and won the 1978 Tony Award for Best Musical, the first in Azenberg's long line of awards. Frank Rich raved in his review of the 1988 revival, which reunited the original cast, 'This musical anthology expands beyond its form to become a resurrection of a great black artist's soul'—namely, Fats Waller. 'The stage of the Ambassador Theater turns into a mythic saloon where black jazz bounces against Tin Pan Alley pop, where 125th Street intersects 52nd Street, where men coil around women in a plume of reefer smoke. It's always 3 o'clock in the morning. The joint is always jumping.'[24]

In 1984, Azenberg partnered with the Shubert Organization to transfer Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's *Sunday in the Park with George* from Playwrights Horizons to Broadway—quite a risk since the musical had begun its Off-Broadway run with only one act intact, and the second act was raw and far from complete even in its final days at Playwrights. Azenberg nonetheless 'heard the cry of the creator', trusted the team, and backed the project; *Sunday* went on to win the 1985 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.[25] 'In his paintings of a century ago, Georges Seurat demanded that the world look at art in a shocking new way', Frank Rich wrote in his *New York Times* review. 'In "Sunday in the Park With George," their new show about Seurat, [Sondheim

and Lapine] demand that an audience radically change its whole way of looking at the Broadway musical.'[26] Although Azenberg often finds Sondheim's musicals to be Brechtian and distancing, he was moved by the message of a work/life balance in songs such as 'Finishing the Hat' and 'Children and Art', which was written just before the Broadway opening. 'The work grows on you the more you hear it', he says. 'It is not unlike a Stoppard experience. You have to invest something of yourself.'[27]Azenberg was also one of several producers on the Twyla Tharp-conceived, Billy Joel jukebox musical, *Movin' Out* (2002) which spent three years on Broadway. Using dance to tell the story of young Americans living through the 1960s and the Vietnam War, *Movin' Out* is recognized as an innovative achievement in musical theatre. Like *Sunday*, *Movin' Out* similarly asked audiences, and the industry, to change their way of looking at the Broadway musical.

Yet not all of Azenberg's productions have been commercial triumphs. Despite his long-standing and successful relationship with Neil Simon, Azenberg's *The Goodbye Girl*, a musical adapted from Simon's 1977 screenplay, was an unexpected flop in 1993. *Side Show*, a 1997 musical about Siamese twins Violet and Daisy Hilton, 'was something I should have not let my emotions get carried away on, but I did', Azenberg reflects.[28] Reviews for the new musical by Bill Russell and Henry Krieger were largely positive, and Ben Brantley hailed both 'the crackerjack Broadway teamwork' of Alice Ripley and Emily Skinner as well as the profound and unexpected 'emotional link that grafts the Hilton sisters onto the hearts of their audience'.[29] But the show closed in a mere three months after failing to find an audience.[30] Many partner producers blamed the subject matter; they had never before encountered a situation where a show had such promising reviews but was unable to generate an audience. 'To say that we did a musical about Siamese twins is just untrue', Azenberg insists. 'It's about "Who Will Love Me as I Am." It's about how we're all freaks.'[31] Shortly after the closing notice, Azenberg announced, 'We will lose a lot of money, but I have no regrets.'[32]

In 2009, Azenberg worked with producing partners to mount revivals of Neil Simon's *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and *Broadway Bound* in rep, as well as a revival of the sweeping historical musical *Ragtime* by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty. Similar to *Side Show*, the productions received promising reviews—but they failed to garner an audience. After twenty-five previews and nine performances, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* closed; its companion piece *Broadway Bound* never opened.[33] *Ragtime* lasted only slightly longer, closing after sixty-five performances. Azenberg's wife, Lani Sundsten, turned to him amidst these agonizing blows and said, 'Nobody died.'[34] 'I know how pedestrian it sounds but family is the strongest support system, in times of stress and even good times', Azenberg says. (His wife is a former Broadway dancer and stage manager, and he has five talented artistic children.) 'Very often the support you get from husbands and wives and family is more reliable and valuable than from fans and friends.'[35]

It is not only the economics that have changed over the decades, according to Azenberg, but the artistry, thanks to the advent of home entertainment, and the audiences, 70 per cent of whom are tourists as of the 2013–2014 season.[36] 'At the prices we charge, it's a theme-park sort of thing—"I better have a good time"', he says.[37] Yet Azenberg continues to hope. Despite threats of retirement, Azenberg perseveres as a creative consultant, general manager, and—yes, still sometimes a producer—on projects that he believes are 'about something'. He works as a producing consultant for the general management firm Baseline Theatrical, manager of the flop Sting musical *The Last Ship* as well as Broadway's latest hit, *Hamilton*. According to Azenberg, every show constitutes 'the résumé of your soul'—and he has quite a résumé.[38] Azenberg still vividly recalls going to the theatre 'as if to a church or synagogue' when he was younger, 'and when it was good you walked out ready to change the world'.[39]

Throughout his career, Azenberg has stayed true to his Labor-Zionist roots by making an aliyah to Israel with a group of Jewish and non-Jewish theatre folk every summer. This annual pilgrimage began shortly after Woody Allen published an op-ed in the *New York Times* in 1988, attacking Israel for its role in the first intifada. Provoked by this act of Jewish anti-Semitism, Azenberg and tour guide Ron Perry have brought over 500 people to Israel in the past twenty-plus years for an on-the-ground education in the complexities of this young country.[40]

Another integral part of Azenberg's work/life balance has been teaching. When his daughter Lisa attended Duke University in the early 1980s, Azenberg began commuting from New York City to Durham, North Carolina, to teach a course at Duke each spring; he continued this adjunct professorship for twenty-five years. Azenberg would rip the covers and title pages off plays to elicit a 'visceral response' from students, preventing any posturing based on a familiar title or playwright's name. 'By the end of the semester, hopefully, they actually had some confidence in their own opinion and also recognized that all the arts are subjective', Azenberg says.[41] For students accustomed to writing well-researched academic papers, Azenberg's class was a challenging and rewarding emotional education. In 1986, Azenberg also established Duke's Broadway Preview Series, later known as Theater Previews, which used the university as an out-of-town tryout for productions including Neil Simon's *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* with Nathan Lane and *A Long Day's Journey into Night* with Jack Lemmon and a young Kevin Spacey. Students often had the opportunity to intern in stage management, design, dramaturgy, and other theatrical fields on these Broadway-bound productions.[42] Among the talented Duke alums Azenberg has mentored are Executive Director of the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center Preston Whiteway, Broadway actor Aaron Lazar, and entertainment lawyer Hailey Ferber. I was fortunate to be one of Manny's students at Duke University myself; he has been a dear friend and mentor—and practically a third grandfather—ever since I took his course in spring 2007. For every one of Manny's students currently pursuing a career in theatre, there

is also a politician, preacher, or a stay-at-home parent who carries some of Manny's wisdom with her: 'Happiness is equilibrium. Shift your weight.'

Producing a Broadway show is not an investment, according to Emanuel Azenberg; after all, there is very little guarantee of a return. Rather, 'it's a cultural crapshoot, which in my mind justifies it for myself—we're trying to do something that might nudge the world', he says. Duly crediting his encyclopaedia of theatrical wisdom, he concludes, 'That's a Stoppard line, it's not mine. That heartfelt commitment justifies your behavior.'[43]

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CHAPTER 31

Cameron Mackintosh: Modern Global Impresario

Jessica Sternfeld

An iconic producer of musicals, Cameron Mackintosh has produced three of the top five longest-running Broadway musicals, and those three properties—*Cats*, *Les Misérables*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*—are also among a small handful of extremely successful international musicals, taking up residence or touring in dozens of cities around the world. Charming yet demanding, humble yet egotistical, Mackintosh is a master impresario and has helped keep the earlier model of the strong, independent producer alive in an age when most musicals are produced by large groups of people and/or corporations.

A Born Producer

Cameron Mackintosh (b. 1946) knew he wanted to be a producer from the time he was 8 years old. Unlike most children who end up in the theatre world, who might dream of starring in a musical or perhaps penning one, young Cameron—from a middle-class family in north London, his father a timber merchant and amateur trumpeter—wanted to be in charge of the whole experience. In a story often repeated (by him, by journalists, and by scholars), he saw the musical *Salad Days* and knew his calling was to mount and present similar shows. He became a fan and student of musicals, studying formally in a stage management programme for only a year before dropping out and trying his luck in London. He began as a stagehand, held various posts in touring productions, and produced his first show—a revival of *Anything Goes*—in 1969. It failed, as did some of his other very early efforts, but still in his twenties,

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he was an incredibly charming, eager, and driven producer. In 1976, he had his first hit with the London production of *Side by Side by Sondheim*, and his reputation was established on the local level. Several other modestly successful revivals followed. In the 1980s, unprecedented success, fame, and wealth made Mackintosh a household name at a time when few producers were even recognizable as individuals and producing had increasingly become the work of a committee or corporation. Like producers of generations before—but with far greater international renown—Mackintosh remains one of the few solo producers whose name on the marquee carries weight. He has enjoyed an impressively successful career for more than forty years, despite a few slow patches; he ranks among the wealthiest individuals in the theatre world, with homes around the globe and, more recently, as the sole owner of a growing number of theatres in London. What has made Mackintosh such a rarity—an internationally successful one-man production team? More than knowing what audiences want, it may be his intensely involved style of producing that leads to hits.

Mackintosh's Hands-on Producing Style

Mackintosh cheerfully admits that he is extremely involved in all aspects of his productions, including casting, the score and book, and the design. This hands-on attention to detail separates creative, lead producers from those more focused on fundraising than aesthetics. But Mackintosh's hand touches every aspect of his productions. 'I'm a terrible interferer', he told a *New York Times* reporter in 1990. 'There isn't an element of the show, from the design of the poster all the way through, that I don't have a go at at some point.'[1] Multiple accounts explain that Mackintosh's technique involves sensing something, big or small, is wrong with an aspect or moment in a show, and then tossing out many solutions, some of them ridiculous, until the creative team comes up with a change. He explains: 'I sniff out a problem area of a show and then I'm like a terrier with whoever's department it is. I keep on them. And I'm always coming up with hundreds of gratuitous solutions, which rarely are right but invariably prompt the authors or the director or whoever to come up with the right solution, usually one I would never have dreamt of myself.'[2] Andrew Lloyd Webber points out that such heavy involvement from the producer requires a strong director to push back, since otherwise 'there's nobody ever to say no to him',[3] and a production benefits from the friction and the discussion far more than if Mackintosh is given full control. Mackintosh agrees, saying that working with strong and opinionated directors like Trevor Nunn (*Les Misérables*, among others) and Sam Mendes (*Oliver!*) leads to rewarding discussions of artistic differences. 'No great show comes out of everyone saying "It's wonderful"', he notes.[4] In 2014, Mackintosh summarized his hands-on approach to *The Guardian*:

> I'm proud of the fact that I've taken a lot of big directors, such as Trevor Nunn and Nick Hytner, who were musical virgins, and introduced them to the form. I

> also supervise every single word of the script and every note of the orchestration and I'm at the knee of the lighting designer all the time. But, when the show's in rehearsal, I only pop in two or three times a week early on, then I let the director and choreographer get on with it. To be a good producer, you need to be able to distance yourself. If a director wants my approbation for everything they do, I know it's going to be a disaster.[5]

Mackintosh is quick to give credit to the creative team of a musical or his own staff, yet eager to point out that only he can do what he does. Rocco Landesman, President Emeritus of Jujamcyn Theaters, concludes: 'Cameron is the last singular idiosyncratic producer.' He adds: 'Everything is produced by committee these days. There are very few producers who have their own personal imprint on their shows.'[6]

Mackintosh has often explained that one of the advantages of his success is that he can raise money for a show without any investment from theatre owners (whom, he feels, should remain separate from the productions their buildings host) or other hands-on partners. 'I'm in the lucky position of being able to raise $5 million in five phone calls', he told the *New York Times* at the height of his celebrity in 1986. 'This has changed my relationship with the New York theater people considerably. It all boils down to money. Money buys you independence.'[7] By 2000, when his hit streak had slowed somewhat, the *Times* wondered if the 'age of the maverick producer' had passed, Mackintosh perhaps having been the last remaining example. 'He's really the only giant we have left in our business', Landesman suggested.[8] Mackintosh has stipulated that his production company will work no more after his death; his name will appear on no other productions and his corporation will disband. He explains, 'If anyone is capable of creating new work, they should go and create it themselves, not using my infrastructure.'[9]

Mackintosh Ushers in the Megamusical: *Cats*

His leap from a very young, mostly failed producer to a famous, unprecedentedly successful one began with a phone call from Andrew Lloyd Webber. In 1980, Lloyd Webber, the composer already internationally known for his works with Tim Rice (*Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Evita*), reached out to Mackintosh to see if they might make a good team for his next project. The result was the very unlikely hit *Cats*, which became the longest-running Broadway musical until that record was broken by another Mackintosh project (*The Phantom of the Opera*). Based on a collection of children's poems by T. S. Eliot, *Cats* has a very loose story involving the introduction of various cat personalities that make up a sort of community. One cat—Grizabella, the only truly troubled cat in the group—is chosen to be reborn into a new and better life, away from the rough and dangerous alley or abandoned lot where the show seems to take place. But we spend little time with her; instead, most songs introduce a new cat or cats, who sing about their particular traits.

Mackintosh recruited the director Trevor Nunn, one of *Cats*'s most influential collaborators in the show's creation. Artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company at the time, Nunn had no experience with musicals, but Mackintosh reasoned that his flair for wordy British language (Eliot was American, but his collection *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* drips with dense, obscure Britishisms) and eye-catching staging would make him a good fit for this odd material, and he was right. Nunn's interpretation of this world of cats gave the show coherence; working with choreographer Gillian Lynne and designer John Napier, he created a through-line for the show constructed more from mood and subtext than plot. Napier's set depicted trash (cans, fish bones, cereal boxes, abandoned cars) rendered in oversized proportions to create a cat perspective. The result was an engrossing and escapist experience for audiences. Mackintosh, as is his wont, had a hand in all aspects of the show's creation, including casting; for example, he famously called Elaine Paige, London's first Evita, asking her to step in as Grizabella at the last minute when an injured and not entirely satisfactory Judi Dench could not continue.[10]

Cats was a hard sell for Mackintosh to pitch to investors. Desperate, he took out advertisements in financial newspapers, asking for small sums. It took 220 separate investors, in addition to Lloyd Webber's own money (personal investment being an unusual move for most musical theatre writers and composers), to mount the show in London.[11] But from *Cats* onwards, Mackintosh needed only a few large investors, and this team, in various combinations and often with Mackintosh on board, would almost dominate the West End and Broadway in the 1980s and beyond.

Cats revealed Mackintosh to be a master of marketing. The opening in London (1981) garnered massive publicity, and in New York, *Cats* may have been the most heavily marketed show Broadway had ever seen. The result was the highest advance ticket sales at that point in Broadway history, at $6.2 million.[12]

Mackintosh's marketing strategy relies on creating hype, and on generating anticipation and excitement. One of his first and most influential innovations was to use a simple, eye-catching visual for all of the marketing posters, commercials, and other materials, resulting in instantly recognizable branding. For *Cats*, that image was two yellow cat eyes, the pupils represented by dancers' bodies, on a black background. For *Les Misérables*, a lithograph of the waif Cosette was similarly used; for *Miss Saigon*, black brushstrokes outlining the production's famous helicopter against a menacing sun. These images not only brand the shows instantly, they also work effectively in international contexts. With no reliance on text, and therefore little need for translation, these logos also became one of Mackintosh's strategies for global marketing. All of these campaigns originated in England at the Dewynters advertising agency, Mackintosh's long-standing British advertising partner, and were then passed on in New York to Serino/Coyne, one of the leading Broadway advertising firms (known, according to some, for their 'aggressiveness', manifested for example in the plastering of the eye-catching logos all over the country).[13]

Thus Dewynters can be credited with offering Mackintosh the library of iconic logos, and Serino/Coyne, masters of market saturation and cross-pollination of their products, can be credited with the art of the media blitz.[14] One can see the influence of this strategy in the immediately recognizable logos for later shows such as *The Lion King* (a simplified lion head), *Aida* (a double face), or even *Hamilton* (a silhouette of the lead character on a shadowy star) appearing on billboards, buses, apparel, and so on.

In 1982 Mackintosh plastered the *Cats* image everywhere he could, in print and TV ads and on merchandise long before the show opened, and even on the Winter Garden Theatre itself, a full four months before opening night. Radio ads used an instrumental strain of the song's eleven o'clock number 'Memory', with only the tantalizing tag line, 'Isn't the curiosity killing you?' Throughout the summer of 1982, Mackintosh flooded the media, popular culture (several pop stars recorded covers of 'Memory' prior to any performance on Broadway), and even the beaches (planes flew over the tri-state area trailing banner ads with the radio tagline). Numerous publications ran feature articles, including not only major newspapers but also magazines ranging from *Smithsonian* to *Penthouse*.[15]

An event when it opened, and a success despite mixed reviews, *Cats* remained an event for a then-record-breaking eighteen years, becoming one of the shows any tourist, domestic or international, wanted to see when visiting New York City. Mackintosh and his team smartly shifted strategies over the years to maintain interest; the initial advertising campaign was sexy and mysterious, but many years in, TV commercials featured cheerful children with faces painted like cats, hugging the friendly Old Deuteronomy cat, thus making the show feel far more child-friendly than before (or indeed than it truly is). In London, it ran a then-record-breaking twenty-one years, surpassed only by Mackintosh's *Les Misérables*. A direct-to-video movie of the entire production of *Cats*, featuring Elaine Paige as Grizabella and Ken Page as Old Deuteronomy, only heightened interest in the live show when it was released in 1998.

Three More Megamusicals Dominate the Decade

Following *Cats*, Mackintosh produced another Lloyd Webber musical, the small-scale *Song and Dance* in 1985. He then lent his support to the very odd (thanks to its plot about a man-eating plant and its unusual tone of comedy/horror) American production that opened Off-Broadway, *Little Shop of Horrors*, a show that became an unlikely hit, especially on tour and in community productions. *Cats*, however, remained a record-breaking and stand-out success for Mackintosh until a similarly large-scale megamusical came his way: *Les Misérables*.

Composer Claude-Michel Schönberg and lyricist Alain Boublil were partly inspired by large-scale musicals—among them Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*—to tackle the epic tale of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Following Lloyd Webber and Rice's example with *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the duo released

the score as a concept album before it was staged. On the cover of the album was the lithograph of the young character Cosette, originally created by nineteenth-century illustrator Emile Bayard for the novel's first edition. This eye-catching branding was so strong and effective that Mackintosh's long-term collaborator, Russ Eglin of the London-based advertising agency Dewynters, simply adapted the image when he came on board to develop the project's advertising campaign.

Mackintosh first heard the concept album (which had led to a moderately successful French staging) in late 1982, and knew he had a hot property. He again recruited director Trevor Nunn, still artistic director of the RSC, who brought the company's name and public subsidy, as a co-producer. Nunn also brought a number of RSC creative team members (including his frequent co-director John Caird) and performers. The original London production thus opened as a joint effort, at the RSC's London home, the Barbican. As usual, Mackintosh remained very hands-on; he had the final word on the hiring of musicians, and he and Nunn shared veto power when it came to casting. Schönberg and Boublil had expected Mackintosh to simply buy the rights to their French score, so were pleased and surprised when he invited them to spearhead the effort to translate and expand the score for a British, American, and eventually international audience. Mackintosh hired first one, then a second lyricist, and the latter—Herbert Kretzmer—wrote or translated the bulk of the English score. Also on board was designer John Napier, who worked with Mackintosh and Nunn on *Cats*'s junkyard; here, he created a set based on a revolving floor, carrying along the sweeping effect of the story. *Les Misérables* opened at the Barbican on 8 October 1985, quickly gained word-of-mouth momentum and increasingly strong reviews, and moved to the West End where as of this writing, it continues to run.

Mackintosh offered to share production credit with the Nederlander organization when the show went to New York, as they had already shown interest and had even held the rights for a year (though nothing had come of this). In a second public–private collaboration, *Les Misérables* (known affectionately as *Les Mis* or *Les Miz*) had an out-of-town tryout at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, orchestrated by the Center's chairman at the time, Roger L. Stevens (see Chap. 21). When Mackintosh brought the show to New York as an independent producer (in association with the Kennedy Center)—backed by investors but no co-producers, individual or corporate—he, as the *New York Times* put it, 'single-handedly … restored the balance of power between producers and theater owners at a time when the independent production of Broadway musicals has gone virtually the way of new musicals themselves'.[16] Mackintosh may have been enacting an old producing model in the sense that he reigned as solo producer, but his means of raising money was distinctly modern. Instead of gathering small sums from dozens or even hundreds of investors or 'angels', as was the norm and as he had had to do as recently as *Cats*, he could now call upon a few corporations for large lump sums. The biggest investor behind *Les Mis* was the Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company.

The company became involved as a result of several top executives' personal interest in the arts, and the hope that the investment would be good for public relations and publicity. That one executive also happened to share a lawyer with Mackintosh could only have helped.[17]

In advance of a Broadway opening, Mackintosh topped his publicity saturation technique, unleashed with *Cats*, to flood the market and develop interest in *Les Mis*. Tickets went on sale ten months in advance, when the norm was an advance sale of two or three months. Ads began to run on TV, radio, and in print: 'From despair comes hope. From adversity comes triumph. From struggle comes glory. From across the ocean comes the theatrical event of a lifetime.'[18] The public couldn't resist; Mackintosh broke his own pre-opening sales record with five weeks to spare. *Les Mis* opened at the Broadway Theatre on 12 March 1987, where it would run for sixteen years. The show, extremely expensive at the time with a budget of $4.5 million, recouped in an impressive twenty-three weeks. Mackintosh opened productions in large cities in the United States and also sent out a fully staged road company to reach smaller cities and towns.

Mackintosh had always expected the show to be successful internationally, but when it became clear (even before the Broadway opening) that there was intense foreign interest, he made a crucial decision to export the show exactly as it played on Broadway, rather than simply licensing foreign productions to be mounted by local producers. Thus, the *Les Mis* performed in Australia or Germany or Japan would look and sound exactly the same as the productions in London or New York, except for the translated lyrics. To ensure this sameness, Mackintosh sends carefully trained, small production teams to each location and they work with the local cast not only to recreate the original 1985 production but also to teach its themes and messages.

Part of *Les Mis*'s international success can be credited to its universal themes of justice, forgiveness, and revolution; cultures around the world have been able to relate to elements of the story. The musical's score, with its sweeping melodies and momentum, is also responsible for the show's widespread popularity. But a significant factor in its ability to travel, and keep travelling for decades, is Mackintosh's ability to make the experience of attending the musical feel like an event, a must-see, life-changing milestone. His strategy to saturate the media and raise expectations has worked all around the world.[19]

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the show's opening in London, Mackintosh staged and filmed for TV and DVD a dream cast performance. This event generated fresh interest, as did a 25th anniversary performance featuring popular opera star Alfie Boe as Jean Valjean, Lea Salonga as Fantine, and boyband star Nick Jonas as Marius. The film musical adaptation, co-produced by Mackintosh, was released in 2012. Mackintosh's savvy for choosing a property, shaping it for any and all cultures, marketing it as a must-experience event, and sending copies around the globe, has made *Les Mis* one of the most successful musicals of all time.

Mackintosh's streak in the 1980s continued with the seemingly unstoppable *The Phantom of the Opera*, co-produced with the Really Useful Group (see

Chap. 32). As of this writing *Phantom* is still running in original productions in both London and New York (firmly holding on to its position as the longest-running Broadway musical of all time, unlikely to be topped any time soon), and continuously touring the world. Lloyd Webber partnered with his reliable teammate Mackintosh early in the project's conception, before he even had a librettist. After several false starts, it was Mackintosh who brought the very young Charles Hart on board as librettist after seeing Hart's work in a competition. Trevor Nunn expected to direct; instead, Lloyd Webber and Mackintosh hired Harold Prince, whose influence on the tone of the work was strong and effective. When *Phantom* opened in London in 1986, it settled in alongside *Cats* and *Les Misérables*, a trio of Mackintosh megamusicals that dominated both Broadway and the West End into the twenty-first century.

Mackintosh worked his usual magic to build pre-opening excitement, although Lloyd Webber's name also generated buzz around the show, thanks both to the success of *Cats* and to the ensuing coverage of Lloyd Webber leaving his first wife for Sarah Brightman, an alumna of *Cats* for whom he wrote *Phantom* and for whom he fought to bring to New York with the production. Mackintosh marketed the title song, which had been recorded as a single, the Lloyd Webber name, and the logo image: a full mask (not the half mask the Phantom actually wears, but a more pleasing, symmetrical mask reminiscent of classical Greek theatre masks) with a red rose, against a black background. Successful with audiences and many critics since it premiered, the show became an institution and has taken up residence in major theatre capitals and toured all over the world. Mackintosh proceeded with *Phantom* as he had with *Les Misérables*, exporting replica productions to give every audience the original experience.

Mackintosh continued his megamusical winning streak with *Miss Saigon*, Boublil and Schönberg's follow-up to *Les Misérables.* The publicity surrounding the show's move from London to Broadway ranks among the most intense for any opening, thanks to a highly public casting controversy created, perhaps even encouraged, by Mackintosh. The story, based on Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, takes place in Vietnam during the fall of Saigon in 1975. Kim, a young and innocent bar girl, falls for Chris, an American soldier. She gets left behind in the chaos of the fall of Saigon and raises their son alone, only to discover that Chris, after a long search for her, married an American woman. The majority of characters are local Vietnamese and a handful of Americans. Beyond the ill-fated lovers, the other leading player is the Engineer, half Vietnamese and half French (the product of a previous occupation by a foreign force), who runs the sleazy bar and its prostitutes. He becomes involved with Kim and her young son, hoping to turn her situation to his advantage so he can flee to the good life in America. In casting the original London production, Mackintosh and the creative team searched numerous countries for actors from an Asian background to play the Vietnamese characters in the show. They filled most roles with Asian performers and eventually found their Kim in Lea Salonga, a Filipino teenager. Veteran Welsh—and Caucasian—stage and film

actor Jonathan Pryce was cast as the Engineer. The choice was uncontroversial and very successful in London, where Pryce earned raves for his portrayal of a character who is more symbolic than real; he stands for greed, manipulation, and the pursuit of success, rather than ever becoming a character to whom audiences might relate.

Miss Saigon opened in London to rave reviews and huge advance sales, and made itself at home for a ten-year run. The Broadway theatre owners fought for the show, and once again Mackintosh broke his own pre-opening sales record with a hefty advance of $24 million. The New York opening was set for March 1991; in July 1990, a casting controversy emerged. The Asian division of the ethnic minorities' committee of Actors' Equity filed a complaint. Led by playwright David Henry Hwang and actor B. D. Wong, the complaint asserted that having Pryce play a half-Asian role was offensive and unfair. Actors' Equity had already granted Pryce 'star status', which meant he would be allowed to come with the show to New York instead of the union insisting the role be recast (or at least re-auditioned) and filled by an American. Mackintosh fought back, pointing out that he and his team had indeed held extensive casting calls for the role. The media seized on the story, sparking a national debate. Mackintosh threatened to cancel the show if Pryce's casting was not authorized by Equity for the Broadway production, but union leadership withdrew his star status in deference to the protesters. Equity itself was divided as many performers recognized that if Mackintosh did cancel, the loss of about thirty-four roles for Asian actors (and potentially hundreds of replacement actors over the years, on Broadway and in touring companies) was a far greater loss than the opportunity for one actor to originate a specific role on Broadway. Equity had the ability to encourage, but not demand, the casting of actors of a certain race; withdrawing Pryce's star status was the only official way Equity could block him, and that move was not legally justifiable (since a performer already dubbed a star could not be demoted). Mackintosh made good on his threat and cancelled. Members of Actors' Equity petitioned to force their leaders to reconsider their banning of Pryce. The board of Actors' Equity reconvened and reconsidered; they reversed the ban on Pryce's casting and invited him to New York with star status reinstated, explaining that they had 'applied an honest and moral principle in an inappropriate manner'.[20]

Mackintosh made a bold move at this juncture. Instead of thanking the union for its decision, he demanded full control over casting and any other creative decisions, arguing that the deciding factor had to be talent, not social agendas or politics.[21] He and Equity reached an undisclosed agreement, but not before one final controversy: Mackintosh demanded that he be allowed to bring Lea Salonga to play Kim on Broadway. She could not be granted star status as she was a complete newcomer, but he argued that he had auditioned over 1,200 women and none could do what she could. When he threatened outside arbitration, Equity relented and agreed that no American could immediately be found for the role, so Salonga could be cast in the New York production. *Miss Saigon*'s advance sales reached $34 million, and a few months before the Broadway open-

ing, the *New York Times* called Mackintosh 'the most successful, influential and powerful theater producer in the world'.[22] The musical opened to mixed reviews but intense word of mouth, and ran for a very successful ten years.[23]

Mackintosh in the 1990s and Beyond

Just as the careers of his compositional partners (Lloyd Webber, Schönberg, and Boublil) peaked to unprecedented highs in the 1980s and early 1990s, so too did Mackintosh's, but the group associated with mega-musicals did not always dominate Broadway in the 1990s and beyond. Mackintosh continues to produce with great success, but is less of the front-page celebrity he once was. He produced *Five Guys Named Moe*, a much smaller-scale show than his mega-musicals, in 1992; it began in London, and ran just over a year in New York but enjoys a healthy life in regional productions. He made a rather bold move when he co-produced the ballet *Swan Lake* on Broadway (via London) with choreographer Matthew Bourne's company, Adventures in Motion Pictures, in 1998, in an avant-garde production featuring male dancers as the swans traditionally played by women.

Mackintosh has fared especially well with revivals and film-to-stage adaptations. A production of *Mary Poppins* (2006, co-produced with Disney and based on their film, see Chap. 42) ran more than six years, and two Rodgers and Hammerstein revivals, reconceived by their directors with darker sensibilities, fared well with critics and had solid runs. Mackintosh produced the West End transfer of his earlier collaborator Nicholas Hytner's 1992 Royal National Theatre production of *Carousel*, later produced on Broadway by Lincoln Center Theater (see Chap. 36) in 1994. In 2002, Mackintosh transferred another National Theatre production to Broadway, this time *Oklahoma!*, again under the direction of an earlier collaborator, Trevor Nunn.

In 2000 Mackintosh heavily promoted the stage musical adaptation of the film *The Witches of Eastwick*, which fared poorly in London, leading him to speculate in several interviews that perhaps his era had come to an end. But the mega-musicals of the 1980s lived on, and eventually inspired Mackintosh to mount new productions. He brought a near copy of *Les Misérables* back to Broadway in 2006 for a run of fourteen months, and then brought it back again in March 2014—though he billed this one as a scaled-down, very new production, a claim that a very upset Trevor Nunn (who was left out of the revival) disputes. Especially fond of *Oliver!*, Mackintosh has mounted it several times in his career, including in 1994 in a much-hailed production directed by Sam Mendes. In 2009 Mackintosh revisited that revival, this time directed by Rupert Goold and co-directed and choreographed by Matthew Bourne, following a television casting programme in which Mackintosh appeared and served as a judge in the casting of Oliver (the British public voted on the casting of Nancy). Other London properties that garnered media attention but little success include *Martin Guerre* by Boublil and Schönberg (1996), *The Fix* (1997), *Bat Boy the Musical* (2004), and *Betty Blue Eyes* (2011).

Mackintosh has also become a prominent theatre owner, with a portfolio of nine London theatres and plans for more to follow. He meticulously restores or refurbishes each building, sometimes renaming them in the process. Many of his properties are medium or large West End houses, including the Victoria Palace Theatre, which he took over in 2014. But in 2015 he announced his plans to refurbish the much smaller Ambassadors Theatre, renamed the Sondheim, as a home for smaller shows originating in subsidized venues. Mackintosh's hope is that short runs at the Sondheim may lead to longer runs at larger West End theatres, or at least give shows the chance to be seen over a longer period of time, in a more flexible physical space than a traditional proscenium theatre. Based on these properties and his stakes in the world's most successful musicals, in May 2014, *The Guardian* newspaper estimated that he was worth approximately $1.1 billion.[24] Mackintosh's charitable works and donations are also well known and his reputation is one of generosity. Perhaps most famously, he gave Lionel Bart, the creator of *Oliver!*, who had lost all rights to the show and ended up impoverished and troubled, a generous share of the successful 1994 revival and even a hand in some revisions. Mackintosh made the gesture out of respect for Bart's work, having no legal reason to include him; the move will provide for Bart's family for life.[25]

'The musical theater has become international', Mackintosh explained in 1986.[26] He seemed to suggest that audiences don't particularly care if a show is British, French, or American; they don't even always care who wrote it. What they look for, in Mackintosh's opinion, is a successful, stirring musical that will provide a moving experience. In 2011, while working on *Betty Blue Eyes*, Mackintosh claimed not to be thinking about this dimension as a creator, while simultaneously defining the culture-crossing resonance that successful international musicals need to have:

> If you are bloody lucky enough to have a show that will export, then it will export itself. I never think about life beyond the production I am doing. I am thrilled to have one production, really. I think it's the worst luck in the world to start thinking of something as a global thing, and it is interesting that the shows that have travelled the world have done so because they are very particular—what happens is that other people appreciate the truth that underpins the material.[27]

Mackintosh's latest international market is China, where musical theatre has begun to flourish; he began staging his mega-musicals and other well-known shows there in 2002. Recently, however, he has pulled back his interest somewhat, his managing director citing what he feels is the culture's emphasis on quick money-making productions rather than artistic integrity or training talent.[28] Mackintosh opened an English-language touring production of *Les Mis* in 2002 and a Mandarin-language production of *Cats* in 2012 (co-produced with United Asia Live Entertainment), both in Shanghai, but he was not involved in a 2004 Chinese production of *Phantom*.

As of this writing, his most recent—and very high-profile—undertaking is a thoroughly restaged and somewhat rewritten *Miss Saigon*, which opened in

London at his own Prince Edward Theatre in 2014. A New York transfer was announced for 2017. Hailed with positive reviews and surrounded by intense buzz, the production confirms that Mackintosh, though a veteran, still knows how to win over crowds, and often critics, by offering them satisfying musical theatre experiences.

Notes

1. Quoted in Mervyn Rothstein, 'The Musical is Money to His Ears', *New York Times*, 9 December 1990.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
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5. Quoted in Michael Billington, 'The Saturday Interview: Cameron Mackintosh: Maestro', *The Guardian* (London), 31 May 2014.
6. Ibid.
7. Quoted in Jeremy Gerard, 'A Trans-Atlantic Producer Calls the Tune', *New York Times*, 7 December 1986.
8. Quoted in Robin Pogrebin, 'A Theater Maverick Says He's Not Fretting About a Lean Spell; Cameron Mackintosh Isn't Turning Out Broadway Hits the Way He Used To', *New York Times*, 17 July 2000.
9. Quoted in Bryan Appleyard, 'Hogging the Limelight', *Sunday Times* (London), 20 March 2011.
10. Jessica Sternfeld, *The Megamusical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 120.
11. See ibid., 117.
12. Ibid., 124.
13. Bruce Weber, 'New Yorkers & Co.; Dreams Advertised Before the Curtain Rises', *New York Times*, 14 November 1993.
14. See Jesse McKinley, 'Far from the Spotlight, the True Powers of Broadway', *New York Times*, 26 February 2006.
15. For this and more on marketing, see Sternfeld, *The Megamusical*, 124–5.
16. Gerard, 'A Trans-Atlantic Producer Calls the Tune'.
17. Brooke Kroeger, 'Raising a Million for 'Les Mis"', *New York Times*, 19 July 1987.
18. Quoted in Sternfeld, *The Megamusical*, 189.
19. For more on how various countries embraced the show's themes and made the show theirs, see Sternfeld, *The Megamusical*, 218–19.
20. Quoted in Mervyn Rothstein, 'Equity Reverses "Saigon" Vote and Welcomes English Star', *New York Times*, 17 August 1990.
21. Quoted in David Patrick Stearns, 'Producer Won't Yet Restore "Miss Saigon"', *USA Today*, 22 August 1990.
22. Rothstein, 'The Musical is Money to His Ears'.

23. For a more detailed account of the controversy, see Sternfeld, *The Megamusical*, 296–301.
24. Billington, 'Saturday Interview'.
25. David Wigg, 'The Real Tragedy of Oliver', *Daily Mail* (London), 9 January 2009.
26. Gerard, 'A Trans-Atlantic Producer Calls the Tune'.
27. Quoted in Appleyard, 'Hogging the Limelight'.
28. Bruce Einhorn, 'Broadway in China! It's a Mess!', Bloomberg.com, 9 June 2015.

CHAPTER 32

Laying Down the RUG: Andrew Lloyd Webber, the Really Useful Group, and Musical Theatre in a Global Economy

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In the final days of May 2014, the North American tour of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which was scheduled to open in early June, was suddenly cancelled without warning. As part of the promotional and artistic vision, recognizable figures of popular culture were set to headline the production, including Michelle Williams of the R&B group Destiny's Child (Mary Magdalene), JC Chasez of *NSYNC (Pontius Pilate), Brandon Boyd of the American rock-band Incubus (Judas Iscariot), and Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols (King Herod). But the tour's promoter, Michael Cohl, citing a general lack of interest and the likelihood that the show would be unable to recoup its initial costs, put a halt to all operations.[1] The rights to *Superstar* are owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber's media company, Really Useful Group (RUG), which also served as the tour's primary financial backer, and thus set them on a litigated collision course with Cohl,[2] who owns the touring company S2BN Entertainment and is no stranger to large-scale, big-budget musicals, having served as lead producer for several shows, including *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*.

Musical theatre is a business. Companies like RUG exist largely to manage, promote, and commodify musicals on an increasingly globalized scale. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there have been few more successful than Lloyd Webber's company. Comparatively, Lloyd Webber and Cohl have each met with different degrees of success in the business of producing major

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commercial musicals on Broadway and the West End. While this chapter focuses on Lloyd Webber and RUG, it is important to point out that although the companies run by Lloyd Webber and Cohl have each shown strong understanding and implementation of the larger scope of the theatrical commodity—merchandising, cast recordings, videos, tours, etc.—it is Lloyd Webber and RUG that have navigated the international and globalized opportunities with better success. Indeed, RUG (and its earlier manifestation as the Really Useful Company) provides one of the earliest and most successful models of theatre production and commodification in the global market. This chapter will outline the formation of RUG, its growth and diversification, and examine its restructuring of musical theatre as an international globalized commodity, whereby a particular show is maintained as the property of its producer and as such, makes use of transplantable aesthetics, signifiers, characters, themes, and other elements that increase the likelihood of a musical's success in markets around the world.[3]

Any examination of the Really Useful Group must also include within its purview the person most synonymous with the company itself: Andrew Lloyd Webber (b. 1948). Although Lloyd Webber is best known as one of the premier composers of musical theatre, with musicals such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970), *Evita* (1978), *Cats* (1981), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986), and others, receiving positive critical reception, demonstrating financial viability, and achieving long runs on the West End and Broadway (with *Phantom* maintaining the title of the longest-running Broadway musical), it is his company that maintains the success of the musicals he has written and expands their commercial potential in new markets.

Lloyd Webber was born in London into a family well acquainted with the professional worlds of music and theatre as his father worked as a composer and organist, his mother as a violinist and pianist, and his aunt as a professional actress.[4] He attended the prestigious Royal College of Music and by 1970 had met with critical and commercial success as composer for *Jesus Christ Superstar*. He would collaborate with lyricist Tim Rice on two more musicals, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1973) and *Evita*, and solidify his place as one of the most successful and popular composers of musical theatre in the latter part of the twentieth century. This is due in large part to the growth of new opportunities to capitalize on the success of those musicals and reach into new markets, particularly the recording industry—especially as personal stereo systems were hitting new technological advances in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, *Superstar* was initially a very popular concept album before it moved to Broadway in 1971.[5] Since then, RUG has maintained the rights to the cast recordings of Lloyd Webber musicals, many of which have gone platinum in the United States and United Kingdom.[6] Thus, he is not just a well-known name because his musicals were popular on Broadway, but also because his songs were heard in living rooms, on personal stereos, and radio stations across the United Kingdom and United States. More recently, established recording artists have been drawn to his musicals, as evidenced by the number of major artists who signed on to the now-defunct tour of *Superstar*. RUG has even

pushed Lloyd Webber musicals into the digital realm with a promotional video that, in October of 2015, premiered some of the music and characters from *School of Rock the Musical* (2015, and an adaptation of the 2003 film) that hit over one million views in only three days on YouTube.[7]

Early on, Rice and Lloyd Webber were represented by New Talent Ventures, a large talent agency that was a step up from their previous representation,[8] and which was eventually purchased by Robert Stigwood and his Robert Stigwood Organization (RSO) after the success of *Superstar*. RSO was a very diverse company, representing musical talent from composers and artists but also producing musicals and television shows, including the circulation of these between the United States and the United Kingdom. A company like RSO that owned venues, represented talent, and recorded in-house could reduce costs and maximize returns. It proved particularly successful with reinvesting profits from one area of a production into new ventures for that same production, or into other aspects related to the production's continued profitability and integrity. By using the resources of a diversified company and treating a show like *Superstar* as a commodity rather than just a work of art, RSO was able to promote the show, mount a touring company around the United States, and fight court battles against pirate productions and unauthorized use of the show's music, significantly reducing the risk of financial ruin to the company (and Stigwood) as a whole.[9]

The potential for Lloyd Webber to profit further from his musicals, and conversely take on more risk, was first realized with the formation of separate companies to manage his business interests. Lloyd Webber never states that he modelled the RUG after Stigwood's RSO, but as his musicals became more successful, he moved his company in a similar direction. In 1977, Lloyd Webber initially established Escaway to manage his personal finances, Steampower Music Company to manage music publishing, and the Really Useful Company as the producing arm for his musicals. Eventually, in 1985, he brought these, and other companies that oversaw aspects such as tickets, films, and magazines, under one parent company: the RUG.

The success of Lloyd Webber's shows cannot be understated. Since 1979, there has been at least one Lloyd Webber musical running on Broadway, and no other composer can match his international success, as he has had shows running in countries around the world since the early 1980s.[10] But breaking into East Asian markets was what made RUG truly groundbreaking in the international business of musical theatre. In the early part of the decade, *Evita* and *Cats* helped the Shiki Theatre Company of Japan (see Chap. 28) to become one of the most prolific producers of Western commercial theatre in Japan and changed the landscape of Japanese theatrical production by making the Western musical a hot commodity in the Japanese entertainment economy. The Shiki Theatre Company translated the shows into Japanese and implemented production elements such as the long-run concept and new technological approaches for ticketing and performances that had made the shows so successful on Broadway.[11] The success of these shows forever changed the Shiki

Theatre Company and proved that what made Lloyd Webber so successful was a certain universality within his productions that made transporting them to foreign (particularly non-Western) markets relatively easy, inexpensive, and culturally viable.

The long-term cooperation with the Shiki Theatre Company not only proved the potential of the East Asian markets, but also provided RUG with the necessary capital to venture into other untapped markets in the region. RUG serves as the parent to a number of international offices, set up in countries around the world to protect its interests in a particular state and oversee productions promoted in neighbouring areas. For example, after opening an office in Sydney, Australia, RUG was able to mount a long-running production of *Cats* in Singapore in 1993 at the Kallang Theatre in a market where local shows never played for more than ten days. Other, more recently popular shows like *Phantom* soon followed. RUG now has permanent offices located in Singapore, Hong Kong, Sydney, Frankfurt, New York, and Los Angeles, with its head office in London. In 1996, Patrick McKenna, then chairman and CEO of RUG, explained how this model is used to import RUG musicals into global markets:

> We're committed to developing entertainment centers around the world, what we call location-based entertainment. Obviously, apart from developing, we can produce and promote in these locations, offering first-class service to any new live entertainment. For instance, we could take a hit show from the U.S. and promote and exploit it around the world in our venues, backed up by our branch offices.[12]

These branch offices are not the only example of the presence of RUG around the world. Building and purchasing theatres has been part of the RUG model since the 1980s. Some of these theatres have been purpose-built for Lloyd Webber shows, such as the Starlighthalle in Bochum, Germany where *Starlight Express* (1984) has been playing since 1988 and is the longest running musical in German history. Although now owned and managed by Mehr! Entertainment, the Starlighthalle has helped cultivate a love for Lloyd Webber musicals in Germany since the late 1980s and provided the financial capital for its owner and manager, Maik Klokow, to continue bringing Lloyd Webber musicals into the country. In addition, RUG also owns and operates six West End theatres. The theatrical landscape from Broadway to the West End to Asia has been and continues to be shaped by the presence of Andrew Lloyd Webber. Through the ownership and management of theatre buildings RUG is able to expand the musical experience beyond the stage and throughout the building via gift shops, playbills and ticket counters, and areas for food and drinks. Creating an *experience* within these theatres in markets around the world is what McKenna meant through his use of the term 'location-based entertainment'.[13] The entire location is a part of the performance. Thus, RUG imports not only the Lloyd Webber musical, but also the potential to participate, through the process of

capital exchange, in the culturally and socially signifying involvement with the musical as an expanded commodified phenomenon.[14]

But the success of globalization to open up the business of musical theatre to new markets has also resulted in new approaches for RUG. In the West End in 2002, as his first production where he served solely as producer and in no other capacity, Lloyd Webber attached his name to the musical *Bombay Dreams* as a means of introducing more non-Western concepts into the musical theatre form and hoped to capitalize on the growth of Bollywood and its aesthetic styles outside of South Asia.[15] But to be successful in a Western market, the Indian cultural aspects of the production were appropriated into the predominantly Euro-American musical form. The show was advertised on the marquee of the Apollo Victoria Theatre as 'Andrew Lloyd Webber presents A. R. Rahman's *Bombay Dreams*', and Lloyd Webber even seemed uncertain about potential audience reception when he first signed on to the project, stating that 'It will be an extension of Indian culture presented in English to a wider audience', and, 'We have to laugh with the show and not at it.'[16] The show met with a mixed critical response, achieved mild financial success in its London run, and, perhaps in a tacit yet business-savvy understanding of the difficulty of producing the show in markets without a large Indian diaspora population,[17] RUG only put up the money for one-seventh of the production costs of moving the show to Broadway in 2004. Upon the show's move to Broadway, Lloyd Webber remarked upon the cultural distinctions of the West End production stating, 'We thought we needed to spend a little more time tipping our hat to certain Bollywood traditions. We probably tipped our hat too much.'[18]

The model of location-based entertainment, used to import Lloyd Webber musicals around the world, also seemed to play an important role in bringing *Bombay Dreams* to the West End and Broadway. Notably, the move to Broadway appeared to be more difficult and many aspects of the show were changed. How to define the experience of attending *Bombay Dreams* for Broadway audiences became the focus of the show's move from the West End. As the lead production company, Waxman Williams Entertainment sought to bring in non-Asian audiences as quickly as possible.[19] The conclusion of the musical's narrative was changed so that the show ended on an upbeat note, certain songs were jettisoned or rewritten, and marketing strategies were employed in the poster design and show tagline to highlight the exotic nature of the show's locale, but appealing specifically to Western audiences.[20] It is unclear how many of these changes were precipitated by Lloyd Webber and RUG, despite their reduced role in producing the show, but Lloyd Webber certainly recognized the cultural and racial lines along which this show attempted to balance itself and felt that reception from a primarily white audience would be key to the show's success.[21] In what became, perhaps, a recognition of the importance of a largely white audience to the show's long-term success, Lloyd Webber maintained the Broadway changes to the production in a remount for the West End.[22]

Despite mixed reviews and a mildly successful run,[23] *Bombay Dreams* serves to bring RUG's business model of musical theatre in a global context full cir-

cle. RUG was the company with enough clout and capital to stage the work of an Indian artist unfamiliar to most audiences outside of India and the Indian diaspora. In doing so, RUG's business model hinged upon the familiarity of the Lloyd Webber brand for Western audiences and the management of the cultural borderline as a means to market the production. It imbued *Bombay Dreams* with the conventions of West End and Broadway musical theatre, which resulted in defining Rahman's production as successful or unsuccessful along this cultural borderline. This borderline occurs as a result of the globalizing process where the multinational corporation attempts to 'adopt' or give agency to a seemingly foreign cultural commodity. Jerri Daboo, in her article 'One Under the Sun', states that 'in the case of *Bombay Dreams*, [the] portrayal is a homogenized, stereotypical vision of "Indian," conforming to an imperialist definition of ethnicity'.[24] She goes on to provide insight into the problematic portrayal of capitalist ideals in the production, especially within the historical and postcolonial context of the Anglo-Indian relationship. RUG uses this intersection of appropriating Indian cultural aesthetics into a business model reliant on musical theatre as a commodity developed in the crucibles of the West End and Broadway. In this way, it is apparent that, for RUG, importing musical theatre into particular cultural markets (whether it is *Evita* and *Cats* to Japan or *Bombay Dreams* to the United States) relies on the global recognition of the Lloyd Webber brand and the manicured cultural experience within which the audience feels comfortable participating.

The popularity of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musicals and the success of RUG around the world still make them leaders in the business of musical theatre. RUG has the expertise and capital to turn a potential flop into a more profitable product through its international reach. The 'sequel' to *Phantom*, *Love Never Dies*, opened in the West End in 2010 and, after a harsh critical response,[25] moved to Melbourne, Australia for a substantial overhaul that met with wider praise and a subsequent DVD release before moving on to Asian and European markets.[26] But recently, the company has shifted, along with much of Broadway, into adapting popular films as stage musicals and opened *School of Rock the Musical* in December 2015. Lloyd Webber even supplemented the film's songs with several original songs of his own, as if to claim it for his brand. It would seem that RUG now sees more potential profitability and success in building on the existing cultural capital of popular films and, like in the ill-fated tour of *Superstar*, popular recording artists. But it is certain that the lessons learned by Andrew Lloyd Webber and RUG in decades of bringing musical theatre to audiences around the world has positioned them as leaders in creating a financially viable musical theatre commodity, no matter where the market may be.

Notes

1. Dave Itzkoff, 'Anger for "Jesus Christ Superstar" Cast, and a Black Eye for Its Promoter', *New York Times*, 31 May 2014, http://nyti.ms/1kvytC0. In the article, Cohl is quoted as saying that 'it just did not

make business sense to continue, and we didn't want the cast to endure playing to disappointing audiences', and that the cost of the production was estimated to be 'eight figures'. See also Ray Waddell, 'Why Jesus Christ Superstar Flopped', *Billboard* 126, no. 19 (14 June 2014), 12.

2. Dave Itzkoff, 'No Turning the Other Cheek: Suit Over Canceled Tour of "Jesus Christ Superstar"', *New York Times*, 29 July 2014, http://nyti.ms/1tp29pe. According to Itzkoff's article, the chief executive officer of the Really Useful Group, Barney Wragg, placed the blame for the cancellation solely on Cohl.
3. Dan Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 40–6. Rebellato refers specifically to the musicals of Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh as 'McTheatre' to highlight the emphasis these producers give to providing audiences with as near identical an experience for a particular musical regardless of where it may be seen.
4. See Michael Walsh, *Andrew Lloyd Webber: His Life and Works* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 15–33 for an excellent biography of Lloyd Webber's early life. See also John Snelson, *Andrew Lloyd Webber* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 5–10.
5. Walsh, *Andrew Lloyd Webber*, 61–2 describes endorsement of *Superstar* by Catholic and Anglican leaders as a means to retain religious relevancy amongst an increasingly secularized youth culture.
6. The list of cast recording albums to go platinum in the United States, United Kingdom, or both includes *Superstar*, *Evita*, *Cats*, and *Phantom*. Lloyd Webber also won Grammy Awards for Best Cast Show Album for *Evita* and *Cats*.
7. 'School of Rock's 360 Video Surpasses 1 Million Views on YouTube & Facebook in Less Than Three Days', *Broadwayworld.com*, 17 October 2015, http://www.broadwayworld.com/article/SCHOOL-OF-ROCKs-360-Video-Surpasses-1-Million-Views-on-YouTube-Facebook-in-Less-Than-Three-Days-20151017.
8. See Stephen Citron, *Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber: The New Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 145.
9. See Walsh, *Andrew Lloyd Webber*, 73–5 for a detailed description of the ways in which Stigwood managed his company's control of *Superstar*.
10. See Snelson, *Andrew Lloyd Webber*, 2–4 for a comprehensive list of Lloyd Webber musicals running concurrently by year from 1983 to 1997.
11. See 'Musicals', the Shiki Theatre Company, http://www.shiki.jp/en/musicals.html, for the company's description of the impact of these musicals on the company.
12. Nigel Hunter, 'And Now For Something Really Useful …' *Billboard* 108, no. 42 (19 October 1996): 38–42.
13. For more on location-based entertainment see Al Lieberman and Patricia Esgate, *The Entertainment Marketing Revolution: Bringing the*

Moguls, the Media, and the Magic to the World (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Financial Times/Prentice-Hall, 2002), 269–96.

14. For the capital potential in linking the consumer with the artist/artwork in a 'creative process' see Roger McCain, 'Defining Cultural and Artistic Goods', in *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006), 160–1; see also chapter 14 by B. A. Seaman, 'Empirical Studies of Demand for the Performing Arts', in the same volume.
15. See Stephen Farrell, 'Lloyd Webber Rides the Boom to Bollywood', *Times* (London), 9 March 2000.
16. Quoted in Farrell, 'Bollywood'.
17. Michael Riedel, 'Knock on Bollywood—"Dreams" May Come for Musical on B'Way', *New York Post*, 27 November 2002.
18. Quoted in Zachary Pincus-Roth, 'The Extreme Makeover of "Bombay Dreams"', *New York Times*, 18 April 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/18/theater/theater-the-extreme-makeover-of--bombay-dreams.html.
19. Pincus-Roth, 'Extreme Makeover'.
20. Ibid.
21. Pincus-Roth quotes Lloyd Webber as having stated that a 'white audience … want[s] it to work, embracing the thought that it is musically from a different culture', in 'Extreme Makeover'.
22. Pincus-Roth, 'Extreme Makeover'.
23. Jesse McKinley, 'Broadway Bloodletting', *New York Times*, 9 December 2004. For a summary of the lack of positive critical reception see Riedel, '"Dreams" Dashed as Parade Passes By', *New York Post*, 11 May 2004.
24. Jerri Daboo, 'One Under the Sun: Globalization, Culture, and Utopia in Bombay Dreams', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15, no. 3 (2005), 331.
25. See Michael Billington, 'Love Never Dies', *Guardian*, 9 March 2010, http://gu.com/p/2ffhn/sbl. Billington's review was perhaps one of the most positive when the show first premiered (giving it three out of five stars), yet the apprehension of the show's success and its significant deficiencies clearly tempered any praise. Furthermore, the amount of negative press caused potential Broadway backers to lose interest; see Patrick Healy, '"Love Never Dies" Looking Less Likely for Broadway This Season', *New York Times*, 31 August 2010, http://nyti.ms/1nSgPx9. There also exists a website entitled 'Love Should Die' at loveshoulddie.com, where the creators aggregate various negative reviews and experiences associated with the show.
26. See Jason Blake, 'Ravishing Sequel Brings More Anguish for the Phantom', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 May 2011, http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/stage/ravishing-sequel-brings-more-anguish-for-the-phantom-20110529-1faob.html#ixzz3yanqXjjR. After a more positive reception in Australia, RUG began to aggregate the positive reviews for the show on its website at http://www.reallyuseful.com/press-reviews/love-never-dies-melbourne-reviews/.

CHAPTER 33

'My American Dream': Dreaming of Broadway and the West End in the Philippines

Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco

Several commercial, professional, and semi-professional theatre companies in Manila produce musicals imported from New York's Broadway or London's West End such as *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Wicked*.[1] Then Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) President Raul Sunico explains that the staging of these musicals is important in the Philippine arts scene because beyond the revenue that can be generated, Filipino theatre-goers are introduced to a global range of shows. At the same time, these productions generate an audience for theatre, an audience which is not yet fully developed in the Philippines.[2] While some local theatre companies in Manila bring these musicals in their original staging, occasionally performed by Western actors, other companies produce Broadway or West End shows with Filipino performers as well as artistic and production staff members. Of these companies, Repertory Philippines (Rep Phil) and Atlantis Productions, Inc. (API) have been considered gatekeepers of these musicals, for they produce the most recent and most successful shows in terms of both box office revenues and the response of Filipino critics and the intellectual elite.

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Repertory Philippines

Founded by Zeneida Amador (1933–2004), Rep Phil is one of the oldest professional and commercial theatre companies in Manila. According to the company's website, it 'opened its doors in 1967 with a Tagalog adaptation of August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*'.[3] Under the direction of National Artist Rolando Tinio, the production was critically acclaimed but not popular at the box office. Despite *Miss Julie*'s critical success, Rep Phil opted to stage plays in English, particularly tried and tested productions coming from New York and London.

The decision to focus on English-language production is based on the initial agenda that Amador had in mind when she was envisioning Rep Phil. Amador wanted the Philippine theatre audience to experience Broadway and West End fare without having to travel to New York or London. Together with her investors Baby Barredo, Leo Martinez, Tony Mercado, Monina Mercado, and Buddy Paez, Amador produced and directed Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* in 1967. The first few years of Rep Phil were rocky, especially in terms of attracting an audience. But this struggle did not hinder Amador from continuing to produce English-language shows that eventually made Rep Phil an important theatre company in the Philippines, solely for producing up-to-date Broadway and West End plays. For a few years, Rep Phil's theatre season consisted entirely of straight plays in English until its first musical production in 1974: Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt's *The Fantasticks.* This production was especially successful in that Rep Phil's ticket sales skyrocketed. *The Fantasticks* was immediately followed by another musical, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe's *My Fair Lady*, with sold-out shows during a three-week run also in 1974.

The box office successes of both musicals paved the way for Amador to restructure the company's offerings by including at least one musical in each regular season. Musicals are produced based on the minimal requirements stipulated by licensing agencies such as Music Theatre International (MTI) and Samuel French, and are staged in Rep Phil's home theatre, the Insular Life Auditorium, where a small orchestra pit can accommodate a limited ensemble of musicians. Given the small stage of the Insular Life Auditorium, Rep Phil has produced musicals that do not depend on huge and extravagant sets. The musicals produced by Rep Phil from 1974 until the late 1980s were thus not exact replicas of the original staging of musicals on Broadway and in the West End. Depending on the licences granted by MTI and Samuel French, the sets for these musicals were adjusted based on both the auditorium size and Rep Phil's tight budget.

With a reputation as the producer of Broadway and West End shows well established by the 1980s, Rep Phil began exploring the possibility of producing replicas, or franchises, of mega-musicals. These are productions where a producer not only buys the rights to the original staging but also 'the original production: sets, costumes, direction, lighting, the poster, and all the

merchandise'.[4] Rep Phil markets these productions of Broadway and West End hits as big musicals, produced by the company in an almost identical staging to the original (depending on the licence granted). The difference between these big musicals and the musical productions staged within Rep Phil's regular season programme is that the licensed replicas include a complete live orchestra, with almost the exact costumes and sets of the original Broadway or West End production, and are staged in a larger venue. Rep Phil's big musicals were and remain the company's most anticipated productions, especially because of their reputations as the most popular musicals enjoying a worldwide audience. Beginning with Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's *Evita* in 1986, Rep Phil continuously staged big musicals at the 1,000-seat Meralco Theatre in Ortigas City until the early 2000s. Some of the big musicals produced by Rep Phil at the Meralco Theatre included *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1986), *La Cage Aux Folles* (1988), *The King and I* (1991), *Into the Woods* (1992), *Camelot* (1994), *Evita* (1995), *Carousel* (1996), *South Pacific* (1997), *Annie* (1998), and *Oliver!* (1999), to name but a few. The most popular big musical that Rep Phil has produced and staged is Claude Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil's *Les Misérables*, produced through a partnership with Cameron Mackintosh in Rep Phil's 47th theatre season, in 1993.

In 2013 Rep Phil noted on its official website that 'the need to remain financially viable while providing jobs for Filipino artists, took precedent [*sic*] and consequently Rep chose to tailor their play season for the English speaking Expat community. […] Rep needed to survive and had successfully targeted a clientele who would support and nurture this brand of theatre.'[5] This agenda was likely crafted because at the time Rep Phil was founded, Amador was aligning the vision of the company with the vision of the state: to open up its doors to foreigners, particularly to business investors. Rep Phil is still targeting expats as one of its core audiences, especially now that Metro Manila is home to several multinational corporations, in particular Business Process Outsourcing companies managed by expats from North America, Europe, and Australia. But beyond the expat audience, Rep Phil has already developed a market for musical theatre of mostly upper-middle-class Filipino spectators who want to experience Broadway and West End theatre without leaving the archipelago.

When producer Cameron Mackintosh announced auditions for his production of *Miss Saigon* in 1989, Rep Phil was instrumental in his search for talents to be part of this mega-musical. In the documentary *The Heat is On: The Making of Miss Saigon*, Mackintosh and his *Miss Saigon* creative team travelled to several theatre centres of the world such as New York, London, and Los Angeles only to find their lead in Manila, the Philippines.[6] Rep Phil helped in the auditions and many of its company members were brought to London to be part of the new mega-musical. Most notably, Lea Salonga was cast as the lead, Kim, and later brought home a Laurence Olivier Award and a Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical. Alternating with Salonga was Monique Wilson (who was also cast as Mimi, one of the bar girls in the show). Both

Salonga and Wilson were seasoned actors of the company, and the documentary film credits Rep Phil as their home base.[7]

Since the *Miss Saigon* casting coup, Rep Phil launched various training programmes in musical theatre. As indicated in the company profile, the success of its training programme can be measured by the constant demand for its actors in Cameron Mackintosh productions of *Miss Saigon* in London, New York, Stuttgart, and Sydney.[8] Rep Phil's active participation in the search for the lead role in *Miss Saigon* paved the way for Mackintosh to make Rep Phil his official Philippine partner for the Asian tour of *Les Misérables* in 1993. Mackintosh spent three weeks in Manila to help Amador and Baby Barredo (the Philippine directors of *Les Misérables*) in the Philippine staging of the mega-musical.[9]

In the 1990s, Rep Phil continued to stage one or two regular musicals during its standard season and one big musical as an off-season offering. In 1992 Rep Phil moved to William J. Shaw Theatre at the Shangri-la Mall in Mandaluyong City. The theatre was custom designed and fitted to Rep Phil's specifications. It was in this venue that the company began offering musical theatre workshops for young theatre enthusiasts (12–18 years old). Musicals have been staple recital productions for children and are also licensed by MTI or Samuel French. But a significant development in this transfer of venues is the founding of Rep Phil's Children's Theatre programme, which opened in 1992 under the helm of Joy Virata. Since its inception, Virata acted as overall artistic director and executive producer of the programme, presenting musicals based on popular children's stories and fairy-tales and primarily licensed by MTI. In 2000 Rep Phil began acquiring children's musicals from the Disney Theatrical Group. Since the debut of the musical *Sleeping Beauty*, Rep Phil has staged children's musicals to full houses, including *Aladdin* (1993), *Cinderella* (1993), *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1994, 2000, and 2010) and *Mulan Jr.* (2008).

Soon after the start of the new millennium, Rep Phil had to leave William J. Shaw Theatre. Virata noted, 'a 10-year lease seemed forever then [1992]. But before we knew, it had ended … In February 2003, the sign that says "William J. Shaw Theatre, The Home of Repertory Philippines" will be taken down Forever. The William J. Shaw Theatre will no longer exist.'[10] Rep Phil had to rent alternative venues for their productions. The 450-seat Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium (CPR Auditorium) and 800-seat Onstage at Greenbelt (Onstage), both located in Makati City, opened their doors to Rep Phil, and Rep Phil eventually made a new home at Onstage. Its regular season is now comprised of three plays (opening in January and ending in May), typically with one regular musical production. Children's theatre begins in August and ends in December. Rep Phil's big musical production opens in November, running for four to six weeks.[11]

Rep Phil continues to produce musicals from Broadway and the West End in its season. Big musicals are now staged at Onstage, especially since its stage, backstage, and orchestra pit specifications are similar to those of the Meralco Theatre. Even so, Rep Phil goes back to the Meralco Theatre every so often to stage bigger productions and to accommodate more audience members.

However, Rep Phil today is no longer exclusively enjoying a reputation as the producer of such musicals. Many of Rep Phil's resident artists have established their own theatre companies with similar agendas to that of Rep Phil in its early years: to bring Broadway and West End theatre works to the archipelago. The difference, perhaps, is that these new companies are more aggressive in bringing contemporary Broadway and West End shows as compared to the wider range of shows that Rep Phil has produced.

Atlantis Productions, Inc.

Two of Rep Phil's earliest competitors in producing Broadway and West End hits are New Voice Company (NVC, founded by Monique Wilson in 1994) and Atlantis Productions, Inc. (API, founded by Bobby Garcia in 1999). Both companies have rivalled Rep Phil in acquiring licences and rights for the staging of Broadway and West End musicals, especially the more contemporary musicals such as Jonathan Larson's *Rent* (originally co-produced by NVC and API in 1999 and restaged by API in 2000 and 2001), Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Aspects of Love* (NVC in 2005), John Cameron Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (API in 2001), and Jonathan Larson's *Tick, Tick … Boom!* (API in 2002).

To date, API has been enjoying the privilege of accessing the rights and licences to stage the most current Broadway and West End hits such as *Shrek*, *Aida*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Ghost*, and *Dreamgirls*, among others. API also prides itself on having toured most Asian cities with its own original productions of Broadway and West End musicals such as *Avenue Q*, *A Little Night Music*, and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.

Fresh from his studies and training in directing at the University of British Columbia in Canada, Robert 'Bobby' Garcia founded API in 1999. API was originally established as a 'multimedia company engaged in producing high-quality, creative and educational material',[12] formed to produce not only theatre shows but also film and television. API's first production was the short film *Portrait of a Lady on a Balcony*, screened in Vancouver, Canada under the auspices of The Little Engine Film Society of Vancouver. Upon Garcia's return to the Philippines, he brought with him the Tony Award-winning musical *Rent* by Jonathan Larson, which staged at the Music Museum in 1999 with NVC as co-producer.

Since the Broadway debut of Jonathan Larson's *Rent* in 1996, many local musical theatre enthusiasts had been waiting for its Philippine production. *Rent* became so popular in the Philippines because one of its songs, 'Seasons of Love', was played on several local radio stations and became a favourite theme for many events, such as commencement exercises, reunions, and other special occasions. Rep Phil was expected to bring the musical to Manila, but during the early months of 1999, rumours circulated that another theatre company had been granted the rights to stage the musical in the capital. There are no

reports as to how the negotiation of the rights was accomplished except for that fact that Garcia was in close contact with the estate of Jonathan Larson because of his investment in the Off-Broadway musical *Tick, Tick … Boom!* By the second quarter of that year, publicity materials announced that *Rent* was landing in Manila through API's collaboration with NVC.

Philippine Star columnist Jet Valle describes Garcia's rise as an emerging impresario of the more contemporary musicals from Broadway and the West End: 'in 1999 *Rent* came to Manila under the aegis of Bobby Garcia, and the production quickly became the sensation of the Philippine theater season that year. With enthusiastic crowds packing the venue [Music Museum in San Juan, New Manila] all the way up to the final performance of its original run, the production went on an extended run that continued to draw SRO audiences.'[13] Garcia became a household name in the local musical theatre scene when the local producers of *Miss Saigon* invited him to be the resident director of the mega-musical for its run at the Tanghalang Nicanor Abelardo (Main Theatre) of the CCP in 2000. Together with Lea Salonga, Garcia became the official spokesperson of the Manila staging of *Miss Saigon*.

Rent was restaged at the Government Service Insurance System Theatre in Pasay City in 2001, but without NVC as a co-producer. Producing *Rent* changed the landscape of the musical theatre in Manila because its audience had finally been given almost instant access to the more current musicals from Broadway, Off-Broadway, and the West End. For a long time, this had only been possible if a touring company from New York, London, or Australia brought current musical theatre productions to the Philippines. Like Rep Phil, API's style in producing is to offer an almost exact replica of the original. However, Garcia also makes sure that something new is incorporated into the staging. For instance, when *Spring Awakening* was staged at the CPR Auditorium in 2009, the staging was similar to that on Broadway, including the use of wireless microphones when the actors sing the musical numbers and thus providing an almost Brechtian experience for the audience. Garcia, however, allowed his director Chari Arespacochaga to use a new set design and new choreography. When directing *The Little Mermaid*, in Manila in 2011, Garcia chose not to use the wheelie sneakers from the original Broadway staging. The set design, though, was almost the same as that of the Broadway production, creating a bright, underwater world, while the costumes designed by Eric Pineda for the Manila production were inspired by the colourful fabrics of the Southeast Asian region.

API's success as a producer of Broadway and West End hits is not just due to the currency of the shows the company produces. Several factors contribute to API's success and its ability to possibly overtake Rep Phil's popularity in the future. First, API's founder Garcia is a multi-media artist-producer who works not only in the theatre but also in many corporate shows and in the local television industry. The latter is certainly helpful to API's marketing and publicity strategies. Garcia is the producer and director of the popular prime time television magazine show *Private Conversations with Boy Abunda*.

Hosted by popular television commentator Abunda, the show is a platform to talk about current issues in Philippine politics, show business, and culture. On some occasions, the magazine show features forthcoming API productions, offering instant access to the general public.

Also noteworthy is Garcia's access to the print media as a regular contributor, since 2001, to the lifestyle section of the *Philippine Star*, one of the most popular broadsheets in the Philippines. In his articles, his agenda is clearly to discuss API's current and upcoming musicals. On 10 July 2007, Garcia wrote about Bobby Lopez, the writer with Filipino ancestry who wrote the Broadway hit *Avenue Q*, and noted that he himself was slated to direct the musical in September 2007, with Lopez in attendance.[14]

Garcia is also an entrepreneur and is considered a highly successful Philippine theatre producer because of his daring partnerships with big entertainment companies in the Philippines and abroad. This may be due in part to his long stay in North America, where he met theatre producers while studying and working in Canada and later as an apprentice in New York City. Fourteen years after the foundation of API, Garcia announced in the *Philippine Star* that API had partnered with Viva Entertainment, the country's largest entertainment company. On 13 January 2013, Bobby Garcia declared that API had become Viva Atlantis Theatricals (VAT). Originally intended to create original Filipino musicals, the partnership was eventually used for an artist exchange programme, which helped API succeed at the theatre box office.[15]

While theatre struggles as a form of entertainment in the Philippines, VAT made use of many local popular artists under contract with Viva Entertainment as a marketing and publicity strategy in every production. Viva Entertainment allowed its pool of recording and television stars to appear in numerous VAT productions, such as Nyoy Volante (*In the Heights*), Erik Santos (*The Little Mermaid*), Rachel Alejandro (*Aida*), Ima Castro (*Aida*), KC Concepcion (*Beauty and the Beast*), and Rachelle Ann Go (*The Little Mermaid* and *Tarzan*). These pop stars were significantly used to promote VAT's shows, more than the producer's name, the librettist, or the composer. Even non-theatre enthusiasts began attending theatre productions. Followers of these local showbiz personalities went to see their idols and to show their enthusiastic support. It is a common practice in the Philippines for the fan club organizations of popular stars to undertake fundraising activities as part of a display of unwavering support for their idols. This includes block buying one or two performances' worth of tickets, if an idol from Viva Entertainment is part of a musical, for the benefit of fan club members.

When Mackintosh returned to the Philippines in 2012 for the revival of *Miss Saigon*, Garcia was contacted to help search for new talent. This time, many of VAT's stars were successful in the auditions. Notably, Rachelle Ann Go was chosen to perform the role of Gigi in *Miss Saigon*'s revival staging at the Prince Edward Theatre in London in 2014. In the first quarter of 2015, Go landed the role of Fantine in *Les Misérables* at the Queen's Theatre in London.

Gateway to Asia

Atlantis Productions, Inc. (later Viva Atlantis Theatricals) will certainly be proud to have produced the Filipino premieres of Broadway and West End hits in Manila before taking its productions to other cities in the Southeast Asian region including Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. Having done so, API has become the gateway for Broadway and West End musicals in the region. Garcia's close relations with musical producers from Broadway and the West End have been a major factor in API's growth and success, but another factor contributing to these musicals opening in the Philippines before other Asian cities is surely the Filipino talent pool and performers' ability to master aspects of Western popular culture, particularly American pop culture. Although at times this success is negatively perceived and attributed to a lack of authenticity in the cultural dynamics of the Filipino people, this ability to embrace and reproduce American popular culture has paved the way for many Filipino performers to travel around the world and be part of several international musical theatre productions. Some local performers (mostly from Rep Phil and API) were also recruited by Disneyland Hong Kong to perform key characters popularized by the Disney Company. A reviewer of the Singapore run of *Rent* in 2001 at the Victoria Theatre comments, 'compared to the run of *Rent*, I first watched in London, the Filipino cast more than stood their ground in terms of musical talents. JM Rodriguez, Rachel Alejandro and Anna Fegi were particularly impressive as Mark, Mimi and Maureen respectively.'[16] These initial stagings of Broadway hits in the Philippines may even be viewed as workshop performances or an out-of-town tryout before their eventual touring to other Southeast Asian cities.

When the partnership between API and Viva Entertainment expired in early 2015, API did not renew its contract with the latter for reasons unknown. However, API expanded its reach by recuperating its initial goal: to be an entertainment and multi-media company. This time, Garcia collaborated with other entertainment entities in the Asia-Pacific region such as Ten Bridges Media Corporation and the Robert Stigwood Organization. In the third quarter of 2015, API became Atlantis Theatrical Entertainment Group (ATEG). Atlantis as ATEG debuted with *Saturday Night Fever* at The Theatre at Solaire in July 2015. In this musical, Garcia collaborated with American actors Brandon Rubendall (*Spiderman: Turn Off the Dark* and *Anything Goes*), Jenna Rubaii (*American Idiot*), Mikkie Bradshaw (*Carrie the Musical*), and Nick Varricchio (*A Chorus Line*); an artistic team from Broadway: Vince Pesce (choreography), Tony Award winner David Gallo (set design), and Paul Miller (lighting design); and additional Filipino cast members and Filipino artistic and production teams.

The collaboration was significant, elevating ATEG's reputation as an important producing company not only in the Philippines but also in the entire Asian region. Bringing theatre actors from New York has made the company appear more directly associated with these world theatre cities, and this strategy has

worked very well in terms of targeting a larger market. ATEG took a risk in staging *Saturday Night Fever* in the newly built The Theatre at Solaire with a seating capacity of 1,760. When ATEG was still VAT, its productions were usually staged at the 450-seat CPR Auditorium. The seating capacity of The Theatre at Solaire is almost four times greater than that of CPR Auditorium. However, publicity and marketing stunts using Garcia's connections with these Broadway talents may have succeeded in filling the huge auditorium during *Saturday Night Fever*'s four-week run on the weekends in July. After its run at The Theatre at Solaire, *Saturday Night Fever* travelled around the Asian region beginning in Kuala Lumpur in September 2015, followed by performances in Singapore, China, and Australia.

Rep Phil and ATEG Today

For nearly fifty years, Rep Phil monopolized the production of English-language plays, particularly musicals originally staged on Broadway and in the West End, introducing local theatre-goers to the best of New York and London theatre. Like any theatre institution, Rep Phil has faced challenges, in particular the loss of its home theatre in 2002. Nevertheless, Rep Phil remains an important company in the country, for it allows local audiences to experience Broadway and West End shows without leaving the country.

Rep Phil has also trained Filipino performers who have travelled around the world to showcase their talents in singing, dancing, and acting, most notably Lea Salonga and Monique Wilson. Many Rep Phil actors established their own theatre companies specializing in English-language plays; upon her return to the Philippines in 1994, for example, Wilson established the New Voice Company, with a mission to use theatre as a means of social criticism, particularly in regard to women's rights.

Since ATEG's launch in 1999 (as API), the dynamics of producing American and British musicals in the archipelago has changed. Two Manila theatre companies now dominate the musical theatre scene in the Philippines. Part of Rep Phil and ATEG's vibrancy comes from their occasional battles to license productions of the same British and American musicals. With Garcia's connections to Broadway and West End producers, his active collaborations with several entertainment organizations in and out of the Philippines, and his persistence in becoming one of the most important first-class musical producers in the Philippines, he has ensured that the rights and licences for the most current Western musicals were given to API (and now to ATEG).

These producing companies have played an important role in providing jobs for local artists, but also in showcasing the primacy of the Philippines in the Asian region as a talent pool for world-class musical theatre and music industry performers. In a report by Jazmine Cruz, theatre artist Jenny Jamora opines that even if Manila is not Broadway, Filipino talent should not be underestimated. She remarks, 'it's safe to say that, talent wise and skills wise, we could be just as good as the good actors there'.[17]

Notes

1. Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* (book and lyrics by Richard Stilgoe and Charles Hart) had a successful six-month run in 2013 at the Tanghalang Nicanor Abelardo (Main Theatre) of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP). Following this success, Manila welcomed the Broadway musical *Wicked* (music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, book by Winnie Holzman) in January 2014, also at the CCP Main Theatre with Lunchbox Theatrical producing the show.
2. Natalie Tomada, 'Time to get Wicked! Opening Date: Jan. 22, 2014', *Philippine Star Online*, 15 August 2013, http://www.philstar.com/entertainment/2013/08/15/1092041/time-get-wicked-opening-date-jan.-22-2014, accessed 4 September 2013.
3. Repertory Philippines,'About Repertory Philippines', http://www.repertoryphilippines.ph/about/, accessed 20 October 2015.
4. Dan Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 41.
5. Repertory Philippines, 'Our Story', http://repertoryphilippines.com/about-rep/history/, accessed 1 December 2013.
6. *The Heat is On: The Making of Miss Saigon*, directed by David Wright (1988; London: Free Mantle Home Video, 2008), DVD.
7. Ibid.
8. Repertory Philippines, Jeff Baron's *Visiting Mr. Green* souvenir programme (2002).
9. Repertory Philippines, *Les Misérables* souvenir programme (1993).
10. Joy Virata, 'Goodbye to Shangri-la', *Philippine Star Online*, 22 November 2002, http://www.philstar.com/arts-and-culture/185386/goodbye-shangri-la, accessed 20 October 2015.
11. Repertory Philippines official website.
12. Atlantis Productions, *In the Heights* souvenir programme (2012).
13. Jet Valle, 'Rent … the Melody Lingers On', *Philippine Star Online*, 30 September 2001, http://www.philstar.com/starweek-magazine/135262/rent-melody-lingers, accessed 15 June 2015.
14. Bobby Garcia, 'The Filipino who wrote Avenue Q', *Philippine Star Online*, 27 July 2002, http://www.philstar.com/entertainment/4666/pinoy-who-wrote-avenue-q, accessed 24 October 2015.
15. Bobby Garcia,'Viva Atlantis Theatricals is Born', *Philippine Star Online*, 13 January 2013, http://www.philstar.com/entertainment/2013/01/17/897777/viva-atlantis-theatricals-born, accessed 24 October 2015.
16. Daniel Teo, 'Vive La Vie Boheme', http://www.inkpot.com/theatre/01reviews/01revrent1.html, accessed 20 June 2015.
17. Jazmine Cruz, 'A Booming Theatre Scene', *Business World Online*, 3 October 2013, http://www.bworldonline.com/weekender/content.php?id=77414, accessed 29 October 2015.

CHAPTER 34

Trading Globally in Austrian History: Vereinigte Bühnen Wien

Laura MacDonald

Iconic figures at home in Austria, Mozart and the Habsburg Empress Elisabeth are also extremely well-travelled, continuing to circulate throughout Europe and Asia in musicals produced by Vereinigte Bühnen Wien (VBW, United Stages Vienna). Balancing the local and the global has been part of the company's work since its origins in staging German-language premieres of American musicals in the 1960s. Since the early 1990s, VBW has specialized in producing original German-language musicals at its three Vienna theatres: the Theater an der Wien, the Ronacher, and the Raimund. Once a production proves successful in Vienna, VBW typically co-produces replica productions across Europe and East Asia. It also collaborates with local producers on new productions, leading to variations across a given musical, unlike the faithful reproductions preferred by producers such as Cameron Mackintosh. Major successes have included *Elisabeth* (1992), *Tanz der Vampire* (1997), *Mozart!* (1999), and *Rebecca* (2006). VBW is notable for achieving global success without Broadway or West End acclaim, though the company has workshopped new musicals in London, and *Rebecca* is still aiming for a Broadway debut despite a fraud investigation involving its American investors. This chapter considers VBW's unusual structure as a civic theatre company with an international licensing arm, VBW International, to suggest it is the company's Viennese roots and local infrastructure that have made its global success possible.

Conceived by opera librettist and impresario Emanuel Schikaneder, who sought a larger, more well-equipped theatre for his troupe, the Theater an der Wien (the theatre on the banks of the Wien River, now covered and home to

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an open air market) opened in 1801. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it hosted a range of opera, operetta, and ballet, and after being purchased by the city of Vienna in 1940, it became a temporary home for the Vienna State Opera from 1945–1955. While the theatre's future was briefly under threat, the Vienna City Council undertook renovations in the early 1960s. American musicals such as *Wonderful Town* and *Kiss Me, Kate* produced by Marcel Prawy at Vienna's Volksoper had enjoyed a mixed reception in the late 1950s, but the successful German premiere of *My Fair Lady* at Berlin's Theater des Westens, a cult hit on tour in West Germany, visited Vienna in 1963 and enjoyed 112 performances at the Theater an der Wien. A Finnish production of *West Side Story*, boasting 150 performers and musicians, visited the Theater an der Wien in April 1965. The theatre was eventually established as a home to musical theatre, launching the next phase of the building's history. Under Rolf Kutschera's (1916–2012) leadership as artistic director of the Theater an der Wien from 1965–1983, a number of American musicals had their German-language premieres. A native Viennese, Kutschera had worked as an actor and director throughout Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and paid particular attention to efforts in West Berlin to develop the Theater des Westens as a home for musical theatre.

Kutschera produced the German-language premiere of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, which opened on 21 December 1965 and enjoyed a run of more than sixty performances. Critics declared the theatre 'Broadway an der Wien'.[1] Kutschera's programme note was titled 'Die erste Eigenproduktion' (The first own—or house—production), as if to emphasize the Theater an der Wien's commitment not only to presenting musical theatre but also to offering original Viennese stagings. This production would end the earlier period of guest productions, Kutschera suggested, and was a first step in establishing the theatre as the producer of original productions. What the guest productions (including a range of operetta, dance, and pantomime) had revealed, according to Kutschera, was that *musicals* were the most well attended, leading him to conclude that *How to Succeed* should indeed, succeed.[2] An original Viennese cast album was already being advertised for sale in the playbill. Though emphasizing his production as original to the Theater an der Wien, Kutschera's programme note nevertheless summarized the Broadway production and American national tour's success, as well as *How to Succeed*'s triumphant procession through Europe.

In his very first season, and with the theatre's first original production, Kutschera's hope for success was based on balancing international renown with the tastes of the local Viennese audience, a balance that VBW still seeks today both in its mounting of foreign successes and in the export of its own original Viennese musicals. As W. E. Yates observes in his history of Viennese theatre, 'The assertion of business management principles and the long runs of imported musicals are part of a steady process of internationalization, which has been at work in the Viennese theatre throughout the history of the last two and a quarter centuries.'[3] With Viennese theatres previously relying on

French vaudeville in the nineteenth century, and with strong relationships with Berlin theatres in the first half of the twentieth century, Yates suggests that this process indicates the city's theatre is not stagnating and that Vienna is sure to remain a city of theatre.

An awareness of the relationship between the local production and a musical's international profile continued at the Theater an der Wien. A programme note for *Irma La Douce* asserted that the creation of original European musicals was still in its infancy—as if to suggest that bringing *Irma La Douce* to Vienna might help stimulate the growth of original European musicals.[4] Kutschera directed the Berlin premiere of this French musical in 1962, where it enjoyed a run of 200 performances and a return the following season, before being remounted at the Theater an der Wien in 1966.[5] The musicals *Billy* from the UK, *Evviva Amico* from Italy, and *Mayflower* from France were programmed throughout the 1970s. Though revivals were gaining popularity on Broadway, musical theatre was not yet established enough to merit revivals in Vienna, and the supply of musicals from elsewhere in Europe was not steady, as Andrew Lloyd Webber had not yet begun his ascent. Original German-language musicals were therefore also programmed, including Lotar Olias's *Heimweh nach St. Pauli* (Homesick for St Pauli, 1966), about a German singer returning home to Hamburg after success in the United States. Other German and Austrian musicals included Georg Kreisler's *Polterabend* (1967), about a North Sea fisherman, his summer boarders, and the havoc caused by the arrival of a woman from Hamburg; Udo Jürgens and Hans Gmür's *Helden, Helden* (Hero, Hero, 1972); *Das Glas Wasser oder Barock und Roll* (A Glass of Water, or 'Barock and Roll', 1977, adapted from a 1960 German musical comedy film set at the court of Queen Anne in eighteenth-century Great Britain); and *Die Gräfin von Naschmarkt* (The Countess of the Naschmarkt, 1977), a new Viennese musical especially popular with local fans of operetta.

These were all interspersed with German-language premieres of American musicals, as Kutschera believed the best quality musicals came from what he viewed as the form's origin, Broadway. Essays in the programme for *The King and I* attempted to offer definitions of what a musical is, in contrast to the formulaic operettas more familiar to Viennese audiences (and still being programmed at that time at the Theater an der Wien).[6] Kutschera pursued direct relationships with American creative teams and rights holders rather than working with any intermediaries between New York and Vienna and sought to present musicals created by those who in his mind knew the form best—Americans.[7] Dance captain of the Broadway company of *How to Succeed*, Dale Moreda was hired to recreate Abe Burrows's staging and Bob Fosse's choreography. If *Man of La Mancha* was presented without an intermission on Broadway, so was it presented in Vienna in 1968. Kutschera used Tony Walton's set, Jules Fisher's lighting, and Patricia Zipprodt's costume designs for *Pippin* in its German-language premiere in Vienna in 1974, and critics responded positively to these visual elements despite disliking the musical itself and Kutschera's staging.[8] Harold Prince and Boris Aronson recreated their

Broadway direction and design in Vienna for the German-language premiere of *A Little Night Music* in 1975.

Thanks to his extensive career prior to running the Theater an der Wien, Kutschera was also able to draw from a broad casting pool of actors he had previously worked with and introduced performers such as Harald Juhnke, known as the German Frank Sinatra, to the Viennese audience, as J. Pierrepont Finch (renamed Hannibal Fink in German). Josef Meinrad and Blanche Aubry were recruited from the acclaimed Burgtheater to play Cervantes/Don Quixote and Aldonza/Dulcinea in *Man of La Mancha*, with Aubry returning in 1970 as the emcee in the German-language premiere of *Cabaret*. Though many of the musicals Kutschera programmed in Vienna enjoyed long, open-ended runs in New York and London, he managed to succeed and attract large audiences all the while adhering to the European tradition of running productions in repertoire throughout a season, bringing back especially successful productions in future seasons. By the end of the 1970s, the Theater an der Wien was in need of refurbishment, and beyond maintaining the original nineteenth-century interior decoration, a new sound desk and equipment to amplify an entire company of actors and the orchestra was installed.

When Andrew Lloyd Webber's musicals arrived at the Theater an der Wien, they did so in quick succession, with *Evita* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* bookending 1981. Given the respect for Harold Prince in Vienna, as the original producer of *Fiddler on the Roof* as well as director of the Viennese premiere of *A Little Night Music*, Kutschera was keen to bring Prince's *Evita* staging to the Theater an der Wien. He engaged songwriter Michael Kunze to write the German adaptation of *Evita*. It was in speaking with Prince during *Evita* rehearsals that Kunze first had the idea to write his own original musical about the Habsburg Empire.[9] German musical theatre director Helmut Baumann was hired to direct an original production of *Superstar*.

Through his seventeen-year tenure, Kutschera, 'led the musical to triumph', musical theatre historian Wolfgang Jansen asserts. 'He laid a solid foundation on which all future artistic directors could work.'[10] Kutschera's insistence on high quality casting, music direction, and scenic standards was a major factor in the success of Theater an der Wien musicals, and the same can be said of VBW's standards for its Viennese musicals when staged both at home and abroad.

Offered the position of artistic director of the Theater an der Wien in 1981, theatre, film, and television actor and director Peter Weck (b. 1930) began his tenure in 1983, opening the third production of *Cats* (after London and New York). Auditions were held in Vienna, Berlin, and Hamburg, but also in London and New York, resulting in an international cast of excellent singers and dancers, though their German was in some cases difficult to understand. While there were challenges in transitioning from a repertory company with a season programme to an open-ended long run, *Cats* broke Viennese records, running for seven years and introducing a young Ute Lemper.[11] Under Weck's leadership (1983–1992), the Viennese production visited East Berlin in 1987

and Moscow in 1988. While musicals in Vienna had previously attracted as many as 200,000 spectators over the course of a run, *Cats* was a turning point, attracting more than 1.5 million spectators over its run and establishing musical theatre as a tourist attraction in Vienna.

In an effort to develop a pool of skilled performers in Vienna, Weck founded the Tanz-Gesang-Studio Theater, a school offering a three-year musical theatre training programme. The school cost the theatre ten million Austrian schillings, or a subsidy of about €73,000 per student.[12] By 1987 Weck had overseen the consolidation of three theatres—the Raimund, Ronacher, and Theater an der Wien—as the newly established Vereinigte Bühnen Wien, and he became VBW's general artistic director. VBW joined other companies in Wien Holding, a group owned by the city of Vienna. *A Chorus Line* opened that year at the Raimund while *Cats* continued at the Theater an der Wien. With a subsidized musical theatre producer operating three venues, Vienna consolidated its position as a musical theatre capital. *Cats* transferred to the renovated Ronacher in 1988, and was soon joined in Vienna by the German-language premieres of *Les Misérables* (at the Raimund) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (at the Theater an der Wien), which opened within three months of each other at the end of 1988. *Phantom* was a particular success in its Continental Europe premiere, running three years and, as a high quality replica production, confirmed VBW's ability to produce first-class musical theatre productions.

British mega-musicals, however, ultimately proved a challenge for the subsidized, traditional repertory theatre to sustain. In an article titled 'Austrian Theatres Cost Too Much!' cultural studies scholar Monika Mokre calls the subsidizing of commercial musicals a paradox, explained in part by the limited capacity of each of the three historic theatres—around 1000 seats—too few for commercial musical theatre profit.[13] Box office revenues were not sufficient, particularly with the same royalties to pay even when the productions were no longer playing to capacity audiences. Criticism from the press and from the opposition in municipal politics demanded a re-evaluation.

Given that musicals had become a tourist attraction in Vienna, capitalizing on a longer-standing tourist attraction—Freud and the history of psychoanalysis—was the next project for VBW. *Freudiana*, by Eric Woolfson, opened in 1990 and ran for just over a year at the Theater an der Wien. Habsburg history subsequently came to the fore in Michael Kunze's *Elisabeth*, which followed in 1992, its title character the famed Empress 'Sissi'. Written in collaboration with composer Sylvester Levay, it stayed at the Theater an der Wien (with a hiatus towards the end of the run) until 1998. At that point a production had already opened in Japan, and more companies would follow, in Hungary, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Finland, and South Korea. In 2014 VBW helped bring a German-language production to China. Learning from its success with British mega-musicals, VBW invested in its own corporate branding for *Elisabeth*, and the empress's iconic fan continues to be used both in marketing the musical and as a logo on a range of souvenirs.

Rudolf Klausnitzer (b. 1948), a journalist and media manager, succeeded Weck in 1992. Despite having his contract renewed, he resigned in 2001 to return to media management. During his tenure at VBW, Klausnitzer closed the training programme established by his predecessor; produced VBW's first collaboration with Disney, the European premiere of *Beauty and the Beast*; premiered the Roman Polanski musical *Tanz der Vampire* (Dance of the Vampire, 1997), which, following in *Elisabeth*'s footsteps, enjoyed multiple productions across Europe and in Japan, despite flopping on Broadway in 2002–2003; and premiered *Mozart!*, Kunze and Levay's follow-up to *Elisabeth* and another bio-musical about an Austrian icon. Klausnitzer had acquired shares in the Raimund prior to its acquisition by the city of Vienna, making him a 2.66 per cent shareholder in VBW even after his resignation.

Kathrin Zechner (b. 1963), also with a background in media, became VBW's musical theatre artistic director in 2003. She increased both ticket sales and sponsorship agreements and was responsible for the third Austrian musical from Kunze and Levay, *Rebecca* (2006), which VBW has since successfully licensed for productions across Europe and Asia. The Ronacher underwent major renovations from 2005 to 2008, and now also houses VBW's head offices along with rehearsal studios. Zechner's tenure received mixed reviews from many when she left in 2011 as a result of failures such as *Rudolf*, *The Producers*, and *Spring Awakening*—her efforts to bring innovative new musicals to Vienna. Like Klausnitzer, she returned to media management.

Many musical theatre fans expressed relief at the appointment of Christian Struppeck (b. 1968), a German writer and director who had previously worked as an artistic director for Stage Entertainment in Hamburg and, with his partner Andreas Gergens, had founded a new musical theatre development agency. If a more appropriate pedigree was required, Struppeck was a student in his predecessor Peter Weck's musical theatre training programme at the Theater an der Wien. He also appeared in the ensemble of the Disney stage musical *Der Glöckner von Notre Dame* (The Hunchback of Notre Dame, 1999) in its world premiere in Berlin, only to collaborate in future as a co-producer with Disney and as a librettist with the musical's composer, Stephen Schwartz. Since assuming the position of artistic director for musical theatre in 2012, he has brought *Mary Poppins* to Vienna in collaboration with Disney and Cameron Mackintosh and premiered a new musical (and authored the libretto), *Der Besuch der Alten Dame* (The Visit of the Old Lady), based on Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit*, which has already enjoyed a Japanese premiere produced by Tōhō. He has also secured the rights to the classic 1949 film *The Third Man* for development as a new Viennese musical. While the Theater an der Wien now has its own artistic director for opera programming, Struppeck has brought VBW full circle by writing a new musical about the founder of the Theater an der Wien, Emanuel Schikaneder. With a score by Stephen Schwartz, *Schikaneder* chronicles the impresario's marriage to his wife Eleonore and the creation of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*. British director Trevor Nunn, whose production of *Cats* left so much more than a paw print in Vienna, directed the premiere in 2016.

Notes

1. Peter Back-Vega, *Theater an der Wien: 40 Jahre Musical* (Vienna: Amalthea, 2008), 22.
2. Rolf Kutschera, 'Die erste Eigenproduktion', *Wie Man Was Wird im Leben Ohne Sich Anzustrengen* programme, Theater an der Wien, 21 December 1965.
3. W. E. Yates, *Theatre in Vienna: A Critical History, 1776–1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 245.
4. *Irma La Douce* programme, Theater an der Wien, 9 March 1965.
5. An earlier production of *Irma La Douce* enjoyed a successful run of thirty-nine performances at Vienna's Josefstadt Theater in 1962, making Kutschera's transfer of his Berlin production a fairly safe choice for the Theater an der Wien.
6. *Der König und Ich* (The King and I) programme, Theater an der Wien, 20 December 1966.
7. Wolfgang Jansen, *Cats & Co.: Geschichte des Musicals im deutschsprachigen Theater* (Berlin: Henschel, 2008), 58.
8. Ibid., 92–3.
9. Back-Vega, *Theater an der Wien*, 58.
10. My translation. The German reads: 'Er führte das Musical in den kommende 17 Jahren zum Triumph. Er legte die Grundlagen, auf denen alle kommenden Intendanten festen Fußes arbeiten konnten.' Jansen, *Cats & Co.*, 58.
11. Back-Vega, *Theater an der Wien*, 104–5.
12. Ibid, 105–6.
13. Monika Mokre, 'Austrian Theatres Cost Too Much! A Summary of a Research Project in Vienna', *European Journal of Cultural Policy* 2, no. 2 (1996), 295.

CHAPTER 35

From Amsterdam With Love: Stage Entertainment's Global Success

Sanne Thierens

A carpenter from a humble background becomes a billionaire: it sounds like the American dream, but this is the story of Dutch theatre producer Joop van den Ende (b. 1942). By looking at Van den Ende's career, his business practices, his marketing techniques, and the glamour and stars he brought into his shows, this chapter will investigate how this man from a modest family became a major player in the international musical theatre scene.

Joop van den Ende was born in Amsterdam's East Indian neighbourhood into a working-class family. As a boy, he was introduced to the theatre through a social worker who led the Amsterdams Jongerentoneel (Amsterdam Youth Theatre). It was on that stage that Van den Ende took his first steps as an actor. When Van den Ende was subsequently taken to see a play in the fancy Stadsschouwburg (City Theatre), he realized: 'this is my life'.[1]

Van den Ende was formally educated as a carpenter, and at the age of 16 he found a job as a set builder at the Dutch National Opera. This highbrow environment proved very stimulating for the young Van den Ende, whose family regarded the arts as something that was not meant for 'their kind of people': the poor working class unfamiliar with high culture.[2]

When he was 17, Van den Ende started his own cabaret group, De Pijpers (The Pipers).[3] After performances he would organize dance evenings and book wedding gigs. In the early 1960s, Van den Ende set up his own shows in which he would either host or star. He also worked as an assistant stage manager on social evenings in Hotel Krasnapolsky. Thanks to the addresses and phone numbers he gathered there, Van den Ende connected to professional artists for whom

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he started to organize gigs. From his home office he founded his first booking agency, Spotlight, and booked gigs for artists like teenage star Imca Marina and aspiring comedian André van Duin.[4] In the years that followed, Van den Ende produced plays featuring notable actors such as Joop Doderer and Jeroen Krabbé. By 1972, Van den Ende had five productions touring the Netherlands.[5]

But, Van den Ende wanted more and branched out to television. In 1972 the Katholieke Radio Omroep (Catholic Radio Broadcasting Agency) let him produce the comical musical television series *Citroentje Met Suiker* (Lemon With Sugar). From there Van den Ende expanded his television activities and began producing popular prime-time series and shows. The profits he made from his television work allowed him to finance expensive theatre productions, including musicals.[6]

The Financial Factor

When Van den Ende produced his first musical in 1988, there were neither major musical theatre producers or writers nor a big musical theatre scene in the Netherlands. But Van den Ende's fortune, secured by his work in television, left him with a budget no other Dutch theatre producers could match and that allowed him to import major international productions.

Van den Ende's first musical was triggered by Theater Carré's production of *Cats* in 1987, which attracted a large Dutch audience to Amsterdam. Its success made Van den Ende realize that this was what he wanted too. He produced his first musical, *Barnum*, in 1988. Understanding the value of big names, Van den Ende contracted the internationally acclaimed actor Mike Burstyn to play the lead.

Shortly after producing *Barnum*, Van den Ende started to invest in theatres of his own. In 1991 he bought the once famous but by then decrepit Circustheater in Scheveningen, near The Hague. He fully renovated and redecorated the venue so that he could move *Les Misérables* (which had opened at Theater Carré the same year) to run there as an open-ended production. Van den Ende's decision was significant, as it had been common for Dutch productions to tour the country. In his own theatre, however, Van den Ende's musicals could run as long as he desired. Owning a theatre also gave Van den Ende the advantage of decreased production costs when compared to travelling productions. Additionally, he was no longer hampered by limitations such as varying stage dimensions that constrained the design of touring productions. This allowed Van den Ende to produce large-scale shows, such as *The Phantom of the Opera* (1993), which followed *Les Misérables* at the Circustheater.

Apart from *Cats* in Carré, this type of mega-musical had not been seen in the Netherlands. Van den Ende thus raised the bar when it came to production values; from costumes, sound, and set designs to technical elements, Van den Ende's production company always strove for perfection in every detail. This was a relatively new format in a country where it was common for the entire set to shake if an actor shut a door on stage.[7]

Van den Ende often took options on foreign productions early on. This gave him a head start over other theatre producers. It was not unusual for producers to enquire about the rights of a particular show, only to be told that Van den Ende had already taken an option on them. Though he did not always follow through on these, his proactivity ensured there was little competition from other companies with regards to (financially attractive) Dutch versions of famous foreign musicals. In addition to allegations of holding back Dutch productions of musicals, Van den Ende has been accused of licensing all possible international hits, leaving none for other producers.[8]

From Amsterdam to Broadway

In 1994 Van den Ende's company merged with that of his main competitor, John de Mol. Their organization, Endemol, produced both television and theatre, with the reality television show *Big Brother* becoming their biggest (international) success.[9] In 1998 Van den Ende bought back all theatre activities and placed them into Stage Holding, a separate company that he wholly owned.[10] When De Mol and Van den Ende subsequently sold Endemol to the Spanish company Telefónica in 2000, Van den Ende became a billionaire. This allowed him to again invest his money in his first love, theatre. Stage Holding became Stage Entertainment, and this eventually made Van den Ende the biggest musical theatre producer in the Netherlands.

In the same year he sold Endemol, Van den Ende expanded his empire to Germany, where he was already known for his television productions. He acquired the Buddy Theater in Hamburg (built especially for *The Buddy Holly Story*) and the Colosseum Theater in Essen, followed by the Metropol Theater in Berlin.[11] In 2001 he produced *Der König der Löwen* (*The Lion King*) in Hamburg and *Elisabeth* in Essen. In Germany, Van den Ende competed with Stella AG, which had previously produced musicals like *Cats* (1986), *Das Phantom der Oper* (*The Phantom of the Opera*, 1990), and Disney's *Der Glöckner von Notre Dame* (*Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1999).[12] Stella AG, which had once been the market leader, was now in decay,[13] and by 2002 Van den Ende's productions were more successful than Stella's. According to Peter Schwenkow, who owned half of Stella, Van den Ende was waging a *Musical-Krieg* (war on musicals) against him by buying rights of musicals for incredibly high sums of money, contributing to Stella going bankrupt.[14] Van den Ende then acquired five of Stella's former theatres: the Operettenhaus and Theater Neue Flora in Hamburg, the Apollo Theater and Palladium Theater in Stuttgart, and the Theater am Potsdamer Platz in Berlin.[15] Empowered with Van den Ende's capital, Stage Entertainment would continually seek to unlock new markets, including Spain, France, and Russia.

Aside from conquering Europe, Broadway was Van den Ende's highest goal. Already in 1993 he produced an original Dutch musical there, *Cyrano*. He had trouble finding a suitable leading actor and director; according to Van den Ende, the Americans thought of him and his company as amateurs and there-

fore did not bother to audition.[16] So, Van den Ende contracted Bill van Dijk, who had created the title role in the Netherlands, to play Cyrano, and asked original director Eddy Habbema to direct the Broadway version. The American trade unions did not appreciate this. Not only the star and the director but also the composer, the costume designer, the set designer, and the lighting designer were Dutch. In other words, the musical was 'too Dutch', which is said to have been one of the reasons why the musical flopped.[17] Despite this failure, his New York adventure left Van den Ende with an office in Times Square.[18] Van den Ende started to partner with other producers in New York on new shows. An important step was the joint venture with Edward Strong and Michael David from Dodger Theatricals (which lasted until 2004), resulting in *Titanic* (1997), *42nd Street* (2001), *Urinetown* (2001), and *Into the Woods* (2002). When *Titanic* won the Tony Award for Best Musical in 1997, Van den Ende realized he was starting to mean something on Broadway.[19]

Following this collaboration, Stage Entertainment partnered with other international producers such as Littlestar, Andrew Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Group, Cameron Mackintosh, Vereinigten Bühnen Wien, and Disney Theatricals.[20] Van den Ende was an interesting partner for Disney because he owned theatres in both the Netherlands and Germany. He gained Disney's trust by turning some of their less successful productions into European hits. He made changes to *Tarzan* (2007) and *The Little Mermaid* (2012), improving their quality; new songs and arrangements were written for *Tarzan*, for example, and in *The Little Mermaid* the actors were hung from cables in the ceiling rather than moving on roller skates, as they had done on Broadway.[21]

Marketing Magic

Another major contributing factor to Van den Ende's success as a musical theatre producer concerns marketing. Van den Ende made his shows into experiences that started as soon as one entered the theatre, or even earlier. He decorated his theatres and their surroundings in the style of the musicals that played there. An example are the branded ferries that carry spectators to the Theatre im Hafen, home to *Der König der Löwen*, and the Theater an der Elbe, home to *Das Wunder von Bern* (*The Miracle of Bern*, a stage adaptation developed by Stage Entertainment of the 2003 film)—'*ein Gesamterlebnis*' (complete experience), as journalist Daniela Stürmlinger called it.[22] Van den Ende also exhibited themed art collections inside and outside the theatres and set up an exhibition about *Der König der Löwen* in the centre of Hamburg, organized in collaboration with a German newspaper.[23]

In the Netherlands, Van den Ende made the musical into a glamorous genre. He first introduced the red carpet on opening nights in the country where '*doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg*' (acting normal is crazy enough) was something of a national motto.[24] The red carpet, with reporting media present, put the spotlight on the stars who attended the premieres, giving the events allure and importance. A similar move was the introduction of the

Musical Awards in 2000. Following the Tony Awards' template, Van den Ende created these prizes for Dutch musical theatre. By winning a Musical Award (awarded by independent judges), Van den Ende's productions were given a quality label, which made the product more worthwhile in the eye of the consumer and was useful publicity for the shows. Van den Ende's connections in the television industry allowed him to have the Musical Awards broadcast on television, reaching an even wider audience.[25]

More importantly, Van den Ende's connections in television meant he had access to famous faces that he could put into his musicals. When Van den Ende produced *Les Misérables* in 1991, there were not many famous musical theatre actors in the Netherlands. Therefore Van den Ende convinced the casting directors to give the roles of Mr and Mrs Thénardier to two of his television icons: Simone Kleinsma, famous from television and cabaret, and comedian Paul de Leeuw, who was known for his radio- and tv shows.[26] Van den Ende also used his connection with journalist Henk van der Meijden, who ran the well-read showbiz page in the newspaper *De Telegraaf*. He gave Van der Meijden scoops and background stories about musical theatre actors and got front-page articles in return.[27] In this way, publicity and commerce increased the popularity of the other, less-established actors in *Les Misérables* and eventually made them stars.

Stars were highly important to Van den Ende when it came to promoting his musicals. He was skilled at carefully planning the careers of his protégées to optimize their exposure and popularity. For example, he recommended that budding musical actress Chantal Janzen do a big television show to increase her overall popularity. The next season he gave her the lead in a new musical that would in turn benefit from her increased popularity.[28] In this way, Van den Ende increased Janzen's stardom up to the point where he could launch a musical written especially for her in 2010: *Petticoat*.

Van den Ende also involved celebrities in his international productions. For the Hamburg premiere of *Titanic*, for example, he invited Gina Lollobrigida, Sophia Loren, and Liza Minnelli.[29] In 2009 Van den Ende made Whoopi Goldberg co-producer of the West End production *Sister Act*, knowing her name would guarantee attention. Similarly, for the Hamburg production of *Rocky the Musical* in 2012 he partnered with Sylvester Stallone and world champion boxing brothers Vladimir and Vitali Klitschko. According to Hilde Scholten, a former judge in the Dutch Musical Awards, Van den Ende was not afraid to work with big names from other sectors, though it did not always contribute to the quality of his musicals.[30]

In addition to bringing glamour, an award system, and stars to the Netherlands, Van den Ende made sure to understand his target audience. When he produced *The Phantom of the Opera* (1993) in the Netherlands, he introduced the Phantom Phone, a phone number people could call to book tickets for the show. The Phantom Phone eventually became the international Top Ticket Line and later See Tickets, which is now one of the biggest European ticket agencies. More importantly, through the use of the Phantom Phone,

Van den Ende built extensive customer databases, allowing him to directly reach his target audience with promotions and offers.[31]

In January 2015, Stage Entertainment acquired all shares of its major Dutch competitor, Albert Verlinde Entertainment, consolidating its position as the country's most prominent musical theatre producer.In June, Van den Ende announced that he wanted to work less and sold 60 percent of his company to private equity firm CVC Capital Partners. Barely one year later, CVC's influence already showed: in January 2016 Stage Entertainment announced that 300 to 350 of its 3,000 jobs worldwide would disappear.[32] The Joop van den Ende Academy in Hamburg, the Theater am Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, and Stage Entertainment's UK office closed to reduce costs.[33] Stage Entertainment announced that it wants to run fewer risks making its own productions and instead will more often choose to reprise musicals such as *The Lion King* and the original Stage production *Ciske de Rat* (*Ciske the Rat*, 2007), which indeed became its major productions for the 2016/2017 season in the Netherlands.[34] Still, when Van den Ende sold his company to CVC he expressed his hope to, with their help, double audience numbers by expanding to other parts of Europe as well as South America and Asia.[35] One thing is clear: this carpenter turned billionaire is not finished yet.

Notes

1. Henk van Gelder, *Joop van Den Ende: De Biografie* [Joop van Den Ende: The Biography] (Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 2012), 18. 'Dit is mijn leven.' All translations are my own.
2. Van Gelder, interview by Sanne Thierens, 7 January 2015; Van Gelder, *Joop van Den Ende: De Biografie*, 14.
3. Van Gelder, *Joop van Den Ende: De Biografie*, 21.
4. Ibid., 37.
5. Ibid., 72.
6. Elisa Mutsaers, 'Een Leven Lang Theater: Joop van den Ende', *Theater Instituut Nederland*, 2012, http://www.eenlevenlangtheater.nl/joop%20van%20den%20ende/.
7. Henk van Gelder, 'Met Alle Tekorten en Beperkingen Meer Dan Geslaagd', in *Musicals in Nederland*, ed. Hilde Scholten (Houten: Terra, 2004), 22.
8. Van Gelder, interview by Sanne Thierens.
9. Mutsaers, 'Een Leven Lang Theater: Joop van den Ende'.
10. Ibid.
11. Van Gelder, *Joop van Den Ende: De Biografie*, 304.
12. '"Konkurrenz Belebt Das Geschäft": Stella Musical Theater Klaus von Der Heyde, Vorstandsvorsitzender Der Stella Entertainment AG, Im Gespräch', *Berliner Zeitung*, 22 February 2002, http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/-konkurrenz-belebt-das-geschaeft--stella-musical-theater-klaus-von-der-heyde--vorstandsvorsitzender-der-stella-entertainment-ag--im-gespraech,10810590,9976354.html.

13. Alexander von Kühn, 'Der Traumfabrikant', *Der Spiegel*, 23 January 2012, http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-83679170.html.
14. Gisela Reiners, 'Krise Bei Hamburger Stella AG Verschärft Sich', *Die Welt*, 7 May 2002, http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article388058/Krise-bei-Hamburger-Stella-AG-verschaerft-sich.html.
15. Van Gelder, *Joop van Den Ende: De Biografie*, 313.
16. Ibid., 225. 'In hun ogen waren wij amateurs' (In their eyes we were amateurs).
17. Yaël Koren, *Andere Tijden: Het Musical-Avontuur op Broadway*, documentary (2014; NTR/VPRO), http://www.npodoc.nl/speel.NPS_1237502.html.
18. Van Gelder, *Joop van Den Ende: De Biografie*, 266.
19. Ibid., 269.
20. Ed Meza, 'Teuton Legit Powerhouse Packs Broadway Punch', *Variety*, 10 February 2013, https://www.questia.com/magazine/1P3-2907391171/teuton-legit-powerhouse-packs-broadway-punch.
21. Van Gelder, *Joop van Den Ende: De Biografie*, 337–8.
22. Daniela Stürmlinger, 'Nach "Big Brother" Und "Traumhochzeit" Nun "Buddy"', *Hamburger Abentblatt*, 27 April 2000, http://www.abendblatt.de/archiv/2000/article204304417/Angriff-auf-Stella.html.
23. Van Gelder, *Joop van Den Ende: De Biografie*, 326.
24. Van Gelder, interview by Sanne Thierens.
25. Maarten van Nispen, interview by Sanne Thierens, 23 December 2014.
26. Van Gelder, 'Met Alle Tekorten en Beperkingen Meer Dan Geslaagd', 22.
27. Hilde Scholten, interview by Sanne Thierens, 18 February 2015.
28. Van Gelder, interview by Sanne Thierens.
29. Maarten van Nispen, email to author, 17 February 2015.
30. Scholten, interview by Sanne Thierens.
31. Van Nispen, interview by Sanne Thierens.
32. 'Meer Banen Weg Bij Musicalbedrijf Stage', *De Volkskrant*, 19 January 2016, http://www.volkskrant.nl/theater/meer-banen-weg-bij-musicalbedrijf-stage~a4227311/.
33. Ulrich Gassdorf, 'Stage Entertainment Schließt Auch MusicalSchule', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 23 January 2016, http://www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article206957087/StageEntertainmentschliesstauchMusicalSchule.html; Matthew Hemley, 'Stage Entertainment Axes UK Production Department', *The Stage*, 17 February 2016, https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2016/stage-entertainment-axes-uk-production-department/.
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35. Camil Driessen and Daan van Lent, 'Hoe Misérable Wordt Dit?', *nrc. next*, 20 June 2015.

CHAPTER 36

West Side Story: The Journey to Lincoln Center Theater

Doug Reside

In the liner notes for the cast recording of the 2015 Lincoln Center Theater revival of *The King and I*, Ted Chapin, president of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization recounts the history of theatre at Lincoln Center—a stormy saga which involved several failed attempts to create a resident repertory theatre on the campus before the current company was established in 1985. Chapin concludes his history with the observation:

> We now have a theater that, in performing a repertory of great works, has repeatedly honored the work of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. CAROUSEL (1994), SOUTH PACIFIC (2008), and now THE KING AND I. The repertory theater of Lincoln Center, indeed.[1]

Although Lincoln Center Theater could hardly be considered a musical theatre repertory company in the traditional sense—of the thirty-one or so musicals produced by Lincoln Center since 1985 only six have been revivals (*Anything Goes*, *Most Happy Fella*, *Carousel*, *The Frogs*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*)—there is nonetheless a classical quality to most Lincoln Center Theater musicals. Rather than attempting to revolutionize the musical theatre form with each new production, the company's musicals seem to grow naturally out of the best work of an established tradition.

The current company, Lincoln Center Theater, has been shaped by the failures of its predecessors. The series of companies that tried and failed to establish a permanent home at Lincoln Center between 1964 and 1984 were in

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many ways very different from each other, but each seems to have struggled with specific qualities of the Vivian Beaumont and its audiences.

First, earlier companies often ran into difficulties when the work they produced was overtly political and challenging in ways that disturbed Lincoln Center audiences. In the first season of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, Elia Kazan and Robert Whitehead produced Eugene O'Neill's little-known play, *Marco Millions*—a satire of, among other things, American materialism. A review in the *Harvard Crimson* noted, 'Many whom this satire is aimed at will be occupying its seats.'[2] The company's board was not happy with the results of the first season,[3] and Whitehead and Kazan resigned.[4] The board hired Herbert Blau and Jules Irving from San Francisco to replace them, and in their first production Blau offended powerful donors when he compared President Johnson to 'Robespierre, Castro, Verwoerd, [and] Mao Tse-tung' in the programme notes for *Danton's Death*.[5] Blau resigned in January of 1967 claiming 'the climate is no longer right for me to do what I came to do in the form I had in mind'.[6] Irving stayed until 1972, but the company never really stabilized.

In March of 1973, Lincoln Center announced that there would no longer be a repertory theatre company at Lincoln Center and that Joseph Papp and his New York Shakespeare Festival would instead take over the venue.[7] Papp told the *New York Times* that he was committed to diversifying the audience at the Vivian Beaumont (which he said was 'lily white').[8] 'I want black writers and actors as part of the regular policy', he said.[9] Papp promised that his priority would be to produce 'new American plays', followed by 'new foreign plays', and classics only occasionally if 'a new concept in style and casting' could 'justify the revival'.[10] From the autumn of 1973 to August of 1974, for his first five-show season, Papp produced Puerto Rican-born playwright Miguel Piñero's play *Short Eyes* (1974) as well as *What the Wine Sellers Buy* (1974) by Detroit playwright Ray Milner, who was black.

After the first two seasons, though, Papp felt Lincoln Center audiences did not appreciate his selections. In March of 1975 he told the *New York Times*, 'We engendered a lot of anger and frustration on the part of the audience; outright hostility', and 'We disrupted the audience of this stately mansion.'[11] Indeed, the *New York Times* reported, 'attendance dropped from 27,000 last season to 22,000' over the course of 1975.[11] Papp announced that rather than producing new works, he would 'emphasize classical dramas with international stars and traditionally styled contemporary plays with established American performers and directors'.[12]

It was with full awareness of all of this history that Gregory Mosher of Chicago's Goodman Theater accepted an offer to become the first artistic director of the newly established Lincoln Center Theater in 1985. The new executive producer, Bernard Gersten, a former associate of Papp's at the Public during his time at Lincoln Center, was perhaps even more aware of the rocky history. Although their first season included a short run of Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Mosher and Gersten stuck

mostly to Papp's suggested menu of 'classical dramas with international stars and traditionally styled contemporary plays with established American performers'. Their first musical in the Beaumont was a popular revival of the very old-fashioned, presentational Cole Porter musical, *Anything Goes*, with Patti LuPone as Reno Sweeney.

They seemed somewhat more willing to experiment in the smaller Mitzi Newhouse Theater. The September of 1986 was dedicated to a festival of anti-apartheid South African pieces by the company Woza Afrika! The following season included the musical *Sarafina!* written by Mbongeni Ngema, a member of the Woza Afrika! team. *Sarafina!* transferred to Broadway's Cort Theatre, earned five Tony Award nominations, and ran for more than a year, suggesting that, at least in the Newhouse, and at least with musicals, something like the diverse, adventurous theatre imagined by Papp was possible.

In 1991, Mosher decided to leave both the directorship (reportedly to be able to spend more time directing plays[12]) and the board, and Gersten began to look for a replacement. Andre Bishop, who was then running Playwrights Horizons, was selected. Bishop believes he caught the board's eye:

> [...] because I was very interested in musical theatre and musical plays and I love opera. I take musical theatre seriously. I'm of the old Rodgers and Hammerstein to Sondheim to Adam Guettel and Jason Robert Brown's school of musicals so I was very happy there. We [at Playwrights Horizons] were doing very well. We had made it a viable and useful and good theatre. And we were particularly known because there were very few non-profit institutions except maybe the Public doing new musical theatre work.[13]

Playwrights Horizons had produced many of the most innovative and challenging musical theatre works of the early 1980s including William Finn's *Falsetto* series and Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*. The decision to hire Bishop perhaps signalled that Lincoln Center Theater was interested in continuing to produce new musicals as well as plays.

Gersten stayed on with the company as the Executive Director, but the division of responsibilities between him and Bishop seems to have been fairly clear. Bishop describes it as follows:

> I was in charge of all of the artistic matters of the theatre; he was in charge of the business. We shared advertising, board relations, and fundraising, but there was a very clear demarcation.[14]

Bishop's first production at Lincoln Center Theater was a transfer of Goodspeed Theater's revival of the operatic Frank Loesser musical, *The Most Happy Fella*, a production famous for its drastically reduced orchestrations for just two pianos. The following season he brought Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty, whose *Lucky Stiff* and *Once On This Island* he had produced at Playwrights Horizon, to Lincoln Center with their new show, *My Favorite Year* (1992).

Over the next two decades, Bishop continued to develop Lincoln Center into a venue where musical theatre writers who had achieved some success Off-Broadway could take a step up to the Vivian Beaumont's Broadway stage. Michael John LaChiusa, whose *First Lady Suite* opened at the Public Theater in 1993, made his Broadway debut with musical contributions to the Lincoln Center Theater-produced *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1995), and premiered his first Broadway score at the Beaumont with *Marie Christine* (1999). Likewise, Jason Robert Brown (whose *Songs for a New World* opened at the WPA theatre in 1995), and Adam Guettel (whose *Floyd Collins* had premiered at Playwrights Horizons in 1996) also had their Broadway debuts at Lincoln Center with (respectively) *Parade* (1998) and *The Light in the Piazza* (2005). As musical theatre composer-lyricists, Adam Guettel, Jason Robert Brown, and Michael John LaChiusa are all very different from each other, but each has grown out of an established tradition, the 'Rodgers and Hammerstein to Sondheim' tradition in which Bishop placed himself. Lincoln Center musicals, like Shakespearean and classical drama, tend to feature big emotions, big ideas about long-standing rather than specifically contemporary human concerns, and relatively presentational direction in which performers regularly reflect on these ideas in audience-facing soliloquies.

In part, this is a function of the thrust stage which baffled so many of the company's predecessors. In 1960, Broadway scenic designer Jo Mielziner, who had been assigned to work on the design of the Vivian Beaumont theatre auditorium, revealed that the theatre would have a 'platform stage extending twenty-seven feet at the maximum into the audience'.[15] Mielziner was quoted by the *New York Times* as saying 'It was decided that intimacy and flexibility would be the keynote of this theatre building.' The plan was to have a theatre that would provide a sense of connection with the action and 'excellent sight-lines to all patrons' regardless of their seat.[16] Ironically, difficulty with sight-lines from certain seats and a feeling of distance from the cast have been common criticisms levelled at productions in the Vivian Beaumont over the past fifty years.

Although the first season of the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center was performed in the temporary ANTA Washington Square Theatre, that space was designed to be a near replica of the Vivian Beaumont. The challenges of the thrust were immediately apparent. Director Elia Kazan wrote a retrospective on the company's first season for the *New York Times* in which he admitted that the play *But For Whom Charlie* was 'hurt' by 'mounting it on a thrust stage'.[17] *New York Times* critic Howard Taubman noted in a review of the company's second season that the new directors, Herbert Blau and Jules Irving, seemed to be struggling with the stage (particularly when the thrust was used) noting that in Blau's *Danton's Death*, 'people on the extreme sides had to crane their necks awkwardly to catch everything that went on inside the frame'.[18] Even Joseph Papp seemed confounded by the architecture and announced plans 'to redesign almost the entire interior of the Vivian Beaumont Theater to give it a proscenium stage instead of a thrust stage' after his first two seasons working in the space.[19]

Bishop admits that the design creates 'very specific architectural challenges'. He explains:

> When the Beaumont is used beautifully, [the work] doesn't have to be huge … [The Beaumont is] very good [for] classical work … it's very good [for] plays of language … it's very good [for] plays of direct address … but it isn't very good for 50 per cent of most American plays written in the last fifty years or written today which still tend to be rather insular family dramas. The Beaumont is a thrust and to some degree you have to thrust into it. I mean there are a lot of shows, and mostly new work, which we just can't do in the Beaumont. I mean [they] would get lost in there.[20]

Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals which feature 'stop and sing' musical soliloquies obviously fit well into such a space. New work in the classical style such as *The Light in the Piazza* (an almost operatic piece sung partly in Italian with a score by Richard Rodgers's grandson) or *Marie Christine* (a similarly pseudo-operatic adaptation of a Greek tragedy) also seem especially well suited to presentational staging in this intimate environment.

The physical location of the theatre itself also has affected its producing history. Visitors to the Upper West Side in these first decades of the twenty-first century are often surprised to learn that the neighbourhood—now dotted with multi-million dollar condominiums in buildings, once lent its name to *West Side Story*—a musical set in a poverty-stricken, gang-controlled neighbourhood in Manhattan. While the adjective *uptown* has come to mean a particular sort of gentility, in the mid-1950s, the neighbourhood of the Sharks and the Jets was a fictionalized, but not entirely unfaithful, representation of the situation in the neighbourhoods immediately north and west of Columbus Circle.

Gentrification has been part of New York City life for generations. Like the clean-up of the theatre district near Times Square in the 1990s, the founding of Lincoln Center was met with protest. A 1956 letter to the editor of the *New York Times* signed by Elliott Sachs, president of the West Side Chamber of Commerce, defended the plan as being in the best interests of the majority of New Yorkers even if some of his own constituents might suffer 'hardship' (which included the displacement of residents and business owners who lived and worked in the area).[21] Still, in 1957, 'residents and business men of the affected area' picketed City Hall just before a public hearing was to be held on the project.[22] Nonetheless, the project was approved, and in 1959 President Eisenhower ceremonially turned the first shovel of dirt in the recently cleared space.[23]

The founding of Lincoln Center, in some ways, is a microcosm of the story of the Center in general. Andre Bishop admits:

> I think being at Lincoln Center makes you part of the Establishment no matter what you feel in your heart, and there's no pretending that it isn't […] But I think LCT has done a much more varied repertoire than we are sometimes given credit for.[24]

When asked if Lincoln Center Theater has any particular political leaning, Bishop responded:

> I mean we've done highly political plays, but I don't have a huge political agenda in my life, because as I say I see myself as an absorber and responder to those who do have agendas whatever those agendas are.[25]

While Lincoln Center Theater has produced work addressing contemporary political issues (e.g. *Clybourne Park* and *Disgraced*), the company has not, over the past two decades, established an identity as a politically progressive theatre of the kind imagined by Joseph Papp or even the anti-apartheid seasons of the 1980s.

Still, Lincoln Center Theater does provide an important and nearly unique venue for large-scale, classically styled musical theatre productions in New York. When asked what he thought distinguished the company from other resident theatre companies in New York, Bishop pointed to the scale of the work:

> I think we have the ability, because we have three theatres here and we produce on Broadway with some regularity, to do a huge variety of work—occasionally on a very large scale. I'm not saying that lots of actors and scenery and costumes makes it better, sometimes it makes it worse. But I think that a lot of shows in the Beaumont really hardly anyone else in New York could have done. I don't who could have or would have done *The Coast of Utopia*. I don't know who could have or would have done *Parade* or *The Light in the Piazza*.[26]

Lincoln Center Theater has become, then, the premier venue for large, classically styled musical theatre.

This identity is reflected in the iconic posters artist James McMullan designs for Lincoln Center Theater. McMullan notes that, although his style differs somewhat from poster to poster, almost all of his designs include a sketch of at least one character in the play:

> Somehow, in the minds of the theater-going public there is a sense of a 'typical' Lincoln Center Theater poster. Despite the fact that the texture of the various posters changes dramatically, from hard-edged, as in the case of *The Front Page*, to softer, romantic watercolor, as in *The King and I*, something about the character of my thinking or, perhaps, simply, my consistent use of the human figure as metaphor, give the posters a connecting personality in the audience's memory.[27]

Although in some cases the figure may be recognizable—Patti LuPone's likeness is obvious in *Shows for Days* and the Anna in *The King and I* poster certainly resembles Kelli O'Hara—another actor might assume the role without any special need to change the poster. While many Broadway posters feature a star, or, perhaps, a simple and easily recognizable logo (e.g. a cat's eyes or the Phantom's mask) that might be attached to a range of merchandise, McMullan's posters

capture an individual in a moment of crisis. Playwright John Guare, whose play, *The House of Blue Leaves*, was promoted with a McMullan poster, told the *New York Times* in 1998, 'There is a state of tension in Jim's posters that cannot be resolved in the picture. You have to see the play.'[28] The posters often represent moments where soliloquies might be spoken or sung. These are the moments of 'direct address' Bishop acknowledged as distinctive elements of a successful Lincoln Center piece.

The Theater's administration has recognized McMullan's posters as intimately connected with the company's values. McMullan remembers:

> [Former New York City mayor] John Lindsay, the chairman of the Theater Board in the 1980s, noticed this curious affinity between my posters despite their different uses of the figure, different color palates and different painting styles. At a meeting of the Board to discuss an identity program for Lincoln Center Theater, after several advertising concepts were bandied about, John Lindsay gestured towards the posters hanging on the wall of the conference room and said, 'This is your identity, these McMullan posters.'[29]

This identity may not generate the kind of edgy reputation to which hip new companies may aspire, but, if Lincoln Center Theater can, in particular, develop more racially, ethnically, and economically diverse artists and audiences, it will certainly continue to fill an important niche in the ecosystem of New York theatre.

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CHAPTER 37

Making Musicals that Matter: George C. Wolfe and Oskar Eustis at the Public Theater

Donatella Galella

On 16 April 2015, the Public Theater and the cast of *Hamilton* (2014) celebrated the fortieth anniversary of *A Chorus Line* (1975) on the stage of the Newman Theater, where both of these landmark musicals premiered. When artistic director Oskar Eustis remarked upon how these two musicals shine the spotlight on those whose stories are often left in the wings and asked, 'what better thing could represent what the Public Theater tries to do?' he made explicit a genealogy of innovative musical theatre developed and produced by this New York-based non-profit institution.[1] This rich history includes musicals from *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk* (1996) to *Fun Home* (2013). George C. Wolfe and Oskar Eustis built upon the groundwork of founding producer Joseph Papp (see Chap. 26) to provide a home for many of the most risk-taking, inclusive, and sophisticated musical theatre artists and productions of the past two decades. Often transferring to Broadway, contemporary musicals honed at the Public accumulate economic and symbolic capital and dramatize political histories and social relations.

A gay black man, George C. Wolfe has been committed to breaking barriers and inviting minoritized people to join him in his artistic productions and institutions. Wolfe was born on 23 September 1954 in segregated Frankfurt, Kentucky to Anna (née Lindsey), a teacher and later principal, and Costello Wolfe, a government clerk. When he was 13, he saw three professional productions in New York that had a lasting impact on his artistic vision: Pearl Bailey in *Hello Dolly!*, *West Side Story* at Lincoln Center, and Cleavon Little in *Hamlet* by the Mobile Unit of the New York Shakespeare Festival. Wolfe

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attended Kentucky State University until he transferred to Pomona College where he studied acting, design, writing, and directing. After working at the Inner City Cultural Center in Los Angeles, he moved to New York and studied musical theatre writing at NYU.

Wolfe initially garnered attention for his play *The Colored Museum* (1986), a series of vignettes that satirize dominant narratives of blackness. The play premiered at Crossroads Theatre, a major black-specific institution in New Jersey, and transferred to the Public Theater. Joseph Papp subsequently invited him to become a resident director, and in 1990, Wolfe adapted *Spunk* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. On Broadway, he directed and wrote the libretto for *Jelly's Last Jam* (1991), which explored the racial history and disavowal of jazz composer Jelly Roll Morton. His success led him to direct *Angels in America* (1993), making him the first black director of a major Broadway play by a white writer. Just prior to the Broadway opening, the board of the Public appointed him as producer. Joining the company of Lloyd Richards, Kenny Leon, and Tazewell Thompson, Wolfe became one of a few black men steering major non-profit US theatre companies.

Wolfe joined the Public as producer at a precarious time. JoAnne Akalaitis, the founder of Mabou Mines and successor to Papp from 1991 to 1993, had been fired by the board as a result of financial, artistic, and patriarchal dynamics.[2] (Papp died in 1991.) *A Chorus Line*, which generated sizeable income for the non-profit theatre for more than two decades, had closed the year prior. Wolfe faced a substantial budget of $9.4 million, only a small percentage of which came from ticket sales, and five performance spaces at the Public that ranged from 100 to 299 seats and did not have clear brands.[3] He articulated a new, specific vision: 'the Martinson for new American work; the Newman for plays with broader commercial appeal; the Shiva for performance art and solo pieces; the Anspacher for intimate productions that emphasize the text; and the LuEsther for works in development'.[4] In 1998, he established Joe's Pub to promote an eclectic array of performance artists.

In 1995, Wolfe made a huge impact on the Newman stage, the largest of the spaces, when he collaborated with Savion Glover, Daryl Waters, Zane Mark, Ann Duquesnay, and Reg E. Gaines to create *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk*. Using black musical and movement idioms from blues and hip hop to tap, this artistic team historicized racial hierarchy and specifically the experiences of black men in the United States in a groundbreaking way. Given a history of the Public producing provocative musicals since *Hair* (1967), Wolfe remarked that *Noise/Funk* was 'the kind of show I could have only made at the Public. Imagine if I had gone to a commercial producer and said, "I'm going to do this tap-dancing show with lynching in it—give me money!"'[5] The musical transferred to Broadway where Wolfe won a Tony Award for Best Director and where the production ran for nearly three years.

Committed to building community, Wolfe performed extensive outreach to pave the way for the national tour. The theatre arranged for corporations to pay for 'Bring in the Kids', a programme to give young people free tickets

to the musical. On the diverse audience that he welcomed, he observed, 'You get extraordinarily young kids, you get the old people, you get the fabulous New Yorkers who come to see it … In almost any other scenario, they wouldn't deal with each other at all. I think there's a certain tension in the air that gets released through the show, so it's urban cultural therapy.'[6] Wolfe brought together audiences from across different social strata to reflect critically and cathartically on US history, race, and power. *Noise/Funk* secured awards, acclaim, box office sales, community-building, and legitimacy for Wolfe and the Public.

Wolfe has also articulated his commitment to diversifying the voices heard on stage: 'The producer side of me is really the *service* side of me. I grew up with a very strong sense of responsibility, very specifically from a racial context—I was taught that if you get into the room, you need to open the doors and windows so that others can get in as well.'[7] He cultivated the plays of artists of colour including Suzan-Lori Parks, Anna Deavere Smith, and Diana Son. But Wolfe is particularly drawn to musicals for their rhythm, hybridity of high and low, seductiveness, and potential for critique. He directed and produced a multiracial cast in *On the Town* (1997) and musicals that engaged with challenging themes of race and racism, namely *The Wild Party* (2000) by Michael John LaChiusa and *Caroline, or Change* (2003) by Jeanine Tesori and Tony Kushner. All three of these productions had a life on Broadway that did not last long. For the revival of *On the Town*, the Public served as the managing producer, and for *The Wild Party*, the Public teamed up with commercial producers Anita Waxman, Elizabeth Williams, Roger Berlind, and Scott Rudin as well as Rocco Landesman at Jujamcyn Theaters to secure the Virginia Theatre for the premiere. For Wolfe, 'The challenge is to figure out how to duck beneath the economic barbed wire and deliver a daring, innovative musical.'[8] The non-profit theatre lost nearly $11 million.[9] Wolfe reflected, 'I find that periodically you go through periods when you have to reconvince your board that they should keep supporting and raising funds for the adventurous work you believe in', and he offered as an example *Topdog/Underdog* (2001) whose apparent risk was mitigated by stars Don Cheadle and Jeffrey Wright and Parks's win of the Pulitzer Prize.[10] However, the deficit from the Broadway musicals combined with the difficulties fundraising post-9/11 significantly reduced the theatre's resources.[11] In 2004, he decided to leave the position of producer in part to pursue his independent artistic endeavours. Since then, he has continued to direct on screen and stage. Capitalizing upon the artistic experimentation and political critique that a non-profit theatre makes possible, Wolfe left behind a significant legacy of producing transgressive musicals and providing greater opportunities for audiences and artists of colour.

With a producer's sharp sensibility, a dramaturge's tools, and Papp's democratic spirit, Oskar Eustis became the artistic director of the Public Theater in 2005. Born on 31 July 1958 in Minnesota with the given name of Paul, Eustis comes from a family grounded in leftist politics and higher education. His father, Warren Eustis, was a district attorney with connections to prominent

Democrats, and his stepmother Nancy Eustis is professor emerita of public affairs. His mother Doris Marquit and stepfather Erwin Marquit were committed Marxists who taught at the University of Minnesota, and in 1974, Marquit ran for Governor of Minnesota on the Communist ticket. As a teenager, Eustis left home and found inspiration in the London staging of *Hair* and in the Living Theatre. When he saw the latter burn Monopoly money outside of a bank, he joined in the critique of capitalism by burning his own money.

In 1975, while studying in the Experimental Theatre Wing at NYU, he auditioned for Papp with a twenty-five-minute avant-garde piece because he claimed that he did not know any Shakespeare. He co-founded Red Wing with Swiss artist Stephan Müller to stage high-art pieces mostly for like artists. Eustis later reflected upon his contempt for narrative and popular audiences, 'The good part about that is you can set up a value system that is resistant to the commodification of the dominant culture. The bad part of it is that in so doing, you set up an utterly self-referential and narcissistic system that fails to understand its relationship to the larger culture.'[12] This perception would later inform his populist approach to producing at the Public. In 1977, Red Wing was invited to perform in residence at the Eureka Theatre in San Francisco. From 1980 to 1989, he worked at Eureka as dramaturge, director, and ultimately artistic director, and he famously collaborated with Emily Mann on *Execution of Justice* and Tony Kushner on *Angels in America*. He subsequently worked at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in the roles of resident director, director of new play development, and associate artistic director. In 1994, he was appointed artistic director of Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island where he doubled the audience size, erased $3 million of debt, and produced stalwarts such as *A Christmas Carol* and Shakespeare in inventive ways.[13]

Due to his extensive experience leading theatre institutions in contrast with his predecessors, Eustis is fond of calling himself the first professional artistic director of the Public Theater.[14] When he took on this title in 2005, he came with a multi-pronged mission to stabilize the institution; 'make theatre that matters'; and construct a home for working playwrights, Shakespeare, and all audiences.[15] Because the Public has been subject to the boom-or-bust Broadway model since its founding, the company's production, development, and education initiatives were in precarious positions. He therefore increased fundraising efforts, endorsed New York billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg, and partnered with Bank of America. On how these relationships contradict his typically Marxist rhetoric, Eustis commented, 'I happen to have become an adult in an age of capitalist hegemony. I don't get to decide to be in a different kind of system.'[16] In order to sustain a lively theatre that engages with current events such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and to make that theatre available to as many people as possible, Eustis argues that he must mobilize as many resources as he can.

His efforts have led to myriad new and renewed programmes. To support playwrights and develop their work, Eustis founded the Emerging Writers

Group, Public Lab, and Master Writer's Chair, which Suzan-Lori Parks has occupied since 2008. He institutionalized the Under the Radar Festival and remodelled the Public's lobby with $40 million. Because Eustis understands that free tickets to Shakespeare in the Park still pose barriers to the vast majority of people who do not have time to wait in line or who might not know about the summertime performances, he conceived ways to grant greater access. He relaunched Papp's Mobile Shakespeare Unit to perform for groups such as inmates and invented Public Works to perform classics with local community members. He increased offerings at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, put productions in repertory, and included musicals, namely *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (2005), *Hair* (2008), and *Love's Labour's Lost* (2013), which paid homage to the Public's history by reviving its earliest musicals and by musicalizing another Shakespearean play.

The Musical Theatre Initiative has concretized the institution's pledge to new musicals. Suggesting Eustis's taste, many of these musicals use a sociocultural angle to explore the power dynamics of history through inventive, sometimes immersive, storytelling. Along with Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Eustis produced *Passing Strange* by Stew and Heidi Rodewald; the musical follows a young black man across Europe and it transferred to Broadway in 2008 for a five-month run. Within the next two years, the Public also brought *Hair* and *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* (2010) by Michael Friedman and Alex Timbers to Broadway, and though the former recouped its investment, the latter did not. Dedicated to artists rather than one-off works, Eustis produced several more musicals by Friedman and/or Timbers including *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Here Lies Love* (2013), and *The Fortress of Solitude* (2014). Eustis cultivated relationships with artists who had been previously produced by Wolfe such as Michael John LaChiusa, whose *Giant* (2012) told an epic American story about family, land, and injustice. In addition, Eustis reached out to a legendary artist who had not yet worked with the institution, Stephen Sondheim, resulting in the ultimate version of *Road Show* (2008). These musicals speak to the Public's mandate to produce works that stage pressing issues from the racist, classist prison industrial complex (*Fortress of Solitude*) to Anglo and Chicana/o conflict and community (*Giant*).

Like Wolfe before him, Eustis embraces the populism of musical theatre and centring on marginalized voices. *Fun Home* by Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori and *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda, both of which premiered at the Public and moved to Broadway with critical and financial success, emblematize the producer's ethos. The former is an adaptation of Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir tracing the emergence of her lesbian identification in relation to her father's closeted gay identity and suicide. In 2015, *Fun Home* won Tony Awards for Best Musical, Score, and Book, making Kron and Tesori the first pair of women to achieve this honour. Based on Ron Chernow's biography, *Hamilton* celebrates the US founding father's immigrant bootstraps narrative using a multiracial cast and hip hop. On producing these musicals commercially, Eustis remarked, 'I don't consider that selling out. Musicals are the only

form that actually holds up the possibility of artists making a living in the theater. It is directly related to the fact that you can reach many more people with a musical than you can with a play. That has felt very mission-centric to us.'[17] As a straight, white cis-man, he has also worked to have more equitable representation among the theatre staff.

Eustis dreams of making all tickets to the Public free. At the meeting of for-profit and not-for-profit producers hosted by Arena Stage in Washington, DC in 2011, he articulated his mission as: 'We are here to support art that the marketplace cannot support and we are here to reach audiences other than on their ability to pay. On the basis of those principles, no theater deserves philanthropic support that doesn't have artists on its fulltime staff and theaters should not take subsidiary rights from playwrights.'[18] Asserting himself as more radical than other producers, Eustis put his money where his mouth is by having artists on staff and refusing subsidiary rights, but the enormous success of musicals like *Hamilton* suggest that he also produces work that the commercial realm can indeed support. His critical framing nevertheless enables the Public to appear uninterested in ticket sales yet ultimately reap symbolic and economic capital.

As arguably the most significant contemporary musical theatre librettist-director-producer of colour, George C. Wolfe played an important role in inviting others into the Public Theater to tell and hear provocative stories that would otherwise be silenced, and Oskar Eustis continues to fortify the institution's resources and responsibilities to provide a sustainable home for compelling political theatre. Dedicated to the musical, they used the non-profit company to develop relatively risky new work and repeatedly tested commercial waters, which they have mostly deftly navigated to gain awards and revenue. Moreover, they both built upon the democratic foundations of Papp. A key centre for boundary-pushing musical theatre, the Public extends its musical through-line from *Hair* and *A Chorus Line* to *Noise/Funk* and *Hamilton*.

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CHAPTER 38

Broadway-Bound: La Jolla Playhouse as a Laboratory for New American Musical Theatre

Claudia Wilsch Case

In 1947, with financial support from movie producer David Selznick, Hollywood actors Gregory Peck, Mel Ferrer, and Dorothy McGuire established the Summer Playhouse as a stock company in La Jolla, California, Peck's hometown just outside of San Diego. The theatre, which later became La Jolla Playhouse, was housed in a high school auditorium, where it operated until the mid-1960s, presenting mostly contemporary plays, many of them recently seen on Broadway. In 1956, the company staged its first musical, a revival of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart's *Pal Joey* (1940). As the Playhouse lay dormant for nearly two decades, prolonged fundraising efforts by the Theatre and Arts Foundation of San Diego County helped finance the construction of a permanent home for the organization.[1]

Since 1983, when La Jolla Playhouse reopened as a not-for-profit resident theatre on the campus of the University of California, San Diego, the company has developed into a prominent regional theatre with state-of-the-art facilities, aiming to provide 'unfettered creative opportunities for the leading artists of today and tomorrow' and to support 'audacious and diverse work'.[2] Under the guidance of artistic directors Des McAnuff (1983–1994 and 2000–2007), Michael Greif (1994–1999), Anne Hamburger (1999–2000), and Christopher Ashley, who took over after McAnuff's second term ended in 2007, La Jolla Playhouse has pursued its mission by incubating new plays and musicals and

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staging the occasional reimagined revival. With its development initiatives, such as the Page to Stage program, in existence since 2001, and the DNA New Works Series, inaugurated in 2013, the company serves as a laboratory for new productions. While its not-for-profit structure and its West Coast location make the Playhouse seem far removed from the economic pressures of Broadway, strategic partnerships with commercial producers, beginning with the Dodgers, who count McAnuff as a founding partner, have allowed the company to consider Broadway transfers on a regular basis. When selecting musicals for production, La Jolla Playhouse balances a project's artistic merit with its potential for popular appeal. Several musicals developed at La Jolla have drawn on existing material that may be familiar to audiences, including novels and films, or the oeuvre of a particular band. Seeking to connect with contemporary audiences, most Playhouse musicals have featured rock or pop scores, bringing already-popular musical styles to the stage, rather than expecting the stage to set musical trends.

Big River (1984), adapted by William Hauptman from Mark Twain's 1876 novel *Tom Sawyer*, was the first new musical developed at La Jolla Playhouse, following a workshop production that McAnuff had directed at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The show, with music and lyrics by pop songwriter Roger Miller, had originally been commissioned by emerging producer Rocco Landesman, a member of the Dodgers who would become the president of Jujamcyn Theaters, and, from 2009 to 2012, would serve as the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. After a successful La Jolla run, McAnuff collaborated with Landesman, Heidi Ettinger, and Michael David to bring the production to New York, establishing a model for future Broadway transfers that has blurred the distinction between not-for-profit and commercial theatre. Working with a limited budget of $2.5 million, the producers managed to schedule the Broadway opening just in time to be considered for the 1985 Tony Awards, a calculation that paid off.[3] *Big River* became a hit in New York, receiving thirteen Tony nominations and garnering seven awards, including the Tonys for Best Musical and Best Director. The show later toured nationally and also ran in Australia.

In the wake of *Big River*'s tremendous success, La Jolla Playhouse nurtured more musicals based on novels, although these shows either did not make Broadway transfers or had only modest commercial runs. In 1988, Landesman and producer David Singer provided enhancement money for the premiere of *80 Days*, a project McAnuff had been shepherding for several years. An adaptation of Jules Verne's 1873 novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* with a book by British playwright Snoo Wilson, this musical also included a popular score, composed by Ray Davies, lead singer of The Kinks. The lavish production received mixed reviews, and, despite some talk of revisions, never embarked on its planned Broadway engagement.[4] A similar fate befell *Elmer Gantry*, an adaptation of Sinclair Lewis's 1927 novel (which had also been the source for a 1960 film) with a book by John Bishop and a folk and gospel score by Mel Marvin and Bob Satuloff. Backed by commercial producers Joseph Cates and

Frankie Hewitt, the musical, which had its West Coast premiere at La Jolla in 1991, did not transfer to Broadway, but has since been performed at other regional theatres.[5]

As with *Elmer Gantry*, which was first seen at Ford's Theatre in Washington, DC, in 1988, the Playhouse sometimes develops previously produced work, rather than insisting on mounting world premieres. In 1999, the company staged the American premiere of another musical based on a novel, director John Caird and pop composer Paul Gordon's adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's 1847 work *Jane Eyre*. Directed by Caird, who is known for the Broadway productions of *Les Misérables* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Jane Eyre* had been performed in Wichita, Kansas, in 1995 and in Toronto, Canada, in 1996. After the musical's Canadian producer David Mirvish withdrew, La Jolla Playhouse picked up the project, teaming up with producers Annette Niemtzow, Pamela Koslow, and Janet Robinson, and adding co-director Scott Schwartz. In anticipation of moving *Jane Eyre* to Broadway, the cast was trimmed, the score was revised, and John Napier, Caird's collaborator on *Les Misérables*, designed a technically complex revolving set.[6] The La Jolla production opened to mixed reviews; when the show played on Broadway after further revisions, it ran just six months in the 2000–2001 season but received five Tony nominations.

Dracula, another novel-turned-musical, opened at La Jolla in 2001. *Sunset Boulevard* collaborators Christopher Hampton and Don Black wrote the adaptation of Bram Stoker's 1897 work. Pop songwriter Frank Wildhorn, who had composed two long-running commercial musicals based on literary classics, *Jekyll & Hyde* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, provided the music. With assistance from Dodger Theatricals, the show transferred to Broadway in 2004 with a revised score. Although the New York production flopped, *Dracula*, after additional revisions, later met with success in Europe and Asia.

Beginning with a 2005 Page to Stage workshop production, La Jolla Playhouse also developed *Doctor Zhivago*, a musical based on Boris Pasternak's 1957 novel with a book by Michael Weller, music by Lucy Simon, and lyrics by Michael Korie and Amy Powers. The show had its world premiere under the title *Zhivago* at La Jolla in 2006. After stepping down as the Playhouse's artistic director in 2007, Des McAnuff continued to work on the musical in Australia, where it toured successfully in 2011, and he partnered with Korean producer Shin Chun-soo on a 2012 engagement in Seoul. As an investor in commercial American theatre, Shin was also among the show's producers when it re-emerged stateside as *Doctor Zhivago* in 2015, closing after only twenty-three Broadway performances.

In 2014, La Jolla Playhouse collaborated with Disney Theatricals and New Jersey's Paper Mill Playhouse on the American premiere of the musical *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, with a book by Peter Parnell, music by Alan Menken, and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. Adapted from Victor Hugo's 1831 novel *Notre Dame de Paris* and the 1996 Disney animated film version, the show had originally opened in Berlin, Germany, in 1999, where it ran successfully for three years, before being staged at La Jolla in revised form and

then remounted at Paper Mill in 2015. *Hunchback* ultimately did not move to Broadway and is instead being licensed for regional and amateur theatre productions.

With its proximity to Hollywood, it is no surprise that La Jolla Playhouse has made significant contributions to the growing practice of adapting films into musicals. In 2000, the company staged *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, with a book developed by Richard Morris and Dick Scanlan from Morris's original story and screenplay for the 1967 movie. The show featured a jazz score by Jeanine Tesori and lyrics by Scanlan. Opening on Broadway in 2002, *Thoroughly Modern Millie* introduced Sutton Foster, a last-minute replacement in the La Jolla production. The show received six Tony Awards, including Best Musical and Best Actress, and opened in London the following year.

Additional screen-to-stage musical adaptations nurtured at La Jolla include *Cry-Baby* (2007), *Bonnie & Clyde* (2009), *Little Miss Sunshine* (2011), and *Hands on a Hardbody* (2012), all premiering during Christopher Ashley's tenure as artistic director. Ashley also brought his Broadway success *Xanadu* to the Playhouse in 2008, a stage adaptation of the 1980 movie starring Olivia Newton-John. *Cry-Baby*, based on the 1990 John Waters movie with Johnny Depp, featured music and lyrics by David Javerbaum and Adam Schlesinger and a book by Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan, who had worked on the stage version of Waters's film *Hairspray*. *Cry-Baby* closed after a few weeks on Broadway, but was nominated for four Tony Awards in 2008. The show has since been revived regionally at New Line Theatre in St. Louis, Missouri.

The musical *Bonnie & Clyde*, based on the 1967 film starring Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway, has a book by Ivan Menchell, music by Frank Wildhorn, and lyrics by Don Black. Following its La Jolla run in 2009, *Bonnie & Clyde* was seen at Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota, Florida, then moved to Broadway in 2011. The show only lasted a month in New York, although it later received two Tony nominations and has been produced internationally. Two years after its 2011 Playhouse debut, the musical adaptation of the 2006 movie *Little Miss Sunshine*, with a book by James Lapine and music and lyrics by William Finn, was revised for an Off-Broadway run at Second Stage Theatre. Premiering at La Jolla in 2012, *Hands on a Hardbody* is based on a 1997 documentary film chronicling an endurance competition where contestants keep their hands on a truck in hopes of outlasting each other and winning the vehicle. Doug Wright contributed the book, and the score is by Amanda Green and Trey Anastasio of the band Phish. The musical closed shortly after its Broadway opening in 2013, before being nominated for three Tonys. Like *Cry-Baby*, the show was subsequently picked up by New Line Theatre and was well received in St. Louis. Following a world premiere under Christopher Ashley's direction at Signature Theatre in Virginia, La Jolla Playhouse in 2017 staged a musical adaptation of *Freaky Friday*, based on the 1972 Mary Rodgers novel and two Disney films about a mother and her teenage daughter who switch bodies. Like La Jolla's *Hunchback* co-production with Paper Mill, *Freaky Friday* is another musical initially developed by Disney Theatricals.

Musicals nurtured at La Jolla often feature pop or rock scores, and some of the company's productions have been built entirely around existing music. In 1992, McAnuff collaborated with The Who's Pete Townsend on a stage adaptation of the band's rock opera *Tommy*, based on the 1969 album and 1975 film.[7] Starring Michael Cerveris in what would become his Broadway debut, the show was a hit at La Jolla and in New York and later ran in London. *Tommy* won five Tonys, including the award for Best Director, and La Jolla Playhouse received the 1993 Special Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre. Having produced The Who's rock opera, the Playhouse was an apt venue for the 1997 West Coast premiere of Jonathan Larson's *Rent*, another rock musical based on operatic material. Michael Greif, La Jolla's artistic director at the time, had ushered *Rent* from Off-Broadway to Broadway before bringing his production team to California to recreate their work for La Jolla's fiftieth anniversary season.

In 2004, La Jolla Playhouse developed a production structured around popular music that became the company's most profitable show to date. *Jersey Boys*, a jukebox musical about Frankie Valli and his 1960s rock 'n' roll band The Four Seasons, has a book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, music by Bob Gaudio, and lyrics by Bob Crewe. The show quickly transferred to Broadway in 2005 with help from the Dodgers. What set *Jersey Boys* apart from other jukebox musicals was its emphasis on telling the story of The Four Seasons, in addition to showcasing the band's songs. *Jersey Boys* won four 2006 Tonys, including the awards for Best Musical and Best Actor. Over the past decade, the show has toured nationally and has enjoyed several international productions.

While La Jolla Playhouse focuses on developing new work, the company has also staged some revivals, often on their way to (or from) New York. In 1985 the Playhouse produced Stephen Sondheim and George Furth's *Merrily We Roll Along* in a dramatically revised version of the original 1981 Broadway flop. The collaborators reworked the plot, replaced some of the songs, and cast slightly older actors to play the two generations in the show. The La Jolla version was directed by James Lapine, who had just collaborated with Sondheim on *Sunday in the Park with George*.[8] With additional changes, *Merrily We Roll Along* was subsequently produced at other regional theatres and in England, eventually returning to New York for a 1994 OBIE-Award-winning Off-Broadway production by the York Theatre Company. In 1994, La Jolla Playhouse staged a revival of the 1961 musical *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. Matthew Broderick moved to Broadway with the production and won the 1995 Tony for Best Actor.

While La Jolla Playhouse has developed a variety of musicals based on novels or films, and others celebrating particular song catalogues, the company, particularly since the arrival of Christopher Ashley, has also nurtured musicals that feature newly conceived narratives. Recent examples include *Memphis*, a 1950s-style rock musical by Joe DiPietro and Bon Jovi member David Bryan, which had been in development since its 2003 premiere at the North Shore Music Theatre in Massachusetts. In 2007, La Jolla Playhouse co-produced

the show with Seattle's 5th Avenue Theatre and transferred the production to Broadway, where *Memphis* won four Tonys, including the 2010 award for Best Musical, before it embarked on a national tour and international engagements. Other recent examples include the 2015 world premieres of *Come from Away* (book, music, and lyrics by Irene Sankoff and David Hein), about a small Canadian town's response to 9/11; and the romantic comedy *Up Here*, with book, music, and lyrics by Disney's *Frozen* team Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez. In 2016, the Playhouse premiered *Miss You Like Hell*, a mother–daughter cross-country adventure by *In the Heights* book writer Quiara Alegría Hudes and rock musician Erin McKeown.

Complementing its mainstage offerings, which usually yield a Broadway transfer, La Jolla Playhouse's development initiatives have supported experimental plays and musicals that may or may not have a future in the commercial theatre. In 1999, Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik's rock musical adaptation of Frank Wedekind's 1906 play *Spring Awakening* had a workshop at La Jolla before premiering at Atlantic Theater Company in 2006 and subsequently moving to Broadway, where it won multiple 2007 Tony Awards. The Civilians and Les Frères Corbusier are among the experimental theatre groups that have developed work through La Jolla's Page to Stage program, including a 2004 workshop of Steve Cosson and Michael Friedman's documentary musical *Paris Commune*, which the Civilians premiered in Boston in 2012, and a 2009 workshop of Sean Cunningham, Alex Timbers, and Michael Friedman's presidential pageant *Hoover Comes Alive!*, which premiered at the Abrons Arts Center in New York in 2014 under the title *Here's Hoover*. *Chasing the Song*, a sequel to *Memphis* by Joe DiPietro and David Bryan, depicts the 1960s American music scene and was performed in a concert reading in La Jolla's first DNA New Works Series, prior to receiving a 2014 Page to Stage workshop production.

With its experimental spirit and its long-standing ties to the commercial theatre industry, La Jolla Playhouse has established itself as a highly-regarded regional theatre company that doubles as a tryout space for potential Broadway shows, and thereby offers a model for successful partnerships between not-for-profit theatres and commercial producers. The playhouse's expanding development programs support the company's mission to stage audacious and diverse work, including new productions that will continue to shape American musical theatre.

Notes

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4. Stephen Holden, 'Theater's New Crop Takes Root', *New York Times*, 21 August 1988; Dan Sullivan, '*80 Days*—Not Quite a Winner in the Big Race', *Los Angeles Times*, 30 August 1988.
5. Richard Stayton, '*Elmer Gantry*, Born Again', *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1991.
6. Charles Isherwood, '*Jane* Finds a New Beau', *Variety*, 21 September 1998.
7. Janet Maslin, 'The Man Who Reinvented *The Who's Tommy*', *New York Times*, 9 May 1993.
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CHAPTER 39

Our Brand Is Revival: The Roundabout Theatre Company

Bryan M. Vandevender

The practice of restaging musical entertainments years after their first premiere dates back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when rival stock companies would produce and then reproduce previously successful melodramas such as Charles M. Barras's *The Black Crook* and operettas such as Franz Lehar's *The Merry Widow* and W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The musical revival as it frequently appears on Broadway today is a much more recent phenomenon, whereby a recognizable and often canonized musical property is remounted (frequently as a star vehicle) in a slick new production that offers a team of theatre artists the opportunity to reinterpret a classic. This model of production became a discernible trend in the early 1990s when a surfeit of musical properties from yesteryear took up residence in New York theatres, suggesting that several Broadway producers had shifted their attention away from newer, untested works to focus more readily on appealing to audience nostalgia and capitalizing on time-tested fare.

The 1993–1994 Broadway season in particular proved to be a watershed year in the history of revivals, with the opening of seven musical revivals including Nicholas Hytner's revisionist *Carousel*, Jeff Calhoun's celebrity-studded *Grease*, and new productions of *She Loves Me*, *Camelot*, *My Fair Lady*, *Damn Yankees*, and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. By the close of the season, the seven musical revivals that had opened on Broadway effectively outnumbered the year's new musical offerings. The American Theatre Wing, in an effort to accommodate the unprecedented swell of musicals marked as revivals, created a new category of Tony Award specifically for revivals of musi-

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cals. The establishment and continued presentation of the Best Musical Revival award has helped to ensure that revivals remain a mainstay of the Broadway season.

The ongoing work of New York City's non-for-profit Roundabout Theatre Company has arguably served to sustain the continuing revival trend. The company's primary mission—to restage classic plays and musicals—combined with its operation of five theatre spaces makes Roundabout one of the leading progenitors of revivals both on and off the Great White Way. Since the launch of its Great American Musicals series in 1993, the company has contributed twenty-four musical revivals on Broadway alone. Consequently, Roundabout carries the distinction of having produced more than one-quarter of the musical revivals to play Broadway since the mid-1990s. It has also provided (with only a few exceptions) at least one musical revival to every Broadway season for over twenty years. The company's commitment to the American musical theatre repertoire has become a defining feature of its business model and its annual slate of productions. As a result, Roundabout routinely offers its audiences (which includes a subscriber base of more than 46,000 members) an opportunity to discover or reacquaint themselves with great works of musical theatre penned by such luminaries as Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, Cole Porter, Kurt Weill, Cy Coleman, Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, Charles Strouse and Lee Adams, Maury Yeston, and Stephen Sondheim.

While its fealty to musicals of the past distinguishes Roundabout from several other non-for-profit producing organizations in New York City, the staging of musicals was not a feature of the company's founding mission. The Roundabout Theatre's initial conceit originated with director Gene Feist (1923–2014) and his wife, actor Elizabeth Owens (1928–2005) who conceived of a subscription series theatre dedicated to staging masterworks of the Western dramatic canon. Feist, a Brooklyn native and a graduate of both the Carnegie Institute of Technology and New York University, studied acting and directing with Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio and sought to establish a theatre company that would allow both he and Owens to hone their respective crafts. The company opened in November of 1966 and presented its inaugural season, which included productions of August Strindberg's *The Father*, Molière's *The Miser*, and Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelleas and Melisande*, in a makeshift performance space located in the basement of a Chelsea supermarket. In order to attract New Yorkers who might not otherwise attend theatrical performances, Feist and Owens resolved to make their productions affordable and kept the first season's subscription price to a mere five dollars. Their ploy proved successful as the company ended its first year of operation with more than four hundred subscribers.[1] Feist directed a significant number of the company's productions over the next ten years and subsequent seasons featured his revivals of works written by Strindberg, Shakespeare, Odets, Wilde, Shaw, Feydeau, Brecht, Chekhov, Ibsen, Molnar, Pirandello, and Pinter. Throughout Roundabout's first decade of operation, Feist would revive only one musical, Harold Rome's

pro-union revue, *Pins and Needles*. The production closed Roundabout's inaugural season, received positive reviews, and ran for 214 performances. Despite these markers of success, Feist and his collaborators would choose to focus their attentions on decidedly non-musical works for the next twenty-eight years.

The decision to expand Roundabout's mission by introducing musicals into the company's repertoire began as a matter of financial exigency. For much of the 1970s, Roundabout proved to be both an artistic success and a financial disappointment. A string of positive notices from the *New York Times*, two Broadway transfers, and a membership that exceeded 19,000 subscribers evinced the quality of Roundabout productions, but even so, the company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 1978. By 1983, it had amassed a deficit of $2.5 million. Amidst this fiscal distress, Todd Haimes, a 26-year-old graduate of the Yale School of Management, joined Roundabout's leadership as Managing Director. Haimes spent the first years of his tenure working to help the company regain financial solvency.[2] When Gene Feist retired as Roundabout's Artistic Director in 1990, Haimes ascended to the post.

In an attempt to broaden the company's exposure and subscriber base, Haimes made two significant changes to Roundabout's operations. First, he moved the company's productions to the Criterion Center's Stage Right Theatre located at Broadway and 44th Street. Because of the Criterion Center's uptown address, the American Theatre Wing recognized Roundabout's revivals as eligible for Tony Awards. Second, Haimes launched the Great American Musical series in 1993—an initiative that would ensure one musical revival each season. The inaugural production of the series was Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick's *She Loves Me*, a musical that had not appeared on Broadway since its premiere in 1963. Haimes engaged two relatively unknown theatre artists, Scott Ellis and Rob Marshall, to direct and choreograph the revival. The production's cast featured more seasoned musical theatre talents, including Boyd Gaines, Judy Kuhn, Sally Mayes, and Howard McGillin. When *She Loves Me* opened on 10 June 1993, the major New York theatre critics cheered the revival, remarking upon the overall quality of the production and routinely identifying Ellis's direction and Gaines's performance as its chief attractions. After a two-month limited run at the Criterion Center, the production transferred to the Brooks Atkinson Theatre where it ran for 354 performances and grossed more than $10 million. At the close of the 1993–1994 season, *She Loves Me* received two Drama Desk Awards, four Outer Critics Circle Awards, and a Tony Award for Gaines. The production also confirmed Roundabout as the successful producer of musical revivals. According to Haimes, launching the Great American Musicals series was something of a financial gamble and the success of *She Loves Me* allowed Roundabout to continue producing musical revivals for Broadway.[3] The seasons that immediately followed featured the first Broadway revivals of Stephen Sondheim's *Company* and Sherman Edwards's *1776*, as well as a new production of Cy Coleman and Carolyn Leigh's *Little Me*—all of which received generally positive reviews and earned respectable grosses.

On 19 March 1998, Roundabout premiered its most acclaimed musical revival to date. A new production of John Kander and Fred Ebb's *Cabaret*, directed by Sam Mendes and choreographed by Rob Marshall, opened at the dilapidated Henry Miller's Theatre—a former adult film house and discotheque. Roundabout refurbished the building and rechristened it the Kit Kat Club, the same name employed by *Cabaret*'s Weimar-era nightclub. The production came to the United States by way of London's Donmar Warehouse where it had played for sixteen sold-out weeks in the winter of 1993. Mendes's environmental *Cabaret* represented a radical departure from the original Broadway production directed by Harold Prince in 1966. The director and his creative team transformed the Donmar into an actual cabaret where theatre-goers were invited to sit at café tables and drink cocktails during the performance. According to Miranda Lundskaer-Nielsen, the director's treatment of the musical was 'more consistently seedy and sinister than Prince's, evoking a darker reading of [*Cabaret*'s] underlying themes'.[4] Mendes sought to bring the production to New York after the close of the Donmar production and spent two years searching for a suitable venue before receiving an invitation from Haimes and the Roundabout to co-produce the revival on Broadway. The acting company—led by Alan Cumming and Natasha Richardson as Sally Bowles—included John Benjamin Hickey, Ron Rifkin, Mary Louise Wilson, Michele Pawk, and Denis O'Hare. *Cabaret* opened on 19 March 1998 to rave reviews from the major New York theatre critics. The revival earned a bevy of awards, including two Drama Desk Awards, three Outer Critic Circle Awards, Tony Awards for Cumming, Richardson, and Rifkin, as well as the Tony Award for Best Musical Revival. Three months after opening at the Kit Kat Club, the production moved to a new performance space: the fabled Studio 54 discotheque. It would go on to enjoy a 2,377 performance run and become the second longest running musical revival in Broadway history.[5] Over the course of *Cabaret*'s six years on Broadway, a wide variety of stage and screen stars joined the musical's company for an interval as the emcee or Sally. This distinguished cohort included Raúl Esparza, Michael C. Hall, Adam Pascal, Neil Patrick Harris, John Stamos, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Brooke Shields, Lea Thompson, Molly Ringwald, and Deborah Gibson.

The remarkable length of *Cabaret*'s run, combined with its total gross of more than $119 million, certified the revival as a smash hit and arguably elevated Roundabout's position among the producers of Broadway musicals. The production's many critical accolades, the enthusiastic word-of-mouth it enjoyed, and its frequent use of celebrity casting helped to keep its average weekly capacity above 90 per cent for the majority of its time at Studio 54 and made *Cabaret* something of a fixture on Broadway in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Consequently, the production joined a cohort comprising the era's most enduring musicals (including, but not limited to, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon*, and *Beauty and the Beast*) and the Roundabout Theatre Company took its place alongside such pre-eminent producing organizations as The Really Useful Group, Cameron Mackintosh Ltd., and Disney

Theatricals. Moreover, *Cabaret* arguably raised Roundabout's station among New York's non-for-profit theatres. While the company had enjoyed years of respect and acclaim prior to *Cabaret*'s premiere, the cultural and financial capital that the revival brought to Roundabout was unprecedented within the organization's history, and perhaps second only to the success that the original Broadway production of *A Chorus Line* won for Joseph Papp's Public Theater in 1975. The profits *Cabaret* generated allowed Roundabout to purchase the Studio 54 Theatre, and by doing so, secure a home for future Roundabout revivals. Turning a profit and owning a Broadway theatre confirmed the company's new position as a leading force in the producing of Broadway musicals.[6]

Its triumph with *Cabaret* also led Roundabout to collaborate with other not-for-profit theatre companies to produce musical revivals on Broadway. In 2003, the company joined forces with the Donmar Warehouse once again to restage its 1996 production of Maury Yeston's *Nine*. Antonio Banderas headlined the revival directed by David Leveaux. Later that year, a revival of Roger Miller's *Big River* initiated a new partnership between Roundabout and Los Angeles's Deaf West Theatre. The production directed by Jeff Calhoun featured an acting company comprising deaf and hearing actors. All members of the ensemble signed their dialogue and lyrics in order to make the musical accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences. These productions were followed by revivals of Bock and Harnick's *The Apple Tree* in 2007 and Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George* in 2008. The former was a transfer from New York City Center's Great American Musicals in Concert (*Encores!*) series. The latter was a minimalist production that hailed from London's Menier Chocolate Factory and earned much acclaim for its use of projected animations.

In addition to these co-productions, Roundabout continues to produce its own musical revivals. According to Haimes, the company consciously selects musicals that would not normally receive a commercial production on Broadway due to their age or lack of name recognition.[7] Consequently, the company holds the distinction of mounting the first Broadway revivals of such works as *Follies* (2001), *The Boys from Syracuse* (2002), *Pacific Overtures* (2005), *110 in the Shade* (2007), *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (2012), and *On the Twentieth Century* (2015). The Roundabout productions of the Off-Broadway musicals *Assassins* (2003) and *Violet* (2014) were simultaneously revivals and Broadway premieres. Despite Roundabout's penchant for the esoteric, perennial favourites such as *The Pajama Game* (2005), *Pal Joey* (2008), *Bye Bye Birdie* (2009), and *Anything Goes* (2011) are occasionally mixed into a season's offerings. Roundabout's reputation for artistic excellence coupled with its mission to revisit great works of the past routinely attracts the musical theatre's best and brightest stars. The distinguished cadre of actors to headline the company's productions includes Audra McDonald, Kristin Chenoweth, Harry Connick Jr., Sutton Foster, Kelli O'Hara, and Chita Rivera. Haimes asserts that staging revivals with stars has been one of Roundabout's chief producing strategies since the company's inception.[8] The seasons overseen by Feist witnessed productions featuring such renowned actors as Anthony Hopkins, Malcolm

McDowell, Kim Hunter, Tammy Grimes, Marsha Mason, Jane Alexander, Kate Burton, Eva Marie Saint, Shirley Knight, Jim Dale, Stockard Channing, and Philip Bosco. While the practice of recruiting recognizable stars to headline Broadway productions has become quite commonplace today, the performers engaged for Roundabout revivals tend to sharply contrast the celebrities from film, television, popular music, and reality talent competitions who are routinely employed to attract tourist audiences. By and large, Roundabout casts stars of the theatre or film and television actors who boast substantial stage experience. In doing so, the company consciously privileges talent, artistry, and experience over mere name recognition.

Roundabout's activity in recent years suggests that the company continues to expand the scope of its mission. Since 2008, the company has provided emerging and established dramatists with a laboratory for the development and presentation of new musicals, and consequently, given six musicals their first significant New York production. Three of these musicals—Dick Scanlan and Sherrie Rene Scott's *Everyday Rapture* (2010), James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim's *Sondheim on Sondheim* (2010), and Mike Stoller, Artie Butler, and Iris Rainer Dart's *The People in the Picture* (2011)—premiered at the company's Broadway houses and earned Tony nominations. The remaining three musicals—Adam Gwon's *Ordinary Days* (2008), Mark Saltzman's *Tin Pan Alley Rag* (2009), and Maury Yeston's *Death Takes a Holiday* (2011)—received Off-Broadway stagings. Additionally, the company has increased the number of musical revivals it produces by mounting new productions of established musicals in its Off-Broadway house, the Laura Pels Theatre. The space hosted the Fiasco Theater's minimalist production of *Into the Woods* in 2014 and in 2016 a revival of *The Robber Bridegroom* directed by Alex Timbers and produced in association with Daryl Roth.

In reviving musicals from the past and introducing new musicals to the repertoire, the Roundabout Theatre Company actively contributes to the musical's eminence on Broadway. Furthermore, the fact that musicals have become a cornerstone of the company's public identity suggests that Roundabout views the form as having an import that is equal to the non-musical dramas that it staged during its infancy. Roundabout productions have also achieved their own unique significance within the historical record. On 24 April 2014, the company authentically reproduced its 1998 revival of *Cabaret* with Alan Cumming reprising his role of the emcee. The production's return to Broadway was momentous as it demonstrated that a Roundabout revival could achieve a degree of success and historical consequence that matched or superseded that of its original production. It also marked the first time in recent memory in which a New York theatre company revived a revival on Broadway. The company returned to another previously successful musical property when Scott Ellis staged a new production of *She Loves Me* on 17 March 2016. In so doing, the company has worked to confirm itself not merely as a producer of musical theatre, but also as the author of distinctly original musical revivals that are significant in their own right. Revival has become more than a cornerstone of Roundabout's mission. It is the lifeblood of the company's identity and the hallmark of its brand.

Notes

1. Diana Bertolini, 'Introduction to the Gene Feist Papers', New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Division, December 2011.
2. Jesse McKinley, 'An Expanding Theatre and a Healing Director', *New York Times*, 23 July 2003.
3. American Theatre Wing, 'Downstage Center: Todd Haimes', Podcast, American Theatre Wing Website, mP3 file, 18 July 2008, http://americantheatrewing.org/downstagecenter/detail/todd_haimes, accessed 22 December 2014.
4. Miranda Lundskaer-Nielsen, *Directors and the New Musical Drama: British and American Musical Theatre in the 1980s and 90s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 129.
5. Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 164–75.
6. In 2000, Roundabout purchased and restored the dilapidated Selwyn Theatre on West 42nd Street with the assistance of an $8.5 million gift from American Airlines. Rechristened the American Airlines Theatre, the space became Roundabout's second Broadway house and has held over forty-five of the company's productions. Roundabout acquired a third Broadway theatre in 2009 when it purchased Henry Miller's Theatre, the original home of its *Cabaret* revival. The building was renamed the Stephen Sondheim Theatre in 2010 and has housed only two Roundabout revivals to date, as it has been routinely leased for commercial productions, most notably *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*.
7. American Theatre Wing, 'Downstage Center: Todd Haimes'.
8. Kevin Davenport, 'The Producer's Perspective: Todd Haimes', Podcast, The Producer's Perspective, mP3 file, 15 February 2015, https://www.theproducersperspective.com/my_weblog/2015/02/episode-7-transcript-todd-haimes.html, accessed 22 March 2015.

CHAPTER 40

Reclaiming, Restoring, and Reviving the American Musical: City Center *Encores!*

Bryan M. Vandevender

Renewed interest in the early 1990s in revisiting musicals of the past arguably provided fertile ground for a burgeoning series of concert revivals that would reintroduce the theatre-going public to the more obscure or wholly forgotten works penned by the form's most celebrated composers. In February of 1994, New York City Center launched the Great American Musicals in Concert series (also known as *Encores!*) under the guidance of Judith E. Daykin and an advisory council of theatre artists, producers, and rights holders. The programme's founding mission—'to celebrate the rarely heard works of America's most important composers and lyricists'—would be manifest in the reviving of three musicals that had all but disappeared from the American repertory.[1] These productions would invariably differ from the revivals found on Broadway in both their overall objective and their underlying values. Where the theatre artists resurrecting musicals on Broadway appeared to privilege revision and reinterpretation—making their revivals a director's theatre—the council overseeing the first slate of productions for *Encores!* sought to honour a given property's authorship and attempted to present the work as its creators (chiefly the composer) originally intended.

The inaugural season, overseen by Artistic Director Ira Weitzman, featured concert stagings of Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick's *Fiorello!* (9–12 February), Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Allegro* (2–5 March), and Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin's *Lady in the Dark* (4–7 May). In preparing these productions, Daykin and her collaborators replicated the format utilized for a one-night concert presentation of George and Ira Gershwin's *Of Thee I*

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Sing and *Let 'Em Eat Cake* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in March of 1987. Each *Encores!* production received a total of nine rehearsals and four performances. To confirm each performance as a concert, members of the three acting companies dressed in formal attire and carried libretti throughout the evening. The productions also featured little to no design elements save for simple platforming and a golden false proscenium provided by scenic consultant John Lee Beatty. The original orchestrations and choral charts for each musical were restored under the supervision of Musical Director, Rob Fisher. Additionally, the orchestras for *Fiorello!* and *Lady in the Dark*—which featured more than thirty instruments—appeared on stage for each performance, thereby certifying the musical's score as the evening's star.

All three *Encores!* productions were enthusiastically received by both New York theatre-goers and the major New York theatre critics. Stephen Holden of the *New York Times* cheered the City Center programme and wrote laudatory reviews of each revival in which he claimed that the *Encores!* programme demonstrated how vintage musicals could be just as dynamic and compelling in reduced concert revivals as they are in fully staged productions. Moreover, the critic charged that the greatest discovery of the series was the richness, subtlety, and texture of each musical's original score. That the *New York Times* dispatched Holden, a music critic, rather than a theatre critic, further establishes the *score's* centrality in these concerts. In his review of *Fiorello!*, Holden mused, 'Another lesson that [*Encores!*] teaches—and one that will be difficult for producers to swallow, because of its cost—is that in presenting concert revivals of shows, there is no substitute for the original orchestrations played by a full theatre orchestra'.[2] The critic also praised City Center for reclaiming three inherently flawed musicals and intimated that *Encores!* had confirmed all three properties as worthy candidates for revival.[3]

Holden's rhapsodic assessment of the *Encores!* concerts suggests that the programme's approach to revival represented a marked (and perhaps welcome) departure from the current commercial model of restaging renowned musicals with famous actors. In selecting three relatively neglected musicals, City Center privileged obscurity over name recognition, thereby limiting the appeal of their productions. Moreover, the simplistic nature of the concerts' staging stood counter to the large-scale mega-musicals that had populated Broadway since the 1980s. The *Encores!* programme's celebration of composers and music asked audiences to shift their attention away from stars and spectacle, and invest in the experience of encountering an erstwhile musical's original score. These features of the first *Encores!* season, combined with each production's decidedly brief run, indicate that popularity and profit were not the series' goals. Instead, City Center offered true musical theatre aficionados a relatively unique opportunity to engage with the form's repertoire. The process used to stage these first revivals would be replicated in subsequent years and eventually become not only the programme's chief producing strategy, but also the hallmark of its brand.

Concept and Process

With few exceptions, the process City Center used to prepare its first slate of revivals is the same process it utilizes today. The evolution of a new *Encores!* production begins with preparing the selected work's score and libretto. Rob Fisher, who served as the programme's music director from 1994 to 2005, claims that restoring a musical's original orchestrations can prove challenging as the archival materials provided by licensing organizations are often incomplete. By his charge, the absence of key instrumental charts can be attributed to the rather haphazard manner in which a musical's textual materials were preserved in the early twentieth century: 'Back then, these shows were a more disposable product … like the entertainment of the week. The creator was not expecting us to come along at the end of the century and put this mosaic back together.'[4] Consequently, *Encores!* orchestrators often review a variety of artefacts held in public archives, such as the Library of Congress, or private collections. These materials range from later iterations of the given musical's orchestrations or original charts from other works in the composer's catalogue.

Consequently, the score presented by *Encores!* is often a composite creation and the product of meticulous historical research. By virtue of containing as much original material as possible, it represents a close approximation (if not a near replica) to what the musical's composer intended at the time of its creation. *Encores!* functions, then, as a scholar-producer, and by way of research, provides its audiences with a different kind of encounter with the work of American composers than offered by most commercial revivals. Rising production costs routinely force producers of revivals to reduce the number of musicians they employ for a production. Consequently, many commercial revivals feature condensed orchestrations or drastically revised choral arrangements that erode the authorial singularity of a given composer. The archival research *Encores!* artists conduct thus plays an essential role in the programme's process and advances its mission to honour authorial intent.

As celebrating the composer is a principle that guides the preparation and presentation of a given property's music, *Encores!* engages a playwright for every revival, to adapt a musical's book to the programme's concert format. The coterie of distinguished dramatists who have served *Encores!* in this capacity includes Terrence McNally (*Pal Joey*), Christopher Durang (*Li'l Abner*), John Guare (*Babes in Arms*), Neil Simon (*Promises, Promises*), John Weidman (*Fiorello!*, *Tenderloin*, *Zorba*), and James Lapine (*Merrily We Roll Along*). David Ives, who has provided the concert adaptations for thirty-three *Encores!* productions to date, contends that his primary role in the production process is to streamline the libretto so that it becomes a more effective vehicle for the musical's score. In order to accomplish this goal, the playwright condenses most of the musical's scenes to two pages or less.[5] A common method of reducing the libretto is to excise any period references that are no longer culturally intelligible. Many of the musicals produced by *Encores!* are irrevocably bound to their original era vis-à-vis frequent mentions of public figures, products,

practices, and events that have disappeared from the contemporary cultural lexicon. Several works also feature ethnic slurs and cultural attitudes towards race and gender that would be considered impolitic by present-day standards. Consequently, the script consultant is charged with removing or revising dated material without altering the musical's original dramaturgy.

While restoring a libretto to reflect its author's original intentions is not a primary aim of the *Encores!* programme, the playwrights who prepare a given production's concert adaptation do not attempt to doctor or redraft the musical's book. Structural flaws and lapses in conventional logic—common features of early twentieth-century musicals—frequently remain untouched. Jack Viertel, the programme's artistic director since 2001, contends that *Encores!* audiences adjust their expectations and willingly accept the dramatic conventions of earlier eras: 'Audiences actually become the audiences from another time. They accept things that they would never accept in a new musical today … they don't ask you to be fifty years ahead of where the show was. They want to go back to where the show was.'[6] Treatment of libretti is then another notable characteristic of the *Encores!* programme that distinguishes its productions from most commercial Broadway revivals. Where Broadway revivals often eschew a musical's original text in favour of a freshly revised book, the concerts produced by *Encores!* feature the original text in a forthright—albeit slightly reduced—manner.

The manner in which *Encores!* artists prepare a musical's score and libretto for concert performances highlights a tension that underlies each of the programme's revivals. The historical moment from which the given musical first emerged is both summoned and minimized. The act of reconstructing the musical's score according to authorial intent casts the work itself as an artefact of a bygone era. An *Encores!* revival aims to transport its audience back in time through the resurrection of past musical idioms. The labour invested in archival recuperation suggests that the programme is not only committed to reproducing a musical's score as authentically as possible, but also invoking the material conditions of the past through aural aesthetics. At the same time, the methods used to adapt libretti seem to strip the musicals of their temporal signifiers and the non-musical material remnants of their moment in time. The removal of dated references and rhetoric might certainly help to make the works more culturally coherent, but the practice also stands counter to the goal of authentically reconstructing the past. Furthermore, the programme's continued use of concert performance signifiers (minimal scenery, an on-stage orchestra, actors in mostly contemporary dress, holding libretti) can create a sense of temporal ambiguity as the revivals feature few if any visual aesthetics that would confirm a musical's historical setting. As a result, musicals of much earlier eras appear to be both current and historic.

The standard interval for staging an *Encores!* concert is nine days. This timeline includes eight days of general rehearsals and one day of dress rehearsal. Actors in principal roles often begin their preparations months in advance and occasionally meet with the production's director one week prior to the official

start of rehearsals; however, the teaching and learning of the musical's blocking, choreography, and choral music is confined to a mere eight days. The highly compressed production schedule that *Encores!* employs has become one of the programme's defining characteristics. Members of the advisory council frequently describe the project of mounting a new concert production as 'Summer Stock with the A-Team'.[7] This designation is fitting as it refers not only to the brevity and intensity of the *Encores!* rehearsal process, but also the pedigree of the artists that the programme attracts. Some of Broadway's most celebrated directors, including Jack O'Brien, Susan H. Schulman, Jerry Zaks, Kathleen Marshall, Casey Nicholaw, Lonny Price, and John Doyle, have helmed *Encores!* productions. Additionally, the acting company of each revival features a host of Broadway veterans. Among the actors who routinely appear in *Encores!* productions are Kristin Chenoweth, Patti LuPone, Christine Ebersole, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Donna Murphy, Karen Ziemba, and Philip Bosco. The programme has also featured the talents of Nathan Lane, Tyne Daly, Andrea Martin, Sutton Foster, Idina Menzel, Faith Prince, Vanessa Williams, Raúl Esparza, Victor Garber, Donna McKechnie, Peter Gallagher, Tonya Pinkins, Norm Lewis, F. Murray Abraham, and Anne Hathaway.

While a minimalist aesthetic is still a chief characteristic of *Encores!* productions, the programme's revivals have evolved over time to include more developed staging and choreography. As dance was never intended to be a prominent feature of the series, the initial seasons of *Encores!* featured very little choreography. In most productions, the acting company stepped to the far sides of the stage while the orchestra played dance arrangements. Today, choreography plays a much more prominent role in *Encores!* revivals with some productions featuring as much dance as their Broadway counterparts. Furthermore, the programme has introduced New York audiences to the work of many up-and-coming choreographers. In addition to Kathleen Marshall and Casey Nicholaw, choreographers who have honed their talents at *Encores!* include Rob Marshall (*Promises, Promises*), Rob Ashford (*Tenderloin*, *A Connecticut Yankee*), Sergio Trujillo (*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, *Kismet*), Randy Skinner (*Do Re Mi*, *No, No, Nanette*), and Joshua Bergasse (*It's a Bird … It's a Plane … It's Superman*, *Little Me*).

As the role of staging and choreography in an *Encores!* revival has increased over time, so too has the length of each production's run. A limited number of performances coupled with the acclaim of the theatre artists involved (and occasionally the reputation of the musicals produced) have made *Encores!* concerts must-see events for New York theatre-goers. Furthermore, the fact that the *New York Times* reviews each season's offerings has arguably imbued the productions with a legitimacy and import equal to revivals that have been commercially produced for Broadway. Demand for tickets and a 96 per cent subscription renewal rate has prompted the programme's advisory council to increase the number of *Encores!* performances several times over the programme's lifespan. The limited engagement of four performances that the programme first offered in 1994 eventually expanded to seven performances in

2011. The brevity of the *Encores!* run also led to the preservation of some of the programme's more popular productions on original cast albums. At present, fourteen *Encores!* concerts have been recorded, namely *Call Me Madam*, *Out of This World*, *Pal Joey*, *The Boys from Syracuse*, *St. Louis Woman*, *Babes in Arms*, *The New Moon*, *Do Re Mi*, *Tenderloin*, *Face the Music*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Pipe Dream*, and *Lady, Be Good* (Table 40.1).

Contributing to the popularity of the *Encores!* programme is the fact that each new season calls attention to works that have not received a major New York production in some time. From its inception, a primary mission of *Encores!* has been to produce properties that are unlikely to receive a commercial revival on Broadway despite having been authored by musical theatre's most distinguished composers. Founding members of the advisory council somewhat facetiously described the programme's first slate of concert musicals as 'flops by tops' to indicate the types of works that *Encores!* intended to produce.[8] Consequently, the programme has staged the first notable New York revival of several otherwise forgotten musicals, including Cole Porter's *Du Barry Was a Lady*, Jerome Kern's *Sweet Adeline*, George Gershwin's *Pardon My English*, Jule Styne's *Do Re Mi*, Jerry Bock's *Tenderloin*, Harold Arlen's *House of Flowers*, Bob Merrill's *Carnival!*, and Charles Strouse's *Applause*. While a handful of seasons have featured concerts of more familiar works, including Galt MacDermot's *Hair*,

Table 40.1 Musicals revived by City Center *Encores!*

Year	
1994	*Fiorello!* (1959), *Allegro* (1947), *Lady in the Dark* (1941)
1995	*Call Me Madam* (1950), *Out of This World* (1950), *Pal Joey* (1940)
1996	*Du Barry Was a Lady* (1939), *One Touch of Venus* (1943), *Chicago* (1975)
1997	*Sweet Adeline* (1929), *Promises, Promises* (1968), *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938)
1998	*Strike up the Band* (1930), *Li'l Abner* (1956), *St. Louis Woman* (1946)
1999	*Babes in Arms* (1937), *Ziegfeld Follies of 1936* (1936), *Do Re Mi* (1960)
2000	*On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (1965), *Tenderloin* (1960), *Wonderful Town* (1953)
2001	*A Connecticut Yankee* (1927), *Bloomer Girl* (1944), *Hair* (1967)
2002	*Carnival!* (1961), *Golden Boy* (1964), *The Pajama Game* (1954)
2003	*House of Flowers* (1954), *The New Moon* (1927), *No Strings* (1962)
2004	*Can-Can* (1953), *Pardon My English* (1933), *Bye, Bye, Birdie* (1960)
2005	*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1951), *Purlie* (1970), *The Apple Tree* (1966)
2006	*Kismet* (1953), *70, Girls, 70* (1971), *Of Thee I Sing* (1931)
2007	*Follies* (1971), *Face the Music* (1932), *Stairway to Paradise* (2007—Original Revue)
2008	*Applause* (1970), *Juno* (1950), *No, No, Nanette* (1925)
2009	*On the Town* (1944), *Music in the Air* (1932), *Finian's Rainbow* (1947)
2010	*Girl Crazy* (1930), *Fanny* (1954), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964)
2011	*Bells Are Ringing* (1956), *Lost in the Stars* (1949), *Where's Charley?* (1948)
2012	*Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Pipe Dream* (1955), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949)
2013	*Fiorello!* (1959), *It's a Bird … It's a Plane … It's Superman* (1966), *On Your Toes* (1936)
2014	*Little Me* (1962), *The Most Happy Fella* (1956), *Irma La Douce* (1956)
2015	*Lady, Be Good* (1924), *Paint Your Wagon* (1951), *Zorba!* (1968)
2016	*Cabin in the Sky* (1940), *1776* (1969), *Do I Hear a Waltz?* (1965)

Richard Adler and Jerry Ross's *The Pajama Game*, Charles Strouse's *Bye, Bye Birdie*, and Stephen Sondheim's *Follies*, *Encores!* always remains dedicated to the task of unearthing hidden gems from the unexplored annals of musical theatre history.

Over the course of twenty-two seasons, *Encores!* has also been committed to celebrating American musicals created by American songwriters. In addition to the composers previously mentioned, the programme has featured the music of Leonard Bernstein, Frank Loesser, John Kander, Cy Coleman, Burton Lane, and Marc Blitzstein. As of this writing, only six of the sixty-eight musicals to appear on the *Encores!* stage were written by composers who were not of American birth. The music of German-born Kurt Weill has been commemorated with concerts of *Lady in the Dark*, *One Touch of Venus*, and *Lost in the Stars*. A production of *The Ziegfeld Follies of 1936* reacquainted audiences with the music of Russian-American composer Vernon Duke. Additionally, the music of Sigmund Romberg, originally of Austria-Hungary, entered the *Encores!* repertoire with a revival of *The New Moon*. All of the aforementioned properties nevertheless uphold the programme's mission of presenting American works as they were developed and originally produced in the United States. *Encores!* has produced only one musical of European origin to date, Marguerite Monnot's *Irma La Douce*.

Broadway Bound

While *Encores!* revivals are staged for strictly limited runs at City Center, spirited responses from critics and audiences have occasionally inspired Broadway producers to transfer the programme's concerts to the Great White Way for longer commercial runs. The first production to make this shift in venue is the most famous production in *Encores!* history. The long-running Broadway revival of John Kander and Fred Ebb's *Chicago* began its life at *Encores!* as the final offering of the 1996 season. Directed by Walter Bobbie, the production featured Ann Reinking and Bebe Neuwirth in the principal roles of Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly. Broadway veterans James Naughton and Joel Grey also appeared in the concert as Billy Flynn and Amos Hart. Reinking served as the production's choreographer, and in keeping with the *Encores!* mission to honour a musical's authorship, staged *Chicago* in the style of its original director and choreographer, Bob Fosse.

Like earlier *Encores!* concerts, the musical's physical production embraced minimalism. The production's only notable set piece was a large 'jury box' designed by John Lee Beatty to hold the musical's band. Ken Billington's film noir-inspired lighting and the careful arrangement of cabaret chairs helped to suggest the play's locations. Costume consultant William Ivey Long dressed the entire company in black. Most of the ensemble wore revealing dancewear while supporting characters sported contemporary black suits. The uniformity of the production's palette combined with the fact that the creative team made no attempt to identify the musical's Jazz Age setting through visual signifiers

suggested that *Chicago*'s action could occur in the present. This approach to staging the musical would arguably help to draw parallels between the work and recent real-life events. A series of highly publicized trials and scandals involving the likes of O. J. Simpson, Amy Fisher, Lorena Bobbitt, Eric and Lyle Menendez, Tonya Harding, and President Bill Clinton occurred in the years prior to the concert and gave *Chicago*'s story of murder and celebrity contemporary relevance.

According to Bobbie, the *Encores!* production of *Chicago* met with an ardour that was both fervent and unparalleled.[9] Critics responded in kind with Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* leading the charge. In particular, Brantley praised the production's minimalism: 'Who needs fancy backdrops and props? The only things needed to create this work's seamy world are a couple of ladders, some black chairs … and performers who know how to strut their stuff.'[10] At the conclusion of the production's four-performance run, producers Barry and Fran Weissler quickly secured the rights to *Chicago* and engaged the *Encores!* creative team to restage the concert on Broadway. This new production would retain the essence of the *Encores!* presentation vis-à-vis costumes and scenery, but also feature more developed staging and choreography. The slightly expanded revival opened at the Richard Rodgers Theatre six months later to uniformly positive reviews. After one month on Broadway, the musical sold an average of 10,000 tickets per week and earned weekly grosses exceeding $600,000.[11] By the end of the 1996–1997 season, the revival had won five Drama Desk Awards, six Tony Awards (including the prize for Best Musical Revival), and according to Peter Filichia, was the unequivocal hit of the year.[12] In the years that followed, *Chicago*'s revival became something of a phenomenon, through transfers to the Shubert Theatre in 1997 and then to the Ambassador Theatre in 2003. The production spawned numerous national and international companies—both resident productions and tours. As of this writing, it carries the distinction of being the longest running musical revival to play Broadway and the second longest running Broadway musical of all time. As of 27 December 2015, the New York production of *Chicago* had played over 7,940 performances, been seen by 7,911,994 theatre-goers, and earned more than $540 million. The production has also grossed over $850 million worldwide.

Three additional *Encores!* concerts followed *Chicago* to Broadway. A production of Leonard Bernstein's *Wonderful Town*, directed and choreographed by Kathleen Marshall in 2000, was the next to arrive on the Great White Way. Producers Barry and Fran Weissler opened the revival at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre in November of 2003 where it played for 497 performances. Donna Murphy, who starred in the *Encores!* concert, returned to headline the production. Much like *Chicago,* this new staging of *Wonderful Town* maintained the minimalist aesthetic of *Encores!* performances and featured a slightly reduced orchestra on stage. But unlike *Chicago*, *Wonderful Town*'s 1930s setting was suggested with period details. The production earned Drama Desk Awards for Marshall and Murphy as well as a Tony Award for Marshall's

choreography. A 2006 revival of Bock and Harnick's *The Apple Tree* starring Kristin Chenoweth followed. Produced by the Roundabout Theatre Company, the production reunited Chenoweth with director Garry Griffin and choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler who staged the musical for *Encores!* in 2005. Unlike *Chicago* and *Wonderful Town*, the revival abjured all signifiers of concert performance. *The Apple Tree* ran for a limited engagement at Roundabout's Studio 54 and closed after ninety-nine performances. A 2009 *Encores!* concert of Burton Lane's *Finian's Rainbow* transferred to the St. James Theatre on Broadway just five months after its presentation at City Center. Directed and choreographed by Warren Carlyle, the production ran for ninety-two performances. The revival featured a significant portion of the concert production's cast, which included Jim Norton, Kate Baldwin, and Cheyenne Jackson.

New Series

In 2007, *Encores!* launched a second performance series dedicated to staging canonical musicals at City Center during the summer months. These new productions would differ from previous revivals as they would run for three weeks and feature fully realized scenery and costumes. Additionally, members of the acting company would appear on stage without scripts. Entitled '*Encores!* Summer Stars', the spin-off series opened with a production of *Gypsy* starring Patti LuPone and directed by the musical's librettist, Arthur Laurents. The revival transferred to the St. James Theatre on Broadway seven months later where it ran for 332 performances and earned Tony Awards for LuPone and her co-stars, Boyd Gaines and Laura Benanti. The following summer witnessed a production of *Damn Yankees* starring Jane Krakowski, Sean Hayes, and Cheyenne Jackson. Directed by John Rando, the revival featured Bob Fosse's original choreography, faithfully recreated by Mary MacLeod. *The Wiz* served as the final 'Summer Stars' production in 2009. The revival, directed by Thomas Kail and choreographed by Andy Blankenbuehler, notably presented R&B recording artist Ashanti in her New York theatrical debut.

Encores! introduced a third concert series celebrating the scores of Off-Broadway musicals in 2013. Under the artistic direction of composer Jeanine Tesori, '*Encores!* Off-Center' presents revivals of cult musicals that have yet to receive a Broadway bow. The programme's first productions included Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*, Gretchen Cryer and Nancy Ford's *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road*, Jonathan Larson's *Tick, Tick … Boom!*, William Finn's *A New Brain*, and Andrew Lippa's *The Wild Party*. The inaugural season also featured a one-night concert performance of Tesori's *Violet* featuring Sutton Foster in the title role. The musical would make its Broadway debut nine months later—seventeen years after its creation—when the Roundabout Theatre Company moved the *Encores!* cast to the American Airlines Theatre for a five-month limited run.

Significance

Historian Garrett Eisler contends that the *Encores!* method of presenting musicals from the past raises a variety of complex questions regarding the current state of revivalist practice in professional theatre. In particular, Eisler's concerns pertain to issues of scale and how the valorizing of a pared-down concert model might unintentionally open the door to the musical theatre's economic retrenchment:

> When a venue originally intended as a pragmatic, concert-hall alternative to fully staged performance eventually functions in the marketplace as the real thing—charging Broadway-compatible prices, for instance—does it unwittingly validate a downsized business model for revivals? By partially reinforcing the cost-cutting mentality of current theatrical practice and inuring audiences to the lowered expectations of rudimentary designs and staging (performed 'script in hand' with significantly abridged librettos), has the success of *Encores!*—as well as the spate of 'piano and music-stand' imitators it has given rise to—effectively defined musical production downward?[13]

Eisler has also suggested that *Encores!* productions, however inadvertently, compromise the American musical's legacy as 'a total work of art'—the wedding of dramatic narrative, song, and spectacle. He asserts that the programme's celebration of composers minimizes the contributions of a musical's other authors (directors, choreographers, designers, and librettists) and divests a given work of the composite artistic elements that once made it unique.[14] These concerns, while valid, do not diminish the important contribution that *Encores!* has made to the field of musical theatre production. *Encores!* and the spate of other concert revival series that borrow from the *Encores!* production model (Musicals in Mufti, Reprise, Lost Musicals) have extended the lifespan of musicals that might otherwise languish in obscurity. In *Subsequent Productions*, Jonathan Miller suggests that great plays secure their place in the theatrical canon when they inspire new stagings. By his charge, a given play's afterlife—the production history that follows the conclusion of its original production—determines its worth and import to the historical record.[15] Thus, *Encores!* functions as a recovery project that keeps properties viable and secure within the American musical repertory. Continued reclamation, restoration, and revival help to reaffirm these musicals' significance and to commemorate the considerable contribution that their composers made to American culture.

Notes

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CHAPTER 41

Garth Drabinsky's 'Grand Moves': Artistic Ambition and Commercial Illusions in the 1990s

Todd Decker

Canadian producer and theatre builder Garth Drabinsky (b. 1949) had a short, brilliant Broadway presence in the 1990s. Drabinsky built his production company, Livent, Inc., on the acquisition and exploitation of the Canadian rights to *The Phantom of the Opera*. Livent's first original musical, the thematically challenging *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, experienced a difficult path to Broadway. Careful and costly shepherding by Drabinsky took the show to Broadway and the Tony Award for Best Musical in 1993. Drabinsky himself was the creative force behind two massive shows of the 1990s: a lavish revival of *Show Boat* that ran longer than any previous production of this historic musical and the new musical *Ragtime*. For the latter, Livent built the Ford Center for the Performing Arts (renamed the Lyric in 2014), a huge theatre in the heart of Times Square erected on the combined former footprint of two historic theatres. Livent embarked on an innovative corporate structure in 1993, offering shares on the Toronto Stock Exchange and attracting major institutional and private investors. The scheme was not successful, in part due to financial mismanagement and fraud. Shortly after *Ragtime* opened, control of Livent passed into new hands. As a result, Drabinsky was fired, sued by the new owners, and then indicted for fraud by the US and Canadian justice departments. He faced the Canadian charges and served a prison term from late 2011 to early 2013. After a period of day parole, Drabinsky was granted full parole in 2014.

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Drabinsky's Toronto childhood was marked by a bout with polio at the age of 3 which left him with an extreme limp. He started out in show business as an entertainment lawyer but soon transitioned into a producer of films and stage shows as well as an owner of movie theatres. In the 1980s, Drabinsky played a prominent role in the industry transition to the multiplex cinema exhibition model. He formed the Cineplex Odeon chain, taking the company in ten years from an eighteen-screen complex in Toronto to 1,800 screens across Canada and the United States.

Forced out of Cineplex Odeon in 1989, Drabinsky retained control of the company's interests in live theatre and created Livent, Inc. (The Live Entertainment Corporation of Canada). He launched Livent on an ambitious path of show and theatre development. Livent's initial asset was acquisition of the Canadian rights to *The Phantom of the Opera*. Aware that no theatre in Toronto could appropriately house the show, Drabinsky lavishly renovated the historic Pantages Theater (which Livent owned), re-seating the house to increase its already sizeable capacity and committing Livent's business plan to attracting and sustaining large audiences. Aggressive marketing—such as package bus tours serving nearby cities such as Buffalo and Rochester—and innovative merchandising—including the recording of a commercially successful Canadian cast album—fuelled the production for a ten-year run. Drabinsky's faith in the importance of cast albums was strong: he believed 'the album sells the show and the show sells the albums', and wrote in 1995 that, 'If it were possible, I would prefer to produce [the cast album] even before the show begins.'[1] (Drabinsky would act on this idea a few years later during the long development of *Ragtime*.) Livent also managed tours of *Phantom* as far afield as Hawaii, Alaska, and the Far East. With a hit like *Phantom* to promote, Drabinsky demonstrated an entrepreneurial ability to create a large audience for Broadway musical theatre outside New York City.

Phantom initiated Drabinsky's relationship with director Harold Prince. Their association would remain close. Prince approached Drabinsky with the possibility of producing his own current project, the John Kander and Fred Ebb musical *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, which had stalled after negative reviews by New York critics who travelled to see a workshop of the show staged too near the city at SUNY Purchase (1990). At a time when *Kiss*'s prospects were doubtful, Drabinsky agreed to produce a revised version in Toronto (1992) because, in his words, he 'believed the musical had the potential of being an artistic breakthrough'.[2] The show failed to find an audience but Drabinsky pressed on. After more revisions and a change of choreographer, *Kiss* opened to strong reviews but middling business in London's West End (1992). On arrival in New York (1993), *Kiss* won Best Musical but, again, proved uncommercial.

Kiss of the Spider Woman is an adaptation of Manuel Puig's 1976 novel about a gay window dresser and a leftist revolutionary who develop a relationship while in prison in Argentina. The show, intended for adult audiences, treated political violence and homosexuality in an altogether frank manner for a Broadway musical in the 1990s. Torture sequences dominate the first half hour.

The central homosexual character Molina is shot in the head at the climax. The show's modestly staged fantasy sequences—Molina's memories of film musicals starring a song-and-dance diva with four male backup dancers—and its theatrically framed apotheosis of Molina after his death offer repeated doses of undisguised camp. *Kiss* unashamedly stages the close historical connections between the musical and gay culture in a story context of violent repression—offering a sharp contrast with the 1983 Broadway musical, *La Cage Aux Folles*, which deals with a gay couple in a glamorous and comic context. Drabinsky's faith in *Kiss* speaks to his genuine desire to expand the thematic and emotional reach of Broadway as an artistic expression of American life. But *Kiss* was not commercial. Drabinsky breathed new life into the production by casting a trio of new principals—including pop singer Vanessa Williams and generally considered superior to the original cast (which starred Chita Rivera)—and recorded a second complete cast album featuring the new stars. Still, the show was not profitable. Yet Drabinsky kept the Broadway production and a national tour going: his reasons had much to do with Livent's business model.

In autumn 1993, Livent went public on the Toronto Stock Exchange—an extraordinary, entirely unique move for a company, as described by the *New York Times*, that 'owns and manages [live] theaters and produces musicals'.[3] Going public allowed Drabinsky to bypass individual investors and the standard Broadway financing scheme which links funding directly to a given production. This freed Drabinsky to develop new shows, productions, or theatres according to his own desires—which were invariably grandiose and expensive. The trade-off was the continual need to satisfy shareholders by producing new hits and sustaining revenues from already running productions, such as the Toronto *Phantom*. Investors in Livent followed the fortunes of the company's productions and theatres closely. Fear of disclosing the financial failure of *Kiss*—despite its critical success—likely kept the production active far beyond its viability: as long as *Kiss* was running, Drabinsky could avoid writing off the show's $8.75 million in development costs. (Most shows close when it becomes apparent development costs will not be recouped. Drabinsky's first attempt to produce on Broadway—*A Broadway Musical* [1980]—closed after one performance for lack of money to market the show against uniformly critical reviews.) Concerns about the viability of Livent's business model and earnings reports were aired in the entertainment press from the start, especially in Canada where the end of Drabinsky's tenure with Cineplex Odeon had revealed accounting irregularities.

Drabinsky described Livent's goals as 'reproduction, restoration and origination'.[4] The Toronto *Phantom* and a touring version of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* starring Donny Osmond reproduced and deftly profited from highly commercial hits by Andrew Lloyd Webber. *Kiss* marked the origination of a critically successful show. *Ragtime*, another adaptation of a novel, would follow. As Drabinsky noted in 1998 of Livent's development of new material, 'We don't enjoy the enviable position of owning a library of animated musicals that can be adapted to the musical stage.'[5] This reference to Disney,

a global entertainment corporation aggressively moving into Times Square with new shows based on pre-sold family film titles and renovated theatres in the mid-1990s, suggests the scale of Drabinsky's ambitions. The 1994 revival of *Show Boat* expressed Drabinsky's devotion to restoration.

It was Drabinsky's idea to revive *Show Boat*, which had not seen a new Broadway production for almost fifty years. Drabinsky tellingly called *Show Boat* 'Ziegfeld's epic'—identifying the musical with its producer, not its authors—and declared a desire to produce 'a full recreation, not a revival'.[6] The production had a $10 million budget and a cast of sixty-six (almost three times the size of most Broadway casts). He hired Prince to remake the show in a fluid, cinematic style. Up to date automation, computerization, and lighting were deployed to lend *Show Boat* a gritty, documentary quality far from the picturesque productions of the past. Questions of race at the heart of *Show Boat* were dealt with in a 1990s manner as well, especially in Susan Stroman's innovative choreography. And, unsurprisingly, Drabinsky's *Show Boat* included the dramatic arrival of the boat itself onstage, adding an expensive touch of mega-musical aesthetics.

Livent's *Show Boat* opened in October 1993 at the North York Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto, a new 1,850-seat theatre designed, with Drabinsky's input, for musical shows. The production successfully drew audiences to the Centre, despite its location some ten miles outside Toronto's theatre district. With a hit on his hands in Canada, Drabinsky put off moving the show to Broadway. During rehearsals and at opening night sidewalk protests, local activists attempted to shut down the production as racist. Drabinsky and Prince's response was sustained—meeting repeatedly with the protesters—but firm. An educational component was developed to address these concerns, including a television documentary about the production titled '*Show Boat*: Journey of an Epic Musical'. Without taking on questions of racism directly, Prince framed *Show Boat* as all about 'the family of man' and Drabinsky argued the show allows the audience to 'cry at all the right things'.[7]

Show Boat opened at the Gershwin Theatre (one of the largest houses on Broadway) in October 1994 after a year-long promotional campaign resembling those typically mounted for new musicals and introduced a new top ticket price of $75. A fellow Broadway producer noted at the time, 'These kinds of grand moves are so rare now that anyone who does anything on Broadway with some showmanship these days is a hero.'[8] The production won five Tony Awards, including Best Revival of a Musical.

Drabinsky and Livent's association with Prince continued to markedly less successful ends with three artistically serious, extravagantly produced productions that were commercial failures: *The Petrified Prince* (1994, Off-Broadway at the Public Theater; the show never advanced to Broadway), *Candide* (1997, at the Gershwin; a revival of Bernstein's show lasting 100 performances), and *Parade* (1998, at the Beaumont; a *succès d'estime* that survived only eighty-five performances). Prince has only directed one Broadway musical in the almost two decades since *Parade*.

The idea of making E. L. Doctorow's 1975 novel *Ragtime* into a musical was brought to Drabinsky by Marty Bell, a Livent Vice President of Creative Affairs. Bell had tried to get the author's permission years earlier: Drabinsky prevailed in 1994 and embarked on a three-year development process. Drabinsky wrote of *Ragtime* at the start of its creation: 'in many ways this is my personal sequel to *Show Boat*'.[9] He engaged playwright Terrence McNally—who had written *Kiss of the Spider Woman*—to write the script. McNally laid out the structure of the show, which tells overlapping stories of white, black, and Jewish families at the turn of the twentieth century and includes several historical figures in small but important featured roles. Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens won a competition among ten songwriters and composer/lyricist teams for the chance to create the score. (Each team offered four songs; three of Ahrens and Flaherty's audition numbers made it into the finished show.) *Ragtime* was lavishly developed, with weeks-long workshops for the authors, a fully orchestrated cast album recorded part way through rehearsals, and an initial production at the North York Centre. Development of the show reportedly cost $15 million. The production process was detailed in a one-hour episode of the PBS series *Great Performances* titled 'Creating *Ragtime*' (drawing upon an earlier television show 'The Making of *Ragtime*', which aired in Canada).[10] Hosted by Whoopi Goldberg, 'Creating *Ragtime*' situated the show historically and artistically and spoke directly to questions of race. Goldberg described *Ragtime*'s central black couple as 'torn apart by the forces of racism' and the show itself as 'filled with the tragic reality of how things were'.

For the move to Broadway, Drabinsky and Livent built a massive, state-of-the-art theatre: the Ford Center for the Performing Arts. Acquiring and demolishing two historic but abandoned theatres (the Lyric and the Apollo), Drabinsky created a modern theatre appropriate for technologically complex musicals in the historic style of Broadway's existing architectural fabric. The Ford Center remains Drabinsky's lasting legacy on Broadway, where the theatre continues to host the kind of large-scale musicals for which it was designed. (In the collapse of Livent, the Ford Center was purchased by SFX Entertainment, a media company later absorbed by Clear Channel. Live Nation managed the theatre from 2005 to 2014, selling naming rights to the Hilton hotel chain [2005–2009] and the Foxwoods Resort Casino [2011–2014]. In 2014, the British company Ambassador Theatre Group acquired and renamed the theatre the Lyric. Drabinsky's design for the theatre preserved the beautiful street façade of the original Lyric Theater on 43rd Street.)

Ragtime did not win the Tony for Best Musical in 1998: the award went to *The Lion King*, which had opened in Disney's newly renovated New Amsterdam Theatre. And *Ragtime* did not emerge as a long-running mega-musical the likes of those produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber in the 1980s and Disney in the 1990s. But while *Ragtime* only lasted 834 performances—in part due to Drabinsky and Livent's financial and legal implosion described below—the show has continued to see production. It was brought to London in 2002 in a minimal staging and revived (unsuccessfully in commercial terms)

on Broadway in a less lavish style in 2009. *Ragtime* has begun to circulate in professional and amateur theatres across the country. As a family-friendly, tuneful show with a large multi-racial cast (including children), many roles of all sizes, several options as to staging, and a contemporary sensibility about race and ethnicity in American history, Drabinsky's epic creation is poised to enjoy years of amateur and educational production.

In June 1998, Michael Ovitz, former head of Disney and a well-known Hollywood dealmaker, bought a controlling interest in Livent, infusing the company with $20 million. Ovitz's entrance was engineered by investment banker and theatre enthusiast Roy Furman, who held a large stake in Livent and was growing increasingly worried about its financial position. The shift in ownership initiated closer scrutiny of Livent's accounting and swift action to save the company. In early August 1998, as Livent's new show *Fosse* was in tryouts, Drabinsky was locked out of his Livent offices. By the end of the month, a class action suit by Livent investors had been initiated against the company.[11] Livent filed for bankruptcy in October and simultaneously sued Drabinsky and his partner Myron Gottlieb, alleging kickbacks and various schemes to skim off the firm's accounts. The *Ragtime* tour was shuttered but *Fosse* continued to move towards Broadway, where it would win Best Musical in 1999. Livent's existence as a production company ended with Drabinsky's departure. The company's primary remaining assets were the very large theatres Drabinsky developed in New York, Chicago, Toronto, and Vancouver (all but the last acquired by SFX).

As a producer and theatre builder, Drabinsky had an artistic drive to create challenging musical theatre. His motivation for making *Kiss of the Spider Woman* could hardly be more direct: 'Doing the show at all immediately garnered me recognition as a producer of significant work and enhanced my stature in the industry almost overnight … That was worth everything.'[12] Drabinsky linked his signature productions in this way: '*Kiss*, *Phantom*, *Show Boat* [and *Ragtime*] all share one thing—they are all humanistic, all about intense human relations, about people reaching out to people, taking them at face value, not judging them on the colour of their skin, on some disfigurement, on their sexual orientation.'[13] Unfortunately, this artistic impulse—which supported the creation of innovative shows which have enriched the Broadway tradition and remain to be explored by theatres Off-Broadway—was not linked to commercial instincts and led to a quick collapse of Drabinsky's career as a producer. Other Broadway producers commented throughout the 1990s that there was no way Drabinsky's productions—especially *Show Boat* and *Ragtime*—could be as profitable as Livent was claiming. At the time of Livent's bankruptcy, Rocco Landesmann, then president of Jujamcyn Theaters, reportedly said, 'Garth lived on Fantasy Island all those years and still does.'[14] Drabinsky's years on Broadway were few and yielded compelling, interesting, unusual work that consistently stood outside the norms of the commercial theatre. But in the end, his work as a producer proved both unsustainable and illegal.

Notes

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4. Bruce Weber, 'Canadian Showman Takes on Broadway With a Swagger', *New York Times*, 1 November 1994.
5. Chris Jones, 'Livent Names Names in Upcoming Plots', *Variety*, 2 March 1998.
6. Drabinsky, *Closer to the Sun*, 447.
7. Todd Decker, *Show Boat: Performing Race in an American Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 217–18. Television show in the Theatre on Film and Tape (TOFT) collection at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center.
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9. Drabinsky, *Closer to the Sun*, 493.
10. Both shows in TOFT.
11. Notice in *Variety*, 31 August 1998.
12. Drabinsky, *Closer to the Sun*, 469.
13. Ibid., 492.
14. Robin Pogrebin and Jesse McKinley, 'In Livent's Bankruptcy, a Cautionary Tale for Broadway' *New York Times*, 19 November 1998.

CHAPTER 42

Disney Theatrical Productions: Anything Can Happen If You Let It

Amy S. Osatinski

'We will have failures because the creative people fail, we will not have failures because the production side failed or the financing side failed.'[1] Michael Eisner, the CEO of the Disney Corporation from 1984 to 2005 sums up the advantages of Disney Theatrical Productions' approach to musical theatre producing. With the nearly unlimited resources of the Disney Corporation behind it, Disney Theatrical Productions (DTP) has the freedom to produce theatre its own way and with 'a consistent point of view where the creative are the loudest voices'.[1] Through persistent branding, the ability to tailor production methods to each property, and dedication to quality and consistency, DTP has quickly become a mainstay on Broadway. DTP's success over the last twenty plus years may be evidence that, as Mary Poppins says (in the 2006 Disney Theatricals Production), 'anything can happen if you let it'.[2]

Although DTP has produced a few notable failures, Disney's resident dramaturge and literary manager, Kenneth Cerniglia, points out that most theatre companies fail two-thirds of the time with new shows, whereas DTP has found financial success with two-thirds of its Disney-branded Broadway musicals.[3] Over the last twenty years, DTP produced six Disney-branded musicals as a sole producer: *Beauty and the Beast* (1994), *The Lion King* (1997), *Tarzan* (2006), *The Little Mermaid* (2008), *Newsies* (2012), and *Aladdin* (2014). DTP also produced the Disney-branded *Mary Poppins* (2006) in partnership with Cameron Mackintosh, *Aida* (2000) through a subsidiary of Disney Theatricals, Hyperion Productions, and two other shows—*Sister Act* (2011), and *Peter and the Starcatcher* (2012)—in association with other producers.

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DTP also produced a special six-performance production of the Alan Menken and Tim Rice oratorio, *King David* (1997), to celebrate the opening of the New Amsterdam Theatre.

DTP occupies an unprecedented position as an independent producer under the umbrella of a large, publicly traded entertainment corporation. As a part of the Studio branch of the Walt Disney Corporation, DTP's finances are managed in combination with Walt Disney Studios' finances. Though DTP is a small part of the division, Kenneth Cerniglia states, when the film studios have had a bad year, the profits from the theatrical division have 'been the difference between in the red and in the black'.[4] The Walt Disney Corporation's deep pockets allow DTP to take risks that other producers might never be able to take.

DTP is also able to take advantage of the fact that it is but one branch of a comprehensive entertainment corporation. Merchandise for Disney's Broadway shows occupies a place on the shelves at Disney stores all over the world alongside merchandise for Disney films. Disney also owns the ABC television network, which provides an exceptional opportunity for promotion. *Aladdin* provides an excellent example. In April 2014 *Nightline* aired a behind-the-scenes feature, and the cast performed on *The View*. In addition, the musical appeared on *Jimmy Kimmel Live* as part of a recurring segment where Kimmel sends an ABC security guard, Guillermo, into funny, fish-out-of-water situations. Guillermo joined the cast of *Aladdin* for the night, and his scene was broadcast on Kimmel's show. These ABC programmes (among others) brought *Aladdin* into the consciousness of a wide variety of TV viewers (and therefore potential theatre-goers) through high-profile product placement rather than traditional advertising.

DTP may be a small part of Walt Disney Studios, but it is a big company by Broadway standards. DTP not only develops and produces shows on Broadway but also develops titles for licensing, runs educational programmes in several states, and oversees productions and tours of DTP properties all over the world. Disney productions have played in dozens of countries, including Germany, Japan, Australia, Spain, Mexico, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, Russia, Italy, England, China, Argentina, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Estonia, and South Korea.[5] In June 2016, DTP opened a production of *The Lion King* in a purpose-built, Broadway-style theatre in the new Shanghai Disneyland, marking the musical's premiere in Mandarin.[6]

Disney's decision to go to Broadway was not an easy one. Although *Beauty and the Beast* was the first Disney animated feature to be adapted for the Broadway stage, it was not the Disney Corporation's first foray onto the Great White Way. In 1983, Disney backed the Broadway premiere of Larry Atlas's *Total Abandon*, a play that closed on opening night, and which Frank Rich of the *New York Times* called a 'preposterous' melodrama in which nothing makes sense.[7] Walt Disney Studios also produced Bill Irwin's 1989 vaudeville show, *Largely New York*, which enjoyed modest success and ran 144 performances. Though Disney produced these shows, the company was not the sole producer and none of the material belonged to Disney.

Michael Eisner recalls, 'Just dealing in New York was hard, we were ducking bullets in the 70s, and garbage trucks and it was just, you know, "forget it, let's go make movies".'[8] Disney therefore stayed away from Broadway until December 1991, when the *New York Times* published Frank Rich's annual retrospective, 'The Year in the Arts', in which Rich proclaimed, 'The best Broadway musical score of 1991 was that written by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman for the Disney animated movie *Beauty and the Beast*.'[9] This declaration by a highly esteemed theatre critic encouraged the Disney Corporation to develop a live-action musical for Broadway.

Prior to 1991, the 42nd Street Development Project had tried without success to entice the Disney Corporation to restore a theatre on 42nd Street. However, once the decision was made to adapt *Beauty and the Beast* for the stage and to form DTP, Eisner noticed a problem. In the tight market of Broadway real estate, it was difficult to find 'a theatre suitable for big-budget musicals that wasn't already tied up by Andrew Lloyd Webber'.[10] The solution was the New Amsterdam Theatre. The negotiations for the theatre renovations lasted for more than two years and ended with Disney agreeing to contribute $8 million to the renovation of the theatre. In addition to the Disney investment, the City of New York agreed to grant the Walt Disney Corporation a $21 million, low-interest loan.[11]

This loan angered many other producers who were previously denied the same perk, leading some of them to compare Disney to Wal-Mart, suggesting Disney's work at the New Amsterdam was akin to Wal-Mart opening in a small town and putting the 'mom and pop' stores out of business.[12] The status of the Walt Disney Corporation as a major entertainment superpower, as well as its seemingly limitless financial resources, certainly helped the company negotiate such a favourable deal, in contrast to other, smaller producers who had failed to procure similar deals in the past. In his 1995 article for *TDR*, 'Broadway and the Beast: Disney Comes to Times Square', Steve Nelson describes the Broadway establishment's reaction: 'The jokes began almost immediately about how Times Square would be transformed into a sanitized theme park, with 42nd Street between Broadway and 8th Avenue as "Main Street USA".'[13]

Beauty and the Beast reportedly cost over $15 million to stage, which made it the most expensive musical ever produced when it opened in April 1994 at the Palace Theatre.[14] DTP's approach to producing *Beauty and the Beast* was to transplant the film to the stage with as much fidelity to the look and feel of the original as possible. Walt Disney Studio Chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg reportedly told Robert Jess Roth, the director of *Beauty and the Beast*, to 'stage the movie'.[15] This choice resulted in a theme park aesthetic, which critics dismissed despite the show's popular appeal. For example, Jeremy Gerard of *Variety* declared that the sets 'look like something designed to be seen by people in moving seats, maybe at Disneyland'.[16]As Nelson observes:

> The movie had a fluidity born of animation's virtually unlimited potential to actualize the animators' ideas, establish character, and shift locales. It was a crisply

> edited 85-minute cartoon, while its stage incarnation was bloated to beyond two hours and given more mechanized show stoppers than even the sturdiest of book musicals could sustain. Sensing that they had already overextended the score and book, Disney went for a vast scenographic opulence that overshadows the show's subtler moments.[17]

In order to provide a full evening's entertainment, several characters and musical numbers had to be added, thus altering the crispness of the original film. Still, *Beauty* ran for 5,461 performances, indicating that DTP produced a product that appealed to theatre-goers. Even if the critics had responded positively to *Beauty and the Beast*, the production had little chance of being embraced by the Broadway establishment. Disney used its own personnel to put on the show, as Michael Eisner explains, 'Basically, we did it with our own internal talent; we have more Broadway talent at Walt Disney World and Disneyland than all of New York.'[18] Disney's choice to use its own talent rather than established Broadway talent, in addition to its status as a giant corporation, left many in the New York theatre scene unwilling to give the show a chance.

As Eisner notes, the people who created *Beauty* were Broadway people and they were theatre people: they just happened to work for Disney. *Beauty and the Beast* was brought to Broadway in a traditional manner, with an out-of-town tryout in Houston during which it was honed and revised. Costume designer Ann Hould-Ward painstakingly researched eighteenth-century French material culture and diligently recreated the style in the anthropomorphized *objets* that came to life in the Beast's castle. Ward's challenge was twofold: she had to ensure that the costumes were not impeding the actor's movement and ensure that the characters were immediately recognizable to the audience.[19] Jim Steinmeyer and John Gaughan, who had created illusions for numerous magicians including David Copperfield and Doug Henning, contributed many complex illusions, including the Beast's transformation. The final product was spectacular and demonstrated the incredible attention to detail discernible in any Disney product.[20]

DTP's next project would transcend theme park comparisons. In 1994, the film version of *The Lion King* had been a tremendous success (in 2015 it was the third highest grossing animated film of all time, at $987 million[21]). In 1995, Michel Eisner walked into a staff lunch and said 'we're going to do *The Lion King*', though Thomas Schumacher and Peter Schneider, the executives leading Disney Theatricals, were unsure it was even possible.[22] Schumacher eventually realized that the solution was simple: hire Julie Taymor.[23] In 1985, Schumacher unsuccessfully attempted to bring Julie Taymor's production of *Liberty's Taken* to Los Angeles and was familiar with the scale and quality of her work. Hiring Taymor was an intriguing and ultimately brilliant choice. Taymor's background as an avant-garde theatre director and designer brought a new aesthetic to Disney. While *Beauty and the Beast* was criticized for being a plastic, theme park, and too true a recreation of the film on stage, the mere act of engaging Taymor to helm *The Lion King* counteracted the prevailing

criticism that Disney Theatricals was invested in Broadway only for profit and not to create art.

Taymor's approach to *The Lion King* was to return to the roots of the story, Africa. Instead of simply using the songs composed by Elton John and Tim Rice for the film, Taymor looked to an album of music called *Rhythm of the Pride Lands* that featured music inspired by the film. Taymor was drawn to the music of South African composer Lebo M, whose work was prominent on the album. Lebo M not only composed new music for the stage adaptation but also led a South African chorus featured in the production. Taymor notes how M's 'African rhythms purposely collide with the pop tunes to create a unique sound'.[24] The same could be said of Taymor's African-inspired aesthetic for the show, as it combined with the cartoon quality of the original film to create an uncommonly beautiful world on stage.

One of the greatest challenges in creating that world was determining how best for performers to embody the animals central to the story. Taymor recognized the power of the animals' humanity in the film, and to ensure that the human actors were not completely hidden within the costumes, she wanted 'the human being to be an essential part of the stylization'.[25] This desire for hybrid forms where the human body could be seen as a part of the animal led to the creation of an array of wearable puppets that brought to life the world of the film.

The innovation and creative solutions extended far beyond puppetry to every aspect of the production, and the final product was a sophisticated marriage of the original film and Taymor's avant-garde aesthetic. *The Lion King* represents what DTP strives to achieve as a producer: take a highly successful title from the Disney catalogue and produce it in an artistically innovative way while adhering to the tenets of the Disney brand and offering family-friendly entertainment with a positive message. The musical's familiarity to fans of the film helps draw an audience of children and parents, while the artistic approach pushes the show beyond the theme park aesthetic.

Taymor notes that the critic John Lahr called the show the 'ultimate business art'.[26] This designation is fitting for the musical as it represented a distinct artistic vision executed to a high standard and positioned to reap substantial box office returns. That potential has been realized many times over. In October 2013, *The Lion King* became the first Broadway musical to reach $1 billion in cumulative gross,[27] and as of 1 March 2017, it is the third longest running Broadway show with 8,029 performances.[28] *The Lion King* shows no signs of slowing down with Broadway sales still strong and productions playing all around the world.

Though DTP recognizes that there will probably never be another *Lion King*,[29] the company certainly hasn't given up trying to produce artistically innovative and satisfying work that also conforms to Disney's brand identity. After *The Lion King*, DTP decided to branch out from simply staging the company's animated films. In March 2000 DTP opened Elton John and Tim Rice's *Aida* at the Palace Theatre. The show is based on the famous Verdi opera set

in ancient Egypt as well as a children's book of the same name. It was originally intended to be an animated movie, but after the success of *Beauty* and *Lion King*, Disney made the decision to produce it on Broadway. However, rather than releasing the show as *Disney's Aida*, DTP opted to form a new production division, Hyperion Theatricals.[30] Though the personnel and the money were the same as for any other Disney Theatrical Production, the show was not branded with the Disney moniker, given *Aida*'s pursuit of a more adult audience[31] and the story's tragic ending. As Michael Eisner notes, 'a double suicide is better non-Disney'.[32] *Aida* was modestly successful when compared to *Beauty* and *Lion King*, running for four years and more than 1,800 performances.

While *Mary Poppins* was the next Disney-branded musical to hit Broadway in 2006, having been running in London since 2004, the process of creating the show began many decades earlier. Disney's film *Mary Poppins* was released in 1964 after many years of negotiations between Walt Disney and the creator of the character and book series, Pamela Travers. Producer Cameron Mackintosh, who grew up loving the film, spent years courting Travers to obtain the stage rights to the story. Eventually, he obtained those rights, but Disney still held the rights to the film version and its music. Mackintosh knew that no stage musical version of the show 'would attract an audience if the show were totally divorced from the cultural memories the name automatically evoked'.[33] With the rights split between Disney and Mackintosh, and neither willing to sell their portion to the other, the only solution was to collaborate. Negotiations between Mackintosh and Disney began in the mid-1990s, and throughout the decade they showed no sign of coming to any conclusion. However, Cameron Mackintosh and Thomas Schumacher eventually met each other, and Mackintosh would later remark of Schumacher that 'Dealing with him is like dealing with another me'.[34] Eventually a deal was struck, and in 2002, Thomas Schumacher and Cameron Mackintosh met to discuss ideas for the musical and realized that they both were interested in returning to the original books in order to expand the story.

One of the smartest decisions the pair made in the development of *Mary Poppins* was to bring in former Artistic Director of the National Theatre in London, Richard Eyre.[35] It was Eyre who led the charge during the revision process and was able to give the script the focus it needed. Eyre helped the team develop a 'leaner, more linear show'.[36] In 2003 Michael Eisner attended a reading of the script. He was 'looking for an indication that *Mary Poppins* was going to be interpreted on stage in a tone that was compatible with the Disney name and reputation'.[37] The script he heard certainly was, as was the production that followed. Though *Mary Poppins* was produced in partnership with Mackintosh, the show conformed to the Disney brand promise and met the Walt Disney Corporation's exacting standards.

After an out-of-town premiere at the Hippodrome Theatre in Bristol, England, *Mary Poppins* opened in London at the Prince Edward Theatre in December 2004.[29] The show was a success, so Schumacher and Mackintosh

set their sights on Broadway. In August 2006, while the show was still running in London, rehearsals began in New York for the Broadway incarnation. *Mary Poppins* finally arrived at the New Amsterdam Theatre in November 2006 and ran for 2,619 performances, closing in March 2013.

When *Mary Poppins* opened on Broadway, DTP had three successful productions running simultaneously in New York, and not one failure to date. That would soon change. For DTP's fifth Broadway adventure, the team at DTP looked to the 1999 Disney animated hit, *Tarzan*. Adapting the film to the stage presented several challenges. The first is the structure, as *Tarzan* is almost two stories in one: Tarzan's childhood in the first half the film provides necessary exposition, but the real story does not begin until Jane appears.[38] To tackle this challenge, DTP enlisted Broadway veteran David Henry Hwang to write the book for the stage show. Hwang, who previously worked on the book for *Aida*, was chosen because Thomas Schumacher felt he had 'a great sense of how to adapt preexisting material and how to work in an ongoing, collaborative process'.[39]

The next challenge the team faced was the music. Unlike DTP's previous screen-to-stage adaptations, the music in *Tarzan* is not written in a traditional Broadway style. Rather than plot- and character-driven songs, *Tarzan* contains non-diegetic songs used as underscoring or commentary on the action. In the development of the film, pop star and composer Phil Collins first attempted to write more traditional musical theatre-style songs that were driven by the plot and sung by the characters, but he was not successful and so his 'signature style songs' were used in the film to 'establish theme and mood'.[40] They were not sung by the characters themselves, but rather served as underscoring with the composer singing them as an omnipresent narrative voice. In order to stage the film, the team would have to adjust the music to be sung by the characters, as is typical for a Broadway musical.

In addition to adapting the less traditional film score, the movement and characterization also presented challenges during the show's development, in particular, how to best bring the gorillas to the stage and how to make Tarzan fly through the jungle. Broadway and West End veteran Bob Crowley's initial vision for the show 'was not to create a live-action *Tarzan* in the usual sense of a stage musical, but to produce it in some kind of large traveling structure, like a touring circus'.[41] This idea was discarded, and Crowley eventually settled on an abstract approach. The stage was transformed into a green box using strips of fabric to represent the jungle vines. The back wall was outfitted with a metal frame and an inflatable barrier that provided entrances and exits for the airborne performers (and kept them safe). Crowley's choice to stay away from literal representation informed every decision throughout the production process.

To develop movement and strategies for flying, Australian contemporary ballet star and expert aerialist Meryl Tankard was hired as the show's choreographer, and Pichon Baldineau, the co-founder of De La Guarda (the company behind *De La Guarda* and *Fuerza Bruta*[42]) to devise the flying. Rather than

an out-of-town tryout, workshops were held in Buenos Aires, where Baldineau was based, to establish a movement vocabulary for the flying, and then in a warehouse in Brooklyn, where staging and choreography were further developed. After extensive exploration, the movement team decided to expose the flying mechanisms using a hybrid system of rock climbing equipment and theatrical flying technology.[43] Flying by Foy[44] designed and built a hybrid flying system that utilized computerized winches alongside a team of riggers. The actors clipped themselves into the system in full view of the audience, rather than trying to hide the apparatus. Journalist Robert Felberg described the final result, noting 'Performers, hanging from bungee cords attached to body harnesses, bounce and soar through the air, walk on walls and slowly descend from the top of the theatre nearly close enough to touch audience members' heads.'[45] Using rock-climbing equipment rather than a more traditional flying apparatus allowed the performers more freedom of movement and direction in the air as well as the ability to perform athletic movement and dance. The realization continued DTP's notion of innovative modes of stage presentation.

The final product was visually stunning. The first ten minutes of the show, performed entirely without words, were a beautiful melding of aerials, lighting, sound, and magic. In his review for *Variety*, '"Tarzan" Has Winning Look', David Rooney describes the opening moments:

> The show opens with an eventful but fluid sequence notable for its striking stage pictures and skillful manipulation of perspective. We watch a storm at sea and the near drowning of a couple and their baby, tossed up on a beach in Africa; they enter the jungle, where a leopard with glowing red eyes kills both human parents and a baby gorilla, whose grieving mother adopts the orphaned human baby. It's a classically cruel Disney plot setup conveyed with imaginative narrative concision.[46]

Though the first ten minutes were striking, once the opening moments passed, the show never managed to return to its initial visual magic. The book and music were also problematic. Though DTP brought in David Henry Hwang, a Broadway veteran to write the book, and the entire team worked to better incorporate Phil Collins's cinematic songs into the story, the book, characterizations, and structure never lived up to the visual elements' promise. *Tarzan* ran a relatively short 486 performances. Since *Tarzan* did not recoup its enormous costs and a majority of critics dismissed it, the show became DTP's first failure. Jeff Lee, DTP Staff Associate Director, believes that Broadway audiences were not prepared for the show's aesthetic. He points to the subsequent success of the production in Europe as evidence of a mismatch between the show's concept and American audiences.[47] Regardless of why *Tarzan* failed, Cerniglia admits that its failure was certainly a hit to DTP's morale, making the company more cautious in its financing of future new musical development.[48]

Tarzan is not the only DTP musical that did not recoup its investment while playing on Broadway. Its successor, *The Little Mermaid*, began previews at the

Lunt-Fontanne in November 2007 and also failed. Because of the limited availability of large theatres and Disney's belief that *Mermaid* and *Beauty* were too similar in theme, DTP closed *Beauty and the Beast* in order to open *The Little Mermaid*.[49] DTP could not, however, have predicted that *Mermaid* would be its next flop. Given the continued success of *Beauty and the Beast* and the uncertainty of the success of a new show, DTP was perhaps too hurried in its decision to close *Beauty* before *Mermaid* had even completed its out-of-town tryout, especially considering that *Tarzan* had closed less than a month earlier.

Similar to *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Little Mermaid* was developed through a traditional out-of-town tryout in Denver, Colorado in August 2007. Disney returned to the approach that brought it so much success with *The Lion King* and looked outside the world of commercial theatre for the creative team, including opera director Francisca Zambello and opera set designer George Tsypin. Unfortunately, this decision did not lead to another *Lion King*. In his August 2007 review, *Denver Post* theatre critic, John Moore found the costumes 'hit or miss', the setting sometimes confusing, and the climax 'messy'.[50]

When the show opened on Broadway in January 2008, Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* destroyed it, calling it an 'unfocused spectacle, more parade than narrative, that achieves the dubious miracle of translating an animated cartoon into something that feels like less than two dimensions'.[51] *Mermaid* ran for a year and a half and 685 performances. Since it didn't recoup its investment and received critical disdain, it became DTP's second failure in a row and in as many years. Although *The Lion King* and *Mary Poppins* were still running successfully at the time, DTP became more cautious.

This caution explains the unorthodox journey of Disney's next Broadway hit: *Newsies: The Musical*, based on the 1992 live action film that fictionalized the New York Newsboy strike of 1899. The film and its musical adaptation follow Jack Kelly, a scrappy newsboy turned strike leader. The triumph of the musical's unlikely heroes over New York City's paper bosses mirrors the triumph of *Newsies: The Musical* in its unexpected journey to financial and artistic success on Broadway.

Kenneth Cerniglia insists that there really was no plan for *Newsies* to ever make it to Broadway. He notes that after several failed attempts at a script, several twists of fate changed the course of the venture: (1) the arrival of Harvey Fierstein as the book writer, (2) an unexpectedly successful pilot production at the Paper Mill Playhouse, and (3) the context of the Occupy Wall Street movement with its message echoing that of the show. These factors all led to a limited engagement at the Nederlander Theatre; as Cerniglia asserted, 'You can't plan this stuff!'[52]

For years, Disney received requests for a live version of *Newsies* but couldn't seem to make it work. The original film was unsuccessful at the box office but had acquired a cult following though repeated airings on The Disney Channel and through home video. An entire generation of 'fansies' wanted to see *Newsies* live on stage. Though DTP tried several times to adapt the story, several elements posed challenges, most notably the lack of female characters.

Finally, after years of trying to crack the story, playwright Harvey Fierstein agreed to take a look at the script. He added the character of Katherine, a female news reporter, who replaced Bryan Denton (the male reporter from the film). Fierstein also altered elements of the plot, introducing Katherine as Jack's love interest (rather than Davey and Les's sister as in the film) and turning Jack into an artist. He also made the decision to open the show with the song 'Santa Fe', which matched the story's hopeful tone. Composer Alan Menken and lyricist Feldman revised their songs from the film for the stage version and also created some new ones.[53]

Fierstein's adaptation worked, and the team at DTP moved forward with the plan to develop the script for licensing. DTP brought veteran Broadway director Jeff Calhoun on board to helm a pilot production at New Jersey's Paper Mill Playhouse so that DTP could ensure the script was ready for licensing. Christopher Gattelli was hired to choreograph, and his electric choreography breathed life into the newly relevant story. The movement in the show is dynamic, athletic, and masculine, which complements the energy of the young men in the cast and the optimism of the characters they portrayed. When the show opened at Paper Mill it was enthusiastically received not only by millennial fansies, but also by the baby boomers who make up the Paper Mill's subscription audience and by the notoriously fickle New York critics. Given the overwhelmingly positive response to the show, DTP decided to move *Newsies* to Broadway.

Although *Newsies* was clearly in demand, its distinctive set also helped it transfer to Broadway. Paper Mill's associate producer Anne Quart convinced DTP's Schumacher to spend extra money on the set to realize set designer Tobin Ost's idea of a moving landscape of fire escapes and metal structures. She convinced Schumacher that the towers could be built to be movable and rented out along with the licensed version of the show to theatres all over the country.[54] Schumacher acquiesced without knowing how important that decision would be to the show's eventual success. Cerniglia explains:

> We already had a set that could come apart and go back together, so we didn't have to rebuild it. So, it ended up being, spend [a little] more money to bring it to Broadway. We knew we wouldn't recoup it on Broadway, but maybe eventually it would help us with more people knowing about [the show]. And then all the tickets sold out. So we were like, 'well, let's extend another ten weeks', and then all the tickets sold out … The it went to the decision, 'maybe we can open run it and just see'. It ended up being our quickest recouping show.[55]

Newsies broke DTP's losing streak. The show was not only successful at the box office but also received eight Tony Award nominations, winning for Best Original Score and Best Choreography. The show ran for 1,004 performances, closing on 24 August 2014, the original plan for eight weeks having turned into over two years and a highly successful national tour.

In addition to its box office success, *Newsies* also opened up a new avenue for DTP to connect with its audience and market its shows: social media. Shortly

before *Newsies* opened at the Paper Mill, DTP hired Greg V. Josken as its first digital marketing coordinator. Josken capitalized on the fansies' demand for *Newsies* related content by bringing it directly to their computers, and on 2 June 2012, *Newsies* trended on Twitter when the cast did their first live chat session.[56]

After the success of *Newsies* on social media, DTP adjusted its digital marketing plan for all shows. Every company of each production now has a cast member who is designated as the show's 'Social Media Captain'. The Captain is responsible for capturing video and still images and posting them to the show's Instagram account. The DTP marketing team also produces what they call 'bumpers', which are memes that pair show quotes with production images. These bumpers are frequently posted to Facebook and followers are encouraged to share the images on their own pages.[57]

The momentum generated by *Newsies*' unexpected success pushed Disney Theatricals into development for its next Broadway hit, *Aladdin*. The show's journey to Broadway began in 2002 at Disney's California Adventure Park in Anaheim, California. *Aladdin* was the first major project for Anne Hamburger, who took over as the head of entertainment for Disney Theme Parks after serving as the artistic director of several theatre companies, including a brief stint at the La Jolla Playhouse. The theme park *Aladdin* was a forty-minute live adaptation of the 1992 Disney animated film. Hamburger insisted that it was not her plan to develop the show for Broadway and that any later adaptation would be 'up to Thomas Schumacher and Michael Eisner'.[58] She used her theatrical savvy to assemble a team of legitimate theatre heavy hitters, including opera director Francesca Zambello and puppet designer Michael Curry (who had assisted Julie Taymor on *The Lion King*). *Aladdin* was a hit, with park-goers waiting in line for more than two hours to get a seat.[59] Because of the success that *Aladdin* was enjoying at California Adventure, when Disney Theatricals was looking for its next Broadway adaptation, it made sense to continue the work that Hamburger and her team had begun in California. The high-quality Broadway feel of the production led DTP to expand the forty-minute iteration into a full-length Broadway musical. With the show already partially formed, DTP saved money on development, as they did not have to start from scratch.

DTP was cautious in developing *Aladdin*, trying it out at several regional theatres (including the 5th Avenue Theatre in Seattle; Tuacahn Amphitheatre in Ivins, Utah; and the MUNY in St. Louis) before its official out-of-town tryout in Toronto in 2013. In an attempt to minimize the possibility of another failure, the script was honed before it was even presented as a Broadway tryout, as the team at DTP sought to ensure that it conformed to the Disney brand standard. *Aladdin*'s long development process is indicative of DTP's caution after the failure of *Tarzan* and *The Little Mermaid*. If *Aladdin* is any indication, DTP has shifted away from its original development approach of throwing unlimited funding at a new project (as was the case with *Tarzan*). DTP now cautiously puts its properties under more intense scrutiny before a title is developed and set on a path to Broadway.

Aladdin opened at the New Amsterdam Theatre on 20 March 2014, one month shy of the twenty-year anniversary of Disney's first Broadway show, *Beauty and the Beast*. Director and choreographer Casey Nicholaw brought his signature shtick, sass, and tap dances to the familiar story, making *Aladdin* feel like a fun-filled Broadway musical comedy with lavish costumes and scenery alongside a classic athletic production number, 'Friend Like Me'. Audiences and critics adored the show, with Charles Isherwood of the *New York Times* noting that it 'defied his dour expectations'.[60]

Whether the momentum generated by the success of *Newsies* and *Aladdin* continues to grow remains to be seen, as DTP develops new titles for the stage. Disney's next Broadway musical, *Frozen*, based on the 2013 animated hit (and the highest grossing animated film of all time) is scheduled to hit Broadway in 2018. By bringing the Disney catalogue to the stage in new and engaging ways, DTP continues to attract a steady audience of children and families to live theatre.

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CHAPTER 43

Against All Odds: Kevin McCollum, Creating Communities Through Theatre

Chris McCoy

When *[title of show]*—that quirky four-person musical about 'a couple of guys trying to write a musical about a couple of guys trying to write a musical'—opened at the Lyceum Theatre in 2008, Kevin McCollum, the show's producer, defended his decision to bring this little-show-that-could to Broadway: 'I think getting a show to Broadway *against all odds* is a big American idea' (emphasis mine).[1] Indeed, the prescient producer behind such hits as *Rent* (1996), *Avenue Q* (2004), and *In the Heights* (2007) has been dedicated to defying the odds. Whether through cutting-edge shows that speak to young, contemporary audiences with themes about community and family in a multicultural age, embracing innovation in marketing and sales, or redefining the relationship between Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regional markets, Kevin McCollum has established himself as a producer of the twenty-first century.

McCollum was born on 1 March 1962 in Honolulu, Hawaii, to Tom and Sue McCollum. His parents divorced when he was very young; he lived with his mother and was estranged from his father. When he was only 14, both parents died. McCollum describes the loss of his mother to breast cancer as a defining moment in his life and one that would inspire him to pursue a career in the arts: 'She always followed her dream. I knew I would follow mine.'[2] This dream was a life in theatre, something important to both him and his mother: 'Theater was part of her family; it was my community.'[3] After his mother's death, he lived with an aunt and uncle in Chicago until he enrolled at the University of Cincinnati College–Conservatory of Music.

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In describing his decision to produce *[title of show]* on Broadway, McCollum said the show is about how to 'build a family with your friends to get through this world. And all my shows have that ethic: *against all odds*, build your family, learn to love each other' (emphasis mine).[4] Indeed, it is easy to see the recurring theme of family in the projects McCollum chose to produce: the bohemians of *Rent*, the neighbourhood communities of *Avenue Q* and *In the Heights*, and the four friends in *[title of show]*. McCollum's attraction to these shows may be a reflection on the instability of his own family history; however, this theme also resonates with younger generations of audiences who grew up during a time when divorce rates were at an all-time high (1981) and LGBTQ visibility was challenging the ideals of heterosexual familial structures. 'I think our art has to reflect the time that we're in', McCollum said; he's interested in producing 'shows where people make a difference and you actually belong to a community'.[5] Tapping into this zeitgeist, McCollum's shows tend to attract younger audiences who are more likely to identify through their groups of friends rather than genealogical families as well as LGBTQ audiences who have a history of making their own non-traditional families.

At only 32 years of age, McCollum joined another young producer, Jeffrey Seller, to form The Producing Office in 1995 and The Booking Group in 1996. The first major work in which The Producing Office invested and helped develop—in partnership with the New York Theatre Workshop—was Jonathan Larson's *Rent*. The widely lauded musical won the Tony Award for Best Musical as well as the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. *Rent* emphatically captured McCollum's community-as-family interest with its group of struggling artists of various sexual orientations and identities who forge their way in millennial America. When transferring the show to Broadway, the director, Michael Grief, and producers made a brave aesthetic decision by choosing the Nederlander Theater on West 41st Street in order to capture 'the Lower East Side spirit of the show'.[6] This venue was a strong indication of another of McCollum's defining qualities as a producer: innovation in marketing and sales.

Rent was also known for selling tickets in the first two rows of seats for $20, through a lottery directly before the performance began. When the idea was originally announced, the *New York Times* reported on the producers' bravery in offering prime seats at ticket prices far below the then $60–$80 average. McCollum responded: 'In keeping with the spirit of the show and the vision of Jonathan Larson, we are happy to be able to offer prime seats to people who otherwise would not be able to purchase them. […] Jonathan was himself a struggling artist and his dream was to create a universal piece of musical theater that's available to everyone.'[7] While this decision could be viewed capitalistically as clever marketing or optimistically as dedication to financially struggling artists, the effect was far more pervasive. It created a dedicated fan base for the show, which McCollum describes as a 'tribe' but which also became known as 'Rentheads'. McCollum attributes his decision to offer $20 tickets to his belief in theatre as a medium for creating communities in an increasingly digitized culture: 'You're helping them build their own families based on their passion.

They think it's their little secret and they're isolated in their enjoyment. They really need […] a way to gather together around this ethic of the live arts.'[8] McCollum asserts his fundamental belief that the purpose of theatre is to create familial communities through shared experience as well as dramatic content.

An important element of McCollum's shows is an acknowledgement of the changing racial and ethnic demographics in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century. Growing up in Hawaii opened his eyes to multiculturalism at a time when identity politics movements were bringing this issue to the fore in the United States.[9] *Rent* had a diverse, self-chosen 'family' at its core. Likewise, *Avenue Q*—which became McCollum and Seller's next big hit in 2004—had a through-line about diversity (even though slightly subversive) through its integration of human and puppet characters, its subplot of monster equality, and sometimes politically incorrect humour. Inspired by *Sesame Street* and the Muppets, the creators of *Avenue Q*, Robert Lopez, Jeff Marx, and Jeff Whitty, realized that their generation was resistant to traditional musicals and instead were familiar with musicals in the form of children's television.[10] Likewise, this Generation X grew up with an awareness of diversity and increasingly inclusive spaces. *Avenue Q*, which won Tony Awards for Best Book, Best Score, and Best Musical, shares with *Rent* a group of characters who create their own community, a self-defined family.

McCollum's dedication to portraying multicultural communities on stage continued with *In the Heights* (2007). Set in a Washington Heights barrio, the musical is about a community of Dominican Republic immigrants making their way in New York City. The music and lyrics for this show were written by a fresh new voice, Lin-Manuel Miranda, with a book by Quiara Alegria Hudes. Given that Latino/as represent the fastest growing ethnic demographic in the United States, this show presented an under-represented population in musical theatre. It won four Tony Awards, including Best Musical (the first musical by Latino/a writers to do so), and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. In describing why he decided to invest in *Heights*, McCollum said 'It's a contemporary musical about an Hispanic community, but it's really about us, about America.'[11] Again, the recurring theme of community, a hallmark of a McCollum production, is evident.

McCollum began his career working as a theatre producer in Los Angeles, with the Muny in St. Louis, and with the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota. These experiences informed his dedication to redefining the relationship between Broadway and regional markets by recognizing the latter's earning potential as well as their abilities to draw diffuse audiences and help musicals expand beyond the geographically defined 'Broadway'. The first attempt at redefining this relationship occurred after *Avenue Q* won the Tony Award for Best Musical in 2004, a shocking upset against the popular favourite and expected winner, *Wicked*. Instead of sending *Avenue Q* on a national tour, McCollum and the other producers of the show made an exclusive deal with Steve Wynn to mount the first regional production in his Las Vegas casino for an open-ended run. While musicals had become an increas-

ingly prevalent entertainment offering on the Las Vegas strip, no Broadway show had yet skipped the national tour to head straight to Vegas. (The London hit jukebox musical *We Will Rock You* would skip both a Broadway production and a national tour in favour of playing Vegas as its US debut.) *Avenue Q*'s transfer to Las Vegas was a snub to the presenters and promoters of the touring industry, who also make up a significant demographic of the Tony voting pool; an article in *The New York Times* on 11 June 2004 subtitled the decision as '"Avenue Q": The Fallout'.[12] The radical choice to move *Avenue Q* to Las Vegas ultimately proved disappointing. The show ran for two years and lost money in its last five months.[13]

McCollum's next foray into regional producing, however, proved to be a success. In 2004, he obtained the rights to adapt and produce the perennial favourite film musical *White Christmas* (1954) on stage as *Irving Berlin's White Christmas*. While the show had plenty of New York talent, McCollum decided to open the show at San Francisco's Curran Theatre. This was not a typical out-of-town tryout with sights set on Broadway; instead, McCollum aimed to franchise the show to regional markets. Hence, Los Angeles, Boston, Toronto, Detroit, and St. Paul saw productions over the course of four years. According to McCollum, the show began as a musical theatre producer's answer to the seasonal holiday offerings: 'The regional theatres do "Christmas Carol," and the ballets do "Nutcracker." But musical theatre has nothing.'[14] The decision to produce franchised productions in regional markets was not necessarily new, but certainly an inspired choice for a show with limited seasonal appeal (although the Muny in St. Louis staged it during the 2006 summer as 'Christmas in July'). When McCollum finally brought *White Christmas* to New York in 2008, he worked with the unions to create special contracts for a ten-week limited run, which he described as 'a grand experiment'.[15] The out-of-town productions allowed the sets, costumes, and staging to be completed so that rehearsals in New York were limited.

While Broadway producers of yore could be just Broadway producers, contemporary producers must be willing to invest in and investigate alternative options, including not only regional theatres but also Off-Broadway venues. Indeed, McCollum and Seller created an Off-Broadway performance space in New York that allowed them to completely circumvent the traditional Broadway model of producing. With a successful, star-studded revival of David Rabe's *Hurlyburly* in 2005, the producing partners transferred the production to 37 Arts, which they helped establish. This production had all the makings of a Broadway revival, but the producers (with permission of the cast) decided to transfer the show to their 499-seat theatre rather than to a larger Broadway house. The announcement in *The New York Times* began with the phrase 'Thumbing its nose at Broadway', demonstrating an industry bias.[16] According to the article, 'a 12-week run at 37 Arts will cost $650,000 to produce, as opposed to the $1.8 million on Broadway largely because labor, advertising and rent are more expensive on Broadway'.[17] Indeed, this model attracted the attention of a *New York Times* financial reporter: 'whether they

ultimately succeed or not, at least they're thinking about new business models. Somebody sure needs to.'[18] According to this reporter, the current Broadway model of production is 'unsustainable' and he applauds McCollum and Seller's attention to creating alternatives.

In January 2012, McCollum and Seller announced that they would disband their 21-year producing partnership in order to pursue independent careers. This conclusion of The Producing Office signals the end of a team whose productions, in addition to the works discussed here, include director Baz Luhrmann's Broadway production of the opera *La Bohème* (2002) and the Arthur Laurents-directed revival of *West Side Story* with Spanish lyrics and dialogue (2009). McCollum's desire to create community through the medium of theatre in an increasingly solitary world is evident in all of his productions, and his emphasis on self-selected families remains a hallmark of his work.

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CHAPTER 44

'I Am Them': Tyler Perry's Black Musical Theatre for the Masses

Rashida Z. Shaw

The year is 1992. The setting is Atlanta, Georgia's 14th Street Playhouse. The musical is *I Know I've Been Changed*. Performing the lead role of Joe[1] is a 23-year-old African American newcomer to theatre named Tyler Perry (b. 1969). This role, along with his simultaneous work in the production as the producer, writer, director, and actor, would serve as the launching pad for Perry's now dominant position as a multimillion dollar producer of black musical theatre.

Inspired by an episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in which Oprah suggested that writing is a cathartic tool for the release of lived pain and troubles, a young Perry, not yet able to claim full ownership of his own truth, put pen to paper and invented fictional characters who experienced, in dramatic form with song, his real traumas of child abuse.[2] The result was *I Know I've Been Changed*, a therapeutic, humorous, and Christian-centred musical that would take six years to evolve from its failed beginnings as a flop to the sold-out musical success that it became in its 1998 incarnation.

The premiere of *I Know I've Been Changed*, produced in Atlanta's popular performance venue, The Tabernacle (formerly the House of Blues), cost Perry $12,000 of his own savings to produce before an underwhelming assembled audience of thirty people.[3] However, when the revised production became a hit, Perry soon moved the musical to Atlanta's Fox Theatre, three times the size of The Tabernacle, where it continued to sell out, recouping not only the young playwright's losses but also motivating him to pursue his dreams.[4] Propelled by *I Know I've Been Changed*'s success, Perry began his journey of

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producing nationally touring musical theatre, of his own authorship, every year since that fateful production in 1998. His brand of theatre has been categorized as one that caters to a primarily African American audience. The shows are commonly produced in large performance venues that seat thousands and are geographically far removed from the more recognized lobbies, halls, and auditoriums of regional, Broadway, and even locale-specific community theatre houses. Standing alone as a multimillionaire[5] African American theatre producer, director, writer, and actor who also produces his own work for film and television, Perry continues to pinpoint the spectator-driven impact of his musical theatre as the root of his success.

> My connection with this audience is unbreakable. The pride and the ownership that they have in me, you know, it's like I'm a family member. I represent so much to them. I represent hope. I represent what they can do. I represent possibility. So going out on the road is very important, it's almost like running for president. You travel the country. You get out in front of people, you shake hands and kiss babies. But it's just me reaffirming my connection with the audience because *I am them*.[6]

It is this palpable connection to his audience, enveloped by conscientiously crafted narrative and performance content that relies on identifiable African American cultural content (e.g. popular vernacular dances or the casting of well-known African American television actors from the 1980s and 1990s) and American popular culture references (e.g. Steven Spielberg's 1985 film *The Color Purple* or Jonathan Demme's 1991 film *The Silence of the Lambs*) that has become the signature hallmark of a Perry production. Placed within a captivating and cathartic theatrical environment, Perry's engagement with his audience, their interests, and their realities, both on and off stage, has been the key to his long-standing and profitable success as a producer.

A New Orleans native, Tyler Perry was originally named Emmitt Perry, Jr. While Perry has commented widely about the childhood abuse he suffered at the hands of his father, Emmitt Perry, Sr., a carpenter,[7] he always expresses gratitude to his mother, Willie Maxine Perry, a preschool teacher,[8] for being a strong and loving force in his life until her death in December 2009. Perry has often described his childhood as 'hell',[9] stating that it was filled with beatings, multiple suicide attempts, and sexual molestation at the hands of various perpetrators.[10]

Although he was never sexually molested by his father, at the age of 16, Perry changed his first name to Tyler in an attempt to separate himself further from the senior Emmitt Perry: 'I just started telling people my name is Tyler. I didn't want to carry my father's name. I didn't want to be anything like him. I didn't want to be his Jr. I have no idea where I got the name from.'[11] Later in life, however, he credits his forgiveness of his father with the success of *I Know I've Been Changed*. As journalist Margena Christian recounts, 'In 1998, his life changed. First, he found it in his heart to forgive his father. Then, his

play became a success.'[12] Most recently, Perry has learned through DNA testing that his father is not his biological father. According to media reports, he is now on a quest to find his birth father.[13]

In professional theatre circles, Perry's success is considered something of an anomaly. Through gospel and R&B infused musicals, centred on familial and/or relationship dramas, set in urban locales, and wrapped in colloquial Christian ideology, Perry has created a dedicated national fan base of African Americans who are willing to pay between $65 and $95 a ticket[14] to attend his productions. In each city, his productions are usually booked for four to five shows across four consecutive days. As an example of the intensity of his production schedules, the national tour of Perry's musical *Madea's Big Happy Family*, written and produced after his mother's passing and starring Perry in the lead role, opened in El Paso, Texas and was performed on tour a total of 125 times in 126 days.[15]

For Perry, theatre, like his writing in film and television, allows him to imaginatively tell often difficult stories: 'I have a lot of stories to tell and what I write about are human experiences and the kind of dysfunction that I came from. I have years and years of stuff built up here.'[16] He emphasizes: 'I love theatre. I knew I would get to film and television eventually but theatre seemed to be the obvious path for me because there is no better training than sitting there in front of ten thousand people letting them tell you, you know, this is good or it's not.'[17] As evidenced by his lengthy body of theatrical work, Perry's love for theatre still motivates him to produce, direct, and perform in his own musical productions annually, alongside his film and television projects.

The content of Perry's plays, however, has meant they do not tour without controversy. In the popular press, academic circles, and theatre-goers' conversations, Perry's musicals have been classified within a branch of American musical theatre known as the Chitlin Circuit. The word 'chitlins', in its plural form, holds particular significance within African American communities as the name of a culinary delicacy developed during slavery by African American cooks. As Amiri Baraka explained in his essay 'Soul Food', 'After the pig was stripped of its choicest parts, the feet, snout, tail, intestines, stomach, etc., were all left for the "members," who treated them mercilessly.'[18] The phrase 'Chitlin Circuit' makes historical reference to the segregated black performance routes of African American vaudeville that thrived during the early twentieth century.[19] More negatively construed in contemporary conversations, Tyler Perry's African American musicals, along with the musical productions of his counterparts who have been producing similar musical fare since the 1980s, have been assigned this label 'Chitlin Circuit' based on multiple critiques of the negative, derogatory, and stereotypical representations of African Americans that their productions stage.[20]

Tyler Perry's most prominent character Madea, described by Perry as a 'God-fearing, gun-toting, pot-smoking, loud-mouthed grandmother',[21] while popularly defining his brand, has been under constant scrutiny since her creation due to the negative racial, classed, and gendered stereotypes she evokes.

Yet Perry, who plays the titular character himself, donning a grey wig, a fat suit, and a floral dress, sees Madea as not only a combination of his mother and aunt,[22] but also as a much-needed dose of humour in his work which, outlandish antics considered, enables him to talk about the more serious issues plaguing the black community:

> There is no way I can talk about abuse. Something that is plaguing our community, something that is molestation, incest, abuse, drug addicts, crack-addicted mothers, children raising themselves, there is no way that I could talk about any of that and get an audience to watch. For my audience, they don't want to hear it. They live it every day. What is the point? I'm talking about my base audience, the ones who have been with me from the beginning. They live it every day so, 'What is the point in you trying to tell me about how I live?' But what I found is—and this is what people don't understand. […] It is very specific. People who live in misery and have pain and struggle everyday don't want to go to the movies and see it. But I learned, take Madea in, wrap it in humour, let it be broad as can be and if you can get this message in there at the same time, this is the only way it's going to get to the community: the only way.[23]

Thus, with Madea, Perry the writer has created an unforgettable, indomitable, and controversial character who voices his community-oriented messages and concerns in drag, and may have the staying power to survive within the annals of African American popular performance history. More importantly, for Perry, the independent producer of the work he writes, directs, and performs, Madea serves as the axis about which everything in his entertainment empire—from advertising to casting to narrative to music to the size of the theatrical venue, as examples—rotates and relies upon. In fact, if palpable audience connection is understood as the signature hallmark of the Perry producing strategy, then Madea must be considered the muse and the strongest voice through which the producer works his seat-filling magic in spite of and in consideration of the negative criticism she and, relationally, his work receives.

To date, Perry has produced more than nineteen musicals, twenty films, and seven television shows, with more of each currently in development. In 2005, with the box office success of his first film, *Diary of A Mad Black Woman* (Darren Grant, 2005), an adaptation of his 2001 musical of the same name with a screenplay written by Perry who also played two characters in the film, the burgeoning media mogul expanded his entertainment market to include film and television offshoots, alongside the development and production of new musicals. Recognized by *Forbes* in 2011 as *the* highest paid man in American entertainment, with earnings totalling $130 million for that year,[24] Perry's accolades include numerous awards and nominations from respected film, television, and business institutions. These include the African-American Film Critics Association (AAFCA), the Black Business Professionals Association (BBPA), Black Entertainment Television (BET), the Black Movie Awards, the Black Reel Awards, the Boston Society of Film Critics, the Denver Film Critics Society, Movieguide, the MTV Movie Awards, the National Association for

the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO), and the National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE).[25] In 2006 he was awarded the now defunct Quill Award[26] for Best in Humor, and Book of the Year,[27] for his book *Don't Make a Black Woman Take off Her Earrings: Madea's Uninhibited Commentaries on Love and Life*.[28] He has, however, only received one award for his theatrical work: the Helen Hayes Award for Excellence in Theater.[29] Perry received this award in 2001 within the category of Outstanding Lead Actor in a non-resident production, for his performance as Madea in the touring production of his musical *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*.[30]

For Perry, who admits to not having any college or professional training in theatre, film, or television, the criticism can hit hard. He and his entertainment products have been the focus of many cultural and academic debates about African American representation in the media and popular culture since the box office success of *Diary of A Mad Black Woman*. While he has amassed the support of some well-respected American icons, entrepreneurs, and entertainment giants such as Oprah Winfrey,[31] he has been subjected to media backlash from other well-known critics, such as African American film director Spike Lee.[32] Although Perry and Lee have reconciled their differences,[33] in an earlier 2004 interview with *Ebony* magazine, Perry admitted that 'the criticism' he received used to make him 'feel ashamed of his productions',[34] until he had a conversation with the esteemed African American playwright, August Wilson:

> August said, 'Do what you do. Don't worry about these people, do what you do because I don't think it's bad at all' [...] And his words just shed a whole new light on everything.[35]

Today, Perry is the proud owner of a 20,000 square foot film and television studio, equipped with five sound stages and built from the ground up in Atlanta, Georgia.[36] The sign on the main doors tells the tale of a man, a producer, in fact, with bigger plans ahead: 'Welcome to Tyler Perry Studios: "A Place Where Even Dreams Believe"'.[37]

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CHAPTER 45

Between Broadway and the Local: Arts Communication International (ACOM), Seol & Company, and the South Korean Musical Industry

Hyunjung Lee

In the process of South Korea's cultural modernization during the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of America evoked visions of glamour and global success. In the context of commercial theatre, 'Broadway' was branded as the great symbol of affluence and coalesced into a fantastic, overblown image to represent America.[1] The power of the Broadway musical as a 'distinctively American and widely influential art form', to quote Raymond Knapp,[2] was immediately linked with commercial success and the workings of global capital. Therefore, during South Korea's economic boom in the 1980s, theatre companies such as Hyundai Theatre (founded by Kim Ui-kyoung, Pyo Jae-soon, and Lee Ban in 1976) declared their goal of achieving a 'corporatization of theatre' (meaning that they wished to obtain a substantial amount of commercial profits). To achieve this aim and to cater to Korean audiences' attraction to American popular culture, it was essential for the group to select and stage popular American musicals such as *Peter Pan* (1979), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1981), *The Sound of Music* (1986), and *West Side Story* (1987).[3]

As they witnessed the impact of Broadway musicals upon local audiences, South Korean theatre producers seeking commercial success began to create musical companies along corporate lines—an ambition that was encouraged by the nation's explosive economic growth in the late 1980s. Broadway as a source for emulation thus resulted in an active implementation of the

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Broadway entertainment system, including turning profits and developing substantial brand-making strategies. Concurrent with this corporate approach, critics called for the development of a musical genre that aligned with original Korean repertoires (*ch'ang jak musikol*).[4] In response, the cultivation of larger markets for Korean productions beyond the national borders gradually became part of the discourse.

As the 1990s began, a number of commercially oriented theatre groups started to translate and adapt American musicals to be performed in Korean for domestic audiences. For example, Yegrin Theatre of the 1960s changed its name to Seoul City Musical Theatre and staged *Fiddler on the Roof* (December 1993, directed by Im Young-woong) and *Porgy and Bess* (July 1999, directed by Lee Jong-hoon).[5] Accordingly, in this chapter I trace how the rise of musical theatre in South Korea has worked in tandem with the demand for and implementation of a corporate system in musical theatre production companies. The establishment of Arts Communication International (ACOM) in 1991 and Seol & Company in the early 2000s are both representative outcomes of this trend.

Arts Communication International

With aspirations to institute a theatre company that could attract domestic investment, train professional musical performers, and pursue international as well as domestic markets, Yoon Ho-jin (b. 1948) founded ACOM in 1991 with several renowned theatre artists and corporate owners. Most of ACOM's founders maintained high profiles—some were even government affiliates with authoritative positions in the South Korean arena. In 1991 Yoon himself had been an important figure in Korean theatre for almost twenty years, mainly due to his position as the artistic director of Keukdan Shilhum Kukjang (Experimental Theatre Group) since the 1970s.

ACOM produced its first 'original Korean musical', *The Last Empress*, in 1995. This production, the first Broadway-style mega-musical to be created by an exclusively domestic workforce, was based on the original play *Yowoo sanyang* (The Fox Hunt) by Lee Moon-yeol, a mainstream novelist and notable literary figure in South Korea who also happened to be a founding member of ACOM. The musical is a dramatization of the 1895 Japanese assassination of Queen Min, the last empress of Korea's Chosun Dynasty, and was produced as part of the centennial commemorations of her death. The musical's cast and staff members came from the elite of South Korea's mainstream social scene. Kim Won-jung and Lee Tae-won, the double-cast actresses who played Queen Min, both trained in classical voice at Juilliard and had performed musical theatre and classical opera roles in major international performance venues. Kim Kwang-lim, the ACOM associate who turned Lee's play into a musical, studied at UCLA, served as a dean at the Korean National University of Arts, and sits on the board of directors of Theatre Yonwoo Company (which he founded in 1978).

By investing the unprecedented amount of more than KRW (Korean Won) 1 billion (approximately US$1 million) into the premiere of *The Last Empress*, ACOM clearly projected its image of affluent cultural capacity. Priding itself as the first Korean musical company to travel to New York and the West End for overseas stagings of *The Last Empress*, ACOM claimed to be the most advanced leading musical company in South Korea. In most of the existing theatre companies, the actors as well as the staff members had routinely suffered from low salaries and irregular incomes, without proper sponsorships; thus, actors and staff alike were prone to take odd jobs between rehearsals and performances. With the implementation of a new corporate culture, ACOM proudly implemented a monthly payment system, an innovation that had previously been almost inconceivable in the financially vulnerable field of South Korean theatre.

ACOM's creation of *The Last Empress* has been generally read as a nationalistic backlash in response to the late 1980s dominance of Broadway musicals. The company's assertion that their projects were 'winning' against Broadway plays affirmed its desire to triumph over the very object it had been endeavouring to imitate. The domestic issues and controversies surrounding *The Last Empress* reveal how the nation's desire for globalization became intertwined with its own desire for national development and success; that is, the 'national production' in this context usurped and constructed its label as a global product for its own satisfaction and glory.[6] Particularly with the production's first trip to New York in August 1997, it becomes evident how the musical's producers, as well as the domestic media and audiences in South Korea, pursued the term 'Broadway' (even though the performance venue was Off-Broadway) as an empty signifier for the global in order not only to prove the advancement of the nation's cultural industry but also to be almost gladly deluded by it.

The musical's first trip to New York was immediately hailed as a nationwide triumph, and its domestic popularity rose accordingly. *The Last Empress* was called an exemplary model that secured the nation's fame by promoting Korea's exquisite culture on the most important international stage. For South Korean theatre critic Noh Younghae, *The Last Empress* is the 'people's [*kukmin*] musical' because it represents the nation and has proven the superior quality of South Korean performance culture as a whole.[7]

However, South Korean media also continually overstated the musical's impact in New York by, for example, using the term 'Broadway' to misrepresent the play's few nights as a special visiting tour Off-Broadway; it was never an extended-performance, Broadway-run production. Mainstream media further deployed the rhetoric of global success by exaggerating the impact of the play's international tours.[8] Early in 1997, in advance of the New York premiere, South Korean mass media ubiquitously trumpeted the launch of 'this Korean-brand musical': '*The Last Empress*' New York premiere has to be recognized not just as an ordinary international tour event; it has to be seen as "the first Korean musical export" on Broadway, the heart of musical theatre.'[9]

Under the influence of this prevalent nationalistic treatment and the tremendously strong nationalistic motivation underlying it, ACOM gained powerful

if not always heartfelt support from mainstream outlets. *Chosun Ilbo*, Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS), and Samsung Corporation helped underwrite the New York performances (for the play's London run, the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism funded performance expenses). But in New York, most of the audience was Korean or Korean American, at a ratio of about 9:1 (Koreans vs. non-Koreans).[10] In this context, the fable of global success can be recognized as an empty signifier, functioning merely as an expression of long-held desire rather than literal triumph.

In 2009, ACOM produced the premiere of *Hero*, a sequel to *The Last Empress*. This action attempted to capitalize on emerging trends that, in turn, reveal Asian regional interactions in terms of related cultural transactions and developments. *Hero*, also a musical, portrays the life and death of another historical figure, Ahn Jung-keun, a Korean nationalist and independence activist who assassinated Ito Hirobumi, the Prime Minister of Japan and Resident-General of Korea, as the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea began in the early twentieth century. It took more than five years and more than KRW 4 billion for ACOM to finalize the production of *Hero*. Like *The Last Empress*, *Hero* prides itself for its massive deployment of various workings of stagecraft.[11] For example, the production's assassination scene features an actual train that measures 12 metres by 2.7 metres.[12]

ACOM's rationale behind the creation of *Hero* is similar to that of *The Last Empress* in terms of the musical's international message and the nationalistic mindset behind it. *Hero*, however, at least attempted to avoid a unilateral depiction of Japan as Korea's eternal enemy, a depiction that permeates *The Last Empress*. Furthermore, following up on contemporary South Korean musical production trends, *Hero* demonstrates an alternative cultural trajectory in terms of its marketing strategy by relying on the popularity of Korean popular culture (aka the Korean Wave, or *Hallyu*) in East/Southeast Asia. For instance, Ahn was originally performed by Jung Sung-hwa, an extremely popular musical star not only in South Korea but also in other Asian countries. The 2013 season of *Hero* featured K-pop (Korean pop music, part of *Hallyu*) star JK Kim Dong-wook in the title role. This selection was made to keep up with the trend of casting K-pop stars (namely members of 2PM, Super Junior, Dong Bang Shin Ki, and Girls' Generation) in major musical productions. ACOM thus enhanced the marketability of its production through casting.

Seol & Company

Seol Do-yoon (b. 1959) had a long and varied theatrical background before achieving fame as the founder of Seol & Company, which he established in 2001. The son of entertainers, Seol was born in Pohang, a city in North Kyungsang Province. Because his family owned the only turntable and sound system in the village, Seol was able to spend most of his childhood dancing, singing, and creating skits with his friends. As a dyslexic (his condition was not

adequately treated until his early forties), he preferred physical and creative activities to reading or other school subjects.[13]

Seol entered college intending to major in classical voice but joined the school drama club and spent most of his time as a student actor. He eventually dropped out and joined a professional theatre group with the intention of building a career as a professional actor. In 1981 Seol auditioned for Hyundai Theatre; as the prototype for the first private musical company in South Korea, the company staged translated versions of American musical repertoires.[14] There Seol learned the basics of professional acting, dancing, and musical theatre production. Moreover, he enjoyed popularity for about nine years as a major actor by collaborating with other important theatre groups such as Keukdan Cecile and Keukdan Minjung, but eventually chose to become a producer (and thereby to abandon the uncertainties of an actor's life) in 1986. In 1987 he served as principal choreographer at KBS (Korean Broadcasting System, a national television network) and started to make a name for himself by choreographing the opening and closing ceremonies for the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul.

In 1992 Seol invested KRW 3 billion and produced a French musical, *Jazz*, for the opening of KBS Hall, but the endeavour turned out to be a financial disaster. It was Seol's lack of business education and practical experience that persuaded him to launch an unknown musical in an environment with almost no market for musical theatre. Having learned from this mistake, he went on to stage a successful Korean production, *Sarangeun Bireul Tago* (with an English title of *Singing in the Rain*, though it is unrelated to the Hollywood film of almost the same name), in 1995 and since then has become an influential figure in Korea's musical industry. The success of *Sarangeun Bireul Tago* resulted from Seol's cultivation and endorsement of rising K-pop stars and effective promotional efforts via mass media.[15] Banking on this commercial success, Seol founded Seoul Musical Company the same year, which seeded the current Seol & Company.

The musical industry in South Korea gained additional momentum in 2001 when the newly established Seol & Company staged the first Korean-language version of *The Phantom of the Opera* at the LG Arts Center, an emblematic achievement for Seol.[16] In fact, *Phantom*'s Seoul premiere marked a turning point in the history of South Korean musical theatre. Its unprecedented success enormously accelerated the genre's processes of industrialization and popularization, something reflected in its domestic record-setting ticket sales of more than 240,000 in its first year alone. (The show had already broken domestic records with a 95 per cent audience share on its 1995 international tour [performances in English with surtitles] at Seoul Arts Center under the auspices of Seol Musical Company.) In 2009, Seol's Korean *Phantom* set another domestic record: 407 performances (including previews) that attracted more than 330,000 spectators during its run at the Charlotte Theatre, Seoul's most celebrated venue for musical performances. In 2012, the show set yet another record when more than one million fans came to see the English-language international touring company perform at Seoul's Blue Square Theatre during *Phantom*'s twenty-fifth anniversary

celebration, an event carefully planned by Seol & Company.[17] The synergy between the foreign cast and the Korean production, as well as the systematic promotional management catered by Seol & Company, was responsible for these unprecedented audience numbers; in turn, Seol & Company proved that these commercial successes constituted new, reliable types of shows for further domestic as well as global investments.

These achievements become even more remarkable when one recalls that Seol's production career began with financial difficulties in 2001, when he first decided to produce *Phantom* in Korea. First of all, it was nearly impossible to meet the essential production costs of more than KRW 16 billion. Seol began to court investors in 2000, when the country had barely recovered from the severe economic downturn of the late 1990s IMF intervention (due to the Asian economic crisis). 'During that time there was no such thing as mutual funds or investment funds', Seol recalls. 'So I had to search for cash-rich figures in the Gangnam area on individual basis and ask for help but without significant success.'[18] After a series of tough negotiations, Seol found a sponsor, Orion Group (one of the major conglomerates in South Korea), which certainly was pleased with the unanticipated success of the show and its investment.

Since then Seol & Company has been lauded in South Korea as a highly commercially minded musical company. Its *Phantom* production in Seoul was immediately recognized as unprecedented in terms of garnering huge increases in financial investment and audience capacity and as a sign of the potential for development of the domestic musical industry as a crucial cultural market. After *Phantom* closed in Seoul in 2002, Seol & Company brought an international cast of *Cats* to Seoul in 2003. In 2004, Seol launched a tour of the show in six South Korean cities via a large tent theatre referred as The Big Top Theatre.[19] With funds from these successes, Seol produced the first Korean-language performance of *Cats* in 2008 with a Korean cast. It was warmly received.

As the company's reputation grew, Seol signed an agreement with the UK-based Really Useful Group (RUG; see Chap. 32) to produce tri-annual licensed shows as well as tours of celebrated musicals.[20] Seol is responsible for most launchings of RUG's touring performances in the Asia-Pacific region; for example, the 2011 Asian tour of *Cats* was arranged so that Seoul would be the show's first stop.[21] In May 2012, Seol also oversaw the Korean premiere of *Wicked* (performed in English by the original Australian cast during its Asian tour) and, with co-investors from corporations based in major Asian cities, successfully managed the tour through Taiwan, China, and Japan. In 2013, *Wicked*'s Korean-language premiere, with a Korean cast, was staged starring Ok Ju-hyun as Elphaba and Kim Sun-young as Galinda/Glinda.

Towards the Future

The examples set by ACOM and Seol & Company since the early 2000s show the compressed development of the field of Korean musicals—all of this happened in less than a decade. The drastic increase since then in the number

of musical companies, musical acting schools, works, venues, and professional performers as well as an active musical fandom (both domestically and transnationally) demonstrate not only the expansion of the Korean musical industry but also its reliance upon the popular trends of *Hallyu* and its fans in other Asian countries.

The rise of the Pacific Rim as the new frontier of capitalism and the increasing transactions of pan-Asian popular cultures among major Asian cities further complicate the South Korean musical industry. New South Korean musicals, whether created by South Koreans or adapted from international mega-successes, have not only gone transnational but also differ from their predecessors in terms of content and marketing. One hopes that the future will encourage disparate patterns of new cultural expressions that are not reduced to fixed narrative descriptions, and that new works will be creatively fused with various forms of local and regional cultures in order to attract new fan bases.

Notes

1. Hyunjung Lee, '"Broadway" as the Superior "Other": Situating South Korean Theatre in the Era of Globalization', *Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 2 (2012), 312.
2. Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.
3. Yeon-ho Suh and Sang-woo Lee, *Uri yonkuk baeknyon* (One Hundred Years of Korean Theatre) (Seoul: Hyunamsa, 2000), 335. Names of the translators were not found. All of the productions mentioned in this chapter were performed in Korean unless otherwise noted. Translations of the Korean sources are mine unless otherwise noted.
4. See Paek-pong Kim, 'Musikol gwa uri hyonsil' (Musical and Our Reality), *Hyundai Yonkuk* (Modern Theatre) 5 (1972): 14–17; Young-mi Lee, 'Ch'oe kun musical baramui malhaejunungot' (The Significance of the Recent Boom in Musical Theatre), *Ch'ang jak gwa bipyong* (Creation and Criticism) 84 (1994): 295–305; and Sung-hee Kim, 'Hankuk ch'och'angki mujikol undong yonku' (On Early Korean Musical Movements), *Hankuk kukyesul yonku* (Korean Theatre Art Research) 14 (2001): 51–95.
5. Suh and Lee, *Uri yonkuk baeknyon*, 338–9.
6. In almost all of South Korea's mainstream newspapers, theatre reviews, and broadcasts of the late 1990s, *The Last Empress* was praised as a successful original Korean musical and hailed as a national triumph in the cultural arena.
7. Younghae Noh, 'Exploring the *Kukmin* Musicals of the late 1990s South Korea: *The Last Empress* and *Linie 1—Das Musikal*', *Music and Culture* 3, no. 3 (2000): 61–90.
8. According to ACOM, the musical appeared at Lincoln Center in New York (1997, 1998) and was subsequently presented at the Shubert

Theatre (1998) and the Kodak Theatre in Los Angeles (2003). The musical's English version was introduced at the Apollo Hammersmith Theatre in London's West End (2002) and at the Hummingbird Centre in Toronto (2004).

9. *Dong-A Ilbo*, 9 May 1997.
10. *Hangyore Simmun*, 18 August 1997.
11. Man-kyu Park, *Hankuk musicalsa* (The History of Korean Musicals Since 1941) (Seoul: Hanul Books, 2011), 754–66.
12. *Hero*'s 2009 premiere was sponsored by the City of Seoul, the Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture, the CJ Culture Foundation, Kukmin Bank, Kia, Fursys, and the Korea Expressway Corporation. See Hong-sam Suh, *Mudaeui tansaeng* (The Birth of Staging) (Seoul: Miraeui Chang, 2013), 322–5.
13. Ju-hee Song, 'Do-yoon Seol, the CEO of Seol & Company', *Seoul Kyungjae Sinmun*, 18 July 2014.
14. As a private company, Hyundai Theatre is strictly a commercially oriented group, unlike Seoul City Musical Theatre (formerly Yegrin Theatre; see Chap. 25). See Suh and Lee, *Uri yonkuk baeknyon*, 339.
15. Song, 'Do-yoon Seol'.
16. With the main roles performed by Young-suk Yoon and So-hyun Kim, the 2001 *Phantom* lasted seven months, from 2 December 2001 through 30 June 2002. LG Arts Center is a multi-performance space established in 2000 where a wide variety of performance genres are staged, including classical concerts, plays, musicals, and dance performances. The theatre has three floors and a 1,103-seat capacity ('About LG Arts Center', http://www.lgart.com, accessed 22 November 2015).
17. See Se-won Jung, 'The Figure of 2001, Seol Do-yoon', *The Musical* 70, 20 July 2009.
18. Tae-hyung Song, 'Cultural Management 25 Hours, Seol Do-yoon the CEO of Seol & Company, the Leader of South Korean Musical Industry', *Hankuk Kyungjae Sinmun*, 7 July 2014.
19. The 2003 and 2004 performances of *Cats* both featured an international cast and were sung in English with Korean surtitles.
20. For the Broadway and West End shows, performances were in English, with Korean surtitles.
21. Song, 'Cultural Management 25 Hours'.

CHAPTER 46

Performing Like a Concert King or a Queen: Producing Original Filipino Musicals

Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco

Contemporary theatre in the Philippines is dominated by the musical genre. Producing musicals in Manila, the nation's capital, typically results in box office success. Most theatre companies in the city include at least one performance of a musical imported from Broadway or the West End in their seasons.[1] However, a number of local theatre companies have become producers and promoters of the Original Filipino Musical (OFM), a localized version of Broadway and West End musicals, particularly the mega-musical. The OFM is a contemporary genre in the Philippines that is often viewed as a combination of three traditional theatrical forms: the *komedya*, the *sarsuwela*, and the *bodabil*.[2] These traditional forms include dances and songs, which are of course defining features of musical theatre. Significantly, OFM producers draw on a range of local source material, from popular culture to social issues, and consequently inscribe a genre that simultaneously entertains as it critiques the Philippine social sphere. Four OFMs will serve as primary examples of the genre: *ZsaZsa Zaturnnah, Ze Muzikal*, produced and staged by Tanghalang Pilipino (TP) in 2006 (restaged for the seventh time in 2011); *The Silent Soprano*, produced and staged by Dulaang UP in 2007 (restaged in 2008); *The Care Divas*, produced and staged by Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA) in 2010 (restaged in 2011 and 2012); and *Chuva Choo Choo, The Mr. Kupido Musical*, produced by Stages Group Incorporation (Stages) in 2015.

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Four Producers, Four OFMs

Most theatre productions in the Philippines are collective endeavours by a producing theatre company, in contrast to the Western model of a lead producer. Often, the practice of producing the OFM begins during a company's meeting about its theatre season. Normally, a director initiates the production of an OFM, and the concept is then communicated to a potential playwright to write lyrics and a script. Both the director and the playwright are typically part of the producing company, as resident artists. This was the case with *ZsaZsa Zaturnnah* (its director, Cris Millado, is also the Vice President of the Cultural Center of the Philippines where TP is a resident company), *The Silent Soprano*, and *The Care Divas*. At times, the producing director is also the artistic director of the company, as with *The Silent Soprano* and *The Care Divas*. In some instances, the composer is also a member of the producing company such as *The Care Divas*. But most of the time, music composition is outsourced away from the producing company, as was the case with *The Silent Soprano*, *ZsaZsa Zaturnnah* and *Chuva Choo Choo*.

Producer of the OFM *ZsaZsa Zaturnnah*, TP was established in 1987 with a mandate to raise Philippine theatre to 'heights of professional and artistic excellence, dedicated to developing and training actors, playwrights and designers with special emphasis in the production of original Filipino plays'.[3] TP's season of four to five productions opens in July and ends in March. A musical, either an original or a restaging, is a staple in TP's season. The company prides itself on being the only theatre institution with an actor's training programme where all actors are trained in different performance genres, including the musical.

In 2005 Carlo Vergara's graphic novel *Ang Kagila-gilalas na Pakikipagsapalaran ni ZsaZsa Zaturnnah*, reached number twelve on the Philippine best-seller fiction list.[4] This graphic novel is the first cultural text in the country narrating the story of superhero ZsaZsa Zaturnnah, a voluptuous female with long red hair and muscular physique, whose alter-ego Ada is an effeminate homosexual. Having won a National Book Award in 2003, the graphic novel has become required reading in gender studies courses at some universities, including the University of the Philippines, the country's national university.[5] With the novel's popularity and its growing importance in academia (as evidenced by the scholarly writings of Soledad Reyes, J. Neil Garcia, and Eleanor Sarah Reposar), it is not surprising that TP adapted the graphic novel as a musical during the company's twentieth season.

The concept for the musical adaptation began with its director, Cris Millado, who, as indicated in the play's souvenir programme, approached Vergara to discuss the possibility of transforming the novel into a musical production. The adaptation was later developed by Cris Martinez, a playwright and screenwriter with whom Millado had worked as a student at the University of the Philippines. When the script was drafted, it was sent to Vincente De Jesus to write the songs. This collaboration between Millado, Martinez, and De Jesus resulted in *ZsaZsa Zaturnnah* becoming a camp-musical created for the local audience.

The laboratory arm of the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts (DSCTA) at the University of the Philippines, Dulaang UP is a semi-professional, university-based theatre company. Like TP, Dulaang UP is a training institution for theatre artists. But unlike TP, the training leads to a certificate, a bachelor, or a master's degree in theatre. As stated in the souvenir programme from *The Silent Soprano*, Dulaang UP has been a platform for seasoned theatre artists to articulate their visions and to interact with theatre students through productions mounted by the company's directors, who are also faculty members in the DSCTA. Since its establishment in 1976, Dulaang UP has produced original Filipino works (including traditional theatre forms and OFMs) and Western plays in the original language or in translation. With four productions every season, Dulaang UP's theatre season begins in August (the beginning of the academic year in the Philippines) and ends in April. With a mandate to stage a wide range of theatre works, Dulaang UP offers students the opportunity to learn about the Philippines' different theatre traditions and also world theatre traditions.[6]

In the case of *The Silent Soprano*, the initial idea came from Ricardo Saludo, former undersecretary and head of policy studies of the presidential management staff. Director Alexander Cortez met Saludo at a national event that Cortez had directed. Saludo spoke with Cortez regarding a play he was writing at the time about a domestic helper who is transformed into a Canto-pop superstar. From this idea, an OFM was born and the idea was presented to Dulaang UP's advisory board. When the board approved a production, Cortez asked local pop music composer Arnel De Pano to provide music. Vincente De Jesus was later invited to collaborate with De Pano on the OFM's songs.[7]

With two to four productions a season, Philippine Educational Theatre Association's (PETA) theatre season begins in July and ends in December. Established in 1967, PETA was founded as a people's theatre. Its official website describes PETA as an 'organization of creative and critical artist-teacher-cultural workers committed to artistic excellence and a people's culture that fosters both personal fulfilment and social transformation. It is committed to using distinctly Filipino theatre practices as a tool for social change and development.'[8] In the history of Philippine contemporary theatre, PETA is remembered for leading several protest performances against the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, between 1970 and 1986.[9] To date, PETA has staged more than 400 productions, almost all of which engage with social problems in Philippine society.

In the case of *The Care Divas*, Maribel Legarda, a director, and Liza Magtoto, a playwright, conceptualized the possibility of adapting the documentary film *Paper Dolls* (directed by Tomer Heymann, 2006) into a musical. Known for its realistic performances, it is not surprising that PETA showed interest in the adaptation of this documentary film into a dramatic narrative, since the film concerned very real social issues in the Philippines: migration—as represented by the five caregiver characters who moonlight as nightclub performers in Tel-Aviv—and issues of sexuality and identity, since the five caregivers are also

transgender people. After conceptualizing the adaptation of the documentary film into a musical, Legarda and Magtoto convened with other PETA resident artists to get feedback on the project. After completing the script, Vincente De Jesus was once again recruited to compose music for the new OFM.

Stages Group Incorporation (Stages), producer of *Chuva Choo Choo, The Mr. Kupido Musical*, is not a theatre company per se but a talent agency that often produces events such as concerts and musical revues. Its official website describes the company as 'a one-stop shop for all … entertainment needs by providing talents and production specialists from conceptualization to post-production in concerts, special events, audio-visual presentations, along with providing clients interactive design and advertising'.[10] Nonetheless, Stages has produced theatre in the past, including Broadway and West End revues as benefit shows for its clients that feature its pool of performers.

Chuva Choo Choo is Stage's first OFM produced for the Philippine theatre scene. Based on and inspired by the songs of Vehneeh Saturno, the musical is also an example of the Western jukebox musical. George De Jesus, its director and librettist, admits that the idea to transform Saturno's popular songs into a musical was accidental.[11] Alvin Trono, one of the stakeholders of Stages, mentioned in conversation with De Jesus that he wanted to do an original Filipino musical using Filipino love songs of the 1980s and the 1990s. Some of the most-loved and most popular songs from those decades were written and composed by Vehneeh Saturno. A few weeks after the conversation, Trono and De Jesus sought Saturno's permission to use his songs in an OFM.

Defining the OFM: A Compensatory Approach

The four OFMs discussed here have each been produced by their companies through the use of compensatory elements due to financial constraints. Three markers of compensatory aesthetics exist in the OFM. First, the presence of specific Filipino vocal techniques and pop music sounds are staples; these dimensions compensate for the absence of huge sets in mega-musicals. Second, innovative lighting design provides the visual spectacle, again compensating for the absence of huge sets. Third, due to cost and space, OFMs employ either small bands or minus-one recordings for instrumental support.

Vocal Technique and Pop Music

OFM creative teams typically incorporate what is known in the Philippines as *birit*, or vocal calisthenics, into their shows as way of compensating for the lack of eye-popping sets. They dazzle the ear rather than the eye. *Birit*, a stylized way of sustaining a loud yell similar to belting, can stir an audience's emotions and provide an emotional climax towards the end of a song without the need for a large set to do something spectacular. In addition to a loud and sustained yell, a *biritera* (a performer who does *birit*) is expected to add musical elements not indicated by the composer. The improvised material, known locally as *pag-*

kukulot (curling), provides greater emotional nuance to the lyrics and melody of the song being performed.

The *birit* promotes a much-loved Filipino singing technique and its use in OFMs can be seen as a strategy for potential box office success, as it is so popular with the general public. *Birit* is also popular in karaoke, singing competitions, music bars, and concerts, all of which attract much larger audiences in the Philippines than live theatre. When it comes to pop music, producing companies often invite pop stars to appear in OFMs. This is evident in the casting of Morisette Amon in *Chuva Choo Choo*, Agot Isidro and K. Brosas in *The Care Divas*, and Natasha Cabrera in *The Silent Soprano*.

In *ZsaZsa Zaturnnah*, the use of pop music is explicit, especially since it is used to highlight the campness of the musical.[12] At the same time, TP invited guest artists from local television and the popular music industry, such as television actor Eula Valdez to play the title role and singer Agot Isidro (alternating with K. Brosas) as her nemesis, Queen Ferminah. Cris Millado remarked in a post-show conversation during the musical's seventh run at the Cultural Center of the Philippines that the use of pop music is a revealing hybrid of the artificial and the real. Millado adds that by listening carefully to pop music, especially songs written by Filipino composers, real emotions can be heard, but because of the way these emotions are delivered musically, they become over-stretched and exaggerated by the singing style used by pop singers in the local music industry.[13] As Millado asserted, this negotiation of the real and the artificial is at the heart of camp. Millado was referring to the *birit*, which in the local music industry is supplemented by various changes in dynamics through the *kulot*, or the curling of the lines through the ad libbing of additional notes.

The same approach occurs in other solo numbers throughout *ZsaZsa Zaturnnah*. For instance, when Dodo (performed by Arnold Reyes, alternating with Lauren Navarro) sings 'Ikaw ang Superhero ng Buhay ko, Ikaw' (You are the Superhero of my Life, You), the actor belts the final verse of the song to emphasize how he has finally fallen in love with Ada. In this number, the actor accentuates the belting through *kulot*. Another example is Didi's (played by Ricci Chan) 'Nakikita ko na ang Liwanag' (I See the Light), where Chan delivers additional notes in every line and hence indicates real pain (because Didi is wounded) while maintaining an artifice of dignity and elegance. While the lyrics indicate a serious tone, in performance it becomes hilarious due to the various improvised extensions and the curling of the last line of every verse.

In *The Silent Soprano*, Margie had three solo numbers where Natasha Cabrera (as Margie, alternating with Laura Cabacho) performed the *birit*. These songs received the most enthusiastic applause, with the final solo number garnering a standing ovation and bravos from the audience. Before Margie's first solo number 'The Life I Knew', she reveals her contentment with her simple life in the provinces. The song does not reveal any information about her character except for generic lines, which reinforce a motto commonly heard in local pop songs: 'Learning to be contented but living a happy life, is the life I knew'.[14] The number was not, however, the same as one might expect in a mega-musical

since it does not provide a reference to the dramatic action of the musical or the complex characterization of the character, nor is it written in the sung-through style.

Arguably, *Chuva Choo Choo, The Mr. Kupido Musical* is the most pop-ish OFM ever staged in the Philippines to date. The rationale behind Stages's decision to produce the show is simple: 'the trend these days are original Filipino musicals … There are already enough English productions in the market and we like to do something for the Filipino audience', says Alvin Trono, a representative of Stages and regarded as the show's executive producer.[15] Like *ZsaZsa Zaturnnah*, this OFM is an attempt to entertain the local audience with camp. Vladimir Bunoan writes, 'the musical is fashioned more like a cheesy variety show and given the different garish settings—a provincial singing contest, a cheap gay bar and a TV talent search—there is a deliberate attempt to make it camp'.[16] Nonetheless, the narrative and the staging technique are secondary to the musical numbers. As indicated earlier, the songs in this OFM are based on the popular songs composed by Vehneeh Saturno. The kind of musical experience taking place in the auditorium was reminiscent of a pop concert. Saturno's songs are a primary reason for the production's success; Amadis Ma. Guerrero writes that 'the show's appeal lies in the featured songs written by Vehneeh and popularized by many name singers'.[17] Additionally, the casting of Morisette Amon, one of the most popular singers on television, was highlighted in the marketing and publicity for the production.

Lighting Design

A second key element of OFM is the use of colourful lighting design, which is not suggestive of milieu or setting but rather heightens the visual spectacle in lieu of the elaborate sets seen in mega-musicals. This is not necessarily the producing company's choice but one made in consultation between the musical's director and lighting designer, who often is hired by the producing company on the recommendation of the show's director.

In *The Silent Soprano*, Margie is ironing her employers' clothes when suddenly she whispers to herself how she misses her family on Bohol Island, leading into her first solo number. At the start of her number she is still ironing, but midway through the song she moves to the side of centre stage and the lights slowly dim. On the walls, audiences see colourful red, purple, and yellow twirls as the song reaches its climax.

The same lighting strategy appears in the last number of *The Care Divas*. Prior to the finale, there is a montage of monologues delivered by all the caregivers, praising the heroism of their friend Chelsea. At the end, the lights slowly fade to reveal a bare stage. Colourful disco lights begin to appear, and the ensemble enters in stylized gowns. Different shades of pink and red circulate not only on stage but also in the entire auditorium as if at a concert of a pop icon.

In *Chuva Choo Choo*, the set is simple: a Rubik's Cube-inspired design. But as the lights illuminate this sparse set, the entire stage is enlivened and transformed into a fantasy realm, an effect that is also a staple of pop music concerts. This particular use of lighting is not surprising here, since Stages, the producing company, is known in the Philippines as an event organizer specializing in music concerts.

Small Bands or Minus-One Recordings

The use of small bands or a minus-one recording is another defining element of OFMs. A complete orchestra is prohibitively expensive; additionally, the producing companies discussed here all use relatively small auditoriums, so the physical space for instrumentalists is necessarily limited.[18] A minus-one recording is a widely used solution to this dilemma. Similar to karaoke music, a minus-one recording consists of a high quality track without a vocal line that is relatively inexpensive to create.

Sidekicks

In addition to compensatory elements, OFMs typically have a particular character type that defines them. These supporting characters, normally sidekicks or best friends, generally appear alongside protagonists in an OFM. The sidekick is common to local pop culture narratives, such as those seen in films and comics, and is also present in the traditional Filipino theatrical forms evoked in OFMs. In the *komedya*, he is a *lukayo* (clown). In the *sarsuwela*, he is a *matalik na kaibigan* (best friend). In the *bodabil*, he is an *alipin* (slave). The sidekick usually acts as a sort of conscience and alter-ego of the protagonist and provides comic relief in serious narratives, often through humorous slapstick. The character fulfils a similar role in an OFM.

The presence of the sidekick, however, is no longer the responsibility of the producing company but is typically already embedded in the narrative of the source text prior to any musical theatre adaptation. The director, as the representative of the producing company, has a *de facto* duty regarding the development of the narrative. For example, in *The Silent Soprano*, director Alexander Cortez made sure that the sidekick character was integrated into the narrative due to the serious tone of the play. Cortez revealed that he even had actors Via Antonio and Lucky De Mesa in mind to play the sidekick role of Chika, who acts as a sort of foil to the character of Margie.[19] Chika's upbeat numbers contrasted with those of the calm and serene Margie.

In *ZsaZsa Zaturnnah*, Didi, the sidekick, is a character in the graphic novel. As in the source material, Didi is a flamboyant gay character who provides contrast to his less flashy best friend Ada. Didi's songs are also vaudevillian in that they involve lengthy dance sequences with chorus members lifting him up in the air. In *Chuva Choo Choo*, the sisters Dina and Darla are accompanied by

their best friend—and sidekick—Nenita on their adventures in Manila. Like other OFMs, his role is to act as the conscience counsellor for Dina and Darla.

Building Audiences and Creating a Filipino Genre

The musical theatre producer's overall responsibility in the Philippines is to look for a potential audience. Although this task is daunting, the different producing companies in the Philippines have already created their respective niches that cater to specific audiences: students at the national university and the nearby university for Dulaang UP, students from the provinces and the middle class for both PETA and TP, and the working class for Stages.

Generally, OFMs are produced with compensatory elements due to financial constraints and may be seen as assemblages of various cultural traditions—entanglements of the indigenous and the foreign. The use of entanglement in the OFM is figurative in the sense that it is identified with contexts of colonialism and its aftermath, archipelagic narratives and migration, transnational relations, and connections and narratives about the Philippines's participation in a global world.

Notes

1. The staged musicals are often mega musicals from Broadway or the West End such as Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Evita*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar*; Claude Michel-Schönberg and Alain Boublil's *Les Misérables*, Elton John and Tim Rice's *Aida*; or Frank Wildhorn, Steve Cuden, and Leslie Bricusse's *Jekyll and Hyde*. Other popular imports include Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers's *The Sound of Music*, *South Pacific*, and *Carousel*; Stephen Schwartz's *Pippin* and *Wicked*, among others. For details see Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco, 'Buhol-Buhol: The Possibilities and Problems of Entanglement in Contemporary Manila Theatre' (PhD diss., National University of Singapore, 2014), 235–6.
2. The *komedya* re-enacts the socio-religious conflicts of the Christians and the Muslims while the *sarsuwela* features domestic narratives and is performed with a local brass band. Spaniards introduced both forms during colonization.The *bodabil* is an American-inspired form of popular entertainment that combines comic sketches with singing and dancing and is performed on a makeshift stage in a plaza during a town's fiesta celebration.
3. Cultural Center of the Philippines official website, 'Tanghalang Pilipino', http://culturalcenter.gov.ph/programs/tanghalang-pilipino/, accessed 24 October 2015.
4. Philippine Comics, http://www.philippinecomics.net/characters/Zsazsa/Zsazsa.htm, accessed 26 October 2015.
5. Ibid.

6. UP Diliman Office for Initiatives in Culture and the Arts official website, 'Dulaang UP: Profile', http://www.oica.upd.edu.ph/performing-groups/theater-groups/, accessed 29 October 2015.
7. Alexander Cortez, conversation with the author, 22 October 2015.
8. Philippine Educational Theatre Association official website, 'About Us', http://petatheater.com/about-peta/, accessed 20 October 2015.
9. Doreen Fernandez, *Palabas: Essays on Philippine Theatre History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996), 158–60.
10. Stages official website, 'About Us', http://thestagesgroup.com/?page_id=82, accessed 20 October 2015.
11. George De Jesus, conversation with the author, 26 September 2015.
12. Tanghalang Pilipino, 'ZsaZsa Zaturnnah, Ze Muzikal' souvenir programme, 2006.
13. Post-show conversation, Cultural Center of the Philippines, 4 March 2006.
14. Ricardo Saludo, 'The Silent Soprano', unpublished typescript (2007), 10.
15. Romsanne Ortiguero, 'Sing Along to Vehneeh Saturno Hits in Chuva Choo Choo: The Mr. Kupido Musical', *Interaksyon Online*, 25 August 2015, http://www.interaksyon.com/lifestyle/sing-along-to-vehnee-saturno-hits-with-chuva-choo-choo-the-mr-kupido-musical, accessed 25 October 2015.
16. Vladimir Bunoan, 'Review: Morisette returns to theatre in Chuva Choo Choo', *ABS-CBN news online*, 25 September 2015, http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/lifestyle/09/25/15/review-morisette-returns-theater-chuva-choo-choo, accessed 25 October 2015.
17. Amadis Ma. Guerrero, 'Chuva Choo Choo or Whatever Musical', *Philippine Star Online*, 1 September 2015, http://www.philstar.com/entertainment/2015/09/01/1494448/chuva-choo-choo-or-whatever-musical, accessed 25 October 2015.
18. At Tanghalang Huseng Batute (Huseng Batute Theatre), the lone studio theatre of the CCP, depending on the size of the acting area, the auditorium can seat no more than 240. The PETA Theatre has a maximum seating capacity of 300. Wilfirdo Ma. Guerrero Theatre of the Dulaang UP used to be a lecture room at the University of the Philippines with a seating capacity of only 250. Stages's *Chuva Choo Choo* played at the Power Mac Center Spotlight in Makati City, which can only accommodate up to 150 spectators.
19. Alexander Cortez, conversation with the author, 22 October 2015.

CHAPTER 47

Producing Musicals in Russia at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century: Navigating Across Socialism, Capitalism, Occidentalism, and Nostalgia

Art Babayants

At least two important preambles are necessary to understand how musical producers operate in contemporary Russia. The first one pertains to the term *musical* itself. While musical theatre was a very significant part of theatre production in the USSR,[1] the expression *musical theatre* was never synonymous with the genre of the musical, as it is typically interpreted in the Anglophone world. Instead, in the USSR, the concept of musical theatre was closely associated with opera[2]—a genre that enjoyed a much higher status under the communist regime. Soviet composers preferred to label their musicals as operas to give their creations more weight and ultimately more legitimacy.[3] To this day, the negative rhetoric associated with the American musical as an inherently low-brow bourgeois genre still occasionally resurfaces in Russian cultural discourse.

The other preamble acknowledges the extreme fluidity and agility of the Russian cultural context: in the last thirty years most post-Soviet societies (including Russia) have gone through rapid political, economic, and ideological transformations of enormous proportions. Economically, Russia has shifted from the socialist system and a planned mode of production to capitalism and a market economy. In turn, official Russian ideological discourse has swung from a pro-Western/American and largely self-deprecating cultural rhetoric (predominant in the early and mid-1990s) to a staunchly nationalist and anti-

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American/Western discourse in the late 2000s and especially the early 2010s. These changes have in turn affected the Russian perspective on the American musical and the capitalist mode of theatre production, i.e. the approach directly copied from West End and Broadway shows: one show per theatre, eight shows a week, presenting a memorable spectacle with expensive merchandise and advertising to match.

As early as the late 1990s, Russian theatres, almost exclusively state-owned and regulated by the Russian Ministry of Culture, began experimenting with commercial production. Some municipal theatres created their first commercial partnerships and began offering musicals in blocks of two or three days in row. One of the first experiments that gained great media attention and enjoyed a long, successful run was the musical *Metro* (music by Janusz Stokłosa and lyrics by Agata and Maryna Miklaszewska[4]), produced in 1999 by the Moscow Operetta Theatre and Katerina Gecmen-Waldeck, a former Soviet/Russian actress allegedly married to an Austrian baron. While *Metro* was originally a Polish musical, in Moscow it was deliberately advertised as a Broadway import, even though its Broadway run was technically a major flop.[5] It was essential for the *Metro* producers to bill their show as the first Russian production that involved the licensing of a supposedly American musical, the authors' supervision, an open casting call, and aggressive advertising. The producers' yearning for this authenticity can be explained by the prevalent pro-American and pro-capitalist discourse of post-Soviet societies in the 1990s. At the same time, the highly reputable Moscow Operetta Theatre (MOT), one of the major musical theatres in the country—a grand nineteenth-century building with a luxurious pseudo-imperial auditorium—infused *Metro* with a sense of legitimacy. *Metro* consequently laid the groundwork for the commercial production of Western musicals in Russia, providing a new framework for state theatres to work with independent producers.

Some years later, a few emerging producers began renting Broadway-sized theatres for uninterrupted runs of eight shows a week. The 2002 production of *42nd Street* at the Moscow Youth Palace's 1,600-seat auditorium became one of the first and possibly, most financially adventurous projects of that kind. *42nd Street* was the first major producing experience for Boris Krasnov (né Roiter, 1964, in Kiev), who had a long, fruitful career as a set designer and scenographer in Ukraine and Russia, and worked with Russian pop stars as a set designer of their major concert tours.

As a producer, Krasnov took a bold decision to pursue linguistic and cultural authenticity in producing the American musical, and made this its selling point:

K. Kravinski (interviewer): You mean the whole cast will be American?

B. Krasnov: All, entirely. The chorus of 70 is flying in on the 23rd of August and we're starting the rehearsals. The whole team: the director, choreographer, librettist—all of those engaged in the creation of the latest remake of *42nd Street* on Broadway.

> According to Tony Word, it's the best production of 2001 and in 2002 it is already in Moscow. Do you know what I mean? It's Broadway 'freshest' produce and it's the whole team. The conductor, the percussionist, the trombonist and pianist—are also American, and the Tony Award for the best musical of 2001 went to *42nd Street* too …[6]

At the same time, another American import, *Chicago*, was also being produced in Moscow. Unlike *42nd Street*, *Chicago* was fully translated into Russian to be performed solely by Russian-speaking actors. Led by a team of American producers as well as the Russian pop star Filip Kirkorov, who had been featured in a non-signing role in *Metro* and who had produced a number of his own mega-shows in Russia and abroad, *Chicago* enjoyed a much longer run and more successful box office revenue than *42nd Street*. In 2003, *The New York Times* cited Pavel Rudnev, the editor of Russian's weekly *Vash Dosug* (Your Leisure), explaining that one of the reasons for the quick demise of *42nd Street*—in contrast to *Chicago*'s success—may have been the choice of language: '*42nd Street* is a musical about nostalgia for the old days of American theater … But our audience has no memories of this. And a musical that has no Russian language and no Russian themes is doomed to fail.'[7] From the producing point of view, other factors, such as the ticket price policy, the choice of venue, Krasnov's lack of producing experience, and the four bomb threats that the theatre received could have played a bigger role in *42nd Street*'s closing after only an eleven-week run.

Simultaneously with *42nd Street*, the very idea of exploiting nostalgia was inspiring another team of Russian producers who arrived at theatre producing through producing music, specifically bard ballads, an extremely popular genre involving singing poetry to an amateur-sounding guitar accompaniment. Alexey Ivaschenko and Georgii Vasiliev (a team of popular Russian bards), Dmitry Bogatchev (music producer), and Alexander Tsekalo (a member of a popular cabaret duo) decided to use the Anglo-American production model to create a Russian national musical. *Nord-Ost*, based on a classic Soviet novel, came with a price tag of US$4,000,000[8] and, according to Bogachev, became the most expensive show in Russia in 2002.[9] *Nord-Ost* (music and lyrics by Ivaschenko and Vasiliev) was staged at the specially rebuilt, refurbished, and renamed Teatral'niy Tsentr na Dubrovke (Theatre Centre on Dubrovka), a former Soviet Dom Kul'tury (House of Culture) on the edge of Moscow's city centre. This sung-through show employed both flashy special effects, such as a full-size military bomber aircraft landing on the stage in act two, and a highly populist and unabashedly romantic message glorifying the heroes of the Soviet past. Almost ironically, this so-called first *national* musical—masterfully exploiting a sense of nostalgia—was chosen as the target of a devastating attack by a group of Chechen separatist kamikazes who, on 23 October 2002, seized the Theatre Centre on Dubrovka and held the audience and cast captive for three days.[10] Despite the tragedy, *Nord-Ost* still managed to become the first

commercially successful, homemade, large-scale musical in Russia and enjoyed multiple reincarnations, including a national tour. It is also an excellent example of how Russian theatre culture was able to adopt a new system of production and even test it out on completely new material. Finally, *Nord-Ost* propelled Dmitry Bogachev to the status of the most prominent musical theatre producer in Russia.

Bogachev (born in 1967 in Minsk) started his career as an engineer and switched to producing in 1994. His first major producing success was the music project *Pesni Nashego Veka* (The Songs of our Century), a highly successful endeavour that exploited a sense of nostalgia by rearranging and re-recording popular Soviet bard ballads and selling them as a collection of CDs, followed by a series of sold-out concerts in various Russian cities. In 2002, he went to London to train with Cameron Mackintosh and received a diploma in theatre management. After the success of *Nord-Ost*, Bogachev was appointed managing director of Stage Entertainment Russia (the Russian division of the Dutch theatre producer Stage Entertainment) in 2004, and made a shift from producing new local content to bringing to the Russian stage large-scale Western musicals, which had garnered sufficient cachet and been well-tested internationally. From its inception, Stage Entertainment Russia has produced Russian language productions of *Cats* (2004), *Mamma Mia* (2006), *Beauty and the Beast* (2008 and 2014), *The Sound of Music* (2011), *The Little Mermaid* (2012), *The Phantom of the Opera* (2014), *Singin' in the Rain* (2015), and a number of other franchises of mega-hit musicals and large-scale shows.[11] Bogachev's productions themselves were more or less carbon copies of the original West End and Broadway shows.

What made Stage Entertainment productions hugely successful was Bogachev's introduction to Russia of previously unseen contemporary approaches to show promotion. Under Bogachev's lead Stage Entertainment Russia introduced the first system of online ticket sales, partnered with a TV programme to collectively select the male lead for *Beauty and the Beast* (as had been practised in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands by producers such as Cameron Mackintosh, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and Stage Entertainment) and purchased an iconic cinema in the Moscow city centre (Pushkinsky Cinema) in order to convert it into a large Broadway-style theatre and change its name to the patriotic *Rossiya* (Russia).

While Bogachev expanded Stage Entertainment Russia, turning it into the largest commercial theatre company in Russia, Anglo-American as well as French musicals continued to conquer the Russian state-theatre system.[12] At the same time, as the Russian political discourse slowly but steadily shifted towards anti-Western rhetoric, the idea of nostalgia (sometimes coupled with the concept of nationalism), first introduced by *Nord-Ost*, continued to be exploited at various theatre venues across the country.[13]

In 2012, a new theatre specializing in Russian (i.e. homemade) musicals opened in Moscow: the Theatre of the Musical (ToM), led by the former Minister of Culture Mikhail Shvydkoy. Despite its repertory nature, the theatre

became an unusual merger of the commercial mode of production and the old repertory system. Svetlana Butovskaya, the creator and proprietor of the largest online resource on musical theatre in Russia, *Musicals.ru*, compares the work of the ToM and Stage Entertainment Russia:

> The ToM is a commercial popular theatre with a regular company and a permanent production department […] Their first shows, offered in blocks, were mostly nostalgic. They're for the older generations, for babushkas. What is good about them? Well, they have a full size orchestra and professional conductors, unlike Stage Entertainment who focuses more on promotion and advertising than content and quality. […] ToM's newest original show, though, *All about Cinderella* is really a breath of fresh air […]—it is far from perfect but the show deals with the present day situation without exploiting any escapism and pathos. The problem with the ToM, though, is that they are no experts on ticket sales and their location leaves a lot to be desired.[14]

Butovskaya's sentiment is clear: there is a need for thought-provoking, home-grown material that does not harp on a sense of nostalgia and cheap patriotism but rather experiments with topical issues, while using the general conventions of the Anglo-American musical. In a televised pre-premiere interview, Mikhail Shvydkoy, the artistic director of MoT, echoes Butovkaya's position in regard to artistic choices made in *All about Cinderella*,[15] explaining them as a melding of the 'Broadway tradition' and 'Robert Wilson's aesthetics'.[16] Yet, Shvydkoy makes no mention of new producing strategies or approaches that he and ToM are intending to employ. Shvydkoy (born in 1948 in Kyrgyzstan), unlike Bogachev, did not come to musical production as a practitioner. He earned his PhD in Theatre Studies at the Russian Academy of Theatre (GITIS) and had always been a researcher, a university professor, and a government bureaucrat. It is hardly surprising that under his supervision ToM is focusing more on unorthodox aesthetics, demonstrating its commitment to developing original work rather than pursuing commercial gain. Whether or not this producing choice will eventually pay off from the financial point of view remains to be seen.

A different version of navigating between the old and the new, the foreign and the local, has been adopted by the St Petersburg Theatre of Musical Comedy (SPTMC). SPTMC, originally a Soviet operetta theatre (founded in 1929), is a state-owned theatre located in the very heart of St Petersburg, Russia's second largest city. SPTMC produces a full range a musical theatre genres from Soviet musical comedies and classic operettas, to contemporary Russian and Western musicals. Like Stage Entertainment, it chooses to capitalize on the popular, internationally known musicals and generally follows standard stagings, occasionally simplifying them in order to make them fit the repertory nature of the company. SPTMC's most popular musical, *Dance of the Vampires*[17] (licensed from Vereinigte Bühnen Wien, see Chap. 34), enjoyed a three-year run and won Russia's highest theatre award, the Golden Mask, in 2013.

Russian theatre producers continue to navigate between the commercial mode of production and the old repertory system, exploring both the potential of homemade shows and the profitability of popular Anglo-American and French musicals. Moscow's Theatre of Musicals seems to be adding a new element to the complexity of the genre in Russia—an innovative, potentially subversive aesthetic. This approach may or may not bring the mass audiences required to financially support the expensive theatre genre, as producers try to meet the popular taste of the Russian middle-class audience, an audience progressively becoming more and more conservative. Russian media's repeated reports on cancelled performances in a number of Russian regional theatres[18] during the tour of *Jesus Christ Superstar* produced by the St Petersburg theatre company Rock-Opera (allegedly due to the inappropriate representation of Jesus Christ) indicate that musical theatre producers might have to take these and other new developments into consideration. The future of Western musicals in Russia may be jeopardized by a return to some of the old Soviet censorship standards, suggesting any Russian musical theatre innovation and experimentation may be limited to homegrown Russian musicals.

Notes

1. Russia has its own long-standing tradition of popular musical theatre and film: it includes such genres as Russian vaudeville (especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), Soviet musical comedy that propagated the glory and achievements of the new socialist state (proliferating from the 1930s to the 1950s), Central European operetta, and musical plays for adults (also often billed as operas) and children, to name a few.
2. And, to a lesser extent, operetta. Opera and ballet houses as well as operetta (or musical comedy) theatres were very common in most Soviet urban centres with the Bolshoi Theatre (Moscow) and the Kirov Ballet (Leningrad) being the most famous both nationally and internationally.
3. Even in 1990, Moscow's Mossovet Theatre avoided the term musical by emphasizing the operatic, i.e. sung-through, nature of their production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and by exclusively calling it a 'rock-opera'. 'Jesus Christ Superstar: About the Musical', Musicals.ru website, http://musicals.ru/russia/moscow/jcsm, accessed 27 November 2015. Earlier, when even the word rock was taboo, *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1974) by Alexander Zhurbin, which is often billed as the first Russian musical, had to be named a *zong-opera* (from the German pronunciation of *song*) to conceal the rock nature of its music.
4. The original Polish version of *Metro* premiered at Warsaw's Teatr Dramatyczny in 1991.
5. The Broadway production of *Metro* closed after a brief run of twenty-four previews and thirteen performances in 1992.

6. 'Interview with the producers of 42nd Street', Ekho Moskvy Radio Station website, http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/19130, accessed 27 November 2015. Translated from Russian by the author.
7. Jason Zinoman, 'Broadway Comes to Moscow, and Takes on Risks', *New York Times*, 19 January 2003.
8. By comparison, one of Dmitry Bogachev's later productions, *The Phantom of the Opera*, cost US$10 million.
9. According to other sources, both *Chicago* and *42nd Street* actually cost far more than *Nord-Ost*.
10. The horrifying tragedy of these events, which eventually took the lives of dozens of people, hostages and terrorists alike, became the subject of contentious debate, shifting the public discourse from the musical itself to the devastating consequences of the attack and the role of the Russian special police force.
11. 'Istoriya' [History], Stage Entertainment Russia website, http://stage-musical.ru/ser/ser_history, accessed 27 November 2015.
12. For instance, *West Side Story* at the Novosibirsk Academic Youth Theatre 'Globe', *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Aladdin*, and *Kiss Me, Kate* at the St Petersburg Theatre of Musical Comedy, *Romeo et Juliet* at the Moscow Operetta Theatre, and *The Producers* at The Et Cetera Theatre (Moscow).
13. Popular homemade projects include *Count Orlov* (music by Roman Ignatiev) at the Moscow Operetta Theatre and *The Scarlet Sails* at the Russian Academic Youth Theatre (music by Maxim Dunaevksy).
14. Svetlana Butovskaya, interview with the author, 22 February 2015.
15. Idea by Dmitry Bykov, music by Raimonds Pauls, book and lyrics by Serguey Plotov.
16. 'V teatre muzikla predstavili musikl Zolushka' (The Theatre of Musicals Presents *Cinderella, The Musical*), TV Kultura website, http://tvkultura.ru/article/show/article_id/121283/, accessed 27 November 2015.
17. The original Russian version was directed by *Tanz der Vampire* associate director Cornelius Baltus.
18. 'V Rostove otmenili rock-operu Iisus Hristos-Superzvezda' (Rock-Opera Jesus Christ Superstar Cancelled in Rostov), *Grani.ru* website, http://grani.ru/Culture/Theatre/m.206847.html, accessed 27 November 2015.

CHAPTER 48

David Stone: Defying the Gravity of Expectations

David Carlyon

'There's more to the story'. That's David Stone (b. 1966), one of the twenty-first century's most creative producers, on his vastly popular musical *Wicked*, and its message that there is more to each of us than labels.[1] In the show, commonly called a prequel but what he considers an alternate version of *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wicked Witch of the West is not wicked, Glinda the Good can be bad, and the two have a bond unseen in the original. With Stone too, there's more to the story.

Stone felt affinity for theatre early. He remembers details of seeing *Man of La Mancha* as a five-year-old, and he later spent summers acting and directing at French Woods, a renowned theatre camp run by his aunt and uncle. But, again, there's more to the story. He didn't major in theatre at the University of Pennsylvania, instead choosing communications for a career in film or publishing. (He still says theatre isn't a good way to make a living.) Then he saw Lily Tomlin in *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, and his passion for the theatre revived. He interned with Jujamcyn Theaters and, after graduation, worked with the veteran producers Fran and Barry Weissler.

By 2015 the *New York Times* had labelled him one of three Broadway 'titans'—along with Scott Rudin and Thomas Schumacher—and linked them to legends David Merrick and Harold Prince as 'artistic producers, collaborating with creative teams to build shows from scratch'. (That contrasts with 'acquisition producers' who simply pay to transfer a show.)[2] With the financial success of *Wicked* enabling him to support new work, he uses a thoughtful approach that leads to thought-provoking productions, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Next to Normal*.[3] Yet there's more to the story here too. Despite

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being a prominent public figure, he is a private person, with the interviews for this profile rare, as he barely talks publicly about himself or his personal motivations. Though a quintessential Broadway insider, he has an outsider's perspective as a gay man and a Jew that propels his trajectory. Broadway has certainly had gay and Jewish producers, yet Stone embraces those aspects of himself as integral to his work, fuelling creativity that manifests itself in significant ways. First, his outsider's perspective has led him to seek personal connection to everything he produces, with his musicals informed by the plays. Second, he is creative in a producer's key tasks: finance; leading a show's path; and publicity and marketing. Third, his productions display potent influence, with two, and arguably three, of them transcending theatre to become cultural touchstones.

Personal Connection

Stone's old-school savvy from working his way up in theatre blends with modern sensibility, suggested by the shorts, T-shirt, and sneakers he wore during a summer interview in his office. Whatever the influences, old or new, he seeks work that captures his imagination. He also chooses each project to be substantially different than the one before. As he says, if he is spending every day with a show in development, he doesn't want to be bored.

To appreciate Stone's approach to musicals, it is necessary to consider his personal connection to the plays he's produced. While working in the Weissler office in 1993, he produced *Family Secrets* Off-Broadway because it echoed the humour and pathos of his own Jewish family. He brought *What's Wrong with This Picture*? (1994) to Broadway because, reminding him of his grandfather's shiva, it was 'sad and funny all at once'. It was also a failure, which didn't daunt him: 'You always learn more from a flop than a hit'. Off-Broadway, he produced *Full Gallop* (1996), a one-woman show about the fashion editor Diana Vreeland: her indomitability inspired him, plus his parents had been in the 'schmatte [clothing] trade'. Then he did *The Santaland Diaries* (1996) because its wry, dark humour hit home. The personal intensified with the Broadway revival of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1997), produced by Stone and Amy Nederlander. The publication of a new version of the diary convinced him that the original play had obscured how much this was a Jewish story. Though officially a revival, they engaged Wendy Kesselman to revise the script, creating almost entirely new dialogue that reframed the narrative. Tempering the benediction of its famous line, 'I still believe that people are really good at heart', Stone sought to remind the world, 'They came to kill us'.

It was *The Vagina Monologues* (1999) that Stone sees as key to all that followed. Beginning as a solo performance of monologues by Eve Ensler, inspired by her interviews with women talking about their bodies, it expanded to an Off-Broadway production and then, combining her captivating prose, the rotating trios of celebrity performers, and Stone's marketing, into a worldwide phenomenon. He feels, in many ways, his deepest connection to this show. He says that the title is simultaneously the subject and beside the point, for Ensler's

message is 'about being comfortable with your body, comfortable with your sexuality, about not being ashamed, about not having secrets'. This message resonated for him as a gay man, and would resurface in his musicals, which he sees following in a direct line from this play. The next play, *Fully Committed* (1999), appealed to the New Yorker in him, as 'the ultimate New York power show, how New York defines what's hot, what's in, what's popular, and what is needed to achieve it'. *Lifegame* (2000), an improv-based precursor to reality-TV, told a new story each performance, about someone from the audience, interviewed in advance. For Stone, the show said 'every life is unique, beautiful, moving, meaningful', a message later echoed in *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.

Stone's first musical, a revival of *Man of La Mancha* (2002), proved a labour of love, and a lesson. It is his mother's favourite show, and he dedicated his production to her. It was at the Martin Beck Theater, where they had seen the original when he was five. (She asked if he remembered where they sat. He did.) Beyond the family connection, he relishes the show's celebration of the power of imagination. Yet he acknowledges a mistake. Focused on why it *should* work and how it could make money, he lost his personal impulse—and the production didn't ignite. He learned that being strictly rational about shows doesn't work for him. 'I have to be personally connected, emotionally connected to everything I do'.

Then came *Wicked*. Produced by Stone and Marc Platt in 2003, it is still going strong in 2017, grossing $1 billion, $2 billion, and $3 billion faster than any show in Broadway history, with worldwide productions attended by over 50 million people to date. The development of this powerhouse musical, which made him a producing powerhouse, will be discussed below. But he initially engaged it on a personal level, 'sobbing' the first time he watched a reading.[4]

Any producer might cite Stone's reasons for producing *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (2005): it was 'fresh, inventive, and not like anything else that had come before'. Yet this small musical was risky, because adults play children, a technique that easily curdles, and also because it grew out of improv, like the unconventional *Lifegame*. What drew Stone were the show's characters, who, like theatre kids, were outsiders, maybe nerdy, yet passionate about something they're good at.

Stone's next project, the play *Three Days of Rain* (2006), was a celebrity vehicle for the movie star Julia Roberts, and he acknowledges that her appeal was a major incentive for him. At the same time, he was drawn to a core question of the play: 'Do we ever really know our parents?' That question about family secrets informed his next musical.

Next to Normal (2009) explores a dysfunctional family struggling to deal with its problems, including bipolar disorder, drug abuse, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), and attempted suicide. Stone recognized the struggle personally, knowing the feeling 'when someone sucks all the energy out of a home'. The musical began in 1998 as *Feeling Electric*, a 10-minute sketch satirizing medical treatment, with doctors depicted as rock stars. Seven years later,

Stone picked it from the limitless readings, workshops, and out-of-town shows that producers attend, changed the title, and chose Michael Greif as director. Together, they urged the writers, Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, to shift emphasis from mental illness itself to its effect on the family, though family dysfunction made another risky subject for a musical. Stone enhanced a production at Second Stage in 2008. (Enhancement is a producer's payment to support a show at a non-profit theatre: if the production works, the producer can transfer it to Broadway; otherwise, the support is written off as a donation.) Then Stone took a unique step, discussed more fully below, moving the show out of town to continue work at Washington's Arena Stage. Changes led *Next to Normal* back to New York for a two-year Broadway run at the Booth Theatre, critical acclaim, a Tony Award, the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and box-office records. *BuzzFeed*, a major Internet news company, labelled it the best musical since 2000. (Its top ten list also included *Wicked* and *Spelling Bee*.)[5]

If/Then (2014), Stone's latest production as of this writing, alternated two possible lives of a woman making her way in New York, as it explored how tenuous our lives are. He feels that uncertainty keenly: had he not been in the right place at the right moments, none of it, not even meeting his husband, would have happened. Considering *If/Then*, Stone said 'Our lives are so random', before expanding that thought—

> Do I have a plan? Yes, I have lots of plans. But then a fluke event takes me on a different path. If I think about how terrifying that is, that with all my planning, I am not at all in control, I would never get out of bed each day. But this show is about doing exactly that, because there is no choice.

While the shows that Stone produced may have been realized without his involvement, his absence from their development and execution would inevitably have meant different, and, the evidence suggests, less successful outcomes.

Though Stone seeks projects that are each different than the next, a creative line runs through them, fuelled by that personal engagement.

Business Connection

When it comes to the producer's three key functions of running a business in show business—finances; leading a show's path; publicity and marketing—Stone excels creatively.

Finance and creativity might seem distinct categories, with conventional wisdom contrasting producers as 'the money' against 'the creatives': writers, directors, and designers.[6] Reinforcing this cliché are those formerly known as investors who buy the title of 'producer', because *lead* producers—the ones who make the decisions—face increasing difficulty raising money and so offer the label as inducement. Despite blurred usage, the functional distinction remains: wealthy investors *spend* money to become 'producers', while a lead producer like Stone has to lead. The resulting decisions are crucial for a show's

creative success, and Stone's track record shows his being made with experience, savvy, and courage. He advocated spending an additional $1.5 million on *Wicked* to keep the show together for crucial changes on a hiatus after the pre-Broadway run in San Francisco. Moving *Next to Normal* out of New York to revamp it—with no expectation of its eventual return—represented the same risky outlay. Although Stone runs a multi-billion dollar business in *Wicked*, the notion that producers are 'only in it for the money' ignores opportunities for making easier money elsewhere. After all, 70–75 per cent of Broadway shows fail to meet costs (and are considered 'flops'), and another 15 per cent only make a negligible profit (although they are still considered 'hits'). The remaining 10–15 per cent, in Stone's words, 'make nice money, better-than-the-market-money', while a very rare few make 'much, much, much, much more'. Stone has hit those upper brackets. *The Vagina Monologues* and *Spelling Bee* did better than 'nice money', and *Wicked* is 'one of the big ones that changes everything'.[7]

Stone shines in another key producer's task, leading a show's creative path. That leadership can be seen in the controversial rewriting of *The Diary of Anne Frank* to more profoundly reflect its Jewish identity.[8] Similarly, choosing a director is one of the producer's most important decisions, and hiring Joe Mantello for *Wicked* demonstrates courage and savvy, for Mantello had never directed a musical.

The financial success of *Wicked* allows support of new work, but what might be merely a sufficient condition for other producers is, for Stone, a necessary one. He feels an obligation to 'give back in the same way that *Wicked* has given to me'. For him, that means a responsibility to new writers. Though he is fond of watching revivals, he seeks to add to the Broadway canon, creating musicals to build the future of theatre. One example is *Spelling Bee*, which opened possibilities for other shows as it blended its improvisatory base with audience participation, on its way to becoming a Broadway smash. Improvisation and audience involvement had been part of quirky 'downtown' shows over the years, but here they became significant elements of a mainstream musical.

The unusual journey of *Next to Normal* offers the most dramatic example of his creativity. The mixed-but-encouraging reviews for the Second Stage production might have tempted Stone to transfer it to Broadway; other producers have moved shows with less praise. But he believed that there was more to this risky musical. More to the story. So he took an unprecedented step: he moved *Next to Normal* out of town to continue work, at Arena Stage in Washington, DC. It is common to start a new show *before* New York—insiders relish tales of out-of-town tryouts—and some shows have been rethought years later, but taking a current New York show and paying to move it out of town to continue work with the same writers, director, actors, and designers was an innovation. That included taking pressure off the team by insisting it would *not* go back to New York. Hindsight suggests shrewdness in the move but that assumption ignores what happened, with no clear prospect of a return on the money spent. As Stone puts it, 'There is no universe where a whole show had picked up, moved,

and a few months later, came back in. It never occurred to us it would come back to New York. I simply wanted to complete the show. We all just wanted to finish our work on a show we loved.' Ben Brantley, asked in a public interview why a previously imperfect show had evolved into one of his favourites, said it was because it had 'a producer who wouldn't take No for an answer'.[9]

Publicity and marketing also reflect Stone's creativity. Though insisting that theatre-goers have to find each show on their own, he believes in 'telling people why they should see' his. Personal connection, though not always manifest in the publicity, informs how he works with his team behind the scenes, and how he talks about a show publicly. *Spelling Bee* publicity didn't include Stone's thoughts about childhood insecurity yet those ideas shaped the advertising. Influenced by his experience with *The Vagina Monologues*, Stone decided he needed to push the agenda for *Wicked*, so he spent money even when the show was sold out; he took over all the signage in Penn Station and Grand Central Station, the first show with 'station domination'; he used major billboards to brand the show for everyone coming into Manhattan; and because 'nothing says confidence more than' an uncluttered ad, he consistently ran full-page newspaper ads with only the title and logo. He also paid more for green in ads: 'We don't have a gray witch, we have a green witch'.

Creative Connection

There's still more to the story. *The Vagina Monologues* and *Wicked* became more than particular productions in particular theatres; they emerged as cultural touchstones. Rarely does a play or musical achieve more than popularity, reaching deeper than acclaim to touch a chord in society. The effect can't be predicted. A mysterious alchemy weaves these cultural touchstones into an era's ideas and ideals, anxieties and dreams, and many producers never have one such show. That makes it remarkable that Stone has had two cultural touchstones, and arguably three.

The challenging material—and title—of *The Vagina Monologues* taught Stone to set the agenda (and laid the foundation for his approach to *Wicked*). Facing resistance to the word 'vagina' and the play's message, he did not downplay them, as a producer focused on the bottom line might, but reinforced what Ensler wrote, pushing discomfort, forcing people to deal with the subject and the word, whether in relinquishing shame or acknowledging value beyond lust, jokes, and awkwardness. Disappointed earlier that he had not anticipated the controversy over *Diary of Anne Frank*, he learned from the experience and applied the lesson about taking charge of the situation, in this case 'to be political and be confrontational and create controversy'. He recalled his approach:

> I said, 'Oh, you're not comfortable with the word "vagina"? You're not comfortable with my sexual orientation?' Well, let's make the word 'vagina' really big. Let's create advertisements saying 'Think Inside the Box'. Let's take TV commercials in the most conservative towns in the country.

As his publicity 'keyed into the anger that was in the show itself', *The Vagina Monologues* surged beyond the usual markers of theatre success to become a source of empowerment over its multi-year run. The show's success was instrumental in the launch of V-Day, a movement that has raised $15 million through the play (with grants expanding that amount to $100 million) to support groups combating violence against women and girls around the world. Its broader influence includes increasing public currency of the titular word. Stone recalls that the *New Yorker* initially resisted running an ad because the word 'vagina' was 'too large'. But formerly taboo, the word is now routine, even on network sitcoms. The message of empowerment and the use of 'vagina', routinely shouted in Stone's advertising, helped break a barrier. Just as James Joyce's *Ulysses* struggled against censorship of its explicit address of female sexuality, until the taboo had become commonplace, *The Vagina Monologues* changed things too. With millions having seen the show, in theatres and on HBO, it continues to be a cultural phenomenon, and a powerful lightning rod. Among many national and international examples, a member of the Michigan state legislature was removed from the chamber for saying 'vagina' in debate, and Ensler immediately flew in to perform the play, in support of the embattled legislator and to shine a light on the legislature's action.[10] In 2006 Charles Isherwood described it as 'probably the most important piece of political theater of the last decade'.[11]

Stone produced a second cultural touchstone in *Wicked*. As he puts it, vehemently, if he hadn't learned how to produce and market *The Vagina Monologues* around the world, he wouldn't have known how to lead *Wicked* to international success. He did so despite not merely 'mixed reviews', but divided reviews, a clash of raves and pans, like the disparagement in the *New York Times*, of *Wicked* as a heavy-handed 'sermon' with a 'generic' score.[12] So how did word-of-mouth catapult the show past scorn into a worldwide phenomenon? Ironically, disdain for the London production suggests an answer. The *Guardian* critic bewailed *Wicked* as 'more like a piece of industrial product than something that genuinely touches the heart or mind'.[13] Yet that appears to be precisely what it has done, touching the hearts and minds of millions. Many writers have misread the response, diminishing those millions to 'hordes' of girls. Though early responses did not identify a young-female tilt, that disdainful stereotype has become a critical article of faith.[14] Meanwhile, some scholars criticize this complaint as sexist, arguing that it is 'passionate girl fans who sustain' the show's success.[15] Stone dismisses the emphasis on teen girls from both angles, pointing out that no demographic slice could fill the 1,900-seat Gershwin Theater eight times a week, nor the other huge theatres that the tours sell out around the world.[16] Meanwhile, surveys in 2007 showed that 80 per cent of the *Wicked* audience was over 18 years old (and 25 per cent were over 50).[17] In the most pointed rejoinder he has made about this issue, Stone said, 'Anyone who thinks that a show's global success is based on its appeal to a single audience segment is naïve, if not stupid.' This kerfuffle over audience demographics cannot obscure the immense achievement of the show's creation, development, and expansion around the world.

The provocative twist of two young women bonding as they travel the traditional musical-theatre path of male–female couples does indeed appeal to girls, as they watch the female leads grow from antagonism to union.[18] Yet the global picture reveals the musical also appeals to boys, men, and women.[19] Stone maintains that what draws people around the world are the themes that hit him personally: being an outsider, and how one person can change your life. If other producers have designed shows for girls in attempts to follow what they see as the *Wicked* model, he believes they failed because they 'made a show that was just for one segment of the audience. We made a show that was for everybody.' A show about empowerment. About the ostracized outsider, the Other. Cultural repression. Government duplicity. The question of who writes history. (In meta-fashion, that includes fans and critics tussling over the narrative about who best enjoys the show's narrative.) Stone emphasizes the first entrance in the show of 'this young, idealistic, hopeful, innocent, beautiful green girl' as representative, with audiences immediately understanding that 'if this universally reviled villain from everyone's childhood is not who we thought she was, then neither am I, neither are you'. These larger themes have touched a cultural nerve, making *Wicked* an international phenomenon.

Next to Normal, which Stone could produce because of *Wicked*, can be considered a third cultural touchstone. Ben Brantley called it 'one of the bravest musicals ever to hit the mainstream', and it was fervently embraced by fans, with a closing Broadway performance that felt like being immersed in a hothouse of emotion.[20] Though it didn't break into the consciousness of the larger world as the other two did, its influence remains potent. It became a major player in the de-stigmatization of mental illness, and has received substantial attention from the mental health community. Inside the theatre world, it earned a prized reputation among Broadway insiders for forging critical and financial success from unlikely material; as the Pulitzer Prize jury announced, it 'expands the scope of subject matter for musicals'.[21] In addition, its unique trajectory, led by Stone, continues to encourage writers and composers to persist with their shows if a first production is incomplete. He demonstrated his commitment to the process and to writers by backing Kitt and Yorkey on their next show, *If/Then*. Yorkey, in an impassioned speech at its closing performance, praised Stone for his 'tremendous courage' supporting them on both shows. He added, 'you should all, especially you writers, should all be so lucky as to have a David Stone in your life'.[22]

Crafting a career the way he guides his shows, joining careful thought to sharp intuition, David Stone defies expectations. A public figure, he is a private person. A Broadway insider, he brings an outsider's perspective. Proud of being Jewish and a gay man, he produces shows with broad appeal. In a profit-seeking business, he seeks material that speaks to him personally. A money man, he employs creativity in the producer's tasks. Wealthy thanks to *Wicked*, he uses that wealth to support risky new shows and writers he believes in, to help build Broadway's future. With Stone, there is always more to the story.

Notes

1. Interviews, David Stone, 23 July 2014; 12 August 2014; 11 August 2015; 7 and 18 January 2016. Stone's phrase, 'There's more to the story', echoes an article on *Wicked*, Howard Shapiro, 'Attention to All That's Behind The Curtain', *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 March 2006, accessed 15 September 2014, http://articles.philly.com/2006-03-21/news/25415259_1_oz-wicked-witch-fantastic-story.
2. Patrick Healy, 'Still Hoping a Big Gamble Pays Off: "On the Town" Producers Keep Faith in Their Investment', *New York Times*, 20 January 2015,accessed4February2015,http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/21/theater/on-the-town-producers-keep-faith-in-their-investment.html?ref=arts&_r=0.
3. Having done well, Stone also does good. He has worked with Steven Spielberg on the Shoah Project, raising awareness of the testimony of Holocaust survivors; he is the central catalyst for the Broadway Green Alliance, an environmental initiative; and he organized many fundraisers in support of Marriage Equality. Stone also serves on the Broadway League Board of Governors, and the Board of Trustees of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, while lecturing at the Julliard School, New York University, Yale University, Columbia University, and the University of Pennsylvania.
4. Carol de Giere, *Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz from 'Godspell' to 'Wicked'* (New York: Applause, 2008), 335–6.
5. Louis Peitzman, 'The 43 Best Musicals Since 2000', *BuzzFeed*, posted 22 May 2014, accessed 18 February 2015, http://www.buzzfeed.com/louispeitzman/best-musicals-since-2000#.txB887E0w.
6. Stacy Wolf, in *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), does not mention Stone at all and equates producers with 'global capitalism', 217. Paul R. Laird, in *Wicked: A Musical Biography* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), does cite two Stone decisions, director and budget, but passes over each one in a single sentence, 35, 41.
7. In three stacked *New York Times* articles, reporting on Broadway's finances, Patrick Healy ignored that many 'profits' are negligible, 15 August 2014, accessed February 4, 2015.
   - 'I Want to Be a Producer (Me, Too!): On Broadway Today, a Name Above the Title Isn't That Hard to Get', http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/17/theater/on-broadway-today-a-name-above-the-title-isnt-that-hard.html?_r=0.
   - 'Bring Friends, Bring Checkbooks, Bring Both: A Few of the Producers of "A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder"', http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/17/theater/a-few-of-the-producers--of-a-gentlemans-guide-to-love-murder.html?action=click&content

Collection=Theater&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article.
  - 'So You'd Like to Invest in Broadway?: Rules for Investing in a Broadway Production', http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/17/theater/rules-for-investing-in-a-broadway-production.html?action=click&contentCollection=Theater&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pgtype=article.

8. In 1997 Cynthia Ozick, complaining of distortions in the translation of Frank's diary in the original play and in the upcoming revival, called it '[e]visceration by blurb and stage', *New Yorker*, 6 October 1997, 87. Frank Rich, no longer a reviewer but then a political commentator, countered that Ozick had missed the greater authenticity of a revival she had not even seen, *New York Times*, 2 December 1997, accessed 18 January 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/02/opinion/journal-anne-frank-now.html.
9. Peter Marks interviewing Ben Brantley, 92nd Street Y-Tribeca, 17 October 2012.
10. Lisa Brown, 'Lisa Brown: Silenced for saying (shock!) "vagina"', CNN online, 21 June 2012, accessed 8 January 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2012/06/21/opinion/brown-kicked-out-for-saying-vagina/.
11. Charles Isherwood, 'The Culture Project and Plays That Make a Difference', *New York Times*, 3 September 2006, accessed 18 January 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/03/theater/03ishe.html.
12. Ben Brantley, 'There's Trouble in Emerald City', *New York Times*, 31 October 2003, accessed 4 February 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?res=990CE5DE103FF932A05753C1A9659C8B63.
13. Michael Billington, 'Wicked: the Musical', *Guardian*, 28 September 2006, accessed 4 February 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/sep/28/theatre1.
14. A 2005 re-review in the *New York Times* got caught in the cliché: 'hordes of fans', 'True believers', 'teenage angst', themes 'obsess girls'. Jason Zinoman, 'A Pair of New Witches, Still in Search of the Right Spell', *New York Times*, 15 July 2005, accessed 8 August 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/15/theater/reviews/15zino.html.
15. Wolf, *Changed for Good*, 220–1, and 219–35. Laird's musicological approach assumes the primacy of 'enraptured young women' (vi, also 258, 294–300).
16. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* reinforced Stone's point, starting from its first line: 'Dear little girls and Gleeks of America: You can't have "Wicked." Give it back, OK?' Chris Willman, '"Wicked" Hooks You, My Pretty', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 December 2011, accessed 18 January 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/dec/29/entertainment/la-et-one-mans-Wicked-20111229.

17. Campbell Robertson, 'Tweens love Broadway, but Can't Save It Alone', *New York Times*, 2 October 2007, accessed 7 January 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/02/theater/02twee.html?_r=0.
18. Wolf (*Changed for Good*, 197–218) argues that the main characters of *Wicked*, Elphaba and Galinda, though not necessarily lesbian, are bonded in a way (harmonizing literally and metaphorically) that matches the heterosexual conventions of musicals: boy-meets-girl-they-connect--by-singing-together. See also, Wolf, '"Defying Gravity": Queer Conventions in the Musical *Wicked*', *Theatre Journal* 60, no. 1 (March 2008): 1–21.
19. Laura MacDonald and Myrte Halman, '*Geen Grenzen Meer*: An American Musical's Unlimited Border Crossing', *Theatre Research International* 39, no. 3 (October 2014): 198–216.
20. The author felt the intense emotion of that final performance firsthand. Brantley, 'Theater Listings', *New York Times*, 14 January 2011.
21. The Pulitzer Prizes website, 2010, 'Drama, *Next to Normal*, by Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey', accessed 7 January 2016, http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/7127.
22. Brian Yorkey, post-show speech, *If/Then* closing night, 23 March 2015, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73RSwXIzLms, at 5:02, 7:45, and 10:05.

CHAPTER 49

ART for ART's Sake: The American Repertory Theatre

Stuart J. Hecht

The American Repertory Theatre (ART) has gone through several incarnations, but has always been a hybrid in its joint commitment to generating new works, including musicals, and also promoting them to theatre communities beyond its Cambridge, Massachusetts home. Ever a leader in contemporary theatre practice, its history mirrors the shifting values and tastes of American culture as it tries to anticipate trends and pioneer ever new theatrical paths. This can be seen in both ART's innovative collaborations and artistry, as well as in its effort to develop future audiences and its potential as a commercial producer. As of this writing, the ART has enjoyed three chapters, under the leadership of three artistic directors, each with a distinctive vision for their respective eras: Robert Brustein, Robert Woodruff, and Diane Paulus.

Robert Brustein

The roots of the Harvard University-based ART lay in the Yale School of Drama, where theatre scholar and critic Robert Brustein (b. 1927) served as Dean beginning in 1966. In 1978 university president Bartlett Giamatti decided that Yale should no longer support a professional theatre company, so Brustein left for Harvard where he then founded the ART in 1980. Like at Yale, the ART featured a professional acting ensemble, productions of classics and new works often done in cutting-edge avant-garde fashion, and eventually a theatre-training programme for actors, directors, and dramaturges. It ini-

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tially operated the 556-seat Loeb Drama Center on the Harvard campus, then added an additional 300-seat, flexible space called The Zero Arrow.

Under Brustein's leadership, the ART became a beacon for playwriting and advanced theatre practice, an artistic pillar of the national regional theatre movement. It used its position to stage works which explored artistry and ideas, challenging accepted norms in an effort to pioneer future theatrical practice. This seemed particularly fitting for a non-profit theatre functioning under the auspices of one of the nation's leading liberal arts universities. Brustein was supported in his endeavours by the work of managing director Rob Orchard and an acting ensemble that featured Jeremy Geidt, Alvin Epstein, Karen Macdonald, Thomas Derrah, Will Lebow, Remo Auraldi, and a host of others over the years. The ART presented world premieres of works by a host of authors, including Don DeLillo, Dario Fo, Larry Gelbart, Philip Glass, Milan Kundera, David Lodge, David Mamet, Charles L. Mee, Heiner Müller, Marsha Norman, David Rabe, Adam Rapp, Paula Vogel, Derek Walcott, and Robert Wilson. Brustein also brought in the most innovative world directors, including JoAnne Akalaitis, Andrei Belgrader, Anne Bogart, Liviu Ciulei, Ron Daniels, Liz Diamond, Richard Foreman, Jonathan Miller, Peter Sellars, Andrei Serban, Robert Wilson, and Robert Woodruff.

In 1987 the ART established the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training, a graduate degree granting professional theatre programme. Founded in association with the Moscow Art Theatre, its students spent several months training in Moscow as part of their education and often appeared in small roles in ART productions.

Brustein blended the classics with the new. ART productions often went on to tour nationally and in Europe, usually at prominent international theatre festivals. Twice under Brustein an ART production went on to Broadway success. In 1983 the ART gave the world premiere of Marsha Norman's *'night, Mother*, and the same production went on to play for over a year on Broadway where it received four Tony Award nominations and won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. In 1984 the ART gave the world premiere of the Roger Miller musical, *Big River*. It also went on to Broadway where it garnered seven Tony Awards, including for Best Musical, eight Drama Desk awards, and a run of over a thousand performances. *Big River* earned more than $300,000 for ART at a time when regional transfers to Broadway were not yet the norm. And though it never reached Broadway, Brustein's own klezmer musical, *Schlemiel the First*, which debuted at the ART in 1994, has been produced many times across America and internationally.[1] Brustein retired from the ART in 2002.

Robert Woodruff

As the next artistic director, Robert Woodruff's (b. 1947) theatrical tastes echoed those of Brustein, though he was still more experimental and worked on a decidedly grander scale. Woodruff had directed many world premieres, most notably a series of works by Sam Shepard, had directed at most of the world's

preeminent theatres, and favoured fresh approaches to traditional works. Woodruff fostered the creation of new works for theatre and opera, including *Sound of a Voice* (2003, music by Philip Glass and libretto by David Henry Hwang) and two works developed with composer Rinde Eckert, *Highway Ulysses* (2003) and *Orpheus X* (2006). However, unlike Brustein, Woodruff did not have a tenured position at Harvard. Though artistically successful, his work was decidedly not commercial; Woodruff launched expensive international tours of ART productions which won renown but leaked money, contributing to his 2007 dismissal.[2] Gideon Stern held a two-year 'interregnum' as artistic director as the theatre began its search for a permanent replacement.[3]

It was also at this point that Harvard University realized it had two serious problems with regard to its ART theatre. First, the ART audience, like most playgoers nationwide, was beginning to age. Young people raised on technology suddenly balked at attending live cultural events. This presented a challenge: how to attract this younger audience in order to perpetuate the theatre and its cultural value. Second, in 2008 Harvard was hit hard by the national recession. On the heels of financial losses under Woodruff, Harvard seemed to shift gears in what it expected from his successor, aiming instead for someone who might bring in younger audiences and who, in addition to their artistry, had the capacity to generate profit, thereby allowing the ART to function more self-sufficiently.

Diane Paulus

In 2008, after a lengthy search, Harvard appointed Diane Paulus (b. 1966) as artistic director of the American Repertory Theatre. Paulus graduated magna cum laude from Harvard/Radcliffe in 1988. Her background included studies in ballet and classical piano. After graduating from Harvard she received an MFA from Columbia University. Paulus and her husband formed a theatre company in New York City where they combined classical repertory and pop culture, whether by adding pop music to reshaped classic plays or staging opera in contemporary settings. They gained notoriety for their *The Donkey Show*, a disco adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which ran Off-Broadway for six years and proved attractive to younger, hip audiences. When hired to run the ART, Paulus redubbed the ART's separate Zero Arrow 'the Oberon' and made it home to a Boston edition of *The Donkey Show*, a semi-permanent retro disco club for twenty-somethings.

Dispensing with the ART's long-standing acting ensemble, Paulus shifted the ART's focus towards the creation of theatrical projects, including musicals, with an eye towards subsequent production in New York. Conversely, she also brought prominent Broadway performers to appear in Cambridge. She continued her New York ties beyond the ART, most notably staging a fortieth anniversary concert performance of *Hair* at the Delacorte Theatre that was expanded into a full production at the Public Theater and transferred to Broadway, where it won a Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical.

Under Paulus, the ART began attempts to create original musicals. In 2010 it featured Cherry Jones in Larry Gelbart's adaptation of *Lysistrata*, directed by Andrei Serban, featuring an original musical score by Alan Menken and lyric by David Zippel. Also in 2010 Paulus revived an adaptation of *Best of Both Worlds*, which she had previously staged in New York. It combined *A Winter's Tale* with original music by Diedre Murray and an African American cast in a Motown-inspired fantasy milieu. Later that same year she directed the premiere of a musical aimed specifically at Boston sports fans: *Johnny Baseball: The New Red Sox Musical*. The piece, with a book by Richard Dresser and score by Robert Reale and Willie Reale, drew upon Red Sox history and flirted with issues of racism before it settled into mythic froth. A hotdog vendor was placed in the lobby, attempting to counter the ART's usual high culture ambience. But neither production proved fully successful with critics or audiences.

Turning away from original work, in 2011 Paulus commissioned playwright Suzan-Lori Parks to adapt the libretto for *Porgy and Bess*. 'Paulus was given the go-ahead from the Gershwin estate to make the opera more accessible to larger audiences', Philip C. Kolin and Harvey Young explain. 'Her aim, as well as Parks's, therefore, was to transform an American classic opera into [a] commercially profitable musical that would draw African American audiences into the theater.'[4] Parks focused on the two main characters' romance and sought to flesh them out beyond the stereotypes of the original libretto.[5] One-third of the opera's music was cut, more realistic spoken dialogue replaced recitative, Porgy was revised as a more attractive man for Bess, and the story was rearranged to soften the suffering. These moves were subsequently criticized, in particular by Stephen Sondheim, who felt the archetypal characters didn't require further development. Paulus scored a coup when she persuaded the noted singer-actress Audra McDonald to play Bess, which motivated even the dismissive to see the show. Though the script had been excised and a large chunk of the score eliminated, Paulus nevertheless branded this much-shortened, 'user-friendly' adaptation '*The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess*'. After a successful Boston run it moved to Broadway where it ran for almost a year, received ten Tony nominations, and won Tony Awards for Best Revival and Best Actress in a Musical (McDonald).

Continuing her hybrid approach, in 2012 Paulus assembled a revival of Stephen Schwartz's *Pippin*, this time revamping the original in collaboration with the contemporary circus company Les 7 Doigts de la Main, swapping the male leading player for a female one (Patina Miller), and providing a revised happier ending.[6] Again, after a successful Boston run *Pippin* opened on Broadway and won Paulus a Best Director Tony.

The success of ART's musicals enabled Paulus to channel non-musicals to Broadway. In 2013 she again tapped into the baby boomer mentality, combined with pop cultural appeal, when she brought in actor Bryan Cranston, star of the just-finished television cult hit *Breaking Bad*, to play President Lyndon Baines Johnson in Robert Schenkan's historical drama *All the Way*. Much like Audra McDonald, Cranston's celebrity proved a magnet for local audiences

and allowed the production to overcome a flawed script and become a sold-out hit. *All the Way* moved to Broadway, where it enjoyed Tony Award success, with most of the focus settling on Cranston's performance. That same year the ART staged a production of *The Glass Menagerie* starring Cherry Jones and Zachary Quinto that similarly went on to Broadway success. Paulus has also used the Oberon as a site for smaller, more experimental plays; in 2016 she brought the historical drama *Father Comes Home from the Wars*, a production begun at the Public Theater, to ART for further development, continuing her collaboration with Suzan-Lori Parks. Still, Paulus strove to create a successful original musical. In 2014 the ART staged *Finding Neverland*, inspired by the 2004 film of the same name about playwright J. M. Barrie and the creation of *Peter Pan*. Initially announced for the La Jolla Playhouse's 2011–2012 season, *Neverland* had a developmental reading in New York City in 2011, and premiered in 2012 at the Curve Theatre in Leicester (UK), produced in a collaboration with Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. A year later ART's production was announced, with Weinstein recruiting James Graham to write a new book, former British boyband star Gary Barlow and Eliot Kennedy to replace the original songs by Scott Frankel and Michael Korie, and Paulus replacing Rob Ashford as director. The show was beautiful to watch, though the score was composed mostly of power ballads void of any real feeling or depth, perhaps revealing Barlow and Kennedy's inexperience as musical theatre songwriters. New York theatre critics flocked to Cambridge to see the production but proved less than enthusiastic about the material. *Finding Neverland* moved to Broadway in 2015 in a production featuring prominent stars of television and stage Matthew Morrison, Kelsey Grammer, Laura Michelle Kelly, and Carolee Carmello.

The 2014–2015 ART season also included *O.P.C.*, a new comedy by Eve Ensler, author of *The Vagina Monologues*, and a cabaret piece that featured Broadway and television star Mandy Patinkin. ART again was blending left-wing chic with popular name recognition to form never-to-offend, air-brushed avant-garde works, sure to score cultural points while selling tickets. The same season also saw the premiere of *Witness Uganda*, a musical about American aid workers building a school and teaching orphans based on the authors Matt Gould (who also music directed) and Griffin Matthews's (who played himself) experience with the non-profit Uganda Project. By the end of 2015, the project was retitled *Invisible Theatre* and had transferred to Off-Broadway's Second Stage Theater, where critics applauded the energetic, polished staging by Paulus but lamented the conventional songwriting and awkward depiction of American do-gooders.

More original musicals followed in ART's 2015–2016 season. First came *Waitress*, based on a successful 2007 film. *Waitress* featured a crisp book and catchy musical numbers by singer-songwriter Sara Bareilles, who 'makes an impressive legit bow as a composer',[7] and a cast led by Broadway star Jessie Mueller. The ART's playbill for *Waitress* included an essay by Jessie Nelson, who wrote the musical's book, in which she noted that her interest in making

the film into a musical was because her teenage daughter and friends watched the original film repeatedly. She was thus aware of the project's potential popular appeal to young female audiences. Indeed, teen girls offering video testimonials posted on the ART website exclaimed, 'We've seen a lot of shows at the ART and this really stood out', and of Bareilles's score enthused, 'She has a lot of girl power, she's very courageous with her music.'[8] While ART had previously presented classic plays and musicals, and/or collaborated with acclaimed actors and writers, no mention was made of the film's artistic merit or universality. They adapted it into a musical aiming for commercial consumption and political correctness, a 'feminist fairy tale of a show'[9] with 'bits that are only sitcom deep'.[10] Nevertheless, *Waitress* too made its way to Broadway in 2016 as 'the first Broadway production to fill a musical's four major creative slots—songwriter, book writer, director and choreographer—with a team compromised [*sic*] of multiple women',[11] cementing the ART's reputation as an incubator for developing new musicals.[12]

Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812 was next, an electro-pop opera by Dave Malloy based on a section of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, developed Off-Broadway at Ars Nova before transferring to Kazino, an immersive Russian-style supper club based at two different New York City locations, in 2013. The production, directed by Rachel Chavkin in every iteration, was remounted at ART at the end of 2015, and opened on Broadway in 2016 starring singer Josh Groban. This is a formula that fits the times, making Harvard's ART a leader in recognizing shifting cultural dynamics and tastes.

It is for these reasons that the ART's neighbour, the Harvard Business School, has used Paulus's tenure at the theatre as a management case study, observing her 'aesthetic that aimed to give the audience more ownership over the theater experience'. Reacting to changes in subscriptions and single ticket buying patterns, 'Paulus, inspired by the mission of the A.R.T.—to expand the boundaries of theater—hastened a shift in the A.R.T. business model. Her new plans included operating two unique segmented venues, creating and presenting varied content that aimed to be both challenging and popular, and driving a sales and marketing campaign focused on single ticket buyers, memberships and dynamic pricing.' ART has consequently come closer to breaking even than it has in the past, though still seems to some to be expanding *commercial* potential rather than the boundaries of theatre.[13] It thereby is solving problems experienced by non-profits nationwide, namely ageing audiences, dwindling donations, and a new generation raised with technology and less prone to attend live performance, especially those that they might find challenging.

At ART's helm, Paulus has established herself to be a savvy producer and promoter. She has introduced hip trends and utilized trendy performers, poets, and composers to launch each new endeavour. While this may not reflect the same calibre of artistry accomplished under Brustein (Joan Anderman notes that, 'over the ensuing decades, however, theatergoers lost their patience for somber, challenging productions. Harvard, too, lost its patience with disappointing ticket sales'[14]), it is a body of work designed to appeal to mainstream,

middlebrow culture, especially a younger audience seemingly more concerned with surface than substance, and it has caused ART advisory board and board of trustee members to suggest Paulus is 'destroying the heritage of the ART … making it into something completely different—a place to preview musicals heading for Broadway, musicals in general'.[15] But, Broadway success has led to larger audiences, national recognition, and no doubt substantial income for the ART and its host institution.

'Stagecraft is never a question at the ART these days. The Broadway design team from the Paulus-directed "Finding Neverland" produces the usual effortless-looking theatrical magic', *Boston Globe* critic Joel Brown noted in his review of *Waitress*, recognizing the two-way relationship in which the ART's commercial success supports the work that continues to be done in Cambridge.[16] While Paulus has won accolades and recognition for her directorial work, it may well be that her greater abilities are as a producer, with her ability to pinpoint past and present trends, preserving their product 'brands' while weaving them together to appeal to different generations of playgoers. In all this Paulus has proven successful. The question is whether a pre-Broadway commercial approach merited the sacrifice of cutting-edge art at what had been a pre-eminent non-profit theatre, at a premier, perhaps the pre-eminent, American liberal arts university.[17]

Notes

1. See for instance Robert Brustein, 'American Repertory Theatre', in *An Ideal Theater: Founding Visions for a New American Art*, ed. Todd London (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2013), 514–24.
2. Geoff Edgers, 'Stage directions: Robert Woodruff's exit at the ART came down to a bottom-line decision', http://archive.boston.com/ae/theater_arts/articles/2007/01/28/stage_directions/, accessed 2 March 2017.
3. David Frieze, review of American Repertory Theatre's 2009 season, *New England Theatre Journal* 20 (2009): 188–91.
4. Philip C. Kolin and Harvey Young, eds., *Suzan-Lori Parks in Person: Interviews and Commentaries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 18.
5. Ibid., 18–19.
6. Paulus also staged a feminist revision of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, called *Amaluna* (2012), working with another circus company, Cirque de Soleil. A good profile of Diane Paulus that questions and explores her approach can be found in Joan Anderman, 'Diane Paulus: Drama Queen', *Boston Magazine* 52, no. 2 (February 2014): 64–9, 113–16.
7. Frank Rizzo, 'Pre-Broadway Review: "Waitress" with Jessie Mueller', *Variety*, 20 August 2015.
8. *Waitress:* Audience Testimonials, https://youtu.be/NsX0RUzKhQs, accessed 11 January 2016.

9. Rizzo, 'Pre-Broadway Review: "Waitress" with Jessie Mueller'.
10. Joel Brown, 'Jessie Mueller stands out in "Waitress" at ART', *Boston Globe*, 20 August 2015.
11. Gordon Cox, '"Waitress" Musical Serves Up Broadway's First All-Female Creative Team', *Variety*, 1 December 2015.
12. 'A Note from Writer Jessie Nelson', *Waitress* playbill, American Repertory Theatre, 2015–2016 season, 10–11.
13. Rohit Deshpande, Allen Grossman, and Ryan Johnson, 'The American Repertory Theater', Harvard Business School General Management Unit Case No. 512-026, 5 October 2011.
14. Anderman, 'Diane Paulus: Drama Queen'.
15. Ibid.
16. Brown, 'Jessie Mueller stands out in "Waitress" at ART'.
17. On trying to balance artistry with drawing younger audiences, see Patrick Healy, 'High Art Meets High Jinks Onstage', *New York Times*, 3 February 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/07/theater/07paulus.html.

CHAPTER 50

Roth and Son: Daryl Roth and Jordan Roth on Broadway

Laura MacDonald

'I think that my sensibility is more aligned than maybe some other people, with what audiences actually respond to', Broadway producer Daryl Roth (b. 1944) muses. 'The main audiences. Now I'm not saying that I'm the perfect target audience for everything that's out there, obviously I'm not. But I think that for a majority of audience-goers I'm a representative sample.'[1] Being so aware of her similarity to her spectators helps Roth think carefully about the projects she chooses to produce. As theatre producer Rocco Landesman observes, 'Daryl's taste is not middlebrow—she's a very bright, well-educated person—but I think she's fortunate in that her tastes are often going to be reflected in popular success.'[2] Roth's son, Jordan Roth (b. 1975), also recognizes his mother's distinctive perspective on her audience and notes, 'She's so connected to her audience. Things that are off-putting to her will invariably be off-putting to the audience she is selling to.'[3] President of Jujamcyn Theaters, a producing company with five theatres, Jordan also pays close attention to his audiences and has established himself through a range of niche and mainstream media platforms—a varied and valuable potential market of theatre-goers. He uses social media to engage with theatre audiences but also to keep a finger on the pulse of broader cultural trends, seeking to keep his theatre work relevant and engaged with the world beyond Times Square.

Roth and son's first attempt to produce a Broadway musical together, *The Mambo Kings* (2005) was a false start, never making it to Broadway after an out-of-town tryout. Their next musical collaboration, *Kinky Boots*, with Daryl conceiving the project as lead producer, won the Tony Award for Best Musical

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in 2013 and as of this writing, continues to run at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre (a Jujamcyn theatre, which makes Jordan both his mother's landlord and co-producer). A national tour is scheduled into its third year, and productions have opened in Toronto, London, Malmö, Melbourne, Tokyo, and Seoul. But flop or hit, these collaborations are exceptional, as mother and son typically work independently of each other. This chapter investigates each producer's production history to better establish their distinct producing styles. But beyond genes and the family name, both Roths' ability to not only produce theatre but also to take risks, experiment, and fail is inevitably linked to, and buttressed by, Daryl's husband and Jordan's father—Steven Roth, a multimillionaire and real estate mogul. While substantial wealth may allow the Roths to follow their instincts with passion projects, it also made it possible for Daryl to enter the business relatively late in life and for Jordan to own theatres and start producing on Broadway while still in his twenties. These middle-aged and youthful entrances into the industry have positioned each Roth to connect with different segments of the theatre-going public, thereby setting them apart from more commercially motivated corporate producers and older, longer-established independent producers. Having the capital to serve the theatre-goers they most relate to may be a larger contribution to Broadway's persistence than the Roths have been credited with - so far.

Daryl Roth grew up in Wayne, New Jersey, where her father was a Chevrolet dealer. 'I always wanted to be involved in theatre, I've always loved theatre. As a young person growing up close enough to New York to enjoy theatre, I was lucky enough to be taken by my parents.'[4] She majored in art history at Syracuse University and New York University (NYU) and recalls, 'My life was changed when I came home from college one weekend and saw *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? I remember that it was so dynamic—shattering, really.'[5] She would later produce Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women*. Upon graduation, Roth worked for a few years at *Seventeen* magazine, then spent much of her adult life in New Jersey as a wife, mother, and interior designer, only finding a way into theatre in her forties. *New Yorker* writer Ian Parker suggested Roth 'entered one of the few serious professions that can be started, in an instant, with a checkbook'.[6] Married to a wealthy real estate developer, Roth has admitted, 'When I started people looked at me as a dilettante, and that was fine … because I was determined not to be considered that as time went on.'[7] Writers profiling her and a number of her collaborators have made similar comments over the years, and the contrast between what a wealthy suburban housewife might be expected to achieve as a theatre producer and what Roth has *actually* achieved seems only to highlight her contributions. Roth feels connected to the way Harold Prince produced, and admires him greatly.[8] Having led a fairly eclectic career, though, she hasn't modelled herself after any particular producer.

Jane Anderson, a playwright whose work Roth has produced, describes her as 'secretly a rebel', who 'appears to be a nice, upper-middle-class lady who's very put together—you might even mistake her for Martha Stewart. But she has an artist's heart, and she has a very deep and caring soul.'[9] A 2002 *New*

Yorker profile compared Roth to 'a European sovereign who had slipped away from bodyguards'.[10] And while Roth has been called an Off-Broadway icon and appeared on *Crain's* list of the 100 most influential businesswomen in New York,[11] a 2013 *New York Times* feature on her Sunday routine summed up her day as 'Taking Cookies (and Hugs) to the Theater'.[12] Despite producing serious plays about paedophilia (*How I Learned to Drive*) and cancer (*Wit*) it is often Roth's emotion and sensitivity that people remember.

She has been described as an emotional producer and says, 'That title is definitely accurate.'[13] While known primarily as a producer of plays (including seven winners of the Pulitzer Prize[14]), Roth's first outing as a producer was bringing the Richard Maltby Jr. and David Shire musical *Closer than Ever* to Off-Broadway. Invited to join the board of City Center in 1987, Roth found herself on a committee headed by Maltby, developing what became the *Encores!* series (see Chap. 40).[15] She went to hear some songs by Maltby and Shire at a cabaret and remarked,

> I don't know what I expected but I was so struck by these songs. I felt as though somebody hit me over the head with a hammer and said, 'This is it, this is what you need to do.' At the end of the performance I said to Richard—I don't know whose voice it was coming out of my mouth because believe me I didn't have the confidence to actually say this—but I said, 'I think this would be a great little musical and I'd like to produce it.'[16]

Each song told a story of a different life chapter, and Roth thought that if they spoke to her, they might resonate with other people. *Closer than Ever* was the first inkling Roth had that she herself might be her target audience—'because it really made a difference and it actually empowered me to do what I really wanted to do. Because it was talking about, just do what you need to do in your life. Go through that door that seems locked.'[17] She managed to get a slot at the 1988 Williamstown Theatre Festival where the project was developed, before moving it to the Off-Broadway Cherry Lane Theatre where it ran for nine months.

In 1991 she invested in *Nick & Nora*, an expensive flop and Roth's debut as a Broadway producer. As a junior co-producer, she learned a great deal through observation. 'I realized that the biggest thing that any musical needs is for the creative people to all have the same, shared vision. And if that is not in place, it will not work.'[18] As a co-producer rather than a lead producer, the flop musical didn't allow Roth to play the hands-on role—in developing new work, supporting a company of creative artists, and managing the day-to-day business of a production—that would come to define her style of producing in the years to come.

Long-standing producer Elizabeth McCann, who also produced *Nick & Nora*, recalled that at the beginning of Roth's producing career: 'You wondered if she was going to be in for the long haul … Daryl did a few very little things. It was hard to define her taste. It seemed a little parochial. "Shmulnik's Waltz" was a sweet Jewish musical. It didn't really have the pizzazz to reach

a larger audience. And then I think she developed her own taste and her own signature and her own confidence.'[19]

Missing out on Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* due to a lack of confidence, Roth was more courageous in approaching McCann about co-producing Albee's *Three Tall Women*. 'I saw this is how you have to be', Roth recalls. 'If you see something you want to be involved with, you have to go after it. This is how this business is.'[20] Successful Broadway runs and Pulitzer Prizes followed as Roth honed her instincts for choosing and developing challenging new plays. In 1996, Roth purchased a former bank and landmark building (one she had walked by everyday as an NYU undergraduate), and opened The Daryl Roth Theatre on Union Square in 1998. Along with new plays, the venue has hosted long runs of a trilogy of spectacular, multi-sensory, interactive music and acrobatic productions by the Argentine company De La Guarda. But owning an eponymous Union Square theatre was not enough for Roth, so she contributed to the neighbourhood's further development and worked with restaurants to develop pre- and post-theatre promotions.[21]

In 2004, Roth joined a passionate group of producers to bring Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori's *Caroline, or Change* from the Public Theater (see Chap. 37) to Broadway. Critically acclaimed Off-Broadway, the new musical was not in need of further development and so Roth worked on marketing, advertising, and the daily running of the show. 'You're doing all the work, you just haven't created the baby',[22] she explains. She was becoming known for dealing with the minutiae and for showing up to keep a show running, 'offering the kind of big-picture expertise that makes a producer valuable, like advice on marketing and managing costs'.[23] Though *Caroline* would last less than six months on Broadway, Roth and her partners were realistic. 'All the people that are credited with *Caroline* all went forward out of love, knowing that it probably would not be a commercial venture, but that was so worthy … it was the dream of talent put together in a story that was so meaningful.'[24]

As the wife of a multimillionaire, Roth can pursue passion projects like *Caroline*, fuelled by the desire to make a production happen for a wider audience without having to worry about its commercial success. Furthermore, since 1996 Roth has funded the Daryl Roth Creative Spirit Award, given to support relationships between theatre artists and resident theatres throughout a season.

After a series of intense, serious projects including *Caroline*, *How I Learned to Drive*, and *Wit*, Roth wanted a lighter-hearted project. She chose *Curtains* (2007) because she loved the creative team of John Kander, Rupert Holmes, Scott Ellis, and lead actor David Hyde Pierce. Outsider or marginalized characters run through all of Roth's work, and while the musical focused on a crime-solving detective played by Pierce, it was the show-within-a-show's producer, Carmen Bernstein (played by Debra Monk) with whom Roth identified: '[Carmen] was considered an outsider because her husband had the money but she was the brains of the outfit.'[25] Two decades into her producing career, Roth was no longer the outsider she once was. She joined a team that was already in place, so contributed to the daily running of *Curtains* once it

opened. Like many musicals, *Curtains* went through cycles where its producers had to consider how far they were willing to go to keep the production running. A longer run increases subsidiary rights, Roth explains, but caring for a company of actors and not wanting to give up on them is also a factor she considers. 'Do you need to raise a priority loan? Do you need to cut back the weekly expenses? How do you keep the show running if you truly believe that keeping it running is the right decision?'[26]

Roth contributed to a range of musicals over the next few years as a co-producer, still motivated by working with creative teams that excited her and stories about misunderstood or marginalized people. These included *A Catered Affair* (2008), *Fela!* (2009), the revival of *A Little Night Music* (2009), *Come Fly Away* (2010), *Leap of Faith* (2012), and the revival of *Annie* (2012). 'Helping make it happen is what I can do when I care about the people involved', Roth concludes.[27] Lead producers welcome her as a co-producer because of her ability to generate creative marketing ideas.

Throughout this period Roth was also busy developing her own new musical as lead producer, *Kinky Boots*, after attending the film's premiere at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. 'I knew midway through the film that it was going to change my life', she recalls. She waited for the credits, saw that it was Miramax and Disney, and called her son Jordan in New York to ask him to contact Tom Schumacher. 'I knew that it would make a beautiful musical, I knew it from the story … I could see where it could sing.'[28]

It took a year for Roth to obtain the rights to the film, and in that time, the team she wanted to assemble—co-producer Hal Luftig, playwright Harvey Fierstein, and director-choreographer Jerry Mitchell—all happened to see the film independently of one another. Together they decided on Cyndi Lauper to contribute music and lyrics. Workshops were held, as well as an out-of-town tryout in Chicago where major changes were made to the characters Lola and Charlie: 'we had to make them feel like equal partners in the storytelling', Roth explains.[29] Some considered the musical's title off-putting or salacious but Roth found it joyful and loved it. Another challenge was getting audiences to understand the story—a young man inherits his father's shoe factory and a drag queen helps rescue the struggling business—and realize that it was not a drag show. But once audiences began seeing the inspirational, feel-good musical, word of mouth spread. More than a year into the musical's run, Roth kept hearing theatre-goers saying they wished their children or siblings were with them at *Kinky Boots*, so as a marketing strategy she created 'Wish you were here' postcards, inserted into Playbills.

When Daryl Roth was announced as the 2016 recipient of the Order of the Golden Sphinx award from Harvard's Hasty Pudding Institute of 1770, her son Jordan quickly took to social media, proudly tweeting 'Mom of the Golden Sphinx'.[30] The award 'recognizes individuals in the entertainment industry for their extraordinary contributions to the performing arts'.[31] Roth is the first woman in the history of the award to be honoured. She has also received a Lilly Award, honouring women in American theatre, and in 2015

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio appointed her (along with composer-lyricist and actor Lin-Manuel Miranda) to join director George C. Wolfe on the Theater Subdistrict Council, a municipal programme supporting new work, audience development, and the general promotion of Broadway theatre.

As Roth was bringing *Kinky Boots* to Broadway, she recalls that Jordan 'was by my side throughout … He is my landlord now. I told him it would be very important to me and significant to me if this were in a Jujamcyn house, and he was able to make that happen.'[32] Just over a decade earlier, it was Daryl offering her son midtown real estate when he worked out of her office to produce his first shows—the successful Off-Broadway *The Donkey Show* in 1999 (transferring it to a New York City nightclub from ART, see Chap. 49), and, in his Broadway producing debut in 2000, at the age of 25, a revival of *The Rocky Horror Show*.

'We shared theatre our whole lives and my greatest thrill was being able to watch him develop his own love and passion for theatre which I feel we shared my whole life',[33] Jordan's mother proudly admits. She recalls taking her son to see *La Cage Aux Folles* as a child and being told she was out of her mind, 'but I knew what I was doing. I wanted him to see what's there in the world'.[34] That production became a turning point Jordan has recalled in many discussions of his career:

> I was totally dazzled and I had a chance to visit backstage and I have a very vivid memory of shyly hanging around the doorway to the Cagelles dressing room and peering around all the walls at all of the wigs and costumes that were stacked and racked, and very specifically focusing on the whip … It was the first time that I remember consciously connecting the onstage life of a thing that I had seen to its offstage existence.[35]

Jordan Roth grew up in New Jersey (regularly attending theatre in New York City), and graduated from Princeton with a degree in theatre and philosophy. He later earned an MBA at Columbia. Shortly after graduating from college, and not unlike his mother's reaction to Maltby and Shire's work, Roth recalls, 'I didn't say, "I want to be a producer," I didn't say, "I am a producer." I just was interested in this show [*The Donkey Show*] and I wanted to make it happen, and I did.'[36] The disco club version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ran for six years and toured internationally. His *Rocky Horror* revival followed, and similar to the rotating hosts he had introduced at *The Donkey Show*, Roth's *Rocky Horror* featured a range of celebrity guest narrators, including Jerry Springer and Penn & Teller. When the production was nominated for the Best Musical Revival Tony Award in 2001, Roth became the youngest lead producer ever to be nominated.

In 2005, *New York Post* columnist Michael Riedel reported that Rocco Landesman, one year after purchasing Jujamcyn Theaters (the third largest Broadway theatre owner, with five theatres), was trying to sell off a 50 per cent stake in the company. 'Landesman is now said to be pursuing Jordan Roth,

the Richie Rich theater producer whose father, Steve, is a New York real estate magnate.'[37] Beyond reacting to the family's wealth (as so many had reacted years earlier to Daryl Roth), Riedel noted Jordan Roth's youth and his lack of success with both *The Mambo Kings* and the *Rocky Horror* revival. Would Landesman control the younger Roth? Or would the powerful elder Roth pose a challenge?[38] Such was the debate in the summer of 2005. By the autumn of that year, Landesman announced Roth's appointment as a resident producer and asserted that Roth would 'connect Jujamcyn with a new generation of theatrical productions and audiences'.[39]

Jordan Roth did eventually purchase a 50 per cent stake in Jujamcyn, but not until 2009, when he also become president of Jujamcyn, and Landesman became a passive partner (while leading the National Endowment for the Arts). Roth told the *New York Times* that he was a different kind of person than had previously held such a position. 'Let's just state the obvious', the 33-year-old Roth said. 'My age provides for a different perspective, a different way of looking at the world.'[40] Landesman viewed Roth's youth as an advantage, noting the success of productions he had championed, including *Hair* and *Spring Awakening*. *Hair*'s director Diane Paulus had also directed *The Donkey Show* and suggested Roth was 'the future of Broadway theater'. Landesman concurred: 'I think he's going to be the next leader of the American theater.'[41] By 2014 Roth had acquired a controlling interest in Jujamcyn and remains responsible for the day-to-day-operations of its five theatres, including securing new productions when a long-running one closes.

Roth also keeps busy outside of Jujamcyn. He hosts the 'Broadway Talks' interview series with Broadway actors at the 92nd Street Y and serves as the Broadway Correspondent on the MSNBC programme, *Morning Joe*. He also appeared as himself in the television series *Smash* (see Chap. 51). In 2013 he founded Culturalist, a social network where users curate top ten lists. *Variety* editor Gordon Cox's report on the website revealed just how much Roth had surprised the industry as he rose to the top of Jujamcyn. 'You wouldn't expect a theater exec to be the one to create a digital social network aimed at bringing the cultural conversation into the new-media age',[42] Cox writes. But Roth's desire to 'broaden and deepen the cultural conversation' was no tangent from Broadway. He explains, 'This informs the theater piece in that if you take your theater audience to be blindered, if you think you're engaging them only as "theater people," you've missed them. You've missed their cultural vocabulary and their range of influences. It's why shows that know that in their DNA are the most successful."[43]

Roth has also created Givenik.com, a website offering discounted theatre tickets while giving 5 per cent of every sale to charity. An early adopter of the live streaming app Periscope, Roth has used it to give viewers access to people, places, and events they might not otherwise see. Roth uses his iPhone and Periscope to broadcast the weekly theatre gathering he hosts, 'Making Mondays' (also accessible on Twitter via the hashtag #makingmondays). Launched in 2015, Making Mondays gathers a diverse group of creative people

(many working on Broadway shows) to collaborate, create, and perform songs, plays, and other art works while sharing their process, live, with Roth's 15,000 Periscope followers. Rather than promoting his own productions, Roth says, 'So many of us spend our days in methodical, planned creativity or in sales of creative endeavors … But the ability to come into a room, be inspired by who is around you and make something? That is liberating.'[44]

As president of Jujamcyn, Roth is relatively agile, making use of his personality in ways a corporate or institutional theatre producer may not be able to. It's difficult to imagine even independent producers like Cameron Mackintosh using a cell phone to broadcast his view of the Tony Awards live on the Internet, as Roth has done.[45] These initiatives, pursued through a broad range of platforms and reaching the eyes and ears of eager culture consumers, distinguish Roth as someone who explores social media's potential to engage directly with prospective ticket buyers.

Both Roths continue to experience the highs and lows of producing musicals on Broadway (Jordan quite literally, from his office above the St. James Theatre on West 44th Street). Daryl was the lead producer on *It Shoulda Been You* (2015), a musical about Jewish and Gentile families at a wedding, with multiple characters coming out of the closet. It struggled to find an audience and closed after 135 performances. Jordan was co-producer of two flops, the musical adaptation of Woody Allen's film *Bullets Over Broadway* (2014) and the revival of *Side Show* (2014). At this writing, Something Rotten is in the first year of a national tour and Jujamcyn theatres are booked with the long runs of *The Book of Mormon* and *Kinky Boots* and the promise of the new musicals *Amélie* and *Groundhog Day*. Daryl, as a lead producer, made playwright Paula Vogel's long-overdue Broadway debut possible, producing her play *Indecent* in 2017. Daryl is also developing a new musical inspired by her grandchildren, an adaptation of Jodi Picoult's young adult novel *Between the Lines*.

'A great producer holds in their hands the impossible tension of being at the same time, a person of total blind faith and clear eyed realism,' Jordan Roth muses. 'These are two things that should not ever go together in one being, or perhaps even in a group of beings, and yet they must. A producer has to think that the truly impossible, and in many cases insane, is completely possible, doable, and we're going to do it.'[46] With mother and son equally savvy and both committed to engaging broad, diverse audiences through powerful theatrical experiences (albeit through different methods and media), the Broadway musicals they produce in the future (whether in collaboration or independently) will no doubt be developed out of such passion and emotion and sustained through this producing family's business acumen.

Notes

1. Daryl Roth, interview with the author, 10 July 2014.
2. Ian Parker, 'How to be a Producer: An Amateur from New Jersey Goes to Broadway', *New Yorker*, 4 November 2002, 63.

3. Ibid., 62.
4. Daryl Roth, interview with the author, 10 July 2014.
5. Daryl Roth, 'Twenty Questions', *American Theatre*, March 2002, 64.
6. Parker, 'How to be a Producer', 63.
7. Quoted in Robin Pogrebin, 'Off Broadway's Mom and Angel', *New York Times*, 26 July 1999, E5.
8. Daryl Roth, interview with the author, 10 July 2014.
9. Quoted in Pogrebin, 'Off Broadway's Mom and Angel', E5.
10. Parker, 'How to be a Producer', 60.
11. Ibid., 61.
12. Kara Mayer Robinson, 'Taking Cookies (and Hugs) to the Theater', *New York Times*, 1 March 2014, MB2
13. Daryl Roth, interview with the author, 10 July 2014.
14. Bruce Norris's *Clybourne Park*; Tracy Letts's *August: Osage County*; Nilo Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics*; David Auburn's *Proof*; Margaret Edson's *Wit*; Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*; and Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women*.
15. Parker, 'How to be a Producer', 64.
16. Daryl Roth, interview with the author, 10 July 2014.
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37. Michael Riedel, 'You can own a piece of B'way for a mere $50M', *New York Post*, 6 July 2005, 46.
38. Ibid.
39. Quoted in Jesse McKinley, 'Producer at Jujamcyn', *New York Times*, 28 October 2005, E4.
40. Quoted in Patricia Cohen, 'A New Force on Broadway, and Perhaps a Changing of the Guard', *New York Times*, 9 September 2009, C1.
41. Ibid., C9.
42. Gordon Cox, 'Jordan Roth Makes Legit Moves in Digital Space', *Variety*, 10 January 2014, http://variety.com/2014/legit/people-news/jordan-roth-makes-legit-moves-in-digital-space-1201041006/, accessed 18 February 2016.
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44. Quoted in Pia Catton, 'Broadway Creative Types Let It All Hang Out on Periscope App', *Wall Street Journal*, 18 January 2016, http://www.wsj.com/articles/broadway-creative-types-let-itall-hang-out-on-periscope-app-1453159847, accessed 16 February 2016.
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Curtain Call

CHAPTER 51

New Paradigms for Broadway Producers in Popular Culture and Beyond: *Smash* and the Rise of the Passion Project

Mary Jo Lodge

On 19 March 2015, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an article about the development process for the new Broadway adaptation of the musical *Gigi*, which opened on 8 April 2015. It reported:

> Ms. Segal is the driving force and lead producer of the coming Broadway version of 'Gigi' set to open April 8 at the Neil Simon Theater. The eight-year, $12 million project involved 58 investors and a few hundred employees and has been no easy feat for a producer without any prior experience creating a Broadway show.[1]

While a rookie producer getting her first production to Broadway is certainly newsworthy, what is even more remarkable is that the article never once mentions Jenna Segal's gender—yet female producers like Segal are a relative rarity. In fact, several recent studies have confirmed far fewer women are featured in *any* off-stage roles in the professional theatre. Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Marsha Norman said in the November 2009 issue of *American Theatre* magazine:

> Discussing the status of women in the theatre feels a little like debating global warming. I mean, why are we still having this discussion? According to a report issued seven years ago by the New York State Council on the Arts, 83 percent of produced plays are written by men—a statistic that, by all indications, remains unchanged.[2]

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These studies, including the high profile 2009 one done by Princeton economics student Emily Glassberg Sands (to which Norman was reacting in the above article), revealed that, 'There is discrimination against female playwrights in the theater community', and have turned a spotlight on the glaring gender disparities that exist in behind-the-scenes roles in the theatre.[3] Sands's study, the results of which were featured in the *New York Times*, was undertaken at the urging of playwright Julia Jordan, and subsequently, perhaps because of the attention it garnered, provoked other gender-related research, including an ongoing project by American Conservatory Theater and Wellesley Centers for Women on the gender equity of leadership opportunities in non-profit American theatre as well as another by the League of Professional Theater women that looked at hiring practices for off-stage roles in Off-Broadway theatres from 2010 to 2014.[4] While the gender identities of commercial Broadway producers have not been specifically profiled in these studies, the low percentages of women holding positions in any off-stage roles in theatre suggest that there are few female producers working on Broadway today, and even this volume, dedicated to musical theatre producers, features only a single chapter that profiles a female producer, Daryl Roth. Still, it seems that producers like Segal are at the forefront of shaping a new paradigm for what a producer can be. In addition, new models for getting musicals to Broadway are reshaping the image of the producer, both in real life and in fictional depictions of producers in popular culture.

Still, as Kathryn Edney argued in her chapter in this book (Chap. 2), the various iterations of *The Producers* (the 1968 film, the 2001 Broadway musical, and the 2005 film version of the stage musical) fixed within the popular imagination a very particular, and very persistent, idea regarding what it means to be a Broadway producer.[5] Edney notes that that particular image is male, Jewish, and heterosexual, and she points out that all of the versions of Brooks's *The Producers* deal less with what the producer actually does and more with what the producer gains by doing it. Furthermore, money tops the list for what producers hope to gain by producing, with both power and fame closely connected to this drive for money. Sex, too, is an integral part of the equation for Brooks's producers, with Edney observing that, though Brooks softened the idea in later iterations, *The Producers* sees 'all women as something simply to be used, sexually or otherwise'.[6]

Despite the persistence of these images of the Broadway producer, things appear to have changed, particularly since the advent of *The Producers* musical in 2001. Indeed, Broadway producers in 2017, both as characters and as real people, are less likely to be male and Jewish, and the rise of the female producer marks a notable shift in the Broadway landscape. These female producers, even more so than their male peers, are also often associated with passion projects—ones that they take on not because of the money the show might make but because of their investment in the show's message and/or creators. While this runs counter to Brooks's depiction of the centrality of money and power in the work of producers, it may instead reflect the new and growing Broadway trend

of crowdfunding productions, which has a way of decentralizing the producing process and simultaneously making more central the role of the passion project.

The New Broadway Producer in Popular Culture

In examining depictions of the Broadway producer, post-2001 Broadway musicals, particularly ones about the process of creating a musical, are a fruitful place to start, as they result from theatre practitioners writing about a process with which they are intimately involved. Certainly, backstage musicals which depict the creation and/or rehearsal process for a musical film or stage show are common, especially in Golden Age era musical films (and can even be viewed as chronicles of the industry's own history, written by its insiders), but few feature the producer of the show as a major character. On stage, since the debut of *The Producers*, backstage musicals have been relatively rare, with only one musical truly fitting the bill, *Curtains* (2006, a show about the creation of a musical that also prominently features the producer as a character), and another featuring only some of the elements, *Hairspray* (2002).[7] All three stage works are set within the same three-year period, *Curtains* and *The Producers* in 1959 and *Hairspray* in 1962,which seems to suggest that the late 1950s/early 1960s was a sort of Golden Age for the Broadway producer.

Hairspray, based on the 1988 non-musical John Waters's film, premiered in 2002 as a stage musical and was adapted in 2007 as a film musical. It features music by Marc Shaiman, lyrics by Scott Wittman and Shaiman, and book by Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan. The show prominently showcases Velma Von Tussle, the female producer of 'The Corny Collins Show', a local Baltimore television dance show that features conventionally attractive, white teenaged dancers. Certainly, what Von Tussle is producing is not a musical but a song and dance television show similar to *American Bandstand*. As the antagonist of the musical, she tries both to keep the television show racially segregated in spite of changing times in Baltimore in 1962, and to keep the musical's protagonist, the plus-sized Tracy Turnblad, from becoming a regular dancer on the show. Velma Von Tussle departs from Brooks's producer archetype immediately, both by being female (in fact, she is the mother of the show's other antagonist, Amber, who serves as a romantic rival to Tracy for heartthrob Link's affections) and by not being portrayed as Jewish. In fact, as a further contrast to Brooks's Bialystock and Bloom, Von Tussle is already moneyed and doesn't appear to worry about financing 'The Corny Collins Show'. In addition, her objections to integrating the cast of the dance show seem to be about her personal prejudices, rather than fears that an integrated cast will cause a hardship for the show or its advertisers. Still, primarily because she is the producer of a television show and also because her character—like many in the show—functions more as a villainous caricature, Von Tussle ultimately does not reveal a great deal about the modern producer of the Broadway musical, except that she provides an image of a women in power in the entertainment world.

The 2006 musical *Curtains*, with book by Rupert Holmes, music by John Kander, and lyrics by Fred Ebb (with additional lyrics by Kander and Holmes), in contrast, is specifically about the creation of a new musical, *Robbin' Hood*. The show-within-a-show's entire cast, crew, and creative team are sequestered in the theatre by Boston cop Lt. Cioffi after the leading lady is murdered during a rehearsal for *Robbin' Hood*'s out-of-town tryout. *Curtains* prominently features the characters of Carmen Bernstein and her philandering husband, Sidney, the producers of *Robbin' Hood*. Though Sidney is murdered at the end of the first act of *Curtains*, while alive he adheres to the Brooks model for producers, in that money and power seem to be his chief motivators, and he tries to gain both by blackmailing *Robbin' Hood*'s company. Carmen, in some ways, departs from *The Producers* formula for depicting producers on stage, particularly since she is female and, as in *Hairspray*, is the mother of another character, in this case *Robbin' Hood* cast member Bambi. Also, unlike in *The Producers*, where the Jewish background of the characters, particularly Bialystock, is foregrounded, Carmen's background is unclear, though her name suggests she may be Jewish, but she may also simply be married to a Jewish man. Another contrast is revealed at the end of the show, when Cioffi finds out that Carmen married Sidney (and ultimately killed him) in order to get their show to Broadway and simultaneously advance the career of her daughter (Sidney's step-daughter), indicating her willingness to use sex as a means to get what she wants. This is a reverse of the typical producer paradigm of producing as a means to get sex, which both Brooks's producers (certainly Bloom) and *Curtains*'s Sidney utilize in their affairs. Bialystock does, of course, have sex with elderly, wealthy women to finance his show, though these nameless women are used only for their money and then discarded, which is different from Carmen's marriage to Sidney. Carmen, like Bialystock and Bloom, is closely focused on money, as her song, 'It's a Business' reveals. She explicitly states in the lyrics for that number, 'I put one million in, I expect two million back', indicating that she steers the projects she produces to achieve financial gain and away from the aforementioned passion project (though her final confession that she acted to advance her daughter suggests that her financial focus may have been a red herring in the murder mystery).[8] Surely Kander, Ebb, and Holmes, who crafted lyrics like 'It isn't making art' in the song, were reflecting on the 'Bialystock and Bloom'-style producers they'd encountered over the years, and Carmen proves to be a worthy mouthpiece for their sentiments.[9]

Beyond the stage, the producer of a Broadway musical has been prominently depicted on the television series *Smash*, which ran for two spring seasons on NBC in 2012 and 2013. *Smash* offers the most complex portrayal of a musical theatre producer to date, in part because it prominently features three producers as major characters (one as a series star). Producer Eileen Rand, played by Anjelica Huston, is one of the main characters in the series and in many ways, *Smash* is her story. The men around her, including her ex-husband/ex-producing partner Jerry, exist simply as foils to her character. Eileen offers an entirely new image of the producer, one that contrasts with the

show's depiction of Jerry Rand, played by Michael Cristofer, who is a nearly textbook recreation of the Brooks model. In offering these multiple images of what a producer can be, and in developing those depictions in thirty-two one-hour episodes, *Smash* offers a unique window into the particular work of the Broadway producer, and more specifically, into the way that work is currently evolving.

Smash was created by Theresa Rebeck, a prominent playwright who also was an executive producer of the show in its first season and retained credit as the creator even after she was replaced in season two, reportedly because of the show's plummeting ratings.[10] *Smash*, in an unusual move for the male-dominated behind-the-scenes world of Broadway, often depicts women in powerful roles. For instance, the series' pilot opened with a scene of actress Karen Cartwright (Katherine McPhee) auditioning for a rude female director who takes a cell phone call during Karen's audition (even though statistics show that it is far more likely for a Broadway show to be directed by a man). *Smash* also follows Julia Houston (Debra Messing), a female librettist/lyricist, even though women are also far less likely to hold that role on Broadway. While there certainly are male characters on *Smash*, including Tom Levitt (Christian Borle), Houston's composing partner, and Derek Wills (Jack Davenport), a troubled Broadway director, the show prominently focuses on Eileen, Julia, Karen, and an additional female character, a Broadway chorus girl turned leading lady, Ivy Lynn (Megan Hilty). While it initially earned strong reviews for its pilot, with Emily Nussbaum in the *New Yorker* announcing, '"Smash" does a very satisfying job of merging the pleasures of "American Idol" and commercial Broadway, placing the hummable melody dead center and prioritizing fun over absolute authenticity', the show's ratings and reviews declined significantly over time, resulting in its cancellation after its second season.[11]

The multiple producers in *Smash* offer a detailed look at the work of the modern Broadway producer. The aforementioned Jerry Rand, who is seen in divorce proceedings with wife Eileen (Anjelica Huston) in the show's pilot episode, is, like Sidney Bernstein in *Curtains*, the philandering husband half of a producing power couple team. Jerry comes from a moneyed family, and he is therefore somewhat unaffected by the placing of the couple's joint resources in escrow during their divorce proceedings. By contrast, Eileen must pursue unorthodox ways to finance her production of *Bombshell*, the Marilyn Monroe bio-musical around which *Smash* is built. Throughout the series, Jerry conspires to gain power, particularly over Eileen and the *Bombshell* production, something he achieves primarily through his manipulation of money, especially in the second season, when his conniving briefly results in him controlling *Bombshell*. As in *The Producers* model, Jerry deals primarily with money in the service of achieving power. While his heritage is unclear (a Jewish background is never mentioned for either him or Eileen), Jerry also adheres to Edney's 'persistent' image of the producer by using his producing power to get sex.

In season two, Scott Nichols (Jesse L. Martin) is introduced as artistic director of Manhattan Theater Workshop, which initially produces *Hit*

List, *Bombshell*'s rival, in its downtown space. Scott, as an African American producer-director in the Off-Broadway arena and a viable romantic interest for the newly divorced Julia, is a distinct departure from *The Producers*' paradigm of what a Broadway producer should be. He is as much of a rarity as Eileen, though he may possibly be modelled on real-life pioneering artistic director George C. Wolfe, who helmed the Public Theater from 1993 to 2004. Of course, Scott isn't a Broadway producer, since he technically is an artistic director, though the character seems to have aspirations of producing on Broadway, since he decides to take *Hit List* to Broadway for a commercial run. He displays some of Jerry's ruthlessness in exploiting the untimely death of *Hit List*'s young composer to achieve that end, an action that results in his virtual dismissal from the remainder of the series.

In contrast to the men described above, Eileen represents a truly distinct portrayal of a modern Broadway producer and, uniquely, is established from the start of the show as an experienced producer with great taste, lauded even by the young blonde, Lindsey, with whom her husband cheated on her (this contrasts the bumbling Bialystock and Bloom, who are unlikely to earn any accolades for their producing work).[12] She, like Velma in *Hairspray* and Carmen in *Curtains*, is also a mother to grown daughter, Katie (Grace Gummer), though unlike those producers, she is not a stage mother, as her daughter is a humanitarian and world traveller rather than a thespian. (Velma and Carmen are both prominently depicted as stage mothers—Lt. Cioffi in *Curtains* calls Carmen 'the stage mother of all time'—perhaps as a way to normalize the powerful women, as often happens in early action movies like *Alien 2* and *Terminator 2*, where women could be depicted as ruthless and even deadly because they are protecting either their offspring, or another child.[13]) Eileen's daughter only appears on the show long enough to help her mother wrestle control of *Bombshell* back from Jerry, though Eileen refuses to take money from Katie, who also benefits from Jerry's family money as his offspring, to solve her financial problems. Furthermore Eileen, in contrast to the established producer character paradigm, does not use sex to get what she wants. Her season one boyfriend Nick, a bartender with shady connections, offers her cash to finance the show, but only after they are involved, and she had no way of knowing, when she initiated the relationship, that he had access to that kind of money. In season two, she risks fallout for the show by breaking off her relationship with *New York Times* editor Richard Francis (Jamey Sheridan) just prior to *Bombshell*'s opening.

Eileen contrasts in additional ways with the established archetype for the Broadway producer. Instead of fearing emasculation, Eileen actively attempts to emasculate Jerry, at least figuratively, by regularly humiliating him by tossing drinks in his face at high-end restaurants, and by ultimately besting him for the Tony Award for Best Musical when her *Bombshell* triumphs over his *Hit List*.[14] In fact, while Jason Zinoman lamented on slate.com that Eileen is an unrealistic producer figure because she is 'a cookie full of sugar', several episodes reveal that she can be ruthless, as when she secretly leaks the news of the demise of

the writing partnership of Tom and Julia (to drum up publicity for *Bombshell*) and then blames Jerry for it.[15] Perhaps most significantly, in spite of her toughness, Eileen breaks Mel Brooks's cardinal rule for Broadway producers, one that Bialystock reiterates in all versions of *The Producers*: 'Never put your own money in the show!'[16] During season one, Eileen invests heavily in the show from her own pocket, financing it by first selling off her jewellery and then her Degas sketch. While she does occasionally mention that she wants the show to turn a profit, her primary reason for this investment does not appear to be money, but instead the passionate personal connection she has with the material and its creators. While she certainly, at least in part, wants to triumph over her husband, she also loves and believes in *Bombshell*. Jerry disparages her for this, remarking, 'We were good partners because I knew the business, which allowed you to be the romantic. All this nonsense—theater is art? You deluded yourself and then fell in love with the delusion.'[17] In some ways, Jerry is correct about Eileen, for she seems to have a not-for-profit sensibility in a commercial world. Zinoman says of Eileen and her producing style in slate.com that, 'Such principled stands have set *Smash* up to being one of the least cynical portraits of theater producing on record.'[18] Still, one could argue that given the finances of Broadway today, to invest in it, one must be a romantic, driven by passion for the project rather than catering to hopes of sudden wealth.

The New Real-Life Broadway Producer

Recent history suggests that producers like Eileen Rand may be becoming more common on Broadway. That is, recent Broadway shows are being produced by more women than ever before, and many of these women, like Ms Segal with her production of *Gigi* (which closed after a very brief run of only eighty-six performances in June 2015), produce shows because they passionately believe in them, either because of the people involved or the story being told, but significantly *not* because of (or not primarily because of) the show's money-making potential. For example, television personality Rosie O'Donnell produced the 2003 musical *Taboo* with $10 million of her own money. Although it closed at a loss, O'Donnell still referred to it in the *New York Times* as 'by far the most fulfilling experience of my career'.[19] Television icon Oprah Winfrey produced the musical adaptation of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* in 2005, and revealed her passion for the project, calling producing it 'a dream come true'.[20] While Winfrey's investment of $1 million was a wise one, since the original production turned a profit in less than a year, it does not appear to have been motivated by Winfrey's desire to make money.[21] Similarly, the creator of the television show *Gilmore Girls*, Amy Sherman-Palladino, co-produced the musical *Violet* on Broadway in 2014, not because of her connection to the material, as was the impetus for Winfrey and O'Donnell on their projects, but because of her 'lasting friendship for all times' with Broadway star Sutton Foster, who starred in Sherman-Palladino's ABC family series *Bunheads*, which folded after only one season.[22] Patrick

Healy pointed out in the *New York Times* that because *Violet* was a joint venture of commercial producers with a non-profit theatre (in this case, the Roundabout Theater), the production wasn't geared towards making a profit for the commercial producers.[23]

While the powerful women listed above invested large amounts of their own money in their passion projects, crowdfunding models have opened the door for regular people to get similarly involved in producing theatre projects they love or about which they feel passionate. Bethany Rickwald explained on theatremania.com that, 'Theater producing can be risky—well under half of Broadway's shows turn a profit, for instance—so gathering capital for a new stage production is often difficult. That's why crowdfunding, raising money in relatively small increments from a large pool of backers, is often a good way to go.'[24] In general, crowdfunders on sites like Kickstarter and Indiegogo aren't investors in the truest sense of the word, as they are not promised any share in any profits the show might make. Instead, they are offered 'rewards' for their contributions, however small, to the show. These might range from exclusive updates on the show's progress, usually via email, to prime audience seats for a performance. While crowdfunding has become common for small-scale shows that rarely turn a profit (or perhaps even break even), in November 2015, the first Broadway musical to use crowdfunding, in this case on the site Indiegogo, opened (and closed in February 2016 after only 111 performances). *Allegiance* is a bio-musical of famed *Star Trek* actor and web celebrity George Takei in which Takei made his Broadway debut. As of October 2015, the show's Indiegogo site had raised over $447,000, which Takei said 'will be used to defray some of the costs of the Broadway production'.[25] A share of any profits the show might generate will go to funding Takei's legacy project, the Los Angeles based Japanese American National Museum.[26]

Although the 2011 Broadway revival of *Godspell* was technically the first crowdfunded musical, strictly speaking, it didn't work like other theatre crowdfunding. It was funded by a group that lead producer Ken Davenport dubbed 'The People of Godspell'—'a community of hundreds of investors, each one investing as little as $1,000 in our production of Godspell'. Davenport reported that they would receive 'a limited liability company interest in The Godspell, LLC'.[27] This model allowed for these small-scale producers to share in revenue the show generated. The revival of *Godspell* did not, however, recoup its initial investment and closed at a loss.[28]

So what does the future hold for the changing paradigm of the Broadway producer? An intriguing possibly may be found in *The Prince of Broadway*, a retrospective musical that explores the career of legendary producer and director Hal Prince and marks the first time the work of a producer will be commemorated and recreated in this way. Adam Hetrick reported on Playbill.com that the production was originally aimed for Broadway in 2012, and then again in 2013, but noted that, 'issues with capitalization for the nearly $10 million musical delayed the production's Broadway arrival'.[29] In an unorthodox move, the show opened in Japan on 23 October 2015, with financing from Japanese

investors and featuring Broadway stars Shuler Hensley, Ramin Karimloo, and Emily Skinner. This is not only a musical about a producer but also appears to be a passion project for Prince, who along with collaborators including Susan Stroman and William Ivey Long, has championed the work for several years. While the white, male, and Jewish Prince would have made Max Bialystock proud when he reportedly told the show's original producer, 'It's my policy to not invest money in my own shows', he seems more than willing to helm a passion project that history suggests 'would never turn a profit with its budget, given the proven lack of box office heat for retrospectives'.[30] Fortunately for Prince and his collaborators, Manhatten Theatre Club scheduled *The Prince of Broadway* for a limited Broadway engagement beginning in August 2017. While it remains to be seen if *The Prince of Broadway* will play any role in reshaping the image of the Broadway producer in popular culture, the current influx of female producers in pop culture and beyond, as well as the small army of crowdfunders who are just arriving on Broadway, have already created a new image—and a new idea—of what it means to be a Broadway producer.

Notes

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2. Marsha Norman, 'Not There Yet', *American Theatre*, November 2009, http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/nov09/women.cfm, accessed 13 September 2015.
3. Norman, 'Not There Yet'; and Patricia Cohen, 'Rethinking Gender Bias in Theater', nytimes.com, 23 June 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/24/theater/24play.html?_r=0, accessed 30 October 2015.
4. Patricia Cohen, 'Rethinking Gender Bias in Theater', *New York Times*, 23 June 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/24/theater/24play.html, accessed 13 September 2015.
5. Edney, Chap. 2, this volume, 12.
6. Edney, Chap. 2, this volume, 15.
7. Also of note is the 2015 Broadway musical *Something Rotten*. While it is certainly about the process of creating a musical, it is a broad comedy set during Shakespeare's time, and the 'producer' character within that show, who in many ways is similar to the Brooks paradigm established above, is more reflective of the patronage system of the period than modern producing practices.
8. *Curtains*. Book by Rupert Holmes, original book and concept by Peter Stone, lyrics by Fred Ebb, with additional lyrics by John Kander and Rupert Holmes (New York: Theatrical Rights Worldwide, 2009), 63.
9. Ibid.

10. Chris Harnick, '"Smash" Ratings Drop: What Went Wrong With NBC's Musical Drama', Huffingtonpost.com, 6 March 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-harnick/smash-ratings-drop-what-wentwrong_b_2821404.html, accessed 19 May 2015.
11. Emily Nussbaum, '"Smash": It Had Me at "Hello!"' *The New Yorker*, 6 February 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/smash-it-had-me-at-hello, accessed 19 May 2015.
12. *Smash*, 'The Callback', directed by Michael Mayer, written and created by Theresa Rebeck, NBC, 13 February 2012.
13. *Curtains*, 106.
14. Edney, Chap. 2, this volume, 13.
15. Jason Zinoman, 'How To Save *Smash*,' Slate.com, 22 February 2012, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/curtain_call/2012/02/smash_anjelica_huston_s_broadway_producer_is_too_romantic_.html, accessed 19 May 2015.
16. *The Producers*, book by Mel Brooks and Thomas Meehan, lyrics by Mel Brooks (New York: Musical Theatre International, 2001), 54.
17. *Smash*, 'The Callback'.
18. Zinoman, 'How To Save *Smash*'.
19. Jesse McKinley, '"Taboo" to Close Next Month, At a Loss for Rosie O'Donnell', *New York Times*, 14 January 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/14/nyregion/taboo-to-close-next-month-at-a-loss-for-rosie-o-donnell.html, accessed 19 May 2015.
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25. George Takei, 'George Takei's Legacy Project', Indiegogo.com, https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/george-takei-s-legacy-project#/story, accessed 30 October 2015.
26. Ibid.
27. Ken Davenport, 'peopleofgodspell.com', http://www.peopleofgodspell.com, accessed 19 May 2015.
28. Gordon Cox, 'Broadway Investment Goes Digital with "On The Town"', Variety.com, 13 August 2014, http://variety.com/2014/legit/news/broadway-crowdfunding-investment-on-the--town-1201282160/, accessed 29 May 2015.
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