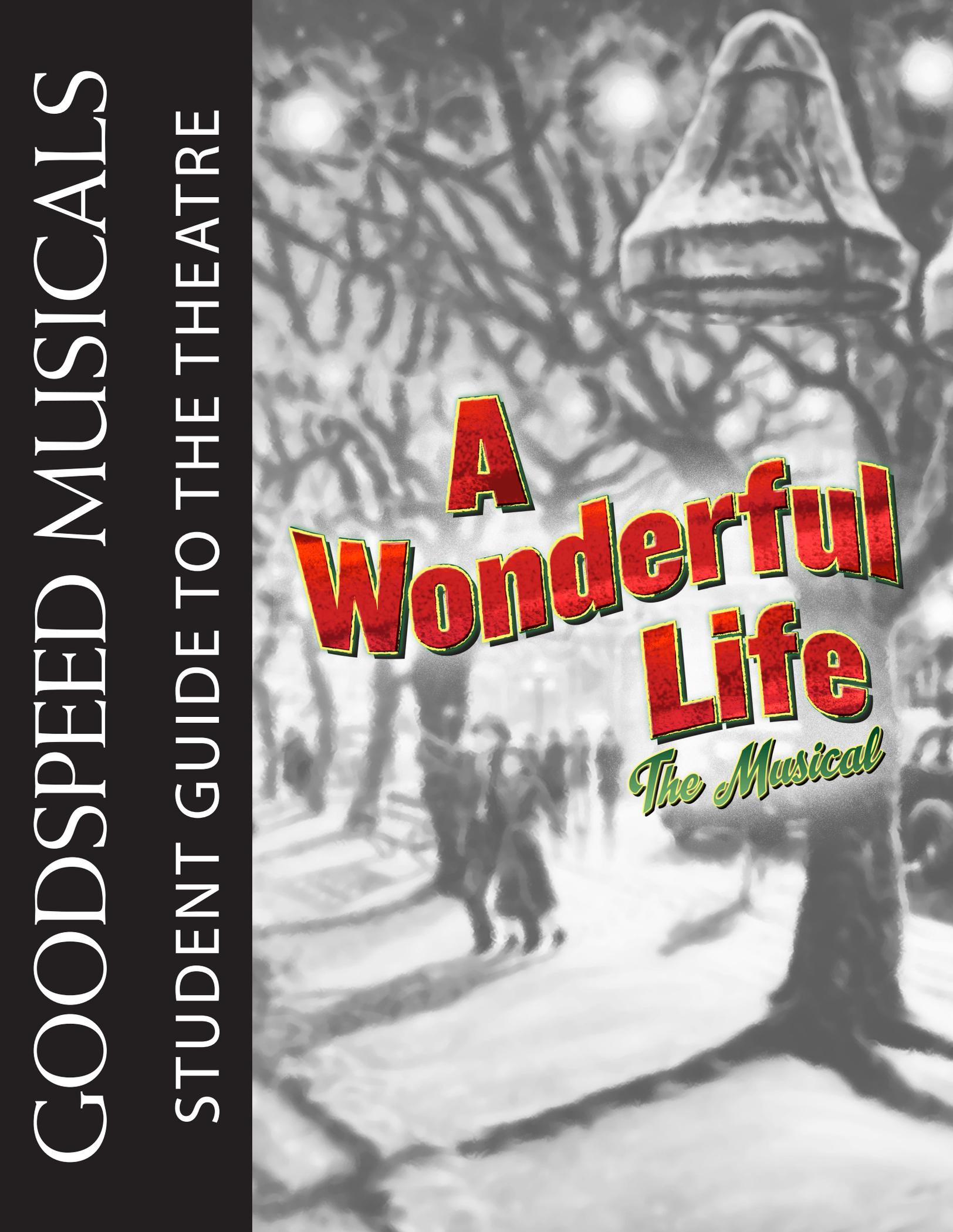


GOODSPEED MUSICALS

STUDENT GUIDE TO THE THEATRE



A Wonderful Life

The Musical

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A Wonderful Life
The Musical

A WONDERFUL LIFE
Goodspeed Opera House
Sept 18 - Nov 29, 2015

Adapted from the Frank Capra
film "It's A Wonderful Life"

Music by
JOE RAPOSO

Book and Lyrics by
SHELDON HARNICK

Lighting Design by
SCOTT BOLMAN

Costume Design by
JENNIFER CAPRIO

Scenic Design by
BRIAN PRATHER

Choreographed by
PARKER ESSE

Directed by
MICHAEL PERLMAN

Executive Director
MICHAEL GENNARO

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The Student Guide for *A Wonderful Life* was prepared by:
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THE CHARACTERS

A Wonderful Life
The Musical

GEORGE BAILEY: A small-town boy with big dreams. He longs to leave his hometown of Bedford Falls and travel the world, but he continuously puts his dreams on hold to support his family, friends, and save his family's business.

HARRY BAILEY: George Bailey's younger, happy-go-lucky brother.

UNCLE BILLY: George and Harry's scatterbrained uncle.

MILLIE BAILEY: Matriarch of the Bailey family and mother to George and Harry.

TOM BAILEY: George and Harry's father and the founder of the family business, the Bailey Building and Loan Association.

MARY HATCH: A beautiful but shy young woman who has had a life-long crush on George Bailey.

MR. POTTER: The wealthiest man in Bedford Falls and the man determined to put the Bailey Building and Loan Association out of business by any means necessary.

SAM WAINWRIGHT: A dashing young man and George's best friend.

CLARENCE JOHNSON: George's bumbling guardian angel who is desperate to earn his wings.

MATTHEW: An Executive Angel.

TOMMY, BETH & ZUZU BAILEY: George Bailey's children.

ERNIE, BERT, MR. MARTINI, MRS. MARTINI, KAREN, MRS. HATCH, VIOLET: Residents of Bedford Falls.



*Frank Vlastnik as Clarence in
Goodspeed's production of A Wonderful
Life. ©Diane Sobolewski.*



Duke Lafoon as George Bailey and Frank Vlastnik as Clarence in Goodspeed's production of A Wonderful Life. ©Diane Sobolewski.

stating that George is worth more dead than alive. Potter goes so far as to call the police and have them issue an arrest warrant for George on various charges. Disheartened and angry, George returns home and takes his emotions out on Mary and their children. Distraught and helpless, George considers ending his life. He is about to step in front of a train when he sees a strange man (Clarence) jump onto the railroad tracks. Unable to stand by and watch a man die, George gives up his plan of suicide and saves the stranger.

Clarence thanks George for his act of heroism and reveals his identity as an angel. George scoffs at this declaration and in the course of their conversation makes a wish that he had never been born. Clarence grants his

wish and George sees what would happen to his family, friends and hometown if he had never existed. Deeply shaken by what he witnesses, George begs Clarence to reverse his wish.

Again, Clarence grants his wish and George joyously greets the family and friends he took for granted. He also finds out that the people of Bedford Falls have taken up a collection to raise the \$8,000 needed to save George and the Building and Loan Association. The police and the auditor are so touched by the townspeople's gesture that they tear up the arrest warrant. Harry Bailey arrives amidst the celebration and toasts his brother, declaring him "the richest man in town."



JOE RAPOSO (*Music*) was born in Falls River Massachusetts in 1937 to Joseph Raposo and Maria (Mary) Ascencao. Joe Raposo Senior was an accomplished violinist, pianist and classical guitarist who passed his love of music on to his son. Raposo graduated from B.M.C Durfee High School in Falls River and continued his education in the undergraduate division of Harvard University. He studied music in school and was well known for writing scores to several Hasty Pudding shows. In 1965 he followed the advice of a friend and moved to New York City to pursue a career as a songwriter.

Raposo worked as a musical supervisor, arranger and composer on various projects around New York City including the original off-Broadway production of *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*. He became famous in 1969 for his work with Jim Henson and the creation of the iconic children's television show, *Sesame Street*. He wrote the "Sesame Street Theme" as well as many of its most popular songs, such as "Being Green," "C is for Cookie," "Sing," and "ABC-DEF-GHI". He also served as the Musical Director for *The Electric Company*, a television series designed for children that had outgrown *Sesame Street* from 1971 to 1974, composed the music for the HBO animated adaptation *Madeline* and the Canadian cartoon series *The Smoggies*.

Though he is primarily known for his work in television, Raposo contributed music to several stage musicals including an adaptation of the text and poems of *A Man's a Man* by Bertolt Brecht and a stage musical about *Raggedy Ann*, which was performed in the Soviet Union and had a brief Broadway run in 1986. He also collaborated with Sheldon Harnick on a musical adaptation of the film *It's a Wonderful Life* entitled *A Wonderful Life*.

Raposo contributed theme songs, incidental music and scores to various projects on stage and screen including *The Great Muppet Caper*, *Curious George*, *Shining Time Station*, *Three's Company*, *House of Flowers*, *Play it Again, Sam*, *Half a Sixpence* and *The Mad Show*. His song "The First Time It Happens," from *The Great Muppet Caper*, was nominated for an Academy Award in 1981 but lost to "Arthur's Theme" from the film *Arthur*.

Raposo passed away in 1989 of Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma at the age of 51. Despite his relatively short career, friends, family and children all over the world remember him fondly.



Joe Raposo and Big Bird on the set of Sesame Street.



CLICK HERE
to listen to Joe Raposo sing "It's Not Easy Being Green."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRZ-lxZ46ng>



CLICK HERE
to watch a Sesame Street montage of "Sing"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wH4HZuz_Vjs

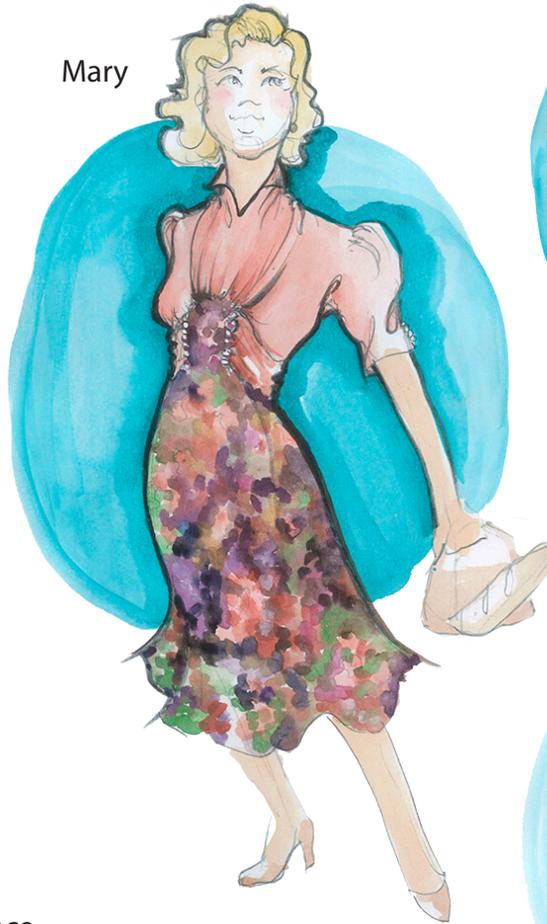


BEHIND THE SCENES COSTUMES BY JENNIFER CAPRIO

George Bailey



Mary



Mr. Potter



Clarence



Violet

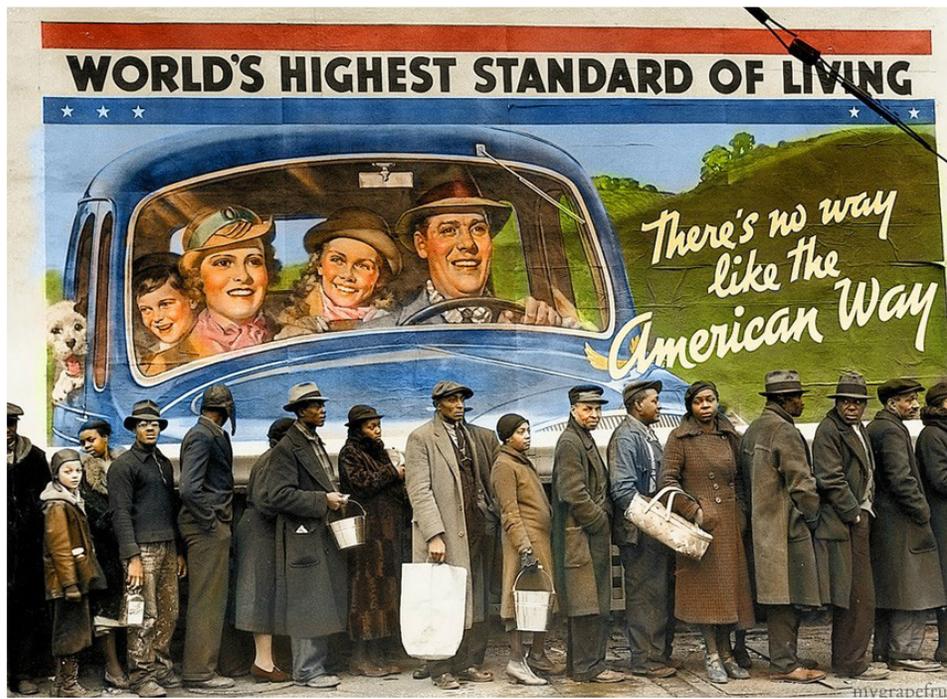


Matthew



C.D. 4706
COSTUME DESIGNER

SIGNATURE 



This 1937 photo by Margaret Bourke-White's shows a line of African Americans waiting for bread after the Louisville floods. They are ironically framed by a poster in the background depicting a white, middle-class American family, who are enjoying the fruits of the American Dream.

according to urban policy expert Matt Lassiter, outlined the expectation "if you worked hard and played by the rules, you deserved certain things. You deserved security and decent shelter and to not have to worry that you might lose your house to bankruptcy." To, once again reference Tom Bailey, Americans simply wanted to be one of the lucky ones, one of the favored few, who were able to earn their way.

The events of *A Wonderful Life* traverse this economic journey from the 1920s to the late 1940s and depict the inner struggle that the pursuit of the American dream has on the citizens of Bedford Falls, specifically George Bailey. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the American dream as "an American social ideal that stresses egalitarianism and especially material prosperity." Material wealth is often viewed as the hallmark of a successful life and the pinnacle of the American dream. This perception of the American dream can make people without great financial wealth feel as though they have failed. George spends the entirety of *A Wonderful Life* desperately in search of the best opportunity, the most exotic trip or whatever else he thinks will satisfy his pursuit of happiness. He negotiates his way through the ever-changing time periods yet stays focused on the idea of monetary

wealth as the ultimate characterization of success. Meanwhile, the new American dream is focusing on the desire for home ownership and George does not realize the importance of his role in making this a reality for members of the community.

Though the details of the American dream may have changed throughout history, finding a place to belong has always been at its heart. *A Wonderful Life* is a reminder that the American dream is not something that can be measured by monetary means but rather refers to the choices individuals must make for their own lives. By using *A Wonderful Life* as a lens to examine what the American dream means, it becomes clear that the answer is extraordinarily simple. For many, the American dream is a place to belong. George embodies the best parts of this interpretation of the American dream both for his eventual realization of how much he values his family and community and by providing countless individuals a way to find their own place to belong. *A Wonderful Life* blends American optimism and family values with the spirit of Christmas to create a powerful, sentimental portrayal of life and the American dream.

IT'S A WONDERFUL PHILOSOPHY

On the surface, *A Wonderful Life* appears to be a straightforward story of a man who learns the importance of his own existence. However, if we examine the nuances of the story more intently, we can detect a stark contrast between George Bailey and Henry Potter. *A Wonderful Life* depicts the struggle between these two small-town bankers and their ethical visions. A case can be made for these main characters representing aspects of utilitarian and capitalist philosophies.



George Bailey shares his money with the people of Bedford Falls in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

George Bailey's reflection of aspects of Utilitarianism

George Bailey is the American "everyman." He is honest, hardworking, honorable and a pillar of his community; his behavior represents utilitarian ideas. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines utilitarianism as "a doctrine that the useful is the good and that the determining consideration of right conduct should be the usefulness of its consequences; specifically a theory that the aim of action should be the largest possible balance of pleasure over pain or the greatest happiness of the greatest number."

George is hopelessly divided between the desire to serve his community and family selflessly and his desire to obtain financial success. Despite his

yearning to put himself before the needs of his community, he instinctively does the "right" thing for the most people on

several occasions. When his father dies and the family business is in jeopardy, George willingly gives up his dream of college and agrees to run the Building and Loan to save the members of his community from the prospect of living in deplorable conditions.

He displays another example of his utilitarian tendencies when there is a run on the local bank. When the local financial institution physically runs out of money, George gives the people of Bedford Falls the funds that he had saved for his honeymoon. Repeatedly, George sacrifices his own wants and needs for those of his community. He acts in the interest of the greater good and practices Jeremy Bentham's policy of utilitarianism "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong." In following the utilitarian path, George denies himself the financial success he craves and dooms himself to become his father; tied to a marginal company that is always on the verge of bankruptcy.

Henry Potter's reflection of aspects of Capitalism

Henry Potter is George's rival in the small town of Bedford Falls, a successful business man and an opportunist of the highest order. If George represents utilitarianism, putting the needs of the many ahead of the needs of the few, then Potter represents pure capitalism and the pursuit of individual and corporate wealth. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines capitalism as "a way of organizing an economy so that the things that are used to make and transport products are owned by individuals and companies rather than by the government." As implied by the definition, capitalism usually refers to an economic philosophy; however, Henry Potter represents the idea of capitalism being used as a moral and ethical standard as well. By allowing his capitalist business theories to become ethical guidelines, Potter's view of the world shifts and the lives of his fellow community members become commodities. A mental shift to capitalist ethics allows Potter to indulge his monetary wants without concerning himself with the well being of others.



George Bailey in front of the sign for Pottersville in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

Continued ●●●●●●●●●●▶

IT'S A WONDERFUL PHILOSOPHY CONTINUED

As the ultimate capitalist, Potter is continuously chasing financial rewards and does so at the cost of the people of Bedford Falls. Unlike George, he doesn't care if individuals are unsafe or live in rickety apartment buildings with no heat. When there is a run on the town bank, his concern is for the institution rather than the individuals affected; he also sees this as a business opportunity and bails the bank out of financial ruin in order to increase his own wealth. Harper's Magazine published a quote in 2005 that succinctly sums up this money oriented view of the world, "Capitalism is at once far too rational, trusting in nothing that it cannot weigh and measure, and far too little as well, accumulating wealth as an end in itself."

How these philosophies play out in the musical

Capitalism and utilitarianism are not polar opposites; they simply approach things from contradictory angles much like Potter and George. George Bailey and Henry Potter lock themselves in a battle that neither can win. Though George is the philanthropic hero of *A Wonderful Life*, his good-hearted gestures would do Bedford Falls little good without the economic stability that Potter provides. Yet, at the same time, allowing Bedford Falls to

become Pottersville and focusing solely on the economic aspect would not be healthy for the community either. George and Potter are two sides of the same coin and though they detest each other, they are necessary for the others survival.

The idea of George Bailey and Henry Potter representing different philosophic or even governmental points of view is not new. In 1946, one year after RKO released the film version of *It's a Wonderful Life*, the FBI issued a memo stating that the film could be communist propaganda. A segment of the document alleged "to the picture 'It's a Wonderful Life,' [redacted] stated in substance that the film represented rather obvious attempts to discredit bankers by casting Lionel Barrymore as a 'scrooge-type' so that he would be the most hated man in the picture. This, according to these sources, is a common trick used by Communists. [In] addition, [redacted] stated that, in his opinion, this picture deliberately maligned the upper class, attempting to show the people who had money were mean and despicable characters." Frank Capra, the director of the film, denied any Communist agenda and said that the theme of the film was truly about "the individual's belief in himself."

With regard to the picture, "It's A Wonderful Life", [redacted] stated in substance that the film represented a rather obvious attempt to discredit bankers by casting Lionel Barrymore as a "scrooge-type" so that he would be the most hated man in the picture. This, according to these sources, is a common trick used by Communists.

In addition, [redacted] stated that, in his opinion, this picture deliberately maligned the upper class, attempting to show the people who had money were mean and despicable characters. [redacted] related that if he had made this picture portraying the banker, he would have shown this individual to have been following the rules as laid down by the State Bank Examiners in connection with making loans. Further, [redacted] stated that the scene wouldn't have "suffered at all" in portraying the banker as a man who was protecting funds put in his care by private individuals and adhering to the rules governing the loan of that money rather than portraying the part as it was shown. In summary, [redacted] stated that it was not necessary to make the banier such a mean character and "I would never have done it that way".

An excerpt from the 1946 FBI memo stating that *It's A Wonderful Life* was communist propoganda.

WHAT IS A WONDERFUL LIFE?

A Wonderful Life
The Musical



A scene from It's A Wonderful Life.

Musical theatre allows its audiences to suspend their disbelief and bask in an alternate version of reality. In this theatrical version of the world, it is commonplace for a character to burst into song, fifty relative strangers to enter a dance break perfectly in sync and for years to pass in a literal blink of an eye. There are numerous theatrical forms in the world besides musical theatre

with their own standards and peculiarities; however, they all rely on the same basic framework to tell their stories. There is drama, tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, satire, romantic comedy and realism to name a few. Musical theatre, by its very nature, is usually not terribly realistic since people don't often nonchalantly burst into song in the course of their everyday lives, yet, it can contain elements of realism. *A Wonderful Life* is an interesting example of a piece of theatre and though it is clearly a musical, it does not fall neatly into one of the genres mentioned above.

A Wonderful Life contains elements of tragedy within its story as it chronicles the life of George Bailey. The audience watches George deal with the death of his father and become trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of disappointment until he can no longer cope and contemplates suicide. However, *A Wonderful Life* it is not quite a tragedy since bumbling Clarence, Angel Second Class, saves him.

A Wonderful Life is certainly a tale with amusing characters that contains a very happy ending, so perhaps it could be classified as a comedy. However, as heartwarming as the ending may be, it incorporates death, betrayal, theft, jealousy, religious aspects and the idea of suicide. For *A Wonderful Life*, the genre of comedy does not seem to be a good fit either.

If viewed through a satirical lens, both George and Henry Potter could be characters created by the authors to show the foibles of greed, materialism and blind ambition. Satire exposes the weakness or vices of an individual or a society and ridicules these negative behaviors. George is so caught up in the idea of a "perfect" life that he comes perilously close to losing everything he holds dear and Potter resorts to petty thievery out of anger. However, *A Wonderful Life* does not hold either man up as an example of what to do or not do. There does not seem to be an obvious bias in the work that leads the audience to scorn or ridicule one man over the other.

The genre of tragicomedy may be the best fit for this particular musical though the definition provided by *Merriam-Webster* is vague, "a drama or a situation blending tragic and comic elements." Combining the idea of tragicomedy with romance, which is defined as "a narrative treating imaginary characters involved in events remote in time or place and usually heroic, adventurous, or mysterious," may be the most fitting classification for *A Wonderful Life*. Combining these genres takes into account the serious aspects of the show, its uplifting conclusion, the love story between George and Mary and the fantastical elements provided by Clarence. However, this classification is simply a combination of four different genres into one phrase, a romantic tragicomedy.

A Wonderful Life is a piece of musical theatre that defies straight forward classification. However, the beauty of *A Wonderful Life* is that it is a narrative that encompasses so many different ideas that it develops into its own unique creation. The audience views a work that balances elements of tragedy, realism, comedy and romance.

INTERESTING FACTS

A Wonderful Life
The Musical



Jimmy Stewart receiving the French Croix de Guerre with Palm in 1944

- Filming for *It's a Wonderful Life* took place during a summer heat wave.
- Jimmy Stewart served in WWII and was one of the highest-ranking officers in the United States Auxiliary Air Force.
- Casting directors considered Ginger Rogers, Olivia de Havilland, Martha Scott and Ann Dvorak for the role of Mary Bailey before ultimately awarding the role to Donna Reed.
- *It's a Wonderful Life* is the second film to star Jimmy Stewart that Sheldon Harnick helped turn into a musical. *She Loves Me* is based on the film *The Shop Around the Corner*.
- Jimmy Stewart was 37 years old when he portrayed George Bailey as an 18 year old and beyond.
- A short story written by Phillip Van Doren Stern in 1939 entitled *The Greatest Gift* was the inspiration for both *A Wonderful Life* and *It's a Wonderful Life*.
- Bedford Falls is not a real place. Frank Capra combined the towns of Seneca Falls and Bedford Hills to create the town name.
- The protagonist of *The Greatest Gift* is George Pratt not George Bailey.
- Joe Raposo passed away before a complete production of *A Wonderful Life* was staged.



**CLICK HERE to
watch the making of
*It's A Wonderful Life***

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=lhaKfDyRoH4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhaKfDyRoH4)

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THEATRE ETIQUETTE

A Wonderful Life
The Musical

Seeing a musical at the Goodspeed Opera House is a unique and exciting experience. All the members of the production, both cast and crew, work hard to give you a great show. As an audience member, you also have an important job. You must help the performers give their best performance possible. You can do this by practicing these rules of theater etiquette:

- Do laugh when the performance is funny.
- Do applaud when the performance is over. Applause is how you say “thank you” to the performer. The actors will bow as you applaud. That is how they say “Thank you for coming.”
- Do stand and applaud if you thought the show was outstanding.
- Don’t forget to turn off your cell phone. A ringing or buzzing phone can be very distracting. It can also be embarrassing for you if it is your phone that is disrupting the show!
- Don’t text during the performance.
- Make sure to visit the restroom before the production begins.
- Don’t speak or whisper during the performance. Whispering is still speaking, so only in an emergency should whispering occur.
- Remember that the overture (introductory music) in musical theatre is part of the performance, so remain silent when the show begins.
- Don’t take pictures during the performance. It can be very distracting to the actors and it can result in an accident.
- Don’t put your feet up on the seats or kick the seat in front of you.
- Do sit ONLY when your seat is in the folded down position.
- Do remain in your seat for the entire performance. If you must leave, exit during intermission. In an emergency, calmly walk toward the nearest exit.



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