

Under the Tent

Notes on Musicarnival's Production Years, 1954-65



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Homography and Musical Numbers Staged by James R. Nygren
Set Designs by Don Ingalls

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(In order of their appearance)

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Music Director	LEVIN MACKEN
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THE
MUSICAL
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Under the Tent

Notes on Musicarnival's Production Years, 1954-65

* *

Written by Bill Rudman and Rebecca Paller

To accompany audio restorations produced by

The Musical Theater Project

*The Lt. Col. Robert "Jim" Price Musicarnival Audio Archive is part of
the John L. Price, Jr. Musicarnival Archives*



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The mission of THE MUSICAL THEATER PROJECT, founded in 2001, is to foster a deep appreciation of the classic American musical—and the social and cultural history surrounding it—by creating programs that educate as well as entertain people of all ages. Through its concert and cabaret series, *The Song Is You!*, and its school program, *Kids Love Musicals!* TMTP serves 10,000 Northern Ohioans each year. The organization also reaches more than 100,000 listeners annually by way of the WCLV (Cleveland) radio program *Footlight Parade*, and thousands more through the program's national distribution on public radio stations and SiriusXM Satellite Radio. For more information, visit www.MusicalTheaterProject.org

Curatorial Staff

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PAUL KLEIN served as editorial assistant.

SPECIAL THANKS Diana Price, Michael Price, Judith Daykin, Amy Dawson, Michael Ruffing, Paul Klein, Ken Bloom, Joshua Ritter, Kathryn Micar, Heather Meeker, Michael Gennaro, Ted Chapin, Bob Noll, Juli Edberg, John Vacha, Lainie Hadden and Robert Conrad



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Foreword

By Diana Price

In 1964, during Musicarnival's 10th-anniversary summer season, its founder and producer included these words in the program: "We care desperately about doing outstanding work.... We also have a mental outlook different from that of any other musical stock company in the country. We do *not* look upon ourselves as a stock company. We are a group of wild-eyed fanatics who dare to attempt to match Broadway quality with the handicaps of limited hours, dollars and manpower—and try to do it with every production. In short, we revel in making our points the hard way....

"To Musicarnival, every production has meant a new challenge to extend ourselves to the utmost limit of our talent, imagination and dedication, so that we might know the one true satisfaction that makes the perils, insecurities, mistakes, disappointments, failures, frustrations all worthwhile—the certain and sure knowledge that we have done our utmost best, and that our total effort has produced a product of true artistic beauty."

Musicarnival's founder and producer was my father, John L. Price, Jr. (1920–2012). He spoke—and wrote—the truth, as Bill Rudman and his colleagues demonstrate time and again in their annotations, and as we hear for ourselves in the immense collection of recorded performances that comprise the Lt. Col. Robert "Jim" Price Musicarnival Audio Archive.

Taken as a whole, the work produced by JP (my name for him) and his fellow "wild-eyed fanatics" was extraordinary. He opened Musicarnival to give expression to his own passion for America's rich musical theater heritage and literature, and to provide Cleveland—and for six winters, West Palm Beach—with professional productions of shows by some of our greatest songwriters: Rodgers & Hammerstein, Irving Berlin, Lerner & Loewe, and his favorite, Frank Loesser, among many others, including the young Stephen Sondheim.

Musicarnival produced its own shows for a dozen seasons (1954–1965) before it succumbed to Vegas and touring packages. But in the earlier years documented in this archive, it set the standard for productions in the summer tent theaters that had been sprouting up all over the country. No other venue could touch it for the quality and creativity of its productions. Nobody else in the industry was paying that much attention to casting, technology and fidelity to the product. JP's passion for musical theater manifested itself in all these aspects.

He ran a tight ship. In the "crew show" one year, the staff member impersonating him bellowed out the order, "This isn't summer stock. This is the STC, the Strategic Tent Command." Everyone who worked under his command loved him. Legions of alumni look back on their Musicarnival days as turning points in their lives, the time when they learned their craft, the time when they did their best work. I even know some stagehands, a breed not usually sentimental, who were personally crushed to see the tent fold in 1975. It was more than just a job to them, and it was JP who created an atmosphere where everybody loved what they were doing, and worked even harder to give it their best.



Founder and producer John L. Price, Jr. in 1954

Musicarnival left several legacies. The alums who got their training there are testimony enough to its status as the premier training ground and producing tent theater of its time. It bequeathed its innovative technology to future entrepreneurs of musical and arena theaters. And finally, a lot of happy and satisfied theatergoers remember having a good time there. They remember the man in the red jacket, standing in the parking lot after the show, waving at each car and saying, “Good night, folks, and thanks for coming!”

My siblings, Jock (John L. III), Mat (Philip Mather) and Mikey (Madeleine Emma) and I thank you for your interest in this collection; we thank two stellar libraries working in partnership—Cleveland Public Library and Scherer Library of Musical Theatre—for their commitment to housing it; we thank The Musical Theater Project’s Bill Rudman for his leadership in scrupulously compiling and annotating the archive; and we thank Evelyn Ward, retired head of literature at Cleveland Public Library, for her own passion in coming up with the idea.

And now, to quote JP’s opening line, delivered every night with brio when he came down the runway (Aisle 1, as we called it) and took the stage: “Good evening, neighbors, and welcome to Musicarnival!”

July 2016

Some Words About the Significance of the Audio Archive and Our Approach to the Project

By Bill Rudman

“Labor of love” is the best phrase to describe this four-year project, accomplished by a team of seven. It began when Cleveland Public Library’s Evelyn Ward permitted me to produce a digital transfer of a seven-inch reel-to-reel tape of *Finian’s Rainbow* starring Martyn Green and recorded live at Musicarnival in the summer of 1958. Johnny Price had given the library hundreds of tapes, and now, with his health failing, Evelyn thought the time had come to focus on the recordings.

As I listened to the overture from the show on CD, with members of the Cleveland Orchestra in the pit, my jaw dropped. This could be a major archaeological dig in the field: complete recordings of dozens of musicals that we now term “classic,” produced by a top-notch arena theater during the halcyon days of American summer stock.

It soon became clear that nothing like this collection of recordings existed in our country—and for a very good reason. Whenever Johnny flipped the switch to tape a performance of one of his productions (and he taped anywhere between one and six performances of the same musical), he did so surreptitiously. If the performers’ and musicians’ unions—and the companies that licensed the shows—had known about the reel-to-reel tape recorder stashed in his office, he would have been in serious trouble.

But aren’t we glad he stayed the course? The archive contains not only more than 110 productions of musicals, but also a number of American and European operettas—and even operas. As his daughter Diana observes, “It was Johnny Price, alone among his fellow impresarios, who snuck into the summer schedule such works as *Tosca*, *Carmen* and *The Ballad of Baby Doe*—all three starring Beverly Sills before she became Beverly Sills.”

Perhaps the biggest thrill for us in opening his time capsule was to hear this cornucopia of musical theater played in front of an audience at a time when the art form thrived in the center of American popular culture. As I point out in my notes for the 1955 *South Pacific*—the first of seven productions of the Rodgers & Hammerstein masterwork mounted between 1954 and 1965—something is in the air that could not be recaptured today. With America only 10 years out of World War II, we know that many in the audience bought the war with them into the theater. Their identification with the story is audible and profound.

If *South Pacific* is the most extreme example, a bond between artists and audience can be felt in all of the recordings. What did arts-inclined middle-class Americans do in their leisure time during these years? They attended orchestra concerts and saw movies—and musicals. Even an American operetta such as Musicarnival’s 1959 showing of *The Student Prince* (1924) would have been quite familiar to the older members of Johnny’s audience. It belonged to a tradition they felt part of.

And then there are the unfamiliar works: for example, Lerner & Loewe's *Paint Your Wagon* (one of Johnny's personal favorites), Styne & Cahn's *High Button Shoes*, Arlen & Harburg's *Bloomer Girl* and Jerry Herman and Don Appell's *Milk and Honey*. To say that full-length recordings documenting these musicals are rare is an understatement.

I was able to place all of the musicals and the American operettas under an audio microscope, and in the annotations the reader will encounter my bias toward the shows staged between 1958 and 1962 by Donald Driver. By Johnny's own admission, this was the golden age of his tent. The producer told me Driver was a "genius"; his subsequent work in New York included the smash hit (and New York Drama Critics' Circle award winner) *Your Own Thing*, which Driver not only directed but co-authored. Even without seeing his productions, Driver's imagination can be savored, and the icing on the cake is that he frequently took on featured roles under his own direction and choreography. You may find several of those performances to be definitive.

A word about the limitation of hearing but not seeing: There's no question we're missing out on something marvelous, because in these early days of the tent-theater movement, pioneers like Don Driver, Johnny Price and their designers were making up the production values as they went along. Diana Price again: "No other tent arena in the country could match Musicarnival for creative solutions to staging problems that were unique to the arena space. The basic architecture of a tripod [explained in the next section] permitted the flying in of scenery typically associated with the proscenium stage. It was capable of suspending heavy set pieces—such as the roof of the smokehouse in *Oklahoma!*

"It also permitted another technological innovation: Musicarnival was the only theater-in-the-round to install three overhead follow spots. These allowed the designer to create more sensitive ambient or mood lighting, while allowing the audience to easily see the performers.... Other theaters were content with basic props, but Johnny insisted that Musicarnival's productions have concept sets, complete with floor design and overhead valance. The valance covering the technical equipment in the grid was an opportunity for designers to create more atmosphere; patrons who entered the theater before the lights went down saw an eye-catching design that set the mood. The floor of the stage was even painted as part of the design." Particularly in the Driver years—and the critics took note of it time and again—the productions were excitingly fluid.

So we find ourselves listening to the shows dismayed that none of them was filmed or videotaped, and I must prepare you for the fact that the audio quality itself is wildly variable. (The recordings are best listened to with script in hand.) Yet the essence and rhythm of each production always come through. Because Musicarnival worked on a mission-nearly-impossible schedule—which is to say, the exigencies of summer stock—there is no doubt that some shows are better than others. In fact, some are much better, and Johnny, a singular blend of dreamer and realist, would be the first to admit it.

Even so, I found myself in a strange, perhaps unprecedented position here. I was turning back the clock 50 or 60 years, and I asked myself: Beyond providing a note that would place each musical in its historical context (a task that fell to Rebecca Paller in the case of the operas and European operettas), should I dare to "review" them as if I were sitting in the third row under the tent? I

decided to go for it—with Diana’s blessing to call ’em as I heard ’em. (Incidentally, Becky and I tried to avoid repeating information, but in some cases repetition seemed advisable.)

For any reader/listener who is tempted to follow the artistic fortunes of this theater with us over the 12 summers in Cleveland and the six winters in West Palm Beach, my objective was to vigorously assess the productions: I wanted you to feel my joy, but also my disappointment when, for instance, the cherished Joan Kibrig—who probably starred in more musicals than anyone else—was at less than her best due to miscasting. The point is, throughout the project I lived these shows, and I wanted to share that visceral response.

I also wanted to share my admiration for the actors, singers, dancers and musicians who ultimately make or break a musical. We are dealing with an era when the craft of musical theater performance had reached a peak, and the fact that these companies often gave letter-perfect evening performances after an unbelievably short rehearsal period—and that they did it while rehearsing the next show during the day—required consummate professionalism.

Most of them are gone now, and their era has long passed. As a popular art form, musicals are always emblematic of our culture, and like so much in this American life that followed Johnny Price’s production years, we may embrace many of the changes. But we must also preserve that which is in danger of being lost.



A packed house for Li'l Abner

Background on the Birth of Musicarnival

Producer **John L. (Johnny) Price, Jr.** spoke the first words from the Musicarnival stage on the opening night of *Oklahoma!*, June 25, 1954 (the performance preserved on CD). Already an irrepressible showman, Johnny greeted the audience with “Good evening, neighbors and friends, and welcome to the fulfillment of a dream.”

A full account of how this exuberant actor—and WEWS-TV’s “Mr. Weather-Eye”—achieved his dream can be found in John Vacha’s book *The Music Went ’Round and Around: The Story of Musicarnival* (Kent and London: The Kent State University Press, 2004). But a few points must be made in laying the groundwork for these annotations:

- In the first chapter of a memoir he unfortunately never completed, Johnny writes that he “first learned about musical tent theaters from my pal, classmate and fraternity brother, **Bill Boehm**,” who had appeared under a tent in Skaneateles, New York. Interestingly, the first tent season had been held just five years earlier in Lambertville, New Jersey, under the auspices of producer St. John Terrell. Boehm believed summer theaters-in-the-round were the wave of the future, and for the next 15 or 20 years, he was right.
- The rapid growth of the tent theater movement—and it can be termed a movement without risk of overstatement—reflected the impact of post-World War II prosperity, suburbanization, increased leisure time, and the ability of these theaters to offer truly “popular prices”: usually half the admission charged for a national company touring major cities. Terrell told *Saturday Review*: “The big reason for our success is accessibility. The legitimate theaters are located in obsolete structures in obsolete towns. They no longer provide easy access. People don’t want to go into the center of town. They want to get out of the snarl, not into it.”
- The 34-year-old Johnny Price was soon convinced; Terrell’s antiurban bias was beginning to play out in Cleveland, then experiencing a wave of suburban sprawl. The triumvirate he formed with **Robert H. Bishop III** (president) and **Alfred M. Rankin** (secretary) capitalized the venture at \$120,000 and decided on the suburban, still-rustic setting of Warrensville Heights, a stone’s throw from Thistledown Race Track. When it opened, Musicarnival would be the ninth tent theater in the country.
- Clevelanders will be interested in the names of the key investors who made it happen: In addition to Price, Rankin and Bishop, the board of directors comprised a who’s who of mid-century community leaders: **Kenyon C. Bolton, Frank E. Taplin, David S. Ingalls, Philip R. Mather, Frank Griesinger, Amasa Bishop, James D. Ireland**—and **Bob Hope**. Said Johnny: “They wanted it to be a popular cultural asset, just like the orchestra and the art museum.”
- Although the idea of presenting musicals in tents had become a trend elsewhere in the country, the 2,000-seat Musicarnival, noted Johnny, “marked the first time that an arena theater has been housed in a *circular* tent.” The architect was **Robert Little**, who designed what Johnny called “the most unusual and safest tent in history ... [and] one of the most beautiful. It was completely circular, a deep blue, with festive orange-and-white alternating side wall panels. Its uniqueness and strength were centered in three steel poles 10 inches in diameter which met at the top like a teepee. They were linked to a bale ring from which were stretched 36 radial steel cables that tied

off to steel eyes in 36 ‘dead men’—concrete rectangles five feet long, two feet wide and four feet deep, embedded in good old Ohio clay. I don’t care how hard the wind blew. That tent wasn’t going anywhere!” (And it didn’t.)

- From the beginning, Johnny assembled a company of Class A Equity (professional) performers, blending New York talent with members of the resident acting company at the Cleveland Play House. And in the pit, in this period before the development of the summertime Blossom Music Center, could be found a number of musicians from the Cleveland Orchestra.

- The artistic team impressed: **William C. Boehm** as director (he would later form Cleveland’s Singing Angels); **Boris Kogan**, formerly the accompanist of the famed Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, as musical director; **Ben Silverberg**, a veteran of the Cleveland Orchestra, as concertmaster; and **James Nygren**, a respected dancer/choreographer for network television, as the tent’s choreographer.

- This is how the ads described the theater on the day *Oklahoma!* opened: “All Professional Productions; Performances Rain or Shine; Comfortable Yacht-Type Arm Chairs; Every Seat Within 44 Feet of Arena Stage; Unlimited Convenient Parking.”

- Five days after the opening, *Life* magazine photographer Gordon Parks traveled to suburban Warrensville Heights to get shots of the production, the audience and the whole occasion of being at Musicarnival for a story that would be titled “Summer Night’s Surprise: Rural show business flourishes with unexpected faces in unconventional places.” The writer went on to cheer “Cleveland’s handsome new circular tent, which gives every spectator a head-on view of the stage.”—**B. R.**



MUSICARNIVAL’s distinguished Board of Directors (left to right): Phillip R. Mather, Frank K. Griesinger, President Alfred M. Rankin, Amasa Bishop, James D. Ireland and (not in photo) Kenyon C. Bolton.

From The Cleveland Press

1954 Season

OKLAHOMA!

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 25–July 4, 1954 (New York opening: March 31, 1943;
2,212 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on the play *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Ridge Bond (Curly), Carolyn Adair (Laurey), Judy Rawlings (Ado Annie Carnes), Don Driver (Will Parker), Rowan Tudor (Jud Fry), Harold Gary (Ali Hakim), Mary Marlo (Aunt Eller Murphy)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’,” “The Surrey With the Fringe on Top,” “I Cain’t Say No,” “Many a New Day,” “People Will Say We’re in Love,” “Pore Jud,” “Out of My Dreams,” “The Farmer and the Cowman,” “Oklahoma!”

SYNOPSIS

The musical is set in Indian Territory soon after the turn of the century and is mostly concerned with whether the decent Curly McClain or the menacing Jud Fry will take Laurey Williams to the box social. Though in a fit of pique Laurey chooses Jud, she really loves Curly, and they soon make plans to marry. At their wedding, there is a joyous celebration of Oklahoma’s impending statehood; Jud is accidentally killed in a fight with Curly; and the newlyweds prepare to ride off in their surrey with the fringe on top. A comic secondary plot has to do with a romantic triangle involving man-crazy Ado Annie Carnes, cowboy Will Parker and peddler Ali Hakim.—*Stanley Green*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

There is not much left to be said about the first musical written by Richard Rodgers (1902-79) and Oscar Hammerstein (1895-1960) at this late date. In its unity and so-called “integration” of character-driven music, lyrics, spoken dialogue, dance and design, *Oklahoma!* set the gold standard for the next 20 years in the development of our musical theater. It was all cut from the same cloth, or as Richard Rodgers remarked some years later, “The orchestrations sound the way the costumes look.” Even today the skill and grace with which the storytelling elements are interwoven can astonish us.

But that is about form; the great gift of *Oklahoma!* is how form follows and supports *content* at every turn. No wonder Oscar Hammerstein said to his wife a few hours before the opening: “I don’t know what to do if they don’t like this. I don’t know what to do because this is the only kind of show I can write.” In other words, it was the only kind of show he believed in.

Though *Oklahoma!* is half carefree musical comedy (the team’s more serious “musical plays” would soon follow), there is honesty and even emotional depth (consider Jud Fry) in these portraits of early-20th-century men and women. As we know, the timing for this musical was right: It opened during the dark days of World War II, when the outcome of the war was not at all certain. As Celeste Holm (the original Ado Annie) recalled years later, “It was marvelous to be part of something that affected so many people’s lives.... I think actually *Oklahoma!* changed the way people felt about being American”—in other words, it made us think deeply about what we were fighting for. And choreographer Agnes de Mille recalls in her memoirs how servicemen preparing to depart New York City for Europe could be seen weeping in the back of Broadway’s St. James Theatre.

So *Oklahoma!* is about things that matter. For me, the most insightful writing on this musical in recent years has come from Ethan Mordden, who stresses the importance of community in nearly all the Rodgers & Hammerstein musicals: “Not only can Oklahoma become a state: Oklahoma *must*. Statehood is an affirmation of individuality within citizenship, of liberty within the corporation. Only when antagonistic factions [the farmer and the cowman] make peace can the Union emerge.... Only when individuals pursue a fair and responsible and personal agenda can the Union prosper.”

As I write this in our own polarized era, Mordden’s words seem all too relevant.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

This inaugural production can be challenging to listen to: It was recorded by Johnny on paper tape for his archive, and the first season had no microphones to pick up the actors' voices, except for one suspended in the fly space and connected to Johnny's reel-to-reel tape recorder.

Nevertheless, the recording offers a thrilling document of the opening night—not only because the capacity audience of Clevelanders came to celebrate it, but also because there is such a strong, audible connection between these 2,000 men and women and the musical itself. In 1954 *Oklahoma!* was just 11 years old and had not yet been filmed. Johnny obtained from the Rodgers & Hammerstein office the first license to produce the musical in a summer theater after more than 10 years of touring.

That was inspired producing. A large number of men in the audience would have served, as Johnny did, in the armed forces during World War II; they were now raising families in the new American Dream of the suburbs, which takes us back to Celeste Holm's comment above. Eleven years after its Broadway premiere, *Oklahoma!* was still a potent symbol—a fervently pro-American statement that this Musicarnival audience responds to throughout the performance. One of the special delights is hearing an airplane fly over semirural Warrensville Heights as Curly rhapsodizes about “The Surrey With the Fringe on Top.” Suddenly a century of Americana casts a glow over the evening.

The production itself is solid, its casting a good example of Johnny's commitment to offer top-drawer New York talent in northern Ohio. Lakewood native **Carolyn Adair**, who plays Laurey, made her Broadway debut in the chorus of the original *Oklahoma!* and eventually toured as Laurey in the national company. Although between them **Ridge Bond** (Curly) and **Mary Marlo** (Aunt Eller) had played their roles for thousands of performances in the national company, they retain a playful zest. And Johnny's Ali Hakim, **Harold Gary**, had a long career on Broadway as a respected character actor.

Also notable is **Don Driver**'s crowd-pleasing Will Parker. As the Musicarnival seasons roll on, we will find Driver—who already had Broadway experience when he arrived here—taking on larger roles and eventually serving as Johnny's de facto artistic director before becoming an important figure in New York theater. Just listening to the laugh he gets in his song “Kansas City” on the line “You c'n walk the privies in the rain an' never wet yer feet” is evidence of a young actor who knows exactly where he's going.

Boris Kogan's orchestra is a little less than half the size of the period's customary Broadway pit, but the essence of Robert Russell Bennett's orchestration is usually respected, except that—and this remained an unfortunate mark of the first seasons—there is a Hammond organ on the premises. No one I have talked to can offer an explanation for this, but with all due respect to the organist, it is, to say the least, annoying.

But all in all, an auspicious launch for Johnny Price's tent. "We were off and running," he wrote years later. "We didn't know what the hell we were doing, but whatever it was, we were doing a lot of it right." Even so, Johnny always added that the Monday after Musicarnival opened, he went back to work on his "Mr. Weather-Eye" TV show: "I kept on with it until 1956. Well, with show business you never know..."

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Naturally the critics reviewed the tent as much as the show, and the opening night was viewed by Arthur Spaeth of the *Cleveland News* as a "brilliant double premiere." Legendary *Cleveland Press* columnist Winsor French, a friend of Cole Porter, who had been covering the city's nightlife since the 1930s, came up with (as usual) the pithiest summation: "It's the most exciting production of *Oklahoma!* that the Messrs. R&H have never seen."—**B. R.**

SHOW BOAT

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 3–15, 1954 (New York opening: December 27, 1927;
572 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Jerome Kern; book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on Edna Ferber's novel

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Paula Stewart (Magnolia), John Tyers (Gaylord Ravenal), Rosemary Kuhlmann (Julie), Frank S. Stevens (Cap'n Andy Hawks), Marian Yezbak (Parthy Ann Hawks), Delores Martin (Queenie), William C. Smith (Joe), Carolyn Adair (Ellie), Don Driver (Frank)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Make Believe," "Ol' Man River," "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," "Life Upon the Wicked Stage," "You Are Love," "Bill," "Why Do I Love You?"

SYNOPSIS

See 1958 SEASON

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1958 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Only five scenes from the musical were recorded by Johnny Price, and four of the scenes are incomplete. Thus it is impossible to gain perspective on this *Show Boat*, aside from noting how ambitious the producer was to close his first season with the most epic of all American musicals. **Paula Stewart** (Magnolia) was later featured on Broadway in Lucille Ball's vehicle, *Wildcat*; and Musicarnival's Joe, **William C. Smith**, had performed the role in the 1946 Broadway revival. Of local interest: Johnny's four-year-old daughter, **Diana Price**, appeared as Kim, and his mother, **Emma M. Price**, played the Old Lady on the Levee; both can be heard in this severely truncated recording. Johnny revisited *Show Boat* with a good production in 1958, which was recorded in toto.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Respectful, if qualified. William F. McDermott was regarded as the dean of Cleveland theater critics from 1921 until his death in 1958, and his writing for *The Plain Dealer* left no doubt about Cleveland's status as a ranking theater town. Brooks Atkinson, the eminent theater critic of *The New York Times*, said of his friend McDermott: "Bill is interested in everything, takes time to mull it over and comes up invariably with wise and generous conclusions. The presence of one man like that would be reason enough to live in Cleveland." McDermott's capsule comment on *Show Boat*: "This is no Ziegfeld performance, but it is a competent and lively presentation." Omar Ranney in *The Cleveland Press*: "It is my happy duty to report that in these tented surroundings *Show Boat* rides beautifully. The cast is an able one." As Frank, Don Driver (see *Oklahoma!* above) continued to make a strong impression—so much so that press agent Marsh

Samuel sent out a feature story that was widely picked up in the papers: “Here, in this five-foot-six package of apparently limitless vitality, is a good actor who can sing and dance with a keen sense of timing so essential to fine comedy. Relatively new to show business, Driver not only has the knack of adapting a believable yet consistent characterization; he develops his own choreography as well. . . . His current portrayal of Frank was developed entirely by him.”—*B. R.*



WHILE LIGHTNING PLAYS ABOVE, SPECTATORS FLOCK TO REFRESHMENT STAND DURING INTERMISSION OF CLEVELAND'S "MUSICARIVAL" HELD IN A TENT

SUMMER NIGHT'S SURPRISE

atural show business flourishes with unexpected faces in unconventional places

Photographed for LIFE by GORDON PARKS

The straw-hat theater, which really grew out of hard times 25 years ago when actors would try anything to keep eating, is now as much a part of the American summer scene as baseball. Many of the 500 summer theaters, running in all 48 states, are like May flies that flutter up and quickly die. But there is also a sturdy and more permanent group of 140 playhouses, which abide by the rules of Actors' Equity. Many of these offer established stars in established hits and, especially this season, a surprising gallery of personalities—a former

President's daughter, a prominent heiress, a septuagenarian dancer, all venturing into new pastures.

Moving off the beaten cowpath, summer theaters are also providing patrons with surprising new surroundings. The trend toward under-canvas productions of Broadway musicals resulted last month in Cleveland's handsome new circular tent (see and next page) which gives every spectator a head-on view of the stage. New places and new faces are all inducements for Americans to make theatergoing a summer habit.

From Life magazine

KISS ME, KATE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 10–26, 1955 (New York opening: December 30, 1948;
1,070 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Cole Porter; book by Samuel and Bella Spewack

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Ted Scott (Fred Graham/Petruchio), Eleanor Lutton (Lilli Vanessi/Kate), Christine Mathews (Lois Lane), Richard France (Bill Calhoun), Lawrence Vincent (Baptista), Rosetta LeNoire (Hattie), Nolan Bell (Paul), Don Driver (First Man), Frank Shaw Stevens (Second Man)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Another Op’nin’, Another Show,” “Why Can’t You Behave?,” “Wunderbar,” “So in Love,” “I’ve Come to Wive It Wealthily in Padua,” “I Hate Men,” “Too Darn Hot,” “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?,” “Always True to You in My Fashion,” “Brush Up Your Shakespeare”

SYNOPSIS

The musical takes place backstage and onstage at Ford’s Theatre in Baltimore, from 5 PM to midnight during one day of the tryout of a musical version of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. In the plot, egotistical actor-producer Fred Graham and his temperamental co-star and ex-wife, Lilli Vanessi, fight and make up and eventually demonstrate their enduring affection for each other—just like Shakespeare’s Petruchio and Kate. A subplot involves actress Lois Lane, whose romance with actor Bill Calhoun is complicated by Bill’s weakness for gambling. —**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

It’s usually thought of as Cole Porter’s (1892-1964) *Kiss Me, Kate*, but it’s much more than that. Most of the great musicals are based on novels or plays, and granted, *Kate* draws liberally from

Shakespeare; but this musical belongs to that rare breed of “original” works, and its script by Sam and Bella Spewack is one of the wittiest of the era.

Producer Saint Subber gets credit for the idea: As a young stage manager on Broadway, he couldn’t help noticing that the famous husband-and-wife acting team of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, whose signature roles included Kate and Petruchio in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, quarreled constantly offstage. He and the Spewacks asked themselves what would happen if two flamboyant theater people, formerly married, found themselves starring in a *musical* version of *Shrew*. They brought in Cole Porter, and the result is a terrific satire on what used to be known as “theatrical royalty.”

Listening to Musicarnival’s full-length production of the show mounted just a few years after the Broadway run and the MGM film that followed provides a lesson in craftsmanship. The musical’s conceit—creating parallels between the onstage story of Kate and Petruchio and the backstage bickering of Lili and Fred—is brilliantly executed, its comedy rooted in the genuine love hidden under the egos of two temperamental Broadway stars. And Porter’s score dazzles.

Legend has it that the master hesitated before taking on the job. Like Irving Berlin, he was a bit intimidated by the Rodgers & Hammerstein revolution that had begun in 1943 with *Oklahoma!* “The librettos are much better,” he rightly observed, “and the scores are much closer to the librettos than they used to be. Those two made it harder for everybody else.”

But working closely with the Spewacks (not his usual practice with scriptwriters), Porter rose to the occasion, and *every song* is stylish and apposite. Much of the fun is in the range of the writing: from faux Viennese waltz (“Wunderbar”) to Bowery waltz (“Brush Up Your Shakespeare”), from a lovely musical setting of Shakespeare (“I Am Ashamed That Women Are So Simple”) to swinging jazz laced with double entendres (“Too Darn Hot”). Combined with the Spewacks’ Broadway in-jokes and hilariously over-the-top battle of the sexes, it adds up to an urbane masterpiece.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

It’s fun to follow Musicarnival’s growth through the nightly welcomes of Johnny Price. Before this final performance of the season opener, he calls attention to the theater’s “new picnic grove” and a new way to get to the tent: via bus on the Van Aken line. Excellent marketing! The bigger picture is this: By 1955 there were 30 summer-stock tent theaters in America, and Musicarnival president **Robert Bishop** took it upon himself to play a lead role nationally by forming the

Musical Arena Theatre Association. According to John Vacha, Bishop “chaired a committee that concluded the first collective bargaining agreement for stock theaters in the history of Actors’ Equity.”

William C. Boehm’s straightforward production of *Kate* nicely supports the story, and in keeping with the theatrical sensibility that is the world of this play, early on he tosses in a reference to the then-trendy notion of theater-in-the-round. Some of the other inside jokes about theater are, as usual, lost on “civilians” (as one of the small-time gangsters says, “You think the audience is getting it? It’s way over their heads!”); but for the most part, the comedy in this classic musical comedy plays well.

The most interesting piece of casting is the chance to hear **Ted Scott**’s Fred/Petruchio. Scott succeeded Alfred Drake and Keith Andes on Broadway, and he possesses the requisite machismo. The downside is that during this era, the Broadway actors taking over major roles were most often directed by the stage managers, who basically had them replicate the star’s portrayal. Unfortunately, Scott comes off as something of an Alfred Drake wannabe; on the other hand, he has mastered the role completely, and even in an audio recording it’s clear this is a commanding performance—exactly what the actor playing Fred/Petruchio must deliver.

Once again I can’t resist noting a comic turn by **Don Driver**—this time as First Man. He gets more laughs than even the Spewacks could have hoped for, and he and **Frank Shaw** turn “Brush Up Your Shakespeare” into an uproarious paradigm of suggestive patter.

Three other actors should be mentioned: **Rosetta LeNoire**, the production’s Hattie and a veteran of New York’s socially conscious Federal Theatre Project, went on to become one of the leading artists of the black theater movement in New York in the 1960s and ’70s. Locally, **Nolan Bell** (Paul) enjoyed the longest, most distinguished acting career in the history of Cleveland’s storied Karamu House. And **Lawrence Vincent** (Baptista) was a jack-of-many-trades at Musicarnival, stepping into a gallery of character roles, stage-managing and directing the Musicarnival school for apprentices. He became the founding chair of the theater department at Cuyahoga Community College’s western campus, a post he held for 20 years, and worked as a longtime New York character actor in film, television and theater.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Here is a telling signal of how times have changed since 1955: In his preview piece on *Kate*, *The Plain Dealer*’s William F. McDermott posited: “One of the most satisfying scenes in [both

play and musical] is where Petruchio physically spans Kate with great energy. I suspect that the women in the audience enjoy this example of masculine force and determination even more than men do.” Really? As for his review, McDermott found the production “cheerful and glowing” and noted the challenge of presenting in the round a show that would seem to depend on a proscenium arch to unfold its musical-within-a-musical. Arthur Spaeth in the *Cleveland News* admitted trepidation: “I will confess I approached last night’s tryst with my favorite musical with a king-sized chip on the shoulder. After all, I had seen *Kate* in all the versions [from Broadway to the cinema]. I knew the score as well as musical director Boris Kogan and the libretto better than the prompter.... And that in-the-round treatment was a question mark—a big one. Then came that opening ‘curtain’.... Me, I forgot all about the missing proscenium frame in the impact of the ring-around-a-rosy freshness of approach.”—**B. R.**

SOUTH PACIFIC

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 27–July 24, 1955 (New York opening: April 7, 1949;
1,925 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan, adapted from James A. Michener’s *Tales of the South Pacific*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Mimi Kelly (Ensign Nelly Forbush), John Shafer (Emile de Becque), Juanita Hall (Bloody Mary), Lee Krieger (Luther Billis), Stan Grover (Lieutenant Joseph Cable)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“A Cockeyed Optimist,” “Some Enchanted Evening,” “Bloody Mary,” “There Is Nothin’ Like a Dame,” “Bali Ha’i,” “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair,” “A Wonderful Guy,” “Younger Than Springtime,” “Happy Talk,” “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” “This Nearly Was Mine”

SYNOPSIS

During World War II, Emile de Becque, a middle-aged French planter, falls in love with the nurse Ensign Nellie Forbush. One of the islanders, the crafty Bloody Mary, has her eyes on the handsome Lieutenant Cable for her beautiful daughter, Liat. They fall in love, but Cable finds it difficult to reconcile their different races. Nellie, meanwhile, meets de Becque's children and is shocked that they are of mixed race; she ends the relationship. De Becque and Cable are recruited to spy on Japanese troop movements in a dangerous mission. While they are away, Nellie bonds with the children and grows to love them. Cable and de Becque's mission is successful, but Cable is killed by the Japanese. De Becque returns home to find Nellie and his children waiting with open arms.—*Ken Bloom*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Earlier I remarked on the cultural developments—including America's suburbanization—that led to the tent theater "boom" in the 1950s and '60s. There is another factor that must not be overlooked: As Johnny Price understood, the 1943 Broadway production of *Oklahoma!* ushered in a golden age of musical theater in this country; there had been innovative periods prior to the Rodgers & Hammerstein breakthrough—notably the proliferation of musical comedy in the 1920s and '30s led by such songwriters as the Gershwin brothers, Vincent Youmans and Rodgers & Hart—but the 1940s and '50s produced a repertoire of classics that has never been equaled. Musicarnival was the beneficiary of that body of work; significantly, Johnny's first two shows of the 1955 season—*Kiss Me, Kate* and *South Pacific*—had originally opened on Broadway within just three months of each other.

During these early years, then, he had a treasure trove at his disposal, and *South Pacific*, only the second musical to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize, was an inevitable choice. More than any other musical, this show defined the era of World War II and articulated what made its men and women, as Tom Brokaw memorably suggested, the Greatest Generation.

And yet *South Pacific* is not a self-congratulatory walk in the park of patriotism. The musical depicts its cast of Seabees and nurses realistically: Co-authors Oscar Hammerstein and Joshua Logan (1908-88)—inspired by James Michener's muscular stories, which also won a Pulitzer—give us three fully dimensional, and flawed, characters: Emile de Becque, Nellie Forbush and Joe Cable. The romance of Cable and Liat is doomed because of racial prejudice, which also infects Nellie's relationship with Emile. Rodgers & Hammerstein confront the theme in a bitter and ironic song, "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," that accomplishes in a minute and a half a stinging condemnation that I've heard church ministers take nearly an hour to deliver.

Hammerstein was an unapologetic moralist. When legislators in the South asked that the song be removed from *South Pacific* during its national tour, Hammerstein refused, noting that the statement it made was the whole point of the musical.

So imagine the experience of seeing *South Pacific* on Broadway four years after the war (three million people did), or at Musicarnival just a few years later. In the midst of postwar prosperity and optimism, Rodgers, Hammerstein and Logan, while creating an immensely enjoyable piece, did not let the audience off the hook. Their message: Much work lay ahead in strengthening our country—and the worldwide community—to ensure that the horrific intolerance that fed Nazism would never happen again.

For anyone who thinks this musical is trapped in its era, seek out the DVD of the superb 2008 Lincoln Center revival. New York writers touted the production for its unexpected timeliness, noting that during that presidential election year, issues of race and war still confronted America. Those of us who saw *South Pacific* in 2008 felt a catharsis that crossed generations (the audience was excitingly diverse) and represented the power of the American musical not only to entertain but to challenge.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

There is good news/bad news to relate: Johnny's casting coup was welcoming to the tent **Juanita Hall**, who had created the role of Bloody Mary on Broadway and left the original New York cast of *House of Flowers* to come to Cleveland. Hall had not toured with the show, and the Musicarnival engagement marked one of only three times she reprised the part until the 1958 film (though in that version, you'll recall that she was regrettably dubbed by Marilyn Horne). The bad news is that only one taped performance of the Musicarnival production exists, and it is missing the first nine scenes of Act One. Thus we are deprived of Hall's passionate, iconic "Bali Ha'i."

What we're left with, though, is very much an authentic rendering: **John Shafer** (de Becque), like Ezio Pinza before him, was primarily an opera singer who doubled as a capable actor. **Mimi Kelly** (Nellie) had understudied both Mary Martin and Martha Wright on Broadway, and both **Lee Krieger** (Billis) and **Stan Grover** (Cable) toured with the national company. As was usually the case with Johnny's productions of the R&H shows, his casting reflected the blessings of the team.

A nod to **Boris Kogan**'s work as musical and choral director; it seems to me that beginning with this production, it is consistently exceptional—quite an accomplishment considering the reduced size of the orchestra compared with a Broadway pit (though we are still cursed with that

Hammond organ!).

The phrase “thunderous applause” can be used without hyperbole to describe the response; again, as in *Oklahoma!*, there is clearly a deep connection between audience and material. As we find time and again in the Musicarnival recordings, this performance is an American time capsule. *South Pacific* made such an impact that Johnny extended it for an unprecedented fourth week in his 2,000-seat theater (which required replacements for the three leads). And the response to Juanita Hall’s performance inspired Omar Ranney to write in *The Cleveland Press*, “When she made her entrance, the effect was the same as adding a hundred volts to the electric current.” Following the run, this great jazz and blues singer remained in the city for a two-week gig at Korman’s Back Room.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Cleveland Plain Dealer critic William F. McDermott led the way in praising the musical as much as the production: “Probably the best romantic musical play of our time,” he wrote, adding, “I don’t know how long this style of writing will endure. It is a romance expressed in the terms of its times.” An apt observation. Answer: About 15 more years. And Winsor French in the *Press* took note of the production’s “breathless, youthful quality”—underlining how in touch with the era this piece is when done well.—**B. R.**

FLEDERMAUS

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 25–31, 1955 (World premiere: Vienna, Theater an der Wien, April 5, 1874;
New York premiere: Stadt Theater, November 21, 1874)

AUTHORS

Music by Johann Straus II, libretto by Carl Haffner and Richard Genée; adapted as *Rosalinda* by Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan, Jr., based on the Max Reinhardt and Eric Wolfgang Korngold version of *Die Fledermaus*; English lyrics by Paul Kerby

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

CHOREOGRAPHY

James R. Nygren

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Beverly Sills (Rosalinda Eisenstein), Lloyd Thomas Leech (Henry Eisenstein), Jeanne Beauvais (Adele), William C. Boehm (Alfredo Allevanto), Keith Mackey (Blint), John Shafer (Momo Falke), Clifford Harvuot (Richard Frank), Michael Pollock (Prince Orlovsky), Mary Ellen Moylan (Fifi/Premier Danseuse), James Harwood (Frosch)

HIGHLIGHTS

“Serenade,” “Oh Jiminy,” “Strip Duet,” “Chacun à Son Goût,” “Laughing Song,” “Czárdás,” “Watch Duet,” “Champagne Is King,” “Brother Mine, Sister Mine,” “Audition Song”

SYNOPSIS

Alfredo, an opera singer, serenades his former girlfriend, Rosalinda, as Rosalinda’s maid, Adele, schemes to attend Prince Orlovsky’s ball. Rosalinda’s husband, Eisenstein, is due to begin a short jail sentence that very evening for a minor infraction, but his friend Falke persuades Eisenstein to go with him to Prince Orlovsky’s party instead of jail. Rosalinda gives Adele the night off, and Alfredo reappears at Rosalinda’s home—where he is mistaken for Eisenstein by the prison director, Frank, and hauled off to jail. Rosalinda goes to Orlovsky’s party disguised as a Hungarian countess and runs into Adele (who is pretending to be an actress) and Eisenstein, who unknowingly woos his own wife. At dawn, Eisenstein hurries off to jail and turns himself in, but the jailer Frosch believes Alfredo is Eisenstein. The complications are happily resolved when everyone gathers at the jail after the party has ended.—*Rebecca Paller*

ABOUT THE OPERETTA

Johann Strauss II (1825–1899) was the father of 19th-century Viennese operetta. Born into a musical dynasty, he was persuaded by the French composer Jacques Offenbach—who admired Strauss’s famed waltzes “Tales of the Vienna Woods” and “On the Beautiful Danube”—to try his hand at operettas. Though Strauss’s first operetta never received a production, his second and third operettas were successful, and his fourth, *Die Fledermaus*, became, along with Lehár’s *The Merry Widow*, the most famous and beloved of all Viennese operettas—regularly produced not only in “light opera” theaters but also in preeminent opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, the Vienna State Opera and Covent Garden.

Die Fledermaus is filled with the joyousness of life in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and transports listeners to a charming world of fantasy in which the implausible becomes the acceptable. Its

libretto was written by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy (the librettists for *Carmen*) and was based on their 1872 French boulevard comedy, *Le Réveillon* (“A Midnight Supper Party”), set in Paris on Christmas Eve.

The plot centers on a gentleman named Eisenstein who has a wandering eye. On the advice of his friend Falke, Eisenstein indulges in a bit of escapism at Prince Orlofsky’s opulent costume party before reporting to prison to serve out a brief sentence. Eisenstein’s wife, Rosalinda, intends to use the time of her husband’s incarceration to reignite an old romance.

Fledermaus means “bat” in German, and the title alludes to Falke’s plan for a bit of good-natured revenge on Eisenstein—who once, after another masked ball, left the drunk Falke sleeping underneath a tree, forcing Falke the next morning to walk home costumed as a bat, to the jeers of passersby.

Die Fledermaus premiered at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna and became a favorite in cities around the world. The practice of interpolating star turns in *Die Fledermaus* took wing in the United States at the work’s Metropolitan Opera premiere (in German) in 1905, with Marcella Sembrich as Rosalinda. During Prince Orlofsky’s ball, a number of world-renowned artists, including Enrico Caruso, Antonio Scotti and Emma Eames, made guest appearances and sang numbers from other operas. In the early decades of the century, *Die Fledermaus* became a New Year’s Eve tradition at opera houses in England and Vienna.

The operetta also received numerous Broadway and West End productions under such jazzy titles as *Night Birds*; *The Merry Countess*; *A Wonderful Night*; *Champagne Sec*; and *Rosalinda*—which opened on Broadway in 1942 with a cast including the young Gene Barry and Shelly Winters. *Rosalinda* was based on Max Reinhardt’s 1920s Berlin revival of the work; it was Reinhardt who expanded the final-act drunk scene of Frosch the jailer, making it a star turn for top bananas (including, at the Met, Jack Gilford, Sid Caesar and Dom DeLuise). Johann Strauss would no doubt approve of their improvisational comedy, as the celebrities are simply taking their cue from Prince Orlofsky’s famous proclamation that his guests should do whatever suits their fancy—“Chacun à son goût!” as the famous second-act song goes.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

In his opening remarks for this recorded performance, **Johnny Price** elatedly asks the audience to “step on our magical musical carpet to old Vienna for a trip to music, romance and Wiener schnitzel.”

Johnny loved opera and had a not-so-secret desire to turn his Musicarnival audience into opera buffs. In 1955, during the tent theater's second season, he began his opera experiment with something buoyant and gay—"opera lite," if you will—a high-spirited production of *Fledermaus* (minus the "*Die*") that eschewed the original Viennese libretto for the hit 1942 Broadway adaptation of the operetta, *Rosalinda*.

In need of bona fide opera singers, Price went to New York to hold auditions and ended up with a terrific cast—headed by a 26-year-old flame-haired soprano named **Beverly Sills**, who performed as her audition piece the "Czárdás" from *Die Fledermaus*. "After three notes we didn't need to hear any more, but we let her sing the whole goddamn thing," Johnny later recalled.

As fate would have it, Sills made her New York City Opera debut as Rosalinda in *Die Fledermaus* just three months after she sang the role at Musicarnival, and returned to Cleveland in November of that same year to reprise—you guessed it—Rosalinda on the New York City Opera tour at Cleveland Public Auditorium. (It was on the tour that she met her future husband, **Peter Greenough**, whose family owned *The Plain Dealer*, one of Cleveland's three daily newspapers.

In 1954 and early 1955 Sills appeared four times on the Dumont television series *Opera Cameos*—half-hour versions of famous operas—but Johnny Price's reel-to-reel tapes of *Fledermaus* are in fact her first complete opera recording. The primitive sound quality of the Musicarnival performance leaves something to be desired (especially when compared with the lush sound of the benchmark 1960 Karajan recording of *Die Fledermaus*), but Sills's star presence is clear. Her rendition of the "Czárdás" displays vocal control and beauty of tone—though her high F at the end is drowned out by the timpani—and she shines in the ensemble numbers, even if she is unable to elevate the hokey dialogue ("His conversation I can resist but his high C definitely undermines my morale") to a more exalted plane.

As Eisenstein, **Lloyd Thomas Leech**—widely rumored to have been the original "Tarzan yell" voice of the Johnny Weissmuller movies—has a vibrant voice and a nice comedic touch. Cleveland's own **William C. Boehm**, Musicarnival's stage director from 1954 to 1957, not only directed the show but gives an irresistible portrayal of Alfred—the tenor who loves Rosalinda but loves himself even more. He is positively hilarious when he sings "mi, mi, mi" to test the health of his vocal cords. (This was Boehm's first onstage appearance at the tent theater, followed the very next week by his Charlie Dalrymple in *Brigadoon*.)

Jeanne Beauvais, who had appeared in the Broadway production of *Rosalinda*, is a vivacious Adele, and another veteran of that Broadway show, the famed ballerina **Mary Ellen Moylan**, is amazingly good with her spoken lines as Fifi. (Alas, we can only imagine the sublimity of her dance sequences.) The Viennese tradition of a tenor Orlovsky is continued by New York City Opera's **Michael Pollock**, and in a bit of luxury casting the Metropolitan Opera baritone **Clifford Harvuot** sings and acts with distinction the role of the prison director, Frank (the same part he played in the Met's Garson Kanin production of *Die Fledermaus*). In addition, **John Shafer** (Musicarnival's Emile de Becque in *South Pacific* earlier that summer) is an admirable Falke.

James Harwood in the spoken role of the jailer Frosch seems to wear out his welcome during his rambling monologue, but then again the story is sort of foolish. *Fledermaus* is all about the music, and Musicarnival's first venture into the classical repertory—conducted with unflagging high spirits by Boris Kogan—is a success.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The Erie Dispatch heaped praise on “what is probably the greatest collection of outstanding voices ever assembled at Musicarnival,” and William F. McDermott of *The Plain Dealer* was entranced by the production and its leading lady: “The singing in last evening's opening performance of *Die Fledermaus* is the best of any of the shows produced in the glorified tent theater on Warrensville Center Road. . . . The acting is sound and skillful and the whole builds up to an irreproachable presentation of a classic operetta. Beverly Sills does exact justice to the songs awarded her, and she creates a lively and improbable character suitable to that role. She has voice and charm and good looks, and who could ask for more.”—**R. P.**

BRIGADOON

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 1–14, 1955 (New York opening: March 13, 1947;
581 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Frederick Loewe, book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

John Shafer (Tommy Albright), Leigh Allen (Fiona), Dee Harless (Meg Brockie), William T. Skelton (Jeff Douglas), William C. Boehm (Charlie Dalrymple), David Lober (Harry Beaton), James Harwood (Mr. Lundie)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Waitin’ for My Dearie,” “I’ll Go Home With Bonnie Jean,” “The Heather on the Hill,” “Come to Me, Bend to Me,” “Almost Like Being in Love,” “There But for You Go I,” “My Mother’s Wedding Day”

SYNOPSIS

Two hikers from the United States stumble upon the mist-clouded town of Brigadoon in the Scottish Highlands. Brigadoon has a secret: It appears only once every 100 years. Tommy, the more romantic of the hikers, falls in love with Fiona, but he is unable to commit to the restrictions imposed by living in the town. He and Jeff, a cynical New Yorker, return to the States, but Tommy can’t get Fiona out of his mind. He returns to Brigadoon only to find an empty meadow where the town once stood. But the force of his love brings the town back, and he and Fiona join together for eternity.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

The John McGlenn, who conducted the first complete recording of *Brigadoon*’s score in 1992, once told me that whenever he saw the musical onstage, he began to cry even before the curtain went up. All he had to do was open his program.

And therein lies the potency of Alan Jay Lerner (1918-86) and Frederick Loewe’s (1901-88) landmark fantasy, with which the team “arrived” (Lerner’s word) in 1947. At the time, Lerner was accused by critic George Jean Nathan of stealing the plot from an old German story, but he dismissed that as “rubbish,” and in 1947 actually published a detailed comparison of the two works to prove his point.

In fact, Lerner’s tale resounds with originality, and in it the team achieved an unsurpassed blending of musical theater elements. Together with Cheryl Crawford (producer), Robert Lewis (director), Agnes de Mille (choreographer), Oliver Smith (scenic designer) and the often-overlooked Trude Rittman (dance music arranger), they created an artwork of great beauty. In

some ways it is the quintessential Lerner musical, for as he explained in his memoir, *The Street Where I Live*: “My own taste has always run toward the romantic (meaning larger than life, not operetta). . . . As a rule it is not sadness that brings tears to my eyes, but a longing fulfilled.”

That fulfillment—that miracle—is the heart and soul of *Brigadoon* and the village’s life-changing impact on a young American man. Lerner confessed, “I do not believe in miracles. I have seen too many.” Those who resist it (my mother did!) tend to resist fantasy in general, and it’s significant that Lerner admired the writings of Scotsman James M. Barrie, a master of fantasy. Others find the work sentimental, but for me, it is drenched in all-too-real emotion. I never feel manipulated by it.

And I am in awe of Lerner’s courage and vulnerability in not holding back. For example, a few lines in Tommy’s song “There but for You Go I,” sung to Fiona, are unlike anything that came before it in American musical theater (even including the lyrics of Oscar Hammerstein): “Lonely men around me, / Trying not to cry. / Till the day you found me / There among them was I.” Loewe’s ravishing, Scottish-flavored melodies and vocal arrangements give wings to Lerner’s words in song after song.

Brigadoon is almost mythic in its power to move us. If we are truly to embrace the experience of its wonders, the musical asks us to go to a spiritually centered place deep within ourselves. The anemic MGM film from 1954 is no substitute for seeing it onstage. A 1986 revival directed for New York City Opera by Gerald Freedman, then artistic director of Cleveland’s Great Lakes Theater, reproduced de Mille’s dances, and it remains one of the high points of my life in the theater. But more than 30 years earlier, Musicarnival also discovered the show’s enchantment.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Beginning with this *Brigadoon*, **Johnny Price** would produce all four of the major Lerner & Loewe stage musicals, including the rarely mounted *Paint Your Wagon* (in 1961) and, of course, *My Fair Lady* and *Camelot* (both in 1964).

In his nightly moment with the audience, the producer loved to catch whatever curves were thrown him. In the audio recording we’ve chosen for his greeting, he acknowledges the evening’s downpour: “Welcome to America’s most beautiful—and tonight, wettest—summer theater under a tent. We’re gonna go on with the show, and when you get those Highland mists, it’s apt to be the real thing.” In Scene Two, the script calls for thunder, and when the sound effect appears, Tommy asks Fiona, “What’s that?,” to which she replies, “We have a storm here every now and

then.” The audience, in the spirit of life imitating art, erupts.

In 1955 we begin to feel the strength of a repertory company: **John Shafer**, *Brigadoon*’s affecting Tommy Albright, had just played Emile de Becque in *South Pacific*, and Falke in *Fledermaus*, and **William Skelton** moves with ease from an R&H naval officer to Tommy’s foil, his cynical friend, Jeff. Local performers are now turning up frequently. In addition to the previously mentioned **Lawrence Vincent**, there are at least two actors from the Cleveland Play House’s fine resident company: **Keith Mackey**, who remained a journeyman actor in Cleveland for decades, and **Charlotte Fairchild**, who later made a name for herself in New York.

Leigh Allen, the production’s charming and very “legit” Fiona, had starred in the first road company of *Brigadoon* a few years earlier. **William C. Boehm**, Johnny’s stage director since the tent opened, cast himself as Charlie Dalrymple. His clarion tenor made him an audience favorite in the Musicarnival operettas that formed an important part of the repertoire during the early years, and he delivers his *Brigadoon* solos with aplomb: “Come to Me, Bend to Me” stops the show.

One longs for the sight of **James Nygren**’s choreography, but at least we can savor the glorious dance music, and **Boris Kogan**’s marvelous string section, choral work and bagpipes produce goose bumps.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Ethel Boros’s review in *The Plain Dealer* offered a splendid appraisal of what made this minimalistic brand of summer stock so special: “Only a few props suggested the brooding, beautiful countryside. Only a puff or two of smoke suggested the eternal mists of Brigadoon. But that was enough, especially when my attention was focused on the vivid hues of the quaint clan costumes, the kilted men, the pretty girls with their fresh white caps and aprons. And of course . . . the spirited folk dancing and above all the music and lyrics all helped to make me visualize quite another world.”—**B. R.**

WISH YOU WERE HERE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 15–28, 1955 (New York opening: June 25, 1952;
598 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Harold Rome, book by Arthur Kober and Joshua Logan, based on Kober's play *Having Wonderful Time*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

LEADING PLAYERS

Frank Green (Chick Miller), Lois O'Brien (Teddy Stern), James Harwood (Itchy Flexner), Bill Parker (Pinky Harris), Dee Harless (Fay Fromkin)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Ballad of a Social Director," "There's Nothing Nicer Than People," "Shopping Around," "Could Be," "Where Did the Night Go?," "Don Jose of Far Rockaway," "Flattery," "Summer Afternoon," "Wish You Were Here"

SYNOPSIS

The musical is set at Camp Karefree, an adult summer camp "where friendships are formed to last a whole lifetime through," and is concerned with middle-class New Yorkers trying to make the most of a two-week vacation in the Catskills. Mainly it's about Teddy Stern, a secretary from Brooklyn, who finds true love—after a series of misunderstandings—with Chick Miller, a law student working as a camp waiter by day and a dancing partner for the guests by night.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

What a treat to hear this now-forgotten 1952 Broadway musical comedy—a show that succeeded only through the tenacity of its estimable co-writer and director, Joshua Logan, who describes it in his memoirs as "rags to riches, sow's ear to silk purse, also-ran to Derby winner. It was one of the most major minor miracles in modern theater history."

Based on Arthur Kober's 1937 comedy, *Having Wonderful Time*, set at an adult summer camp in the Catskills, the musical drew an almost uniformly negative response when it opened on Broadway in late June 1952 on one of the hottest nights of the year. But Logan, who was also the co-producer, girded his loins and resolved to fix it. Rewriting and rehearsing huge chunks of the script during the day, he worked the changes into the evening performances. And since he was one of the best craftsmen of our musical theater, he saw his work pay off. Bolstered by Eddie Fisher's chart-topping record of the title song, *Wish You Were Here* quickly turned into a sold-out hit. The cast featured some bright new faces, including Jack Cassidy, Florence Henderson, Larry

Blyden and Phyllis Newman.

That being said, here's why it's forgotten: The eye-popping central feature of the set—a real swimming pool—made it impossible for the show to tour, and though a nonaquatic version was eventually offered, *Wish You Were Here* had won its notoriety as the “swimming pool musical,” and rebranding the show proved too difficult. In addition, the musical is rooted in its time period, and the script (especially in the second act) isn't strong enough to transcend that.

Still, there's a good time to be had at Camp Karefree. This was the first book musical by a master of satirical revues, composer-lyricist Harold Rome (1908-93), who knew firsthand the middle-class, New York Jewish milieu that is the world of the play. (In fact, he had worked at an adult summer camp as a budding songwriter.) Musical theater historian Stanley Green praised Rome for his “ability to express in songs the honest emotions of those who are least articulate.... For Rome is essentially a people's [songwriter].” We hear it in such “funny-touching” (Logan's term) pieces as Itchy's mock lament, “Ballad of a Social Director,” Fay's tell-it-like-it-is “Shopping Around,” and Chick's passionate “Wish You Were Here.”

What's sexier than a coed summer camp? If we take a look at the photos of the original production—fabulous curvy and muscle-bound bodies in bathing suits—it's clear what this musical is really about. With the exception of the conflicted Teddy, the 20-something women who have traveled to the mountains seek romantic adventures that may or may not include marriage, and much of the fun in this musical is the chance it gives the rest of us to do a little fantasizing as we watch them pair off with those waiters. One of them asks a key question: “Where does a guy go for the main event?”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Wish You Were Here was **Johnny Price's** most thoroughly contemporary musical up to that time, and after all the “classics” that preceded it, the escapism is refreshing. Virtually all of the comedy plays well in this city that boasted a large contingent of transplanted New York Jews. You get the sense the audience is letting their hair down.

The production lacks the polish of, say, *Brigadoon*, but a reminder: The exigencies of summer stock led to a fever-pitch schedule under and around the tent. While *Brigadoon* played out its two-week run of evening performances, many in the company spent their daytime hours rehearsing *Wish You Were Here*, which opened the night after *Brigadoon* closed.

It turned out to be an ideal show for Musicarnival in part because of Joshua Logan's novel approach to stagecraft. He writes in the stage directions at the end of the first scene: "As Teddy and Fay exeunt, the scenery changes—an open change, as are all the changes in the show." Logan gives those Musicarnival apprentices his blessing to move designer **Connie Price's** set pieces without trying to hide anything from the audience.

But Johnny made headlines by creating one of the few pieces of major scenery the theater ever employed. Moving the orchestra into a shell-like sound board behind the last row (**Boris Kogan** conducted with the aid of a headset), Johnny transformed the pit into the show's working swimming pool, which is crucial to the end of Act One. (He pulled it off with a plastic lining and 30 tons of water.) And the canny producer had his press agent, **Marsh Samuel**, and Musicarnival president **Robert Bishop III** jump in: Samuel is listed in the program as Eccentric Diver.

Musical theater mavens will note a change in the score. Even after the release of RCA's original-cast album, Logan and Rome were still tinkering, and the song "Goodbye Love" was replaced by "There's Nothing Nicer Than People"; here it's given a rarely (if ever) heard performance. Likewise, "Bright College Days" is not part of the album. And because the show's dance music is included, there's the bebop arrangement of "Where Did the Night Go?" Again, this is a musical of its moment.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The good-natured *Akron Beacon Journal* review by Oscar Smith hits the mark: "Who cared about the plot, or lack of it, when there was such good singing and dancing? And diving?"—**B. R.**

GUYS & DOLLS

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 29–September 25, 1955 (New York opening: November 24, 1950;
1,200 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, based on a story and characters by Damon Runyon

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Jordan Bentley (Sky Masterson), Don Driver (Nathan Detroit), Joan Kibrig (Miss Adelaide), Lois O'Brien (Sarah Brown), George Blackwell (Nicely-Nicely Johnson), Frank Shaw Stevens (Big Jule)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Fugue for Tinhorns," "The Oldest Established," "I'll Know," "A Bushel and a Peck," "Adelaide's Lament," "Guys & Dolls," "If I Were a Bell," "I've Never Been in Love Before," "More I Cannot Wish You," "Luck Be a Lady," "Sue Me," "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat," "Marry the Man Today"

SYNOPSIS

The high-minded lowlifes of Times Square come colorfully alive in such characters as Sky Masterson, the bet-on-anything gambler; Nathan Detroit, the perpetually harried organizer of the Oldest Established Permanent Floating Crap Game in New York, who bets Sky he can't make the next girl he sees fall in love with him; Miss Sarah Brown, who is the next girl Sky sees and who does succumb; and Miss Adelaide, the main attraction at the Hot Box nightclub, whose psychosomatic perpetual cold stems from her being engaged to Nathan for 14 years. This so-called Musical Fable of Broadway relates the tale of how Sarah (of the Save-a-Soul Mission) saves the souls of assorted Times Square riffraff.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

When I was a 19-year-old college English major, I had a teacher named Mary Louise Vincent who proudly belonged to the "old school" of English professors. Then as now, I was obsessed with musical theater as an art form, but I could rarely get Dr. Vincent to share my zeal. She wore her intellectual snobbery as a badge of honor.

The exception to her rigid set of esthetic rules was the 1950 Broadway musical *Guys & Dolls*. "Oh, now *that's* a masterpiece!" she would say, her face lighting up with a joy usually reserved for Shakespeare and Milton. "There's an extraordinary world created on that stage—a world that is uniquely American."

It's been nearly 70 years since Abe Burrows (1910-85) and Frank Loesser (1910-69) turned characters created by the great Damon Runyon into Dr. Vincent's favorite musical, and

Musicarnival's 1958 production gives us a chance to revisit what so impressed her. It comes down to three themes:

- **Individuality:** In 1950 the cultural backdrop of *Guys & Dolls* was Jewish-American; you'll even find some Yiddish sprinkled throughout the show (for example, "echt with poise," "so nu"). But the first Broadway revival in 1976, featuring an African-American cast and a vibrant Motown sound, demonstrated that there's much more being lived on this stage than the spirit of any one culture. Instead, the musical's hard-boiled (but softhearted) gamblers and show girls celebrate American individualism. The characters are memorable and even hip because they go their own way outside the mainstream.
- **Urban energy:** *Guys & Dolls* is streetwise. And more: The musical is rife with a kind of energy—a pulse, a beat—that can only be found in a big city. A city is a place where anything can happen at any moment. It's loaded with opportunities, but as Betty Comden and Adolph Green once observed, there is also potential danger at every turn (even in Runyon's stylized world); and that sense of unpredictability makes it both alluring and intimidating.
- **Romanticism:** Two love stories are told in *Guys & Dolls*. Although they could hardly be more different, each one plays out the age-old battle of the sexes, and each story confirms that having someone in your life usually beats being alone. But I also use the word "romantic" in its broader sense. Hope and optimism are the subtext of this musical: the feeling that the world it portrays is special; the feeling that beneath the surface of a tough guy, there beats a tender heart.

By now, *Guys & Dolls* is generally regarded as one of a handful of perfect American musicals, thanks to the excellence of its script by Burrows, a radio and television comedy writer making his theater debut, and its score by composer-lyricist Loesser, who knew he was born to take on this assignment. ("When the producers said the magic word 'Runyon,' I was hooked.") Like *My Fair Lady*, it is a glorious explosion of language, although in this case, slang and the vernacular—not formal English—create the real poetry. In one of Loesser's finest, most intimate creations ("My Time of Day"), Sky Masterson confesses to Sarah Brown:

*My time of day is the dark time—
A couple of deals before dawn.
When the street belongs to the cop
And the janitor with the mop,
And the grocery clerks are all gone.
When the smell of the rain-washed pavement*

*Comes up clean and fresh and cold.
And the street-lamp light fills the gutter with gold.
That's my time of day,
My time of day.
And you're the only doll I've ever wanted to share it with me.*

Dr. Vincent was right. Who could resist such an invitation?

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Guys & Dolls was one of **Johnny Price**'s favorite musicals, and the care he lavished on it can be heard in both of his Musicarnival productions in Cleveland: this one from 1955 and the 1958 "revival," in which he cast different actors in three of the four principal roles. It would be difficult to choose one over the other; each is splendidly executed, and in 1955 the scheduled two-week run was extended by popular demand to three weeks. Clearly, the release of the film version that year only whetted the Cleveland audience's appetite for live theater under the tent.

Listening to the recording, I'm struck as always by what a gag-filled script Abe Burrows wrote, yet the comedy is always character-driven, and this cast knows it. Sky Masterson is played by **Jordan Bentley**—a frequent featured player on Broadway—who gets more laughs (and they're legitimate) than I've ever heard from the romantic lead. And as Nathan Detroit, Musicarnival stalwart **Don Driver**, a member of the original cast, plays his first starring role here (he would direct the show three years later). He brings down the house with **Joan Kilbrig** in "Sue Me." Kilbrig is good, though she apes the original Adelaide, Vivian Blaine, too much for my taste. But **Lois O'Brien**, fresh from Johnny's swimming pool in *Wish You Were Here*, is perfection.

The producer cast himself as Rusty Charlie, and in a playful stroke of showmanship, he took advantage of the theater's proximity to Thistledown Race Track. In "Fugue for Tinhorns," on the line "I got the horse right here," he pointed to the edge of the tent, and as John Vacha reports, "the spot picked up a genuine thoroughbred."

Once again **Boris Kogan**'s orchestra shines; hearing the strings navigate the runs in "Luck Be a Lady" is bliss. The production belongs on the short list of musicals that it's a privilege to hear at a time so close to their Broadway runs. True musical comedy energy is generated on that stage, and it comes right back from the audience—this is the 1955 version of a rock concert.

Business was so good that Johnny got a personal note from Frank Loesser: "Dear John My Pal," it began. "[Songwriter] Jimmy McHugh just returned from Cleveland and raved about the great

performances that you and all of the dolls and guys are doing. After all, the performance is the thing. On behalf of your entire cast and yourself will you please accept my sincerest thanks.” Johnny framed it.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Across-the-board appreciation for Loesser and Burrows’s encounter with Damon Runyon—especially in the round: “[The musical] even came up with a few new twists,” Omar Ranney wrote in *The Cleveland Press*. “Certainly no one ever saw a bunch of busier guys and dolls than those who raced up and down the Musicarnival aisles, playing the show just about every place but on top of the tent.... The pace was as fast as Swaps in the Kentucky Derby.” And in *The Plain Dealer*, William F. McDermott took note of Lois O’Brien’s Sarah: “She must be both virginal and sexy. She manages the impossible in a way that I thought charming.”—**B. R.**



Twenty-six-year-old Beverly Sills rehearsing Fledermaus with director and fellow performer William C. Boehm

1956 Season

THE KING AND I

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 8–July 1, 1956 (New York opening: March 29, 1951
1,246 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on the novel *Anna and the King of Siam* by Margaret Landon

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

William Chapman (The King), Eileen Schauler (Anna Leonowens), Stephanie Augustine (Tuptim), Guy Taro (Lun Tha), Jean Sanders (Lady Thiang), Phil Green (Sir Edward Ramsey)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Whistle a Happy Tune,” “My Lord and Master,” “Hello, Young Lovers,” “March of the Siamese Children” (instrumental), “A Puzzlement,” “Getting to Know You,” “We Kiss in a Shadow,” “Shall I Tell You What I Think of You?,” “Something Wonderful,” “I Have Dreamed,” “Shall We Dance?”

SYNOPSIS

The story is set in Bangkok in the early 1860s. Anna Leonowens, the new governess and teacher to the King of Siam’s many children, has frequent clashes with the autocratic, semibarbaric ruler, but eventually—and discreetly—comes to love him. She exerts great influence in helping to democratize the country. A tragic secondary plot concerns the furtive romance between Tuptim, one of the king’s wives, and her lover, Lun Tha.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

The original production of *The King and I* is part of Broadway lore. The show was adapted by Rodgers & Hammerstein from Margaret Landon’s best-selling 1944 novel, *Anna and the King*

of *Siam* (and its 1946 film version, starring Rex Harrison and Irene Dunne). Landon's novel was in turn based on the memoirs of the real Anna Leonowens, who in 1862 traveled to Siam from Victorian England to teach the children of the king.

Rodgers & Hammerstein created the musical at the request of the luminous singing actress Gertrude Lawrence, and cast opposite her was the virtually unknown Yul Brynner. Rodgers later recalled that Brynner won the part "sitting down on the stage and crossing his legs.... He plunked one whacking chord on his guitar and began to howl in a strange language that no one could understand.... There was no denying that he had projected a feeling of controlled ferocity. Oscar and I looked at each other and nodded." As millions around the world know, it was the role of Brynner's career, and after Lawrence's death in 1952, he in effect *became* the show, playing the king in the 1956 film and onstage a grand total of 4,625 times before his own death in 1985.

Composer and librettist were irresistibly drawn to this material. They were fascinated by what Rodgers termed the "intangibility" of the relationship between the king and Anna; the vivid contrasts between Eastern and Western cultures; and the emotional spectrum of the story, ranging from tenderness to cruelty.

But they were also aware of the risks involved: the obliqueness of the love story (the title characters never kiss, and barely touch), the tragic subplot and the absence of even one comic character. In a letter written to his colleague Joshua Logan before rehearsals began, Hammerstein observed: "I am sharpening a very long knife for the first [critic] who tells me that it hasn't the quality of *South Pacific*. It is a very strange play and must be accepted on its own terms, or not at all."

By now it's clear that *The King and I* is a masterwork, its text as searching and universal in its themes as anything Hammerstein ever penned, its music an exotic and ravishing splash of colors that reveals its composer to be Hammerstein's equal as dramatist. The team's writing for their characters—in words, melodies, harmonies and rhythms—is marked by extraordinary compassion and warmth, essential for a show that is, more than any of the other Rodgers & Hammerstein works, a play about ideas, or as historian Ethan Mordden comments, about "two opposing political viewpoints."

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The souvenir book for the 1956 season—Musicarnival's third—radiates well-earned self-confidence: "The gigantic blue big-top theater ... has become a Cleveland landmark and a mecca for summer theatergoers. [It has] gained a national reputation as the finest theater of its kind in the country."

Assuming the proclamation was more than press agentry, that's probably why the Rodgers & Hammerstein office, at that time headed by the authors themselves, took Musicarnival seriously. Johnny proudly announced that the cast for *The King and I* had been personally recommended by R&H, who during that period saw young talent once a week in New York. Their staff groomed unknown performers like Shirley Jones, who worked their way up in the Rodgers & Hammerstein musicals, then including four shows central to American popular culture: *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific* and *The King and I*.

Eileen Schauler, this production's Anna, is one such "beautiful young star," as her bio tells us. **Stephanie Augustine** played the role of Tuptim for two and a half years on Broadway, succeeding Doretta Morrow, and **Mara**—who restaged Jerome Robbins's "Small House of Uncle Thomas" ballet—had served as a consultant to Robbins on the musical's Cambodian and Siamese dancing.

The performer "handpicked" by R&H to play **Johnny Price**'s King of Siam was an unusual choice, and a brilliant one. American baritone **William Chapman**, who originally studied acting, not vocal performance, had attracted attention at Jones Beach (Long Island) in the musical *Arabian Nights*. His career would lead him to opera, and significantly, within a year of his Musicarnival debut he joined the company of New York City Opera, becoming a principal artist there. (One assumes that he received a boost from NYCO's general director, Julius Rudel, who valued acting skills and conducted him in a second summer-stock production of *The King and I* that followed on the heels of the Cleveland run.)

Chapman, then just 22, was one of the first true crossover artists in the field, moving easily from opera to musical theater and back again. He appeared on Broadway later that year in the original *Candide*; again at Musicarnival in the 1958 *Carousel* produced at West Palm Beach (he played Jigger Craigin); and in Johnny's reprise of *The King and I* in 1959, by which time he received billing over the title, which the producer did not often bestow. Chapman was also featured in Frank Loesser's Broadway musical *Greenwillow* (1960). I will never forget his chilling Frank Maurant in a great crossover work, the Kurt Weill–Langston Hughes–Elmer Rice *Street Scene* (1947); he performed it with NYCO several times over the years beginning in 1959, including a national television broadcast 20 years later.

What we discover in this production—and it must have intrigued R&H—is the first king who actually *sings* "A Puzzlement," in addition to acting the role from the inside out. My colleague Ken Bloom has commented that the king is "like a lit fuse" who can explode at any time.

Chapman understands that, and if the explosions are occasionally a bit much, we can blame them on his extreme youth.

His *King and I* is one of the triumphs of Musicarnival's body of work.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The demands of producing *The King and I* are formidable (on Broadway it was the costliest musical mounted up to that time). Omar Ranney in *The Cleveland Press* praised director **William C. Boehm** for "exerting the overall guidance and achieving a finely blended *King and I*" despite the limitations of the circular staging. *The Plain Dealer's* William F. McDermott went so far as to confess, "I was more conscious of the richness and liveliness of the spectacle in the tent theater than I was when I saw it [on Broadway] in a playhouse of conventional pattern. In the arena theater, the spectacle, with its glitter and flourish, thrusts itself upon you."—**B. R.**

PLAIN AND FANCY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 2–15, 1956 (New York opening: January 25, 1955;
461 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Albert Hague, lyrics by Arnold B. Horwitt, book by
Joseph Stein and Will Glickman

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Libi Staiger (Ruth Winters), William Skelton (Dan King), Renee Orin (Katie Yoder), Arthur Newman (Papa Yoder),
Joan Kibrig (Hilda Miller), Tom Rieder (Ezra), Ron Beattie (Peter Reber)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"It Wonders Me," "Plenty of Pennsylvania," "Young and Foolish," "This Is All Very New to Me," "Plain We Live"

SYNOPSIS

New Yorkers Dan King and Ruth Winters have come to Bird-in-Hand, Pennsylvania, to sell a farm Dan owns to farmer Jacob Yoder, a member of an Amish community that gets along without telephones, automobiles, indoor plumbing or even buttons. Yoder has arranged an unwanted marriage for his daughter, Katie, though her “young and foolish” heart still belongs to her childhood sweetheart, Peter Reber. When Yoder’s barn is struck by lightning and burns down, Peter is blamed for putting a hex on it and is shunned by members of the community. By rescuing his brother from a carnival brawl, however, he proves himself worthy of their—and Katie’s—esteem.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

To understand the impact of Rodgers & Hammerstein on the American musical of the 1940s and ’50s, just take a listen to *Plain and Fancy*. It’s an original piece without source material to rely on, but in construction and homespun philosophy it aspires to be a Rodgers & Hammerstein “musical play.” For the most part it succeeds beautifully, telling a story of contrasting cultures: one represented by two New Yorkers (and by implication, the audience in the theater), the other by an Amish community in Pennsylvania.

I’ve always loved the cast album, in which the standout performance comes from the 28-year-old Barbara Cook, who played Hilda, a radiant but feisty young Amish woman: “It would be pleasant when you marry a man,” she says in Amish dialect, referring to the pitfalls of arranged marriages, “you also like him.” Within two years, *Plain and Fancy*’s fast-rising director, Morton Da Costa, would choose Cook for his Marian in *The Music Man*.

And the score is to be treasured, with lyrics by Arnold B. Horwitt (1918-77) and music by the German-born, classically trained Albert Hague (1920-2001). Their “Young and Foolish,” the hit of the show, and “It Wonders Me” are two of the glowing Broadway ballads of the decade, and the anthemic “Plain We Live” gives its male chorus a spine-tingling moment in the theater. Years later, by the way, it was Hague who played the high school music teacher on the TV series *Fame*.

But since many scripts for the era’s musicals (including this one) were published—Rodgers & Hammerstein having raised consciousness about literary merits—the fun for me in listening to the Musicarnival recording was to sit down with the libretto and pay attention to the musical’s architecture, the work of scriptwriters Joseph Stein and Will Glickman. In this, their first book musical, they make use of what Stephen Sondheim has called the “scene-song-scene-song” design of the Rodgers & Hammerstein shows, employing it with laudable economy and

character-driven charm. As Sondheim points out, the approach became formulaic by the early 1960s and would be replaced with freer forms, but here it feels just right for the story.

Stein (1912-2010) was the force behind the Stein-Glickman team. The two parted company a few years later, and Stein went on to write librettos for *Take Me Along*, *Juno*, *Zorba*, *The Baker's Wife*, *Rags* and a masterpiece, *Fiddler on the Roof*. What all of these musicals have in common—and this echoes a frequent Rodgers & Hammerstein theme—is Stein's preoccupation with the power of close-knit communities. It's telling that as a young man this Polish emigre earned a master's degree in social work and was a practicing psychiatric social worker from the late 1930s through the mid-1940s.

The script for *Plain and Fancy* runs out of steam in the second act, but at the end of the show we're touched by Stein's kinship with the men and women he has put onstage. After the barn raising, one of the New Yorkers, Dan, who is a kind of stand-in for the librettist, says: "You have seen these people pitch in and work together," and Papa Yoder defends their way of life with an irrefutable declaration: "We do not destroy; we build only." Stein's sensitivity and integrity were recognized by the people whose alternative culture he celebrated. Since 1986 his musical has been produced annually in Nappanee, Indiana, by the Round Barn Theatre in Amish Acres.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL AND MELODY FAIR PRODUCTIONS

Johnny Price and Musicarnival president **Bob Bishop** shared *Plain and Fancy* with Melody Fair, a tent theater that had just opened outside Buffalo, in North Tonawanda, New York. Each theater retained its own core ensemble and orchestra, but the principal actors, director (**William C. Boehm**), choreographer (**James Nygren**) and scenic designer (**Connie Price**) opened the production in Buffalo, then came to Cleveland for a contiguous run. It made good economic sense (as did Johnny's move to acquire costumes and props from the Broadway production), and the actors had the chance to hone their performances over a longer period than was usually possible in summer stock.

We have restored live performances from both companies not only because they offer an interesting exercise in compare-and-contrast (just why Melody Fair inserts a few jazz musicians in the pit is beyond me), but also because fortuitously the sound is better in the Melody Fair evening during Act One, and in Musicarnival's Act Two.

Three principals deserve mention: **Arthur Newman**, who as Papa Yoder is entrusted with leading "Plain We Live," was at the time a key member of New York City Opera, a pedigree

that turned up with increasing frequency in Johnny's programming. **Renee Orin**, who plays the ingénue, Katie, was married to composer Albert Hague and understudied this role throughout the Broadway run; her association with the musical began when she and her husband performed a year and a half of backers' auditions for it. Toward the end of Hague's life, they created and recorded their own cabaret act, a retrospective of his work for the theater.

And then there is **Libi Staiger** as Ruth Winters, the wisecracking New Yorker, in her Musicarnival debut. Staiger, whose long Broadway track record included *Plain and Fancy*, became an immediate favorite with Cleveland audiences. She was an Almost Star who would have become one if her first and only Broadway vehicle, 1963's *Sophie* (about Sophie Tucker), had succeeded.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The Plain Dealer's William F. McDermott found the production merely "proficient," though he singled out Libi Staiger for "giving abundant life" to Ruth. In *The Cleveland Press*, Omar Ranney opined that William C. Boehm's production "does all right with the laughs, but the quaint charm, the tender emotion and the beauty of mood—practically all the things that give *Plain and Fancy* what real distinction it has as an American musical—fall short in this production."

MELODY FAIR PRODUCTION DATES

June 15–July 1, 1956. Consultants, **John L. Price, Jr.** and **Robert Bishop III**; producer, **Lewis T. Fisher**; director, **William C. Boehm**; musical and choral direction, **R. Whitman Proctor**. Principal actors are the same as Musicarnival production.—**B. R.**

CALL ME MADAM

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 16–29, 1956 (New York opening: October 12, 1950;
644 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Libi Staiger (Mrs. Sally Adams), John Shafer (Cosmo Constantine), Ron Beattie (Kenneth Gibson), Stephanie Augustine (Princess Maria)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“The Hostess With the Mostes’ on the Ball,” “Can You Use Any Money Today?,” “Lichtenburg,” “Marrying for Love,” “It’s a Lovely Day Today,” “The Best Thing for You,” “You’re Just in Love”

SYNOPSIS

According to the program, the musical takes place “in two mythical countries: one is Lichtenburg, the other the United States of America.” When Sally Adams, the hostess with the mostes’ on the ball, becomes ambassador to the tiny duchy, she surprises and charms the local gentry, especially foreign minister Cosmo Constantine, with her no-nonsense, undiplomatic manner. In a subplot, Sally’s young aide, Kenneth Gibson, finds himself falling for Lichtenburg’s Princess Marie, a condition that prompts the ambassador to itemize the symptoms in “You’re Just in Love.”—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Call Me Madam was first, last and always about Ethel Merman. Like nearly all of her musicals—and this one opened almost 20 years to the night after her Broadway debut in *Girl Crazy*—it was a “vehicle,” with every song and scene crafted to capitalize on her singular talent. Since the authors were Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse (*Life With Father*), the songwriter Irving Berlin (1888-1989), the producer Leland Hayward, the director George Abbott and the choreographer Jerome Robbins, *Call Me Madam* couldn’t lose.

Lindsay recalled the very moment he got the idea, watching Merman poolside one afternoon at the Colorado Hotel. Everything about her seemed quintessentially American, and he had just picked up a magazine featuring a story on Washington party-giver Perle Mesta, whose down-to-earth persona seemed to match Merman’s. He immediately called the star, informing her that the next Ethel Merman musical would be inspired by Perle Mesta.

So this was to be a topical story playing off Mesta’s recent appointment by Harry Truman as U.S. ambassador to Luxembourg. In Lindsay & Crouse’s script, the country is the even tinier

(and fictitious) Lichtenburg, and the satire takes good-natured swipes at the munificence of post–World War II foreign aid (“You can lend it right back to us,” sings a jubilant Sally Adams [Mesta], “and we’ll pay you seven per cent!”); the brashness bordering on xenophobia of Americans (observes a Congressman: “The trouble with these European governments is that they’re all run by foreigners!”); and the hapless singing career of Truman’s daughter, Margaret.

It’s not a great book, though the romance between two older characters is unusual and welcome. Not a great score, either—though “It’s a Lovely Day Today” belongs on the list of Berlin’s flirtiest charm songs, and the show’s second-act duet, “You’re Just in Love,” is what Broadway types used to call “socko.”

When the show needed a lift late in the evening, Merman declared she wanted something to do with “the kid” (Russell Nype, playing her press attaché), and toiling in his hotel room out of town, Berlin came up with a contrapuntal duet in the tradition of “Play a Simple Melody.” In her autobiography Merman remembered hearing Berlin demonstrate “You’re Just in Love.” Her response: “We’ll never get off the stage.” Sure enough, the song won seven encores on opening night, and Nype’s crew cut and horn-rimmed glasses became a national fashion trend.

Not only that, but for almost two years—through the 1952 presidential election—the highest-profile number turned out to be “They Like Ike.” Substitute “I” for “They” and you’ve got a nifty campaign song saluting General Eisenhower.

Merman recreated her performance for the 1953 film. It’s especially good to have it because *Call Me Madam* is seldom produced anymore, even though the show was well received at the New York City Center Encores! series in a 1995 in-concert version starring Tyne Daly.

But in 1950 this musical comedy served its purpose, and the tally of 644 performances represented Ethel Merman’s third-longest run on Broadway, topped only by *Annie Get Your Gun* and *Gypsy*.

By the way, Eisenhower and Mesta were crazy about it.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

How do you produce a terrific *Call Me Madam* if you can’t call on Ethel Merman?

If you’re **Johnny Price**, you offer the Merman role to Broadway up-and-comer **Libi Staiger** as part of a deal that comprises *three* 1956 shows in quick succession under the tent: In addition to

Madam and *Plain and Fancy*, both of which were also done in shared productions with Buffalo's Melody Fair, she played the female lead in *Kismet*. Given the grueling summer-stock schedule of working on two musicals at once—one in rehearsal during the day, the other in performance at night—it's difficult to imagine a bigger challenge, or one better suited to a game girl like Staiger.

If at 28 she was a bit young for Sally Adams, it didn't matter. Staiger had star quality, and Johnny and director **William C. Boehm** saw it. There are moments when she pushes too hard, which ironically Merman seldom did. And yet Staiger was self-possessed enough, as Harlowe R. Hoyt remarked in *The Plain Dealer*, to "steer clear of the impediments of imitation." As documented in the Musicarnival tapes, the audience embraces her.

By 1956 *Madam* in Warrensville Heights had lost nearly all of the topicality that amused Broadway in 1950, so there are changes in the prologue that reset the musical in 1952. But it wasn't political satire that drove the show even in its prime. Fans wanted to hear Merman and Russell Nye attack those seven encores of "You're Just in Love"; Staiger and **Ron Beattie** chalk up a more than respectable six.

Stephanie Augustine returned to the tent, where earlier in the summer she had reprised her Broadway role as Tuptim in *The King and I*; here she is the much less troubled Princess Maria and sings the role better than any of her contemporaries. Same for **John Shafer** as Cosmo Constantine. He finds such warmth in the song "Lichtenburg," which in its unaffected simplicity is pure Berlin. Describing his countrymen, Cosmo tenderly observes, "Too many who have copper pennies, / Too few who have gold."

Boris Kogan's orchestra swings out for this production, and making a cameo as one of the two onstage ocarina players was Johnny's longtime show-biz pal **Herman Pirchner**, owner of the Alpine Village, a hallowed nightspot in Playhouse Square.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

This opening-night report by Omar Ranney in *The Cleveland Press* is worth repeating: "With encore after encore [of 'You're Just in Love'], and the applause never slacking off, it began to look like a contest as to who could outlast the other, the audience or the actors. Miss Staiger and Beattie, in some ad-libbing, wisely gave the decision to the audience as they finally feigned complete exhaustion and fell prone upon the stage. Their windup was a fine bit of unrehearsed comedy. They should keep it in the show. Even their fellow actors, waiting to enter on cue, applauded them, and one felt it was one of those rare moments in the theater."—**B. R.**

THE NEW MERRY WIDOW

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 30-August 11, 1956 (World premiere: Vienna, December 30, 1905. New York premiere: October 21, 1907; 416 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Franz Lehár, libretto by Viktor Léon and Leo Stein. Adapted as *The New Merry Widow* with book and English lyrics by Edward Eager.

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Beverly Sills (Vilia Barinkay), Mace Barrett (Prince Danilo), Lloyd Thomas Leech (Camille de Rosillon), Stephanie Augustine (Zina Zador, the Baroness Pilaff), Frank Shaw Stevens (Baron Pilaff), Jean Bruno (Paula Zador-Knitsch), Michael Pollock (Knitsch), Arthur Newman (Marquis de Cascada), Keith Mackey (Duc de St. Brioche), Joy Lynne Sica (Mascha Zador), Joan Sheller (Ena Zador), Mary Ellen Moylan (Prima Ballerina)

HIGHLIGHTS

“A Nice Wealthy Wife,” “Margravia,” “Maxim’s,” “Vilia,” “Fascinating Cavalier,” “Women,” “The Garden of the Moon,” “The Old Maxim’s Sextette,” “I Love You”

SYNOPSIS

Baron Pilaff is hosting a party at the Margravian Embassy in Paris. One of the guests, Vilia Barinkay, is newly widowed after the death of her much older husband. To keep her wealth in Margravia, Baron Pilaff and others have concocted a plot to marry off Vilia to Prince Danilo, the dashing but impoverished scion of the Margravian royal family. When Danilo arrives at the Embassy party following a bit of carousing at Maxim’s, he and Vilia instantly recognize each other and recall their former romance—which ended when Danilo’s father refused to let him marry a commoner. Now their financial fortunes are reversed but the spark is still there, though Vilia and Danilo play a cat and mouse game (which intertwines with a flirtation between Baron Pilaff’s young wife Zina and the French attaché Camille de Rosillon) before they finally give in to love and agree to marry.—*R. P.*

ABOUT THE WORK

At the beginning of the 20th century the composer Franz Lehár (1870-1948) dominated the world of operettas with his biggest success, *The Merry Widow*. The son of a military bandmaster, Lehár was born in Hungary and studied music at the Prague Conservatory but made his home for many years in Vienna, and *The Merry Widow* is very much a typical Viennese operetta. Like Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, it is a lighthearted romantic tale with a flurry of intrigue and misunderstandings—and a happy ending, of course. Though both works immortalize the final glamorous days of Imperial Vienna, *The Merry Widow* employs the richer harmonic palette and, with its versatility of song style and myriad dance sequences, points the way to Broadway musicals.

Interestingly, Lehár was not the first choice for the project. When Viktor Léon and Leo Stein completed their libretto for *The Merry Widow* (*Die Lustige Witwe*, in German), an adaptation of Henri Meilhac's 1861 comedy *L'Attaché d'Ambassade*, the directors of the Theater an der Wien invited Richard Heuberger to compose the music in large part because his *Der Opernball* had been a success at their theater in 1898. This time around Heuberger's music turned out to please neither the librettists nor Louis Treumann, who was booked to sing the leading role of Danilo, and in desperation the libretto was handed to Lehár, who approached the job with gusto—singing into a new-fangled telephone the first number he wrote for the show (“Dummer, dummer Reitersmann”—“Silly Cavalier” in English). On the other end of the line were Léon and Wilhelm Karczag of the Theater an der Wien, who liked what they heard.

Lehár's music is far superior to the often silly libretto, which is at its most inspired when the leading characters turn to insults and sarcasm as they bicker. Neither Hanna or Danilo, it seems, has gotten over their passionate love affair from years earlier, and Lehár provides them (and the secondary couple, Valencienne and Camille) with a veritable “mood ring” of music for their emotional outpourings: lively entrance arias, “stolen love” duets, evocative ballads and a boisterous paean to the charms of women. The pièce de résistance is the title melody: a beguiling, sensual waltz so perfectly conceived that no one onstage or in the audience can resist it.

Following its December 1905 world premiere, word of mouth for *The Merry Widow* soon brought packed houses in Vienna and a clamoring for international productions. The 1906 Berlin premiere of Lehár's operetta featured the Austrian tenor Edmund Loewe, the father of Frederick Loewe—whose gorgeous music for *Brigadoon* and *My Fair Lady* is steeped in the Viennese tradition. By 1907, *The Merry Widow* was the toast of London and of New York—where it opened at the New Amsterdam Theatre starring Donald Brian and Ethel Jackson (and

ran for a hearty 416 performances). It also became a marketing phenomenon—with *Merry Widow* hats, corsets, cocktails and perfumes. *The Merry Widow* has been revived time and again, most famously on Broadway during World War II with Jan Kiepura and Marta Eggerth, and at San Diego Opera and New York City Opera in the 1970s (in a smart translation by Broadway lyricist Sheldon Harnick) starring Musicarnival alumna Beverly Sills and Alan Titus. In 2014 the Metropolitan Opera mounted *The Merry Widow* for Renée Fleming in a new production directed by Broadway's Susan Stroman; the reviews were tepid but *The Merry Widow*, undaunted, will no doubt continue to waltz around the globe.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

In his opening remarks for this recorded performance of *The New Merry Widow* (**Johnny Price's** title), the producer elatedly asks the audience to return to the Paris of yesteryear “for some shenanigans with a very lovely lady known as the Merry Widow.”

As it turns out, the much-touted new book and lyrics by Edward Eager (1911-64), first performed in 1955 at the Music Circus summer theater in Lambertville, NJ, are no better than the original ones—and in many ways are inferior and downright confusing. The over-eager Mr. Eager set the action in 1908 (so that Danilo can sing about “horseless cars”), changed the names of many of the characters (for no apparent reason) and added an insufferable Hungarian woman and her three money-hungry daughters; they have the surname Zador and are based on those real-life Kardashians of the 1950s, Jolie Gabor and her daughters Magda, Zsa Zsa and Eva.

To make even more of a muddle of things, the widow herself—Hanna Glawari, or Sonia as she was known in subsequent productions—has been re-named Vilia, which is also the name of her famous second-act aria. The song “Vilia” is about a hunter who falls in love with the witch of the woods—and Hanna/Sonia sings it at a party to entertain her friends. But in this version the widow sings the song about *herself*. It's probably a blessing that we can't understand the words that are sung by the 27-year-old **Beverly Sills**, who had previously performed the role of the widow in a Shubert Brothers touring production. Though her enunciation is mushy, her voice is sublime—sweet and pure, with an easy sureness of technique—and the Musicarnival audience is in her thrall, applauding furiously and demanding an encore. Her Prince Danilo is **Mace Barrett**, a veteran of several Broadway shows (where he created small roles and understudied the stars) who was Johnny Price's Harold Hill in the 1962 production of *The Music Man*. Barrett has a warm, rich voice that's refreshingly non-operatic and complements Sills in a pleasing yin-yang way.

Stephanie Augustine in the role of Valencienne, who in this adaptation goes by the name of Zina Zador (aka Baroness Pilaff), has an adequate singing voice but uses a really odd European accent that mars her first number with Camille, “A Nice Wealthy Wife.” Camille is terrifically spoken and stylishly (and ardently) sung by the tenor **Lloyd Thomas Leech**, and **Frank Shaw Stephens** as Baron Pilaff and **Jean Bruno** as the Jolie Gabor sendup Paula Zador-Knitsch are among the talented supporting cast members who dispense the hammy dialogue with as much aplomb as they can muster. The audience applause-o-meter runs high for the six principal male characters’ rendition of “Women” (one can only envision the accompanying Monty Python-esque kick line) and for the dancing of prima ballerina **Mary Ellen Moylan** and the corps de ballet. Lots of non-Lehár dances including the Polonaise from Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin* have made their way into *The New Merry Widow*, and conductor **Boris Kogan** and his 12-piece orchestra play them with elán. It should also be noted that the horrid Musicarnival organ is less prominent here than in previous productions—if not well tempered, then at least “slightly tempered.”

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Omar Ranney of *The Cleveland Press* did not care for the updated libretto (which he called “confusing”) or **William Boehm**’s direction, but he was entranced by the leading lady: “[The] production lacked setting. Where there should have been soft lighting, as in the fantasy of moonlight, the lights shone harshly on Miss Sills. What she brought forth was entirely by virtue of a lovely and well-disciplined voice.” William F. McDermott of *The Plain Dealer* also had high praise for Sills and for her co-star: “I have never encountered a better player in the name part than Beverly Sills.... Mace Barrett is her companion in song and he rises to the occasion.”—**R. P.**

CARMEN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 13–26, 1956 (World premiere: Paris, March 3, 1875;
New York premiere: October 23, 1878)

AUTHORS

Music by Georges Bizet, libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, after the novel by Prosper Mérimée;
English translation by Virginia Card and George Houston

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Michael Pollock

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Beverly Sills (Carmen), Lloyd Thomas Leech (Don José), Norman Treigle (Escamillo), Stephanie Augustine (Micaëla), Bill Armstrong (Morales), William McGaw (Zuniga), Bernice Maledon (Frasquita), Ilona H. Strasser (Mercédès), Arthur Newman (Dancairo), Michael Pollock (Remendado)

HIGHLIGHTS

“Habanera,” “Seguidilla,” “Gypsy Song,” “Toreador Song,” “Quintet,” “Flower Song,” “Card Song,” “Micaëla’s Aria”

SYNOPSIS

Carmen, a Gypsy who works in a cigarette factory in Seville, flirts with Don José, a corporal, and throws him a red rose—initiating a relationship that will end in tragedy. José abandons his longtime sweetheart, Micaëla, and deserts the military to follow Carmen and her Gypsy smugglers’ band—but Carmen quickly tires of him and turns her romantic attentions to the toreador Escamillo. Micaëla tracks down the smugglers in their mountain hideaway and takes José home to see his dying mother. As he leaves, he warns Carmen that they will meet again. Carmen and Escamillo go to Seville for a bullfight, and while Escamillo is in the arena, a distraught José shows up and pleads with Carmen to return to him. When she refuses, he fatally stabs her.—*R. P.*

ABOUT THE OPERA

Though Georges Bizet (1838–1875) wrote some 30 operas, as well as compositions that are staples of the orchestral and ballet repertory, he will always be best known for *Carmen*. For more than a century it has been one of the world’s most popular operas, and what a work it is—a veritable jukebox of operatic hit tunes, including the sensual “Habanera” and the rousing “Toreador Song.” It’s also exceedingly accessible—from the opening bars of the prelude, “Bizet grabs hold of you instantly, plunging you into a Spanish world of brazen color, intense gaiety and almost reckless abandon,” said Leonard Bernstein. Yet this merriment is quickly followed by a second prelude that foreshadows doom and the title character’s tragic death.

Bizet based *Carmen* on Prosper Mérimée’s 1845 novel of the same name and wrote it as an *opéra comique*, a genre of French opera that is partly sung and partly spoken. He and his librettists, Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, took some liberties with Mérimée’s story (to

make it theatrically viable) and went to great pains to guarantee that *Carmen*, an alluring Gypsy woman who works in a cigarette factory, was presented as a tragic heroine rather than a stock melodrama character. *Carmen*, who is loved by two men, the jealous corporal Don José and the self-assured bullfighter Escamillo, is a mass of conflicting emotions—cruel one minute and charmingly flirtatious the next, fatalistic yet wanting total freedom—just as the opera itself is a paradox of humor and tragedy, ending with *Carmen*'s graphic murder.

This unusual opera—with its air of immorality and its assemblage of colorful characters who embrace lawlessness—rubbed many of the first-night critics and audience members the wrong way when *Carmen* had its premiere on March 3, 1875, at the Opéra-Comique in Paris. One flummoxed critic even wrote that the music lacked novelty and distinction. But the opera was soon performed all over the world and championed by the composers Wagner, Brahms and Tchaikovsky, and in due course *Carmen*'s popularity grew—though so too did the tendency to perform it with recitatives (sung speech delivered in a declamatory manner) rather than the spoken dialogue as originally written. The use of recitatives in *Carmen* began in October 1875 in Vienna, when the French libretto was translated into German; Bizet's friend Ernest Guiraud composed the recitatives. (In that same production, music from another Bizet opera was interpolated for an extended dance sequence at the top of the final act.)

Sadly, Bizet did not live to see *Carmen*'s mega-success. Suffering from heart disease, he died of a throat infection less than four months after the premiere, never knowing how many people around the world would embrace *Carmen*—this work so rich in character, atmosphere and action—as their favorite opera.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

In 1956 **Johnny Price** brought opera back to Musicarnival. As a follow-up to the previous summer's *Fledermaus* (see 1955 SEASON), he produced *The Merry Widow* and *Carmen*, both starring the rising New York City Opera soprano **Beverly Sills** (the Rosalinda from Musicarnival's *Fledermaus*). Each of these productions ran for two weeks, with *The Merry Widow* closing on Sunday, August 12, and *Carmen* opening the next night. The wonder of it all is that Sills—the ultimate trouper—sang 28 successive performances without missing a beat.

The English adaptation used by Musicarnival was written in the early 1940s by the husband-and-wife team Virginia Card and George Houston. Card was a light opera singer; Houston had a dual career as an opera singer and a Hollywood actor—he starred in several grade-B Westerns—and was the director of the American Music Theatre in Pasadena, which presented opera in English.

Their *Carmen* translation is merely serviceable, skirting the more tragic aspects of the opera and making it clear that colloquial American language (“Here she is, what a girl!”) is worlds away from the original, mellifluous French (“*Voilà la Carmencita!*”). Interestingly, at the same time that Card and Houston were writing their English version of Bizet’s opera, Oscar Hammerstein II was adapting *Carmen*’s book and lyrics for the 1943 Broadway musical *Carmen Jones*—which was set at a black U.S. military base.

The Musicarnival production was directed by the New York City Opera tenor **Michael Pollock**, who also played the supporting role of the smuggler Remendado. The settings (designed by **Connie Price**) were updated from the 1850s to the French Impressionist era of the 1870s, and Pollock returned *Carmen* to its original “opéra comique” status, using spoken dialogue which no doubt played better for the Musicarnival audiences than it does on this 60-year-old tape. When Sills’s *Carmen* and **Norman Treigle**’s Escamillo first meet and coyly engage in double entendre (with Treigle employing a strange “Continental” accent)—“May I be a friend, Carmencita?” “I have too many friends already.” “Then perhaps a lover?”—this writer had to banish thoughts of Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca routines from *Your Show of Shows*. Still, *Carmen* marks the first time Sills and Treigle worked together—a famous pairing that was to reach its peak a decade later at New York City Opera—and their easy rapport is readily evident.

Sills, in her 1987 autobiography, honestly sized up her only stint as *Carmen*: “. . .having sung too many Micaëlas and never sung the title role, I was having a ball singing *Carmen* at Musicarnival. *Carmen* is almost always sung by a mezzo-soprano. Mezzo-sopranos have a fuller, more sensual sound in the lower register. The soprano’s strength is in the beauty of her high notes. However, I didn’t think twice about doing it. It was one of the few times in my life I haven’t taken my work all that seriously. I just wanted to have fun with the role.”

The jollity is evident in her lively, brightly sung performance. What’s missing is tragic stature; there’s no sense of foreboding in the “Card Song.” Tenor **Lloyd Thomas Leech** (Eisenstein in Musicarnival’s 1955 *Fledermaus*) as Don José sings admirably—his “Flower Song” has fine tone and phrasing, with just a smidge of strain on the high notes (the downside of performing 14 nights in a row)—but he’s wooden when delivering dialogue. **Norman Treigle**’s richly delivered “Toreador Song” receives a prolonged ovation from the audience. **Stephanie Augustine** is a sweet but bland Micaëla, and the rest of the supporting cast is fine when singing and less fine when speaking.

Boris Kogan conducts the small but mighty orchestra with exemplary enthusiasm and

sensitivity, though the less said about Musicarnival's organ the better. (Did all summer tent theaters of the day make use of this most annoying of instruments?) And in the tradition of interpolating music from other Bizet compositions, the rousing ballet number at the top of the third act (Musicarnival presented *Carmen* in three acts rather than four) for the American prima ballerina **Mary Ellen Moylan** is Bizet's *L'Arlésienne Suite No. 2*. One can only imagine how splendidly she danced.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

"This audience cheered a great deal of exceptionally good singing, acting and dancing, along with some of the best costumes and lighting the tent theater has shown all season," enthused Oscar Smith in the *Akron Beacon Journal*. "Beverly Sills, as an actress, is not the most impassioned and tumultuous Carmen I have seen. [But she] has a wonderfully flexible voice, pure, true and warmly musical," wrote William F. McDermott in *The Plain Dealer*.—**R. P.**

WONDERFUL TOWN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 27–September 9, 1956 (New York opening: February 25, 1953;
559 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, book by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, based on Fields and Chodorov's play *My Sister Eileen* and stories by Ruth McKenney

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Joan Kibrig (Ruth Sherwood), Stephanie Augustine (Eileen Sherwood), George Gaynes (Robert Baker), Jordan Bentley (The Wreck), Wayne Jordan (Frank Lippencott), William T. Skelton (Chick Clark), Frank Shaw Stevens (Appopolous)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Christopher Street,” “Ohio,” “One Hundred Easy Ways,” “What a Waste,” “A Little Bit in Love,” “Conversation Piece,” “A Quiet Girl,” “Conga!,” “Swing!,” “It’s Love,” “Wrong Note Rag”

SYNOPSIS

The musical concerns the adventures of sisters Ruth and Eileen Sherwood in Greenwich Village after they arrive from Ohio seeking careers. Ruth has problems getting her stories accepted by *Manhattan* magazine, and Eileen has problems warding off admirers. On a freelance newspaper assignment, Ruth gets to interview seven overamorous, conga-dancing Brazilian naval cadets, who cause a near-riot. Though this temporarily lands Eileen in jail, Ruth manages to land a handsome magazine editor.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

There’s a whole genre of shows that have come to be known as New York musicals, in which the city itself is essentially the main character. Though the genre includes musicals ranging from *Guys & Dolls* to *West Side Story*, from *Bells Are Ringing* to *Rent*, it was book writers/lyricists Betty Comden (1917-2006) and Adolph Green (1914-2002) who practically cornered the market. Over a period of 50 years the team penned more of these musicals than anyone else, beginning with their debut show, *On the Town*, in 1944. “New York, New York,” they rhapsodized, “—a helluva town!”

So in 1953, when their mentor, director George Abbott, was dissatisfied with the Leroy Anderson–Arnold B. Horwitt score that had been fashioned for his new show, *Wonderful Town*, based on the play *My Sister Eileen* and starring Rosalind Russell, he immediately called Betty and Adolph. There were two stipulations, though: Abbott wanted to reunite them with composer Leonard Bernstein (1918-90). Would Lenny do it? And Abbott needed the score in four weeks to keep Russell committed to the project. Could *they* do it?

Yes, and yes. In fact, this may be the only great Broadway score created under such pressure. In his memoirs, Abbott reported “more tension . . . and more screaming” than he witnessed in any of his other shows. Yet somehow the four of them, collaborating with playwrights Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, wound up in sync, telling a very funny—and as usual for Comden and Green, satirical—story about two young women from Columbus, Ohio, determined to make it in the Manhattan of 1935.

Bernstein was affected by the sights and sounds of that era: “The Thirties! My God, those were the years!” he said. “The excitement that was around! The political awareness! F.D.R.! Fiorello!

Real personalities! And the wonderful fashions! Glorious! And the songs! What beat!” (All exclamation points his.)

The score is filled with “pastiche”—that is, intentional imitations of various musical styles, like the conga, Irish jig and swing/jazz (the first thing Bernstein enthusiastically played for Comden and Green was an Eddie Duchin vamp). But the songs are all imbued with Bernstein’s unmistakable signature. *Wonderful Town* was the second of four musicals he composed during the decade (the other three: *Trouble in Tahiti*, *Candide* and *West Side Story*). It was a gush of music in the popular vein from the man who led the classical music world.

In her first and only Broadway musical, Roz Russell scored such a tremendous hit that *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson suggested she run for president. But through the years, the show has worked marvelously with performers as varied as Carol Channing, Russell’s successor and star of the national tour; Kim Criswell, who led the 1999 studio cast recording; and Donna Murphy, who took on the 2004 Broadway revival.

Many of us can relate to its theme. In the words of Comden and Green, “This show celebrates New York as the magnet for young people from all fields of endeavor who, like Ruth and Eileen, still come here to fulfill their aspirations in this Wonderful Town.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

On this, the closing night of the two-week run, **Johnny Price** shows us what truly populist theater is all about. Acknowledging the election that’s on the horizon, he asks the audience to fill out a “ballot” with titles of the musicals they’d like to see the following summer. And one can only surmise that he listened—because *South Pacific* turns up *twice* in 1957, just two summers after he first produced it.

Interesting factoid: Robert Fryer, who produced *Wonderful Town* on Broadway, was a college classmate of Johnny’s, so it was only fitting that Musicarnival be granted the license for one of the first stock productions.

This musical stands or falls with the onstage relationship between Ruth and Eileen; on Broadway, Ruth’s sister was played by the vivacious Edie Adams. Musicarnival’s production does not disappoint, with **Joan Kibrig** (Adelaide in the 1955 *Guys & Dolls*) and **Stephanie Augustine** (from Tuptim and Princess Maria to Eileen!) suitably joined at the hip. What a kick to hear “One Hundred Easy Ways” get the laughs it deserves in Kibrig’s deadpan, and she puts

us in touch with the vulnerability that Ruth's words so deftly mask. (Johnny told me: "She could do anything.") Augustine's "A Little Bit in Love" makes you wonder why this charmer of a song never became a hit outside the theater. And of course, to have the duo perform "Ohio" in Ohio is a slam dunk.

But there's more in Warrensville Heights than the Sherwood sisters. Aficionados, take note: Johnny brought in two guys from the original cast to re-create their roles—leading man **George Gaynes** as Bob and **Jordan Bentley** as The Wreck. Gaynes, who died in 2016 at the age of 98, was an awfully good singer and actor; too bad he defected from musical theater to films (including *Tootsie* and the notorious *Police Academy*) after flirting with matinee-idol status in *Wonderful Town*, Cole Porter's *Out of This World* and the national tour of *My Fair Lady*. And to hear Bentley reprise the spot-on satire of "Pass That Football" is to experience a small but pungently American truism.

It's fun to catch Comden and Green's "Story Vignettes"—terrific material for Ruth in Act One and a reminder of the team's original creds in the late 1930s as sketch writer/satirists. And I'm impressed with **Boris Kogan**'s aplomb in pulling off this jazzy, highly sophisticated score with 14 musicians in the pit (a few more horns than usual), given the stringencies of summer stock.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The reviews themselves are fine, but this side note in one of them paints quite a picture. Jack Warfel in *The Cleveland Press*: "The Musicarnival standards [of John Price and Robert Bishop] show no sagging. Unfortunately such able guidance has no control over the pesky insect world. Last night's tent atmosphere suffered a mosquito plague, a problem the management guaranteed would be alleviated by tonight."—**B. R.**

KISMET

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

September 10–23, 1956 (New York opening: December 3, 1953;
583 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest from themes of Alexander Borodin, book by Charles Lederer and Luther Davis, based on a play by Edward Knoblock

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Norwood Smith (a public poet, later called Hajj), Doretta Morrow (Marsinah, his daughter), Libi Staiger (Lalume), Jack Ringstad (Caliph), Michael Kermoyan (Wazir), Mara (Princess Samaris)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Rhymes Have I,” “Not Since Nineveh,” “Baubles, Bangles and Beads,” “Stranger in Paradise,” “Night of My Nights,” “And This Is My Beloved,” “The Olive Tree”

SYNOPSIS

In this “Musical Arabian Night,” the action occurs within a 24-hour period from dawn to dawn in ancient Baghdad, where a roguish public poet assumes the identity of Hajj the beggar and has a series of unlikely adventures. By the time they have ended, he has drowned the wicked Wazir, has seen his daughter, Marsinah, wedded to the handsome Caliph, has been appointed Emir of Baghdad, and has gone off to the desert with the Wazir’s luscious wife, Lalume.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Revisiting the published script for *Kismet*, I was tickled by Richard Watts’s summation in the *New York Post*: “a frankly old-fashioned amalgamation of stateliness and sex.” Correct on all counts, so let’s enlarge on them.

Old-fashioned: Absolutely, especially when you have an old warhorse (1911) of a play by the same name to build on; when producer Edwin Lester originates the production at his operetta-infested Los Angeles Civic Light Opera company; and when songwriters Robert Wright (1914-2005) and George (Chet) Forrest (1915-99)—they of *Song of Norway* fame—are on hand to do what they did best: “adapt” the themes of a classical composer, in this case the Russian Alexander Borodin.

Stateliness: *Kismet* has always seemed to me half costume parade/processional: a kind of extravaganza whose opulence cost \$400,000 (up to that time, only *The King and I* had a bigger budget).

Sex: With choreographer Jack Cole on hand, *of course*; one critic said the show displayed elements of Minsky's burlesque. For example, in this musical Cole gave Broadway's so-called tired businessmen some eye-popping belly dancers. Even the stage directions in the script refer to the "deliciously under-clad slave girls." But we'll credit *Kismet* with more than that: a gorgeous sensuality in its dance and design, its music and even its lyrics ("Let peacocks and monkeys in purple adornings / Show her the way to my bridal chamber, / Then get you gone till the morn of my mornings / After the night of my nights").

Let's settle, though, on Watts's word "amalgamation" as the key, which makes *Kismet* a fascinating anomaly in this age of Rodgers & Hammerstein's ultra-unity. Most of the critics were not won over, but audiences were, despite the weaknesses of the Charles Lederer-Luther Davis book. Word of mouth kicked in, the musical won a Tony Award as the best of the season, and its status as a Big Sing of a show still reaches fever pitch on the cast recording. What powerful personalities—and voices—inhabited that stage: Alfred Drake's charismatic Poet, Joan Diener's voluptuous Lalume, and as attractive a pair of "juveniles"—Doretta Morrow and newcomer Richard Kiley—as the decade produced.

As for Wright and Forrest, they imaginatively integrated Borodin's themes with their own contribution, creating a score that was surprisingly unified, albeit with a few dashes of jazz tossed in, no doubt, for Jack Cole's sake. Classical music lovers will recognize strains of Borodin's D-Major String Quartet in the sumptuous "And This Is My Beloved," and in a song that became a huge hit for Peggy Lee and Frank Sinatra, "Baubles, Bangles and Beads." The "Polovtsian Dances" echo in another pop hit—this one for Tony Bennett and Tony Martin—"Stranger in Paradise."

Some years later, Forrest recalled, "We listened to as many classical recordings as we could find, and wrote down in a big notebook the themes we thought had the most potential." When asked in 1953 if the team approached Borodin with "reverence," he told Mike Wallace: "We feel reverence as long as we can, then we have to get the better of our conscience.... We wrote in the style of Borodin, using many of his themes and fragments, but most of the score is original." Their good taste and craftsmanship make it work.

Kismet has been called a tongue-in-cheek fairy tale that continually spoofs itself. But even in this musical, there's a deeper layer. Ethan Mordden notes that although the Poet manipulates and drives all the action, he knows that "the ultimate truth is not human will but fate." Or as Wright and Forrest put it in the haunting opening and closing number, sung at the end by the Poet:

“Princes come, Princes go, / An hour of pomp and show they know; / Princes come, / And over the sands, / And over the sands of time, / They go.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Boris Kogan, that “dapper Russian gentleman” (**Johnny Price**’s term) and veteran of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, is in his element conducting Borodin-Wright-Forrest. At 17 strong, this is the largest Musicarnival pit orchestra to date, and Kogan luxuriates in its sound and that of his chorus.

Norwood Smith as the Poet sings the role exceptionally well but lacks Alfred Drake’s charisma (who doesn’t?). **Libi Staiger** makes up for it, playing her third starring role of the season with magnetism to spare. As the tough-minded Lalume, who always gets what she wants, Staiger stops the show on two exits.

Stephanie Augustine, in her fifth Musicarnival outing this summer, makes for a lovely Marsina; playing opposite her is **Jack Ringstad**, the tenor from Johnny’s 1955 *South Pacific*. In this production *Kismet*’s dances spring from a female point of view, and a genuinely Eastern one at that: The Manchurian-born **Mara**, who restaged Jerome Robbins’s ballet “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” for *The King and I*, choreographs (with **James Nygren**) and appears as Princess Samaris. And those who followed *The King and I*’s history through the years will recognize the name of **Michael Kermoyan**, who practically based his career on playing either the Kralahome (beginning in 1964) or the King himself. Here the basso reigns as the wicked Wazir.

A disconcerting number of ad libs turn up in this *Kismet*, directed by **William C. Boehm**, but the script is lame in so many places that we won’t point fingers.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Johnny and William C. Boehm seem to have pulled off an impossible feat: making a musical that relies on spectacle work in the stark confines of theater-in-the-round. Wrote William F. McDermott in *The Plain Dealer*: “It is the most ... sensuous and richly caparisoned production of the season. The dancing is especially lively and authentic in style, and the tent stage is frequently an organized riot of motion and color.”

Libi Staiger, who had become Musicarnival’s top crowd-pleaser, got a feature story in *The Cleveland Press*, with Omar Ranney invited to watch her transform herself from “small-town American girl” (she hailed from Illinois mining country) to the exotic Lalume. At the end of his

piece, Ranney took note of the finished product: “An amazing creature out of a dream harem. You gulp something to the effect that, well, why doesn’t she sit down and chat a while? ‘Love to,’ she says, ‘but you see, it’s like this: These skin-tight harem pants—they just weren’t built for sitting.’ You leave, via [Musicarnival’s] old apple orchard [on the tent theater grounds], contemplating the wonders of nature and the theater.”—*B. R.*



William Chapman and Eileen Schauler

1957 Season

THE PAJAMA GAME

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

May 31–June 23, 1957 (New York opening: May 13, 1954;
1,063 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by George Abbott and Richard Bissell (based on Bissell's novel *7½ Cents*), music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

David Aiken (Sid Sorokin), Patricia Marand (Babe Williams), Dorothy Love (Gladys), Tim Herbert (Hines), Jean Bruno (Mabel), Michael Pollock (Prez), Helen Curtis (Mae), Arthur Newman (Hasler)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"I'm Not at All in Love," "Hey, There," "Once-a-Year Day," "Small Talk," "There Once Was a Man," "Steam Heat," "Hernando's Hideaway"

SYNOPSIS

The musical is concerned with the activities at the Sleep-Tite Pajama Factor in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where Sid Sorokin, the new plant superintendent, has taken a shine to Babe Williams, a union activist. Their romance suffers a setback when the workers go on strike for a seven-and-a-half-cent hourly raise, but eventually management and labor are again singing a tune.—*S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

At first glance 1954's *The Pajama Game* looks to be a typical musical comedy of the mid-1950s. But as with *The Music Man*, the show's apparent simplicity is deceptive. Getting a chance to listen to the entire show as it played to a live audience reminded me what an inspired creation—and an unusual piece of Americana—this is.

The show brought together a surfeit of major (or soon-to-be-major) talent: first-time producers Robert E. Griffith and Harold Prince (who saw the possibilities in Richard Bissell's then-current novel, *7½ Cents*, about a strike at a Midwest pajama factory); co-book writer (with Bissell) and co-director (with Jerome Robbins) George Abbott (1887-1995); the young choreographer Bob Fosse (1927-87); songwriters Richard Adler (1921-2012) and Jerry Ross (1926-55), in their first work for a book musical; co-stars John Raitt, Janis Paige and Eddie Foy Jr.; and new face Carol Haney, who led Fosse's galvanic "Steam Heat" dance number.

I want to single out Abbott and Adler & Ross. At 67, you'd think Abbott would be too old to take on this decidedly contemporary tale; besides which, as Prince tells us, "he was not attracted to it; it seemed drab, and it was about a strike, and this country was in the throes of the witch-hunt." But the writer/director came around once he thought up the title and the subplot, wisely relying on Bissell's ear for working-class dialogue, and as usual, his own skill at laying down structure and establishing tone. Efficiency expert Hines's opening speech to the audience is vintage Abbott in its slyness: "This is a very serious drama. It's kind of a problem play. It's about Capital and Labor. I wouldn't bother to make such a point of all this except later on, if you happen to see a lot of naked women being chased through the woods, I don't want you to get the wrong impression. This play is full of symbolism...."

Not a chance. Instead, *The Pajama Game* is full of high spirits and muscular American vernacular. Besides which, the musical is a good-natured spoof of management (says "old-man" Hasler, the boss out to swindle his workforce: "What right has the Union to run their Coca-Cola machines with our electricity!"). And it offers a refreshing sexiness that's rare in an Eisenhower-era musical designed to cater to the so-called Silent Generation. For example, in an exchange you won't find in the sanitized film version: "*Mae* [reading the newspaper headlines]: 'Teenage Sex Orgies Revealed.' Isn't that terrible? *Sid*: Yeah, they sure have more fun nowadays than when I was a kid."

In recent years Abbott's importance in the development of the American musical has been undervalued. Though his signature became predictable by the early 1960s, and writers like Stephen Sondheim virtually deconstructed it in their own work, *The Pajama Game* is Abbott at his best: punchy, touching, economical and (to borrow one of his favorite words) "peppy" musical comedy. And what admirable pragmatism! If Abbott suspects a song will catch on, he makes sure it's reprised at least once—in the case of "Hey, There," twice: once by Raitt and a second time by Paige. Following along with the script, one is tempted, out of admiration, to diagram the plot; it manages to be (another Abbott term) "rational" and full of surprises.

In his memoirs, he says flat-out: “My whole training and experience makes me place ... story line first and words second. A playwright seems to me like an architect—he must know what the whole building is like before he begins.... A novelist can afford to wander, but just let the playwright bring in a new set of unrelated characters in the middle of Act Two and see what happens next.”

As for Adler and Ross, *The Pajama Game* is one of only two musicals they wrote for Broadway, due to Ross’s death at 29 of a lung ailment. (The other is *Damn Yankees*, produced by Musicarnival later in the 1957 season.) The fact that they were mentored by Frank Loesser says a lot; in fact, Leonard Bernstein dubbed them “the two young Loessers.” Together they brought a voice to theater song that was, like Loesser’s, casually conversational in style, from Sid’s duet with his Dictaphone, “Hey, there! You with the stars in your eyes”; to Babe’s doth-protest-too-much waltz: “I’m not at all in love, not at all in love, not I. / Not a bit, not a mite / Though I’ll admit he’s quite a hunk of guy”; to the couple’s faux-hillbilly declaration: “There once was a woman who loved a man / Loved him enough to cause the Trojan war. / They say that nobody ever loved as much as she-ee / But me-ee I love you more!”

Fittingly, as the team once told Stanley Green, “We’re writing for the man in the street. We try to write universal truths in colloquial terms.... We’re writing the way our generation demands we write.”

On Broadway in 1954 *The Pajama Game* was state-of-the-art musical comedy, and the audience sensed it. Writes Abbott: “No large ticket sale awaited us when we opened in New York, but Broadway is a magic and wonderful place when you hit the jackpot. The big lines soon formed at the ticket window.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

First, a word about **Johnny Price**’s welcome to the audience. He points out that next week’s attraction changes from *The Pajama Game* to ... *Tosca*! The producer heralds a new translation created especially for Musicarnival by the Met’s John Gutzman; his stars Beverly Sills (then rapidly ascending at New York City Opera), William Olvis and William Chapman; and his approach to the material: “See how wonderful opera can be in English and intimately performed by a group of singers who also know how to act.” The man had theater in his bone marrow.

Cleveland Press critic Stan Anderson writes that Johnny was “wise to open the season with this piece.” Anderson talks about its high quality (for example, Bob Fosse’s “Steam Heat” number was scrupulously re-created), but he misses the most important point: *The Pajama Game*

celebrates the working class of the Midwest—and Cleveland, especially at that time, was one of America’s hardest-working blue-collar towns. The audience audibly connects with everything in the show: the comedy, songs, romance and dance numbers. One wonders how many union groups Johnny seduced with special discounts.

This *Pajama Game* is well cast, though not exceptionally so. **Patricia Marand**, a favorite of Richard Rodgers who had first attracted attention in Broadway’s *Wish You Were Here* (and received a Tony nomination in the mid-1960s for *It’s a Bird! It’s a Plane! It’s Superman!*), enjoyed a long career in musical theater and New York supper clubs. Her Babe is far better sung than Janis Paige’s (listen to her beautiful back-phrasing in the reprise of “Hey, There”), but she lacks the spitfire quality that made Paige such a dynamo. And **David Aiken** misses the romantic allure (call it charisma) and playfulness that made John Raitt a matinee idol, though his baritone sometimes rings out even more excitingly than Raitt’s, a sign of his credentials singing Menotti on Broadway. The production does better in its featured roles: **Tim Herbert** is in sync with the vaudeville comedy that’s at the heart of Hines, and **Dorothy Love** is a delightfully eccentric Gladys.

The show is a joy, and yet listening to it is also bittersweet. *The Pajama Game* could not be written today because the kind of working-class camaraderie the musical puts onstage belongs to the American past. Those Sleep-Tite manufacturing jobs have gone overseas.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

The reviews are all good to excellent. What I find most significant is Arthur Spaeth’s observation in the *Cleveland News* that *The Pajama Game* is “the fastest-starting musical yet. There never has been a song-and-dancer that set itself up in ... business with the speed this one does.” See above: ABOUT THE MUSICAL. Spaeth’s comment has much to do with the genius of George Abbott, and this *Pajama Game* was the first musical presented by the tent theater for which he had written the script.—**B. R.**

TOSCA

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 24–30, 1957 (World premiere: Rome, Teatro Costanzi, January 14, 1900;
New York premiere: Metropolitan Opera, February 4, 1901)

AUTHORS

Music by Giacomo Puccini, libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, after the play by Victorien Sardou;
English translation by John Gutman

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Michael Pollock

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Beverly Sills (Floria Tosca), William Olvis (Mario Cavaradossi), William Chapman (Baron Scarpia), Arthur Newman (Sacristan and Sciarrone), David Reid (César Angelotti), Michael Pollock (Spoletta)

HIGHLIGHTS

“Recondita armonia,” “Non la sospiri, la nostra casetta,” “Quale’occhio al mondo puo star di paro,” “Te Deum,”
“Vissi d’arte,” “E lucevan le stelle,” “O dolci mani”

SYNOPSIS

Floria Tosca, a celebrated singer, becomes trapped between her allegiance to her rebel lover—the painter Mario Cavaradossi—and the scheming of the treacherous police chief Baron Scarpia, who desires her as his mistress. After Cavaradossi is caught hiding an escaped political prisoner, he is brought to Scarpia’s residence and tortured. Tosca, who has been invited to dine with Scarpia, hears Cavaradossi’s screams and implores the police chief to release him—agreeing to give in to Scarpia’s lust in exchange for Cavaradossi’s freedom. Scarpia writes a letter of safe passage for the lovers and amorously advances toward Tosca, who stabs him to death with a knife from the table. Early the next morning Tosca goes to the condemned Cavaradossi, informing him that he will undergo a fake execution per Scarpia’s orders. When the firing squad’s shots turn out to be real, Tosca kills herself.—**R. P.**

ABOUT THE OPERA

Opera composer Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924) wrote immensely melodic music and was blessed with unerring theatrical instincts—he once stated that God had touched him with his little finger and said, “Write only for the theater.” Puccini diligently obeyed, writing engrossingly dramatic operas that were both sensual and sentimental—operas that instantly appealed to the emotions of audiences. *Tosca*, which was first performed in Rome in 1900 and is the fifth of Puccini’s operas (and the second of his “Big Three” works—preceded, chronologically, by

La Bohème and followed by *Madama Butterfly*), is a melodrama bursting at the seams with romance, lust, political intrigue, torture, murder and attempted rape.

The opera, like the 1887 French play by Sardou upon which it was based (a star vehicle for the celebrated actress Sarah Bernhardt), is set in Rome in June 1800 a few days after Napoleon's decisive victory at Marengo—a victory that guaranteed that Italy would remain firmly under Napoleonic control. Historically, it was a time of fear and menace in Rome—which makes it especially apt that one of *Tosca's* three leading roles, the police chief Scarpia, is an Iago-like character before whom “all Rome trembled.” (Fortunately, there is also a bit of humor to be found in the opera in the character of the bumbling Sacristan—a foil to the satanic Scarpia.)

Tosca has its fair share of ravishing numbers, including the title character's “Vissi d'arte,” Cavaradossi's “E lucevan le stelle,” and the final love duet, “O dolci mani.” But *Tosca*, unlike Puccini's other operas, also has a large amount of sadism—really gruesome stuff. The action takes place within an intensive 18-hour time frame, and by the end of the third act the audience has witnessed a man who has had the screws put to him (quite literally), along with the violent deaths of all three leading characters.

From the time of *Tosca's* world premiere in January 1900 (a media event covered by the international press) and its London opening six months later, when the audience “cheered itself hoarse,” critics have loved to attack it. Joseph Kerman, a music professor at Oxford and at the University of California, Berkeley, referred to its “cafe-music banality” and dubbed it “a shabby little shocker” in his famous 1952 book *Opera as Drama*.

But the great singing actors of our time—none more memorable than Maria Callas and Tito Gobbi as *Tosca* and Scarpia in Franco Zeffirelli's 1964 production of the opera—have reveled in the meaty roles, and *Tosca* today remains one of the most popular operas in the world. Rarely does more than a season go by at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, the Royal Opera in London, or the Vienna State Opera when *Tosca* is not performed. The shabby little shocker, it seems, has legs.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The 1957 season marked the third year in a row that **Johnny Price** brought opera into Musicarnival, following on the heels of *Die Fledermaus* [see 1955 SEASON] and *The Merry Widow* and *Carmen* [see 1956 SEASON], all of which starred the comely young redhead **Beverly Sills**.

In 1957 Sills—who the previous fall had married Peter Greenough, an editor at Cleveland’s *The Plain Dealer*—returned to Musicarnival for a new production that received worldwide attention: *Tosca* in modern dress, with the plot set in an unnamed mid-20th-century Eastern European capital (bringing to mind Gian Carlo Menotti’s 1950 opera, *The Consul*).

The English translation was by **John Gutman**, an assistant manager at the Metropolitan Opera, whose translations of operas were colloquial and eminently singable. His translation of *Tosca* had previously been used for the 1955 NBC Opera telecast starring Leontyne Price, and for the Musicarnival production there were only a handful of phrases in the libretto that needed updating. (“Once we have reached the ocean we’ll find the sailboat and off to sea” became “Once we are at the airport . . . we’ll be free.”) Plus there was the addition of some newfangled electronics: Tosca hears the screams of Cavaradossi, who is being tortured, over an intercom—and Scarpia orders his lackey to “Turn up the sound!” Gutman and **Michael Pollock**, the New York City Opera tenor who directed the Musicarnival production (and played the supporting role of the police agent Spoletta), are to be praised for their success at capturing the essence of the Cold War Era—which has eerie parallels in the present-day situation in Ukraine.

Sills, who was to become famous for her coloratura soprano roles, is not an ideal Tosca. (“Beverly does not have the powerful top notes for roles like Tosca or Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly*”—*Time* cover story, November 22, 1971.) Nevertheless, she was an audience favorite at Musicarnival—as evidenced by the applause upon her Act One entrance—and she gives a committed performance in this production, topped by a beautifully sung “Vissi d’arte” with some melting suspended soft notes. Though you can’t tell from the recording, Sills also had the chance to show off her budding acting chops: In this version Tosca commits suicide not by jumping off a parapet but by stabbing herself with the knife she used to kill Scarpia.

Another Musicarnival favorite, **William Chapman**, star of *The King and I* the previous summer, is well-nigh perfect as Scarpia—singing with force and suavity and proving himself a master of enunciation. (Chapman was certainly versatile: After kicking off Scarpia’s boots, he played Emile de Becque in *South Pacific* the following week at Musicarnival—and four months later assumed the title role in Verdi’s *Macbeth* at New York City Opera.)

Cavaradossi is thrillingly performed by tenor **William Olvis**, whose appealing looks and virile, full-throated voice first gained national attention in 1954 when he replaced Mario Lanza in the film *Deep in My Heart*—and who in December 1956 created the wry role of the Governor in the Bernstein–Wilbur–Hellman *Candide* on Broadway.

Also fine are **David Reid** as Angelotti and **Arthur Newman** of New York City Opera as the Sacristan (who unfortunately, for some unknown reason, is directed to *speak* rather than sing his second role—Scarpia’s orderly Sciarrone).

Strong praise must be heaped on **Boris Kogan**, who conducted an ensemble of 17 players, including six strings—the most musicians he could squeeze into the tiny orchestra pit—yet somehow made the orchestra sound like a million bucks, barring the organ music that wells up at the strangest of times (including during Tosca’s fit of jealousy over Cavaradossi’s newest painting).

All in all, Johnny Price’s “experiment in opera in English,” as he refers to this fourth installment of the opera series during his opening greeting to the audience, makes for an exhilarating listening experience.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

“Audience approval suggested that this new approach to an old opera is not a gamble, but rather a sure-fire hit,” raved Herbert Elwell in *The Plain Dealer*. “A capacity audience applauded the work of a strong cast.... Michael Pollock directed the production with a sensitive regard for minute detail ... and Boris Kogan does his finest musical directing for Musicarnival in this *Tosca*,” wrote Oscar Smith in the *Akron Beacon Journal*. In addition to the local critics, *Time* and *Musical America* weighed in favorably, the latter praising Sills’s “true dramatic flair and a voice to match.”—**R. P.**

SOUTH PACIFIC

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 1–14, 1957 (New York opening: April 7, 1949;
1,925 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan, adapted from James A. Michener’s *Tales of the South Pacific*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Mimi Kelly (Ensign Nellie Forbush), William Chapman (Emile de Becque), Delores Martin (Bloody Mary), Don Driver (Luther Billis), Stan Grover (Lieutenant Joseph Cable)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“A Cockeyed Optimist,” “Some Enchanted Evening,” “Bloody Mary,” “There Is Nothin’ Like a Dame,” “Bali Ha’i,” “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair,” “A Wonderful Guy,” “Younger Than Springtime,” “Happy Talk,” “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” “This Nearly Was Mine”

SYNOPSIS

Emile de Becque, a middle-aged French planter, falls in love with the nurse Ensign Nellie Forbush. One of the islanders, the crafty Bloody Mary, has her eyes on the handsome Lieutenant Cable for her beautiful daughter, Liat. They fall in love, but Cable finds it difficult to reconcile their different races. Nellie, meanwhile, meets de Becque’s children and is shocked that they are of mixed race; she ends the relationship. De Becque and Cable are recruited to spy on Japanese troop movements in a dangerous mission. While they are away, Nellie bonds with the children and grows to love them. Cable and de Becque’s mission is successful, but Cable is killed by the Japanese. De Becque returns home to find Nellie and his children waiting with open arms.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Harlowe R. Hoyt noted in *The Plain Dealer* that “**Johnny Price** is breaking his rule of ‘no repetition’ ” in bringing *South Pacific* back to Musicarnival just two years after the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical had first been presented there. In this case it was a rule worth breaking: The show set box office records in 1955, and as Hoyt wrote in 1957, “it bids fair to become a minor classic.” A little more than a half-century later, we know he need not have qualified the statement. *South Pacific* is one of the most distinguished and compelling works in the canon.

In the 1955 notes, I mentioned that the audience’s deep connection with the material was palpable, given the proximity of the war to their own life experience. (As a lieutenant of an LCT,

Johnny himself was the first skipper to successfully unload troops and equipment on to Utah Beach in the first wave of the Normandy Invasion on D-Day.) In the 1955 production, the first nine scenes of Act One were missing in the tape recordings; now, in 1957, the audience response to the full piece is inexorable. In the performance I chose for the archive, we're listening to an opening night filled to capacity by the Junior League of Akron and their friends; in those pre-Interstate days, that meant quite a trek from the Rubber Capital to Warrensville Heights. But from the moment **Boris Kogan** lifts his baton for the overture, it feels as though the League is visiting a shrine.

Johnny's Nellie Forbush, the now-forgotten **Mimi Kelly**, had understudied both Mary Martin and Martha Wright on Broadway. She reprises her capable performance from 1955, but it's overshadowed by baritone **William Chapman**, here making his second appearance at Musicarnival in a Rodgers & Hammerstein musical (see *The King and I*, 1956 SEASON). Chapman is far from forgotten, though his reputation rests mostly on his work with Julius Rudel at New York City Opera. He was a glorious singer who originally trained as an actor, and his entire skill set is on display here. At 23, of course, he was much too young to play Emile de Becque (Ezio Pinza was 57 when he created the role), but then again, his 21-year-old King of Siam seemed laughable on paper. Johnny, however, knew what he was doing, and although this is probably the first and only time the de Becque is younger than the Nellie, who cares? We even forget that the role was written for a bass.

The featured actors are quite good, with Musicarnival favorite **Don Driver** stealing all his scenes as Billis; **Dolores Martin** (who led the trio of women in the famous "Necessity" number on Broadway in *Finian's Rainbow*) conquering the stage as Bloody Mary; and three men playing officers with a gravitas that gives this production real masculine energy and makes the musical's long "book scenes" wonderfully realistic: **Stan Grover**'s Lieutenant Cable (between his tenor and Chapman's baritone, Richard Rodgers couldn't ask for more), **Frank Shaw Stevens**'s Captain Brackett and **William Skelton**'s Commander Harbison. All of them played these roles in the 1955 production.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press* spoke for his colleagues: "Capsule judgment: A hep company does well by the music and story almost everybody knows. Grade A." Please note: On July 10, in his column for the *Cleveland News*, there appeared an item titled "Catches the Ring": "Love came to Musicarnival yesterday when William Chapman ... appeared before the rest of the cast with Irene Meyer, a member of the ensemble who was happily wearing the engagement

ring he had just placed on her finger.” They were together until Chapman’s death in 2012.—**B. R.**

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 15–28, 1957 (New York opening: December 8, 1949;
740 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Leo Robin, book by Joseph Fields and Anita Loos, adapted from her novel

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

James R. Nygren

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Kyle MacDonnell (Lorelei Lee), Bonnie West (Dorothy Shaw), Jenny Workman (Gloria Stark), Don Driver (Sir Francis Beekman), Bill Parker (Gus Edmond), Michael Pollock (Henry Spofford)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Bye, Bye, Baby,” “A Little Girl From Little Rock,” “Just a Kiss Apart,” “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend”

SYNOPSIS

Set in the 1920s, the musical occurs mostly aboard the *Ile de France*, which is taking Lorelei Lee and her chum Dorothy Shaw to Paris, courtesy of Lorelei’s generous friend, button tycoon Gus Esmond. En route, the girls meet a number of accommodating gentlemen, including Sir Francis Beekman, who loses a diamond tiara to Lorelei (who thereby wins a best friend), and Henry Spofford, a Philadelphia Main Liner who loses his heart to Dorothy.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

In 1949 *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* was a risky undertaking. Though based on Anita Loos’s boisterously popular satire on the Jazz Age (the novel was published in 1924 and soon spawned

a Broadway play and silent film), conventional wisdom held that the story's luster was long gone from Lorelei Lee's tiara. And though today we can't imagine anyone but Carol Channing playing the gold-digging Lorelei Lee, at the time Channing was by no means a shoo-in. Co-producers Herman Levin and Oliver Smith envisioned the character as "terribly sexy, exotic, a cheap kept-lady." That was not Carol Channing.

But composer Jule Styne (1905-94) championed Carol. He and Loos were knocked out by this virtual unknown, then 27, in the Broadway revue *Lend an Ear*. "What we needed," Styne said years later, "was a comedy actress *commenting* on a pretty girl. That was the satire." Loos agreed the minute she saw her: "That's my Lorelei." As for Channing, she understood that this was ostensibly "ludicrous casting. I'm six-foot-one in heels, and Lorelei was a little girl—the cutest, most babyish flapper of the Twenties.... She brought a bit of virginity to every man she met—and for every bit of virginity, she got a diamond. Dumb like a fox. She was really a little ho-ar, but with a Girl Scout quality.... I had a fix on the character."

Even so, investors only ponied up after Smith and Levin got the idea of doing a backers' audition for the all-powerful quartet behind *South Pacific*: Leland Hayward, Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein and Joshua Logan. When each man pledged \$5,000 to the project, the producers had their Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval, and the balance of the money was raised within 48 hours.

As brilliant as Channing was in the part—and she reprised it in 1973 in Broadway's *Lorelei*, later a touring package that played Musicarnival—*Blondes* was more than the star-making moment for the most idiosyncratic comedian of her time. Smith (New York's leading stage designer) and Levin (who later produced *My Fair Lady*) were two of the theater's classiest impresarios, and their creative team included book writers Joseph Fields and Loos herself; gentleman director John C. Wilson; the formidable Styne in collaboration with Hollywood lyricist Leo Robin (1900-84); and choreographer Agnes de Mille in one of her few completely lighthearted assignments.

This is the musical in which Styne comes into his own as a theater composer. He thought of it as a "jazz score," and although he rarely indulges in pastiche, his music is nonetheless informed by his early career in Chicago as a jazz musician. Supported by Hugh Martin's scintillating vocal arrangements and Robin's sardonic lines for "A Little Girl From Little Rock" and "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" (the latter weighing in at five and a half choruses, all of them punchy as can be), the score remains wonderfully fresh. Still, all these years later, *Blondes* is underappreciated, though the 2012 New York City Center Encores! production went a long way

toward raising its stock.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

An irony: This production of *Gentleman Prefer Blondes* marked the first time **Johnny Price** gave a performer billing above the title in one of his musicals. The performer was a 1948 *Life* magazine cover girl (and former Conover model), **Kyle MacDonnell**, “who will always be ‘Miss Television,’ ” as the program declares, “to the millions of Americans who enjoyed her shows [*For Your Pleasure* and *Girl About Town*] on the NBC network for five years.” It’s a rare case where Johnny’s gamble doesn’t pay off. There’s a big hole in the production where Lorelei should be.

It’s not that MacDonnell fails by refusing to imitate Carol Channing (to her credit, she told the press, “I am not Carol”); it’s that she brings no perspective of her own to a role that is iconic and demands one. And in this production she is actually upstaged by **Bonnie West**, who, as Lorelei’s friend Dorothy, brings to the occasion punctilious timing and a brassy mezzo.

Other featured performances also come off well: **Mary Morris**, distinguished veteran of the historic Provincetown Playhouse—home of the young Eugene O’Neill—makes her musical comedy debut as a suitably imperious Lady Beekman. But entrusting Musicarnival choreographer **James R. Nygren** with the direction seems to defuse energy rather than ignite it. Too many book scenes fall flat.

Much of the pleasure in the recording comes from hearing Trude Rittman’s playful dance arrangements and Hugh Martin’s splendidly challenging vocal arrangements, performed with gusto under the direction of conductor **Boris Kogan**. No wonder Jule Styne chose to work with Martin so frequently; the two composers complement each other beautifully.

As always with the Musicarnival productions, we can’t help but speculate on the makeup of the audience. Anyone under the tent in her or his 50s (or older) would remember the Jazz Age, and there is lots of witty nostalgia built into the piece. For example, Leo Robin’s lyric for “Homesick Blues,” surely one of the most exhaustive of all list songs: “... Theda Bara, Fisk, O’Hara, / Palais Royale, Standard Oil, / Man o’ War, Barrymore. / Fritzi Scheff, Mutt and Jeff. / Belmont Track, Crackerjack....” Charleston, anyone?

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

The generally positive response to MacDonnell is tempered by critics noting her lack of stage presence: “Unfortunately she’s not always heard too well,” wrote Jack Warfel in *The Cleveland*

Press, “possibly through acoustical difficulties of performing under canvas. . . . Even Houdini would have been discouraged attempting to toss his voice to the four winds simultaneously.” Funny: I’ve not encountered other Musicarnival performers who needed that benefit of the doubt. In *The Plain Dealer* Harlowe R. Hoyt reported that “Producer Johnny Price has gone all out with big casts this summer, and here’s another one. It’s a tricky production with many scenes played at the rear of the tent. . . . There’s elaborate costuming particularly in the Les Girls numbers.”—**B. R.**

CAN-CAN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 29–August 11, 1957 (New York opening: May 7, 1953;
892 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Cole Porter, book by Abe Burrows

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

James R. Nygren

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Libi Staiger (La Mome Pistache), Warde Donovan (Judge Aristide Forestier), Don Driver (Boris Adzinidzinadze), Joyce McConnell (Claudine), Michael Pollock (Hilaire Jussac)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“C’est Magnifique,” “Come Along With Me,” “I Am in Love,” “Allez-Vous-En,”
“It’s All Right With Me,” “I Love Paris,” “Can–Can”

SYNOPSIS

Set in 1893, *Can–Can* tells of La Mome Pistache, who is so distressed about the investigation of her Bal du Paradis—where the chief attraction is the *Can–Can*—that she tries to vamp the highly moral investigating judge, Aristide Forestier. Eventually the two fall in love, and when the case comes to trial, Forestier himself takes over the defense and wins acquittal.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Following his runaway success in 1950 as the librettist for *Guys & Dolls*, former radio scriptwriter Abe Burrows became one of Broadway's peripatetic "show doctors." He was called in to fix any number of ailing musicals during their out-of-town tryouts, and he was good at it. Unfortunately, in 1953's *Can-Can* he needed someone to second-guess *him*. He was hired both to write and direct the show, and that's usually too much authority. Cole Porter, at 61, turned in the songs and was billed above the title, but Burrows was *Can-Can*'s de facto "muscle."

Make no mistake, the show was a hit, running 892 performances, filling the Shubert Theatre with laughter (Burrows's quips always landed with the best of 'em) and displaying its wares with panache.

It also had a foolproof premise, though Burrows and producers Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin (*Guys & Dolls*) backed their way into it. According to Burrows, all Feuer and Martin knew was that they wanted him to helm a new musical set in Paris in the 1890s; that it should have the look of the classic posters by Toulouse-Lautrec; and that the title would be *Can-Can*. They told him they'd have someone research the period to unearth possible story ideas.

And the anonymous researcher hit pay dirt when she or he discovered, as Burrows wrote in his memoirs, "how much Puritanism and censorship there was in Paris in the 1890s.... Police raids were common all over Paris, and one of the main targets was the can-can, but the cops couldn't stop it.... At the beginning of the can-can craze, the dance was not done in nightclubs by professional chorus girls, but in rather seedy dance halls by working girls."

Burrows invented a breezy plot that drew on a real-life figure: the president of the League Against Licentiousness of the Streets. In his script Burrows pitted the man, an uptight judge, against La Mome Pistache, the owner of a rowdy dance hall where the girls hold their skirts up high and flaunt their panties. Naturally, Aristide Forestier (the judge) and Pistache fall in love despite the professional and personal impasse.

Getting the chance to hear a full-length version of this musical is instructive (especially since the pallid film version bears so little resemblance to the Broadway original). Onstage Gwen Verdon became an overnight star as Claudine, the musical's adorable soubrette, and we've always been led to believe that she simply outshone the lead, Parisian cabaret singer Lilo. But I think the problem runs deeper. Burrows's Pistache is funny, yes, and gets three shimmering Porter songs ("I Love Paris," "C'est Magnifique," "Allez-Vous-En"), but the character is hard-edged and

utterly without charm. Observes Aristide toward the end: “You don’t really believe in anything, do you?” to which she replies, “I believe in me.” We applaud his transformation from stuffed shirt to passionate lover, but we’re not persuaded by hers.

Nonetheless, the assets impress: Burrows’s satire on *la vie de Bohème* is juicy and timeless. Porter’s score is never less than attractive, and it bears noting that his “I Love Paris” was inspired by the beauty of designer Jo Mielziner’s Parisian skyline. Michael Kidd created three electrifying dances, including a ballet. And even on the original cast recording, we are delighted by Lilo, Verdon and the outrageous Hans Conried as her egomaniacal sculptor boyfriend.

Comparing the Musicarnival script with David Lee’s 2004 adaptation for New York City Center Encores!, we can appreciate the benefits of pruning Burrows (I’d estimate Lee cut at least 20 minutes out of the show). But more editing is called for, along with a rewritten second act. There are reasons why *Can-Can* is never revived.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

This time we’re really at a disadvantage in not being able to see what is essentially a dance musical (staged for Musicarnival by director-choreographer **James Nygren**). But we hear the audience having a high time in the company of leading lady **Libi Staiger**, back under the tent after three starring roles in 1956 (if her French accent misses the mark, her throbbing mezzo brings the house down with “I Love Paris”); **Don Driver**, who is justifiably over-the-top in the Hans Conried role of Boris Adzinidzinadze (scriptwriter Abe Burrows loved making up the names); and handsome **Wardé Donovan**, who as Aristide melts convincingly—just a few years before he would find his true career path in film and television (Donovan, of course, later married Phyllis Diller).

Once again **Johnny Price** knows how to pull off a Broadway challenge on a summer-stock schedule. In casting **Joyce McConnell** as Claudine, he had on his side a veteran of the original production—she had understudied both Lilo and Gwen Verdon—who knew “every detail of this musical by heart.”

And here’s something unusual to enjoy: Although **Boris Kogan**’s orchestra numbers eight fewer musicians than a Broadway pit, his ensemble offers a terrific reading of Genevieve Pitot’s original dance arrangements for choreographer Michael Kidd’s “Quadrille,” “Apache Dance” and extended “Garden of Eden Ballet,” one of the most ambitious (and wittiest) dances ever conceived for an American musical.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

By now Harlowe R. Hoyt of *The Plain Dealer* was declaring Libi Staiger “one of the real finds of Musicarnival”; in the *Akron Beacon Journal*, Oscar Shaw described her as “that gorgeous blond comedienne.” And whatever its weaknesses, *Can-Can* in Warrensville Heights won the same popular acclaim that greeted the musical on Broadway. Said Shaw: “It was the most wildly enthusiastic first-night audience that this reviewer has been a part of in Musicarnival’s tent theater.”—**B. R.**

SONG OF NORWAY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 12–25, 1957 (New York opening: August 21, 1944;
860 performances)

AUTHORS

Lyrics and musical adaptation by Robert Wright and George Forrest, book by Milton Lazarus from a play by Homer Curran, based on the life and music of Edvard Grieg

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Lawrence Brooks (Edvard Grieg), Irra Petina (Louisa Giovanni), Jan McArt (Nina), Mary Ellen Moylan (Adelina), William C. Boehm (Rikard Nordraak), Don Driver (Count Pepi LeLoup), Michael Pollock (Pisoni), Mary Morris (Mother Grieg), Arthur Newman (Father Grieg), Lawrence Vincent (Father Nordraak)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Hill of Dreams,” “Freddy and His Fiddle,” “Strange Music,” “Now,” “Three Loves,” “I Love You,” “Midsummer’s Eve”

SYNOPSIS

This is the heavily romanticized tale of the early years of Edvard Grieg, who, with his friend, poet Rikard Nordraak, is anxious to bring new artistic glory to their beloved Norway. Though temporarily distracted from this noble aim by a dalliance in Rome with a flirtatious (and fictitious) Italian prima donna, Grieg is so affected by the news of Nordraak’s death that he

returns home to his indulgent wife. Suitably inspired after singing a reprise of their love duet, “Strange Music,” the composer creates the A-Minor Piano Concerto.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Song of Norway holds a singular place in musical theater history. First produced in San Francisco and Los Angeles at Edwin Lester’s Civic Light Opera, then on Broadway in 1944, it was a defiant throwback: a romantic operetta that evoked the glory days of Herbert, Friml and Romberg. The work amassed 890 performances, making it the most popular Broadway operetta of all time.

Its creation was led by composer-lyricists Robert Wright and George (Chet) Forrest, who won their first success in Hollywood in the late 1930s. Although the Swing Era and jazz-tinged musical comedies were all the rage, Wright and Forrest went their own way from the get-go. Both in their early 20s but intentionally unhip, they added songs to screen versions of Romberg’s *Maytime*, Herbert’s *Sweethearts* and Friml’s *The Firefly*. And it was with the latter that in one bold stroke they established their signature. Collaborating with composer Herbert Stothart, they took a 1920 piano piece by Friml and turned it into a popular song, “Donkey Serenade.” As Chet Forrest said years later, “We were always inescapably drawn to lush melodies and romantic stories. Call us old-fashioned, but that was the world we wanted to see—either on stage or screen.”

From then on, they based much of their reputation on creating new stage musicals that “adapted” the music of dead composers: Edvard Grieg (*Song of Norway*), Victor Herbert (*Gypsy Lady*), Alexander Borodin (*Kismet*—see 1955 SEASON), Johann Strauss (*The Great Waltz*) and Sergei Rachmaninoff (*Anya*). (In what is perhaps their most tantalizing work, however, they joined forces with Heitor Villa-Lobos, who was very much alive; the musical was 1948’s *Magdalena*.)

Song of Norway’s book by Milton Lazarus was based on a play by Homer Curran, but both are undistinguished and have little to do with the facts of Grieg’s rather uneventful life. In *The New Yorker*, Wolcott Gibbs averred that “everything was all right with me as long as nobody talked. Then I tried to think of something else.” (Here’s why: Says Grieg’s father, “Edvard should give up these foolish music ideas and stay where he belongs: in the fish business.”) Even the songs rarely develop characters beyond making generic statements.

And yet what works about this piece works extremely well: Wright and Forrest knew how to devise a menu of music that was satisfying dramatically without violating Grieg’s integrity. They spent 10 months researching the musical material, and in the playbill they scrupulously

noted their sources. They based their hit song, “Strange Music,” on two pieces, “Nocturne” and “Wedding Day at Troldhaugen.” Other musical numbers were fashioned from the *Peer Gynt* suite and the Violin Sonata in G Major. Interestingly, they set the lyric for “I Love You” to “Ich liebe dich,” a work that Grieg had composed for his wife, Nina. Their framing device—introduced at the top of the show and performed more or less intact at the end as a ballet—is the Piano Concerto in A Minor. Wright and Forrest drew from nearly two dozen compositions in all.

Edwin Lester mounted the production lavishly, with choreography by George Balanchine and scenic design by Lemuel Ayers, and it was strongly cast with Lawrence Brooks as Grieg, Helena Bliss as Nina and the Met’s Irra Petina as Louisa Giovanni. Future Balanchine stars Maria Tallchief and Alexandra Danilova were the featured dancers.

Song of Norway is as far removed from today’s musical theater as Grieg’s beloved land, but in the 1950s it turned up in summer tent theaters like Musicarnival and even at Jones Beach. As late as 1970—at the height of the rock era—it was made into a film starring Florence Henderson, Turalv Maurstad and Frank Porretta, and in spring 2013 it was performed in concert by the New York Philharmonic with an all-star cast headed by Marni Nixon and Judy Kaye.

Somehow *Song of Norway* endures. In its day, the operetta’s fans included no less than Cole Porter (he saw the Broadway production many times) and, astonishingly, the decade’s most progressive musical theater authors, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. Then preparing *Carousel*, they told Wright and Forrest that they had been emboldened to go for the emotional jugular after watching the audience weep during Helena Bliss’s performance of “I Love You.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Here is one of the grand nights of Musicarnival’s production years. The reasons for its success begin with the producing skills of **Johnny Price**. He engaged **Lawrence Brooks** and **Irra Petina**, both members of the original cast, to re-create their roles of the tormented Grieg and the tempestuous Countess 13 years after the Broadway production. And he selected Cleveland native **Jan McArt**, making her Musicarnival debut as loyal Nina after having established herself at San Francisco Opera, and **Mary Ellen Moylan**, prima ballerina of the Metropolitan Opera (and another original cast member), who was partnered in the ballets by **Royes Fernandez**.

Price entrusted the production to resident director (and in this case featured tenor) **William C. Boehm** and resident choreographer **James Nygren**. Boehm would direct two of the three remaining 1957 musicals before being replaced by featured actor **Don Driver** (who plays

the comic role of Count Peppi LeLoup). This is the apex of Boehm's four-year stint with the company; when it came to operetta, he was to the manner born.

The same can be said for music director **Boris Kogan**. More versatile than Boehm, he conducted musicals, operettas and crossover works like 1958's *The Most Happy Fella* with equal dexterity; but hearing Kogan and his string section—most of them recruited from the Cleveland Orchestra—navigate the classical Grieg-Wright-Forrest score makes it clear that this was by no means your typical summer-stock pit. **William Kurzban** is the piano soloist for the Grieg piano concerto.

Though the sound quality of the live-performance tapes is sometimes distorted, that is ironically a sign of the company's vocal prowess: Just hearing Brooks, McCart and Boehm attack "Hill of Dreams" gives chills. And if this is not an operetta renowned for its comedy, Petina, who had recently introduced the uproarious "I Am Easily Assimilated" on Broadway in Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*, unleashes her witty high style under the tent. When the Countess scornfully sings, "I want a life where the men are neither 40, fat nor tenors," we know this diva is not to be trifled with.

Price, Boehm and Nygren's *Song of Norway* holds the audience from start to finish.

Footnote: Turning up in the comic role of Tito, proprietor of a chocolate shop, is **Linn Sheldon**, who would soon become a legendary figure on Cleveland television. Sheldon invented Barnaby, the elfin host of a children's show that won the hearts of baby boomers (myself included).

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

This is precisely what the tapes reveal: Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press*, "Capsule judgment—Each performer seems to fire the others and it all turns out to be a bang-up musical evening.... There was an excitement about the spirited blending of ... voices that carried deep into *Song of Norway*, and this excitement probably will be more of a conversation piece than any show this season. Somehow or other the performers in this ... story seem possessed by their work.... Irre Petina is utterly fascinating. Even if this mezzo were not to sing a note, I'd still love her. As a comedienne she has a generous bag of tricks." For Harlowe R. Hoyt in *The Plain Dealer*, "The cast builds to its best work of the season." And the *Akron Beacon Journal*'s Oscar Smith praised William Boehm for "giving this production richness of detail and an air of authority."

Speaking of Boehm, just prior to the opening of *Song of Norway*, the *Fairview Herald* interviewed the actor-singer-director for what would be Boehm's last conversation in print; his Musicarnival tenure ended at the close of the 1957 season. Several of his observations bear repeating. The sprouting of American tent theaters was happening so fast that he predicted Musicarnival would soon build a sister theater on Cleveland's West Side: "The in-the-round variety ... [has been] the greatest shot in the arm the theater has had in years"; and "The naturalistic style of acting that comes with [these tents] has caught the public's fancy." Critical of trends in popular music, he noted that radio disc jockeys have "a tremendous responsibility in developing the tastes of teenagers.... They promote records of 'Hound Dog' and 'Blue Suede Shoes' almost exclusively." Boehm said he felt that teenagers could be attracted to musical theater if high schools did a better job of exposing them to it.—**B. R.**

SILK STOCKINGS

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 26–September 8, 1957 (New York opening: February 24, 1955;
478 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Cole Porter, book by George S. Kaufman, Leueen McGrath and Abe Burrows

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Libi Staiger (Ninotchka), Lawrence Brooks (Steve Canfield), Dee Harless (Janice Dayton), Michael Pollock (Brankov), Don Driver (Peter Ilyitch Boroff), William Skelton (Bibinski), Jerry Eskow (Ivanov)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Paris Loves Lovers," "It's a Chemical Reaction, That's All," "All of You," "Too Bad," "Satin and Silk," "Without Love," "Silk Stockings," "The Red Blues"

SYNOPSIS

As in the 1939 film *Ninotchka*, a dour Russian female official succumbs to the charms of both Paris and a man—in the case of the musical, the fast-talking American talent agent Steve Canfield, who is involved in convincing a Soviet composer to write the score for a gaudy movie version of *War and Peace*.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

The 1955 *Silk Stockings* was Cole Porter's 25th and final work for Broadway; he did the last of his composing for an MGM film musical (1957's *Les Girls*) and TV's *Aladdin* (1958), a "spectacular," as they used to call musicals made for the small screen. He died in 1964 without ever having found relief from the pain that attacked him for 25 years, the result of a horseback-riding accident that virtually crushed his legs.

However, typical for the 63-year-old Porter, he never let it be felt in this spirited and very funny show starring Don Ameche, Hildegard Neff and Gretchen Wyler, and the sixth of his musicals set at least partly in his beloved Paris. A few years later, director Rouben Mamoulian turned it into a stylish MGM film boasting Fred Astaire, Cyd Charisse and Janis Paige.

Producers Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin (*Can-Can*) knew that in the 1939 film *Ninotchka* they had source material that practically cried out for song. Musicals give us romantic leads who are polarized in one way or another (con man vs. earnest librarian, gambler vs. Salvation Army worker), and *Ninotchka*'s romance pits Communist against Capitalist. Much of the fun in *Silk Stockings* is that it's an update by the great American playwright George S. Kaufman (1889-1961) and his then-wife, Leueen MacGrath; in their treatment the movie's French count is an American talent agent. Enter Broadway's only musical satire on the Cold War.

Sadly, Kaufman was 66 and frail; the musical would be his last produced effort. When "book troubles" arose out of town, Feuer and Martin bullied him off the playground, bringing in their favorite librettist, Abe Burrows (then 45), to fix what needed fixing.

We'll never know for sure how much is Kaufman and how much is Burrows; we do know it works. And the reason is that the show takes swipes at both the Russians *and* the Americans. Yes, *Ninotchka* is a humorless automaton until she finds romance, and the portrait of her compatriots pokes fun at every totalitarian stereotype. ("*Brankov*: Prokofiev is dead? *Bibinski*: Of course. *Brankov*: I didn't know he was arrested.") They even refer to the most recent edition of *Who's Still Who*.

But the Americans also take it on the chin. Until he falls in love, Steve Canfield, show-biz agent, is an opportunist all the way, and Janice Dayton is a second-rate movie star without taste or intelligence who goes around bragging, “This is my first serious, non-swimming picture.” All of these are cartoons, of course, but in Kaufman and Burrows’s hands the characters are drawn sharply enough to give us pause. It’s rather incredible that in this 1955 tale, the faults of the two cultures are pretty evenly laid out.

And Porter gets in his own licks, as composer Peter Ilyitch Boroff (what a name!) and his “Ode to a Tractor” fall prey to Hollywood. Boroff’s sternly classical work is transformed into the cheesiest of stripteases for Dayton, playing Napoleon’s Josephine, naturally. Porter’s last great comic song, “Siberia,” written for the three Soviet agents, is a mini-masterpiece of ironic worries that includes: “When we meet in sweet Siberia / Where the snow is so superia, / You can bet all right / That your Christmas will be white / In cheery Siberi—a.” In this delightful score Porter also produced his last hit song, “All of You.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The pleasure here is once again going back to the show as originally produced on Broadway. Though the film version is reasonably loyal (and had recently been released when this production opened), there’s still a goodly amount of material in the Kaufman-MacGrath-Burrows book to discover; a marvelous Porter song (“As On Through the Seasons We Sail”) cut by MGM; and in general, a sexier approach to the romance.

Johnny Price’s production, directed by **William C. Boehm**, is good, and as usual, it showcases everyone’s required versatility: **Libi Staiger** moves from French accent in *Can-Can* to Russian in her second Porter musical of the summer; and leading man **Lawrence Brooks** drops every vestige of his staid Grieg in *Song of Norway* to go all-American extrovert. (Incidentally, Brooks understudied Don Ameche on Broadway, and **Dee Harless**, as the water-on-the-brain movie star, succeeded Gretchen Wyler in New York and played the national tour.)

In his welcome, Johnny notes conductor **Boris Kogan’s** Russian heritage. What fun Kogan has with the ersatz Russian chords supplied by Porter!

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

The strongest point of view, pro or con, came from the typewriter of *Cleveland Press* critic Stan Anderson, and he wasn’t buying it: “Too much blather, too little music. Least impressive effort this season under that tent. Sleepy.”—**B. R.**

DAMN YANKEES

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

September 9–29, 1957 (New York opening: May 5, 1955;
1,019 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, book by George Abbott and Douglass Wallop, based on Wallop's novel *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

William C. Boehm

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

John Reardon (Joe Hardy), Ronnie Cunningham (Lola), Don Driver (Applegate), John L. Price, Jr. (Van Buren), Joan Kibrig (Gloria), Keith Mackey (Joe Boyd), Virginia Curtis (Meg)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Heart,” “Shoeless Joe From Hannibal, Mo.,” “A Little Brains—A Little Talent,” “Whatever Lola Wants,” “Near to You,” “Two Lost Souls”

SYNOPSIS

In this variation on the *Faust* legend, a middle-aged Washington Senators fan is so devoted that he sells his soul to the Devil (Mr. Applegate) just for a chance to play on his favorite team. Suddenly transformed into a young man, now named Joe Hardy, the fan not only joins the team but becomes its ace pitcher and hitter. Fortunately for him, there is a contractual escape clause, and Applegate—even aided by the seductive Lola, who usually gets what she wants—cannot prevent Joe from returning home to his wife at the end of a year.—**S. G.**

NOTES ON THE MUSICAL

It's remarkable that in 1956 *Damn Yankees* tied the record set by *South Pacific* for the number of Tony Awards (nine) bestowed on one musical in a Broadway season. Calling the roll provides us with a wonderful snapshot of the talent pool that was then making musical comedy sizzle: best musical; Ray Walston (leading actor); Gwen Verdon (leading actress); Russ Brown (featured

actor); George Abbott and Douglass Wallop (authors); Frederick Brisson, Robert E. Griffith and Harold S. Prince (producers); Richard Adler and Jerry Ross (composer and lyricist); Bob Fosse (choreographer); and even Harry Green (stage technician).

Seven of these folks, of course, had created another smash, *The Pajama Game*, the year before; no wonder they couldn't wait to work together again. If *Damn Yankees* wasn't quite the achievement of the earlier musical, at 1,019 performances it ran nearly as long, and in 1958 its film version gave Gwen Verdon her only chance to reprise one of her signature Broadway roles.

The fantasy, a contemporary take on the Faust legend, is, like *Pajama Game*, redolent of middle-class life in the mid-1950s. Instead of a labor union, the world of this play is major-league baseball, truly the national pastime then—before the game had become big business. And there is some sly commentary going on here in making the Devil, Mr. Applegate, a trim figure in a crew cut, suit and tie: the epitome of the Man in the Gray Flannel Suit, only much funnier.

Though Verdon created a sensation as lovable seductress Lola (as in “Whatever Lola Wants”), Applegate's right-hand witch, most of the people we care about in *Damn Yankees* either play for or root for the Washington Senators, their woebegone baseball team. And their most ardent booster—the middle-aged Joe Boyd, soon to be transformed by Applegate into slugger Joe Hardy—is (bless him) a happily married man, who wants an “escape clause” from promised baseball stardom so he can get back to his wife. Decency is the name of this game, which makes Adler and Ross's hit song “Heart” so right for the show.

Interesting side note: The producing team knew they were taking a risk in building a musical around baseball. Harold Prince points out that “except for Ring Lardner's *You Know Me, Al*, baseball had been anathema on the stage” and that even after *Damn Yankees* received good reviews, “there was resistance to the baseball theme.” In a drastic rethinking of their advertising campaign, they ditched the logo of Verdon in a baseball uniform (which was only “saucy”), replacing it with a picture of her singing “Lola” in a far sexier outfit; they even changed the color of the ad “from ballpark green to red.” “One Monday morning three and a half weeks later,” Prince reports, “there was a long line waiting for the box office to open.”

ABOUT THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

One could argue that **Johnny Price**'s decision to set his *Damn Yankees* in Cleveland instead of Washington, D.C. (making the musical revolve around the Cleveland Indians instead of the Washington Senators), was simply a publicity stunt designed to sell tickets.

But I would disagree. That's not to say that Johnny wasn't a terrific promoter, and coincidentally, he learned a lot from watching one of the masters, Bill Veeck, who from 1946 to 1950 owned the Cleveland Indians. And we know for a fact that the Musicarnival team, costumed in Indians' uniforms, sold gazillions of tickets.

Yet when we listen to the tapes, there's something awfully touching about the change in locale that goes beyond good promotion. Both the Senators and the Indians had reputations as eternal noncontenders, but the ill-fated history of the local franchise, which became a major-league ball club in 1901, runs deeper. With only two World Series championships to their name—1920 and 1948, during Veeck's tenure—the Indians and the city they inhabit have always had a codependent relationship; the loyalty of Cleveland fans borders on masochism. One of my favorite moments in the Musicarnival production comes in the first scene, when Meg Boyd comes home at the end of a televised game. "Did the Indians win, dear?" she asks her husband, who responds with a grunt. The audience goes wild.

So what we have in Warrensville Heights is something devoutly to be wished for in the theater: a truly cathartic evening. And the production is filled with details that make the musical that much more enjoyable: Instead of Applegate saying to Lola, "Welcome to the nation's capital," we get "Welcome to the best location in the nation"—Cleveland's longtime Chamber of Commerce slogan. The printed program lists the cast as the "lineup for tonight's game." The musical numbers appear in print as "batting order." The play-by-play speeches called for in the script were recorded by two Cleveland broadcasters, Jack Graney and Tom Manning, who also "announce" the curtain call. And Johnny welcomed current or former local sports stars to the tent throughout the run (at this performance, it's the Browns' Dante Lavelli and Lou Groza, and Olympic champion Harrison "Bones" Dillard).

Most auspiciously, the producer cast himself as Van Buren, manager of the Indians, and it's anything but a vanity move. An experienced actor in his own right, Johnny leads his team with growling energy. When he and the guys let loose with "Heart," it's a nightly, pre-1960s love-in for the performers and 2,000 members of the Cleveland community.

The leading players have a field day. **Don Driver** is at his sardonic best as Applegate, and **Ronnie Cunningham** (who had just toured with *Can-Can* in the Gwen Verdon role) makes her Musicarnival debut as an adorable Lola. (Keith Mackey gets a footnote here; his Joe Boyd is the first featured role of his four-year Musicarnival stint, and the always-reliable Cleveland actor deserved it.)

The capper is hearing New York City Opera's **John Reardon** make *his* debut under the tent. The bio states, without exaggeration, that he "is one of the most exciting personalities to appear on the concert and opera scene in recent years." And of course one must add, "musical theater scene," because, even then, Reardon would not be pigeonholed. Acting-wise, the role of Joe Hardy is less than demanding, but based on Reardon's performance, Johnny Price signed him to open the 1958 Musicarnival season as Curly in *Oklahoma!* (See the annotation for that production for a fuller appraisal.)

His baseball hero is superior to the performance of Stephen Douglass, who created the role on Broadway. Note his singing on three ballads: "Goodbye, Old Girl," "A Man Doesn't Know" and "Near to You"—all of them about Joe and Meg Boyd. Although none of these songs became popular outside the theater, Reardon invests them with such passion that they feel like hits. Musical theater historian Ethan Mordden writes, "*Damn Yankees*, for all its baseball background, is a love story." Reardon makes it soar.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Not one stuffy purist to be found among the critics; all embraced Johnny's notion of transporting the action from D.C. to Cleveland. The headline writer at the *Cleveland News* had the most fun: "Extra! Our Indians Crush 'Damn Yankees.'" The paper's critic, Noel Francis, began his review with this endorsement: "I have no reason to suspect that [then Indians manager] Kerby Farrell might not be piloting the team next season, but—just in case there might be a switch—this seems a good place to enter a new candidate in nomination. My boy is in good voice ... and he's a great one for pep talks. My candidate for the moment is Johnny Price, Jr., bossman of Musicarnival." *The Cleveland Press's* Jack Warfel singled out John Reardon: "He swats miracles off the bat's fat end. He has an exceptionally good singing voice and obviously knows his way around the stage.... It's altogether topnotch entertainment."—**B. R.**

SOUTH PACIFIC

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

September 30–October 13, 1957 (New York opening: April 7, 1949;
1,925 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan, adapted from James A. Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

John L. Price, Jr.

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Mimi Kelly (Ensign Nellie Forbush), John Shafer (Emile de Becque), Delores Martin (Bloody Mary), Don Driver (Luther Billis), Richard Armbruster (Lieutenant Joseph Cable), Frank Shaw Stevens (Captain George Brackett)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“A Cockeyed Optimist,” “Some Enchanted Evening,” “Bloody Mary,” “There Is Nothin’ Like a Dame,” “Bali Ha’i,” “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair,” “A Wonderful Guy,” “Younger Than Springtime,” “Happy Talk,” “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” “This Nearly Was Mine”

SYNOPSIS

Emile de Becque, a middle-aged French planter, falls in love with the nurse Ensign Nellie Forbush. One of the islanders, the crafty Bloody Mary, has her eyes on the handsome Lieutenant Cable for her beautiful daughter, Liat. They fall in love, but Cable finds it difficult to reconcile their different races. Nellie, meanwhile, meets de Becque’s children and is shocked that they are of mixed race; she ends the relationship. De Becque and Cable are recruited to spy on Japanese troop movements in a dangerous mission. While they are away, Nellie bonds with the children and grows to love them. Cable and de Becque’s mission is successful, but Cable is killed by the Japanese. De Becque returns home to find Nellie and his children waiting with open arms.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

It’s doubtful that any other professional stock theater produced *South Pacific* three times in two years to both critical and popular acclaim, but **Johnny Price** pulled it off. Artistically speaking, this iteration is a case of diminishing returns: **Mimi Kelly**—the Nellie Forbush in all three productions—tries too hard to be lovable and too often comes off as strident; and **John Shafer** pales by comparison with William Chapman, who played de Becque earlier in the season.

Mind you, it’s all competent—and Johnny himself directed: part of the transition out of the **Bill Boehm** era—but this *South Pacific* seldom catches fire. Significantly, Rodgers & Hammerstein’s Pulitzer Prize–winning musical, an icon of American postwar popular culture, didn’t reappear

under the tent until 1961. In Cleveland and throughout the country, it had run its course, and though the film version did well in 1958, the musical did not receive its first Broadway revival until 2008.

No, the real story here is the tremendous success, after four full seasons, of Johnny's high-risk enterprise. You can hear it in his welcome on this closing-night performance, when he crows that Musicarnival has become the "longest-running summer theater in the entire United States." (In 1957 the "movement" had grown to 30 tent theaters, but none of them produced from May through mid-October the way Johnny's did; in fact, Musicarnival had to install a heating system for that final cool month in Cleveland.)

You can also read the success story in the souvenir booklet, in which Johnny generously celebrates what he calls "The Musicarnival Team." Musical director **Boris Kogan** is saluted for conducting 440 performances of 31 productions without missing one downbeat. But most touchingly, the booklet includes bios of everyone from scenic designer **Connie Price**, prop master **Otto W. Pirchner** and stage manager **Lawrence Vincent** (who doubled as director of the Musicarnival School) to the technicians, the administrative staff and the 28-member resident company/singing ensemble/corps de ballet, whom Johnny describes as "the backbone of the theater."

By this time, Cleveland audiences felt a real ownership of Musicarnival, and those three productions of *South Pacific* symbolized the community's bond with its major summer theater. After the bows in this performance, maestro Kogan leads the company and the audience in singing "Auld Lang Syne." Don't you wish you had been there?

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Wrote Jack Warfel in *The Cleveland Press*, "It was homecoming week for a number of the musical's cast ... [and] it is mildly remarkable that the performers still manage to inject so much freshness and enthusiasm into the material. However, zip they have in abundance, and somehow the entire business is almost as much fun as it was at first viewing."—**B. R.**



Johnny Price (center) leading his Cleveland team in Damn Yankees

1958 Season (West Palm Beach)

Beginning in January 1958, and continuing each winter through 1964, Johnny Price operated a satellite Musicarnival in West Palm Beach, Florida—an innovative way to build audiences while creating many cost efficiencies in production. In the seven years that both of the theaters operated, the annotations for the West Palm Beach and Cleveland seasons will be kept separate.

CAROUSEL

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

January 26–February 2 (New York opening: April 19, 1945;
890 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Stephen Douglass (Billy Bigelow), Arlyne Frank (Julie Jordan), Joan Bentley (Carrie Pipperridge), Tom Batten (Enoch Snow), William Chapman (Jigger Craigin), Lucille Benson (Mrs. Mullin)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Carousel Waltz” (instrumental), “You’re a Queer One, Julie Jordan,” “Mister Snow,” “If I Loved You,” “Blow High, Blow Low,” “June Is Bustin’ Out All Over,” “When the Children Are Asleep,” “Soliloquy,” “What’s the Use of Wondrin’?,” “You’ll Never Walk Alone”

SYNOPSIS

Billy Bigelow, a boastful and sometimes violent carnival barker, catches the eye of Julie Jordan, a local factory worker, and soon they fall in love and get married. Julie finds herself pregnant, and Billy begins to doubt his ability to provide for his offspring, especially if it's a girl. He gets involved with a ne'er-do-well, Jigger Craigin, who convinces Billy to join him in a scheme to rob a wealthy businessman. The robbery is botched, and Billy, knowing he will be caught, kills himself. After he spends 15 years in purgatory, the Starkeeper, in heaven, suggests that Billy might redeem himself by doing a good deed and allows the young man one day back on earth. Billy returns to find his daughter, Louise, grown up and ready to graduate from high school. He tries to reach out to his insecure daughter, but in frustration ends up hitting her. The slap does not sting, since it is motivated by love, not hate. Somehow, though unseen by her, he manages to instill a confidence in her exemplified by the song "You'll Never Walk Alone."—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

After the phenomenal success in 1943 of their first musical, *Oklahoma!*, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein had every right to play it safe. Instead, they played it dangerously. Stephen Sondheim says that *Oklahoma!* is "about a picnic; *Carousel* is about life and death."

In late 1943 the producers of *Oklahoma!*, Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn, became obsessed with creating a musical version of the 1909 play *Liliom*, written by Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnar. Set in Budapest, *Liliom* was and still is considered a classic piece of 20th-century drama.

But R&H found it "totally impossible"—this strange tale that mixes realism and fantasy. And the name of the leading character, Liliom, is Hungarian slang for "tough guy." So tough, in fact, that Liliom hits the woman he loves. Moreover, he commits suicide, and the play ends in despair. How could this story possibly be told as a Broadway musical?

Yet the team kept rereading the play and became fascinated by the complexity of the characters, and once they settled on transporting the story to late-19th-century New England, fascination turned to excitement. "I saw people who were alive and lusty—people who had always been depicted onstage as thin-lipped Puritans," Hammerstein recalled. "[But look,] we don't know what the public wants. In fact, I think it's the other way around. We decide on what we want to do, and then we hope the public will want it."

Carousel represented a bracing experiment in both content and form. This musical, Hammerstein

and Jerome Kern's *Show Boat* and Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* are the most serious-minded musicals created for Broadway up to that time. Musical theater historian Ethan Mordden calls the story of carnival barker Billy Bigelow and millworker Julie Jordan a "tale of dysfunctional romance, suicide and too-little, too-late redemption." Or as Rodgers later said, "We were confronted with a young man and woman whose love for each other was committed to disaster from the moment they met."

Many of *Carousel*'s songs are actually extended scenes: The breathtaking "If I Loved You" (known as the "bench scene") runs more than 10 minutes in a continuous stream of music, lyrics, dialogue and underscoring; Sondheim praises it as the "watershed" scene of the modern musical theater. Billy's powerful "Soliloquy," in which he struggles with conflicting feelings about becoming a father, was the first piece written for the score. Hammerstein said it "broke the ice. Without it, I don't think you could have a musical. If you didn't show the inside of Billy Bigelow—the soft side, the human side—he would just be a lout for whom you'd have no sympathy whatsoever."

Carousel, like *Oklahoma!*, was cast with virtual unknowns—John Raitt as Billy and Jan Clayton as Julie—and like the earlier show, it was directed and choreographed, respectively, by two redoubtable musical theater artists: Rouben Mamoulian and Agnes de Mille. De Mille's dances included a heart-piercing second-act ballet, when Billy returns to earth for one day in an attempt to change the life of his daughter, Louise, who like her father is a tortured misfit.

The musical opened on Broadway in April 1945. (Can you imagine hearing "You'll Never Walk Alone" for the first time at the end of World War II?) It ran for two years, and it's a theater piece of such depth and emotional honesty that every generation of artists wants to put their own stamp on it. The revelation for many of us came with Nicholas Hytner's production in the 1990s—first seen in London, then on Broadway. Oscar Hammerstein's son James felt that Hytner's dark and edgy interpretation came the closest to Hammerstein's original vision. James said, "Billy is shown to be a man who is ready to explode. But underneath, there is someone poetic, and it makes Julie excited by the violence, in a sense, and trapped into it. She doesn't know why."

Of course, R&H boldly (and quite brilliantly) changed the resolution of the story so that it became the opposite of what Molnar wrote. During Billy's day on earth, we see his daughter's graduation from high school. The girl, Rodgers once wrote, is "encouraged by her dead father—whom she cannot see or hear (but whose presence she can feel)—to heed the words of the song 'You'll Never Walk Alone.' Just before the ending, the girl sitting next to Louise shyly puts her

arm around her, they smile, and we know that Louise will no longer be afraid.”

This was so different from Molnar that R&H were certain the playwright—who lived in New York—would hate it. But he told them: “What you have done is so beautiful.” Without knowing it, Molnar was validating Oscar Hammerstein’s world view: “I see plays and read books that emphasize the seamy side of life, and the frenetic side, and the tragic side. And I don’t deny the existence [of that]. But I say that somebody has to keep saying that that isn’t all there is to life.”

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Beginning with this first Palm Beach season, **Johnny Price** turned over the directorial reins from Bill Boehm to **Don Driver**, who directed all six productions. In a sense it was his out-of-town tryout. Since he was unknown in West Palm Beach, the stakes weren’t as high as they would be in Cleveland, where he had appeared prominently with the company beginning with Johnny’s inaugural season in 1954. The producer officially announced Driver’s appointment as resident director of Musicarnival when the theater moved north for the 1958 summer season. (For a reflection on Driver’s contribution to the American musical, see the notes for *Annie Get Your Gun* in the 1958 Cleveland season.)

Like Johnny’s 1958 production of *Show Boat* in Cleveland, this *Carousel* is a strong, albeit conventional, rendering of a challenging work. The musical’s dark corners remain unexplored, and its underlying violence is softened under the tent.

Which is not to fault director Driver. One could say that this is a “state-of-the-art” production for the 1950s; it’s just that as with the 1958 Cleveland *Show Boat*, we bring so much more to the piece these days, and I kept wanting this production to go further. That being said, at Musicarnival it is for the most part well acted, and it is certainly well sung, with splendid choral work by musical director **Boris Kogan**.

Fittingly, the Billy Bigelow is **Stephen Douglass**, a ranking leading man of the period after starring roles on Broadway in *Make a Wish*, *The Golden Apple*, many studio cast recordings for Columbia, and of course his two years as Joe Hardy in *Damn Yankees* (a role he would reprise later in the season at Palm Beach Musicarnival). Johnny was smart to sign him, because no Billy Bigelow—not even John Raitt’s—had a longer track record: Douglass essayed the role on Broadway, in London and on tour. Today we remember him as a somewhat wooden singer-actor, but there’s no denying his authority onstage. Douglass’s Julie, **Arlyne Frank**, is all right but offers little subtext for a character who is loaded with it.

There is, however, a remarkable performance from **William Chapman** as Jigger. Chapman was only in his early 20s when Johnny hired him in 1956 to star (triumphantly) in *The King and I*, and he was back in the role three years later. His lauded 22-year career at New York City Opera was just getting started when he appeared in Cleveland and West Palm Beach. Originally trained as an actor, Chapman mines Jigger's dark cynicism in a way that compares favorably with the best of them, including Cameron Mitchell in the 1956 film version and Fisher Stevens in the 1994 Broadway revival.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Unsurprisingly, the notices gave more attention to the opening of the tent than to the production, which was judged "major league entertainment" by Helen Van Hoy Smith in the *Miami Herald*. Wrote Estelle Cullmer in the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*: "Obviously neither rain nor mud nor cold of night deters the dedicated apostles of show business from making a first night. Plagued by the bad luck in the weather which has dogged all new enterprises this early season, the West Palm Beach Musicarnival got under way with all of its surrounding parking grounds a sea of mud and a crew repairing damage to the tent and drying out the arena. Nevertheless there was a festive air about the Big Top."—**B. R.**

CAN-CAN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 4–16, 1958 (New York opening: May 7, 1953;
892 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Cole Porter, book by Abe Burrows

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Libi Staiger (La Mome Pistache), Lawrence Brooks (Judge Aristide Forestier), Don Driver (Boris Adzinidzinadze),

Joyce McConnell (Claudine), Al Checco (Hilaire Jussac)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“C’est Magnifique,” “Come Along With Me,” “I Am in Love,” “Allez-Vous-En,”
“It’s All Right With Me,” “I Love Paris,” “Can–Can”

SYNOPSIS

Set in 1893, *Can–Can* tells of La Mome Pistache, who is so distressed about the investigation of her Bal du Paradis—where the chief attraction is the Can-Can—that she tries to vamp the highly moral investigating judge, Aristide Forestier. Eventually the two fall in love, and when the case comes to trial, Forestier himself takes over the defense and wins acquittal.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1957 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

In West Palm Beach, **Don Driver** brought in a new choreographer (**Duncan Noble**) to restage the dances for James Nygren’s 1957 production, but several of the leads—**Libi Staiger** as Pistache, **Joyce McConnell** as Claudine and Driver himself as Boris—reprised their roles, as did members of the resident company.

Unfortunately, it’s a tepid affair, and **Lawrence Brooks** (Grieg and Steve Canfield, respectively, in *Song of Norway* and *Silk Stockings*) is miscast as Aristide: Even in his strongest suit—singing—he delivers a moribund “I Am in Love.” There is a barely repressed anger in Brooks’s judge that drains the fun out of Abe Burrows’s script. But it’s a bigger problem than Brooks. Only the musical’s most obvious jokes land with the audience.

In all ways, including **Boris Kogan**’s pit orchestra, this *Can–Can* is lackluster by comparison with the earlier production. Apparently, Don Driver was going through his own learning curve.

But what an extraordinary accomplishment for Johnny and company to have come so far—figuratively and literally. The growth of Musicarnival warranted this paragraph in the welcome letter he and president **Robert Bishop** wrote to their new audience: “We are bringing to [West Palm Beach] the same high standards that have made our Musicarnival in Cleveland the leading theater of its kind in the United States, with a national reputation for the distinctive qualities of its productions and with a record-breaking audience of over a quarter-million discriminating theatergoers in its 1957 season alone.”

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The Florida newspapers quickly got on board in support of new kids in town Johnny Price and Bob Bishop. Though *Can-Can* has never been appraised as immortal American musical comedy—whether the production was mounted on Broadway or in Warrensville Heights—West Palm Beach appreciated the quality that the Clevelanders shared with audiences in their new outpost. In the *Palm Beach Post*, Jonathan Koontz reflected: “Perhaps the most enjoyable thing about the Palm Beach Musicarnival offerings to date has been the overall pace and timing of the works, and the general excellence of the chorus, orchestra and ballet. These are the resident company, and we are lucky to have them residing with us.... Overall, an excellent evening of fun.”—**B. R.**

KISS ME, KATE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 18–March 2, 1958 (New York opening: December 30, 1948;
1,070 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Cole Porter, book by Sam and Bella Spewack

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Ted Scott (Fred Graham/Petruchio), Janet Medlin (Lilli Vanessi/Kate), Joan Bentley (Lois Lane), Harold Lang (Bill Calhoun), Tom Batten (Baptista), Lindsay Workman (Harrison Howell), Don Driver (First Man), Al Checco (Second Man)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Another Op’nin’, Another Show,” “Why Can’t You Behave?,” “Wunderbar,” “So in Love,” “I’ve Come to Wive It Wealthily in Padua,” “I Hate Men,” “Too Darn Hot,” “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?,” “Always True to You in My Fashion,” “Brush Up Your Shakespeare”

SYNOPSIS

The musical takes place backstage and onstage at Ford's Theatre in Baltimore, from 5 PM to midnight during one day of the tryout of a musical version of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. In the plot, egotistical actor-producer Fred Graham and his temperamental co-star and ex-wife, Lilli Vanessi, fight and make up and eventually demonstrate their enduring affection for each other—just like Shakespeare's Petruchio and Kate. A subplot involves actress Lois Lane, whose romance with actor Bill Calhoun is complicated by Bill's weakness for gambling.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

In these back-to-back West Palm Beach productions of Cole Porter, director **Don Driver** rebounds from the failure of *Can-Can* by delivering a *Kiss Me, Kate* that is far superior to the Cleveland version staged by Bill Boehm in 1955.

It is electric, with Driver's theater know-how as a performer kicking in as director. Key ingredients: Same leading man from three years ago, **Ted Scott**, who replaced Alfred Drake as Fred/Petruchio in the original Broadway production. New leading lady, **Janet Medlin**, who delivers Lilli/Kate in fine operetta style, but who can also get down and dirty when necessary. New Lois Lane, **Joan Bentley**, understudy to Lisa Kirk on Broadway. And the best news is that we've got a third veteran of Broadway's *Kate*: **Johnny Price** asked the great **Harold Lang** to reprise his Bill Calhoun.

Even in an audio recording, this triple-threat actor-singer-dancer captures us with his charm and charisma. If only we could see him attack his three dance numbers: "Tom, Dick or Harry," "Too Darn Hot" and "Bianca." But we can still get a feel for what he brought to the stage in this important featured role, which he followed with leads in *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'* (1948) and, most notably, the 1952 revival of *Pal Joey*. Lang's Musicarnival stint has left us with what is probably his only full-length recording of *Kate* performed for a live audience. And this marks the first time that Johnny put a major American dancer on one of his stages.

Miscellaneous observations:

- In his welcome to the audience at this closing-night performance (he was now calling his

theater “Palm Beach Musicarnival”), Johnny good-naturedly goads them into making their applause a bit more enthusiastic.

- For whatever reason, the role of the maid, Hattie, traditionally played by an African-American (who leads “Another Op’ nin’, Another Show”), has been changed to Yvette. Likewise, the character of Paul, an African-American who launches “Too Darn Hot,” is in this production played by a white performer.

- By 1958, Ted Scott had been playing Fred/Petruchio off and on for nearly a decade—an example of how the “classic” musicals of this period produced many performers who used them as their calling cards. It’s almost as though there were an unofficial American repertory company in musical theater.

- This is a more complete *Kate* than Musicarnival’s earlier production: We hear more dance music, the vocal on “I Sing of Love” and all the choruses of “Always True to You in My Fashion.”

- Note the appearance of **Gaylea Byrne** as a chorus member. She would go on to play Aldonza/Dulcinea in *Man of La Mancha* for two years on Broadway, replacing Joan Diener.

- One wonders if Don Driver’s success with this musical version of Shakespeare planted the seed for *Your Own Thing*, his playful treatment of *Twelfth Night*, which became an award-winning Off Broadway hit 10 years later.

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Although Jonathan Koontz in the *Palm Beach Post* had some reservations about the leads, he had none about the company as a whole: “The same first-class ingredients are present—a chorus and ballet team second to none, sparkling characterizations in all minor parts, and musical conducting done with taste and respect.... Don Driver is a truly great comedian.”—**B. R.**

OKLAHOMA!

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 5–16, 1958 (New York opening: March 31, 1943;
2,212 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

John Reardon (Curly), Patricia Northrup (Laurey), Joan Bentley (Ado Annie Carnes), Chaunce Conklin (Will Parker), Lawrence Books (Jud Fry), Al Checco (Ali Hakim),
Mary Marlo (Aunt Eller)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’,” “The Surrey With the Fringe on Top,” “I Cain’t Say No,” “Many a New Day,”
“People Will Say We’re in Love,” “Pore Jud,” “Out of My Dreams,” “The Farmer and the Cowman,” “Oklahoma!”

SYNOPSIS

The musical is set in Indian Territory soon after the turn of the 20th century and is mostly concerned with whether the decent Curly McClain or the menacing Jud Fry will take Laurey Williams to the box social. Though in a fit of pique Laurey chooses Jud, she really loves Curly, and they soon make plans to marry. At their wedding, there is a joyous celebration of Oklahoma’s impending statehood; Jud is accidentally killed in a fight with Curly; and the newlyweds prepare to ride off in their surrey with the fringe on top. A comic secondary plot has to do with a romantic triangle involving man-crazy Ado Annie Carnes, cowboy Will Parker and peddler Ali Hakim.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1954 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Though producer **Johnny Price** and director **Don Driver** would never admit it, the Palm Beach *Oklahoma!* was a terrific warmup for the production that opened the 1958 Cleveland season a few months later. These principals came north: **John Reardon** (Curly), **Patricia Northrup** (Laurey), **Mary Marlo** (Aunt Eller), **Lawrence Books** (Jud Fry) and **Joan Bentley** (Ado Annie Carnes). See 1958 SEASON for comments on their work.

Prior to the Cleveland *Oklahoma!*, John Reardon had already distinguished himself as Curly. One has only to hear his final tender chorus of “The Surrey With the Fringe on Top” to realize that this is a star in the making.

Speaking of whom: I get a kick out of a note in the souvenir program: “Musicarnival Stars Ride in New 1958 Bev Smith Fords.”

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Wrote Helen Van Roy Smith in the *Miami Herald*: “*Oklahoma!*, that hardy perennial, is blooming again. Age has not withered nor has custom stained the lilting Rodgers & Hammerstein musical comedy. As presented at Palm Beach Musicarnival, it still deserved that exclamation point.” And the *Palm Beach Post*’s Jonathan Koontz seconded the motion: “The sunniest, warmest musical of them all gets the cast and the production it deserves at Palm Beach Musicarnival for the next two weeks as *Oklahoma!* brings its special brand of magic to our wonderful new theater-in-the-round.”—**B. R.**

SONG OF NORWAY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 18–23, 1958 (New York opening: August 21, 1944;
860 performances)

AUTHORS

Based on the life and music of Edvard Grieg, lyrics and musical adaptation by Robert Wright and George Forrest, book by Milton Lazarus from a play by Homer Curran

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Lawrence Brooks (Edvard Grieg), Irra Petina (Louisa Giovanni), Helena Scott (Nina), Barbara Fallis (Adelina), Jim Hawthorne (Rikard Nordraak), Don Driver (Count Pepi LeLoup), Tom Batten (Pisoni), Mary Marlo (Mother Grieg), Lindsay Workman (Father Grieg), Keith Mackey (Father Nordraak)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Hill of Dreams,” “Freddy and His Fiddle,” “Strange Music,” “Now,” “Three Loves,” “I Love You,” “Midsummer’s Eve”

SYNOPSIS

This is the heavily romanticized tale of the early years of Edvard Grieg, who, with his friend, poet Rikard Nordraak, is anxious to bring new artistic glory to their beloved Norway. Though temporarily distracted from this noble aim by a dalliance in Rome with a flirtatious (and fictitious) Italian prima donna, Grieg is so affected by the news of Nordraak’s death that he returns home to his indulgent wife. Suitably inspired after singing a reprise of their love duet, “Strange Music,” the composer creates the A-Minor Piano Concerto.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1957 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

If anything, this is an even more exciting production than the one staged by William C. Boehm in Cleveland, and that is saying something. **Don Driver** told a reporter in West Palm Beach, “If there is any pitfall in tent theater productions, it is pacing,” and Driver knew whereof he spoke, having been a key member of Musicarnival’s Cleveland troupe since 1954.

This *Song of Norway* fairly races by—quite a feat for an operetta that had been dragging its heels since 1944. Two of the three leads repeat their performances (**Lawrence Brooks** and **Irina Petina**, both veterans of the Broadway original), and the new second female lead, **Helena Scott**, sings and acts the role of Nina beautifully. Several months after this production, she played it at Jones Beach and was part of the definitive recording (early stereo, by the way) conducted by Lehman Engel and released by Columbia.

And here is a remarkable case of **Johnny Price**'s musical theater repertory concept in action: **Mary Marlo**, who had played Aunt Eller in Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* the week before, appears as a very credible Mother Grieg in Wright and Forrest's *Norway*.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

As we know from the tapes, this production delivered in a special way, and the critics knew it, too. Jonathan Koontz: "It is, of course, impossible for the Palm Beach Musicarnival to continue to produce musical plays of the high quality so many people of this area have been enjoying all season long. But somehow they have done it again." And in the *Miami Herald*, Helen Van Roy Smith opined: "The *Peer Gynt* ballet, the lovely 'I Love You' heard at so many weddings, and the haunting 'Strange Music' sent the audience away happy to have witnessed a clean and beautiful production acted with grace and finesse."—**B. R.**

CALL ME MADAM

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 25–30, 1958 (New York opening: October 25, 1950;
644 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Libi Staiger (Mrs. Sally Adams), Lawrence Brooks (Cosmo Constantine), Ron Beattie (Kenneth Gibson), Julia Freeman (Princess Maria)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"The Hostess With the Mostes' on the Ball," "Can You Use Any Money Today?," "Lichtenburg," "Marrying for Love," "It's a Lovely Day Today," "The Best Thing for You," "You're Just in Love"

SYNOPSIS

According to the program, the musical takes place “in two mythical countries: one is Lichtenburg, the other the United States of America.” When Sally Adams, the hostess with the mostes’ on the ball, becomes ambassador to the tiny duchy, she surprises and charms the local gentry, especially foreign minister Cosmo Constantine, with her no-nonsense, undiplomatic manner. In a subplot, Sally’s young aide, Kenneth Gibson, finds himself falling for Lichtenburg’s Princess Maria, a condition that prompts the ambassador to itemize the symptoms in “You’re Just in Love.”—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1956 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

When **Johnny Price** promises in his welcome to this final performance of the first West Palm Beach season that “We’ll be back next year,” the audience makes it clear they’ll be back, too. And why not? Johnny tells them, “This is your theater,” and when he asks them to play a role in selecting the 1959 shows by filling out a ballot, he shows them he means it.

By 1958, of course, *Call Me Madam* is even dustier than in 1956, when Johnny produced it in Cleveland (the political satire was old hat then), and **Libi Staiger** still pushes too hard in the Ethel Merman role. But **Lawrence Brooks** as Cosmo Constantine is well cast opposite her, projecting an Old World graciousness that makes us care about his romance with the brash American ambassador. And **Don Driver** continues to dazzle with the range of his talent: not only directing but co-choreographing with **Duncan Noble** several of the first West Palm Beach shows (including this one), and in *Madam* giving the comic role of the attaché, Kenneth Gibson, just the right sneer.

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

The reviews are all good, but most interesting is this bit of reporting in the *West Palm Beach Press*, demonstrating that occasionally Cleveland doesn’t corner the market on bad weather: “Palm Beach Musicarnival, plagued throughout its opening season here with cold weather and rain, closed its season Sunday night in character. A wind-whipped torrent drenched patrons who made their last trip this year to the theater-in-the-round under the big top. But unlike opening night when the crowd wasn’t all it could have been, the house Sunday was packed for the last fling of *Call Me Madam*.”—**B. R.**

1958 Season (Cleveland)

OKLAHOMA!

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

May 30–June 15, 1958 (New York opening: March 31, 1953;
2,212 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on the play *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

John Reardon (Curly), Patricia Northrup (Laurey), Joan Kibrig Bentley (Ado Annie Carnes), Jimmy Thompson (Will Parker), Lawrence Brooks (Jud Fry), Sheppard Kerman (Ali Hakim), Mary Marlo (Aunt Eller Murphy)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’,” “The Surrey With the Fringe on Top,” “I Cain’t Say No,” “Many a New Day,” “People Will Say We’re in Love,” “Pore Jud,” “Out of My Dreams,” “The Farmer and the Cowman,” “Oklahoma!”

SYNOPSIS

The musical is set in Indian Territory soon after the turn of the century and is mostly concerned with whether the decent Curly McClain or the menacing Jud Fry will take Laurey Williams to the box social. Though in a fit of pique Laurey chooses Jud, she really loves Curly, and they soon make plans to marry. At their wedding, there is a joyous celebration of Oklahoma’s impending statehood; Jud is accidentally killed in a fight with Curly; and the newlyweds prepare to ride off in their surrey with the fringe on top. A comic secondary plot has to do with a romantic triangle involving man-crazy Ado Annie Carnes, cowboy Will Parker and peddler Ali Hakim.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1954 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

For several reasons, this *Oklahoma!* is bolder than the production that launched the tent theater in 1954. Here the 35-year-old **Don Driver** makes his Cleveland debut as Musicarnival's resident director, having consistently demonstrated his prowess as a performer since the first season, including his turn as Will Parker in the 1954 production. Driver was one ambitious young man (in the program he credits himself with "Entire Production Directed by"), but that's okay. Frankly, you can hear the step up in quality throughout the 1958 season; there's more disciplined zest onstage from here on in. How wise of Johnny—who considered Driver a "genius"—to nurture him.

As usual, the producer sought actors who knew these roles well. **Patricia Northrup** played Laurey in both the Broadway and national companies, and Rodgers & Hammerstein cast her in their touring concert, "Broadway Highlights." (In 2006, however, Johnny admitted his disappointment to me: "By then," he said, "she was phoning it in.") The Ali Hakim, **Sheppard Kerman**, had played the part just a few months earlier at New York City Center. And the acting phenom is **Mary Marlo**, who during this period became something of an institution as Aunt Eller: She appeared in the role on Broadway for several years, in the national tour for 10, in Germany at the Berlin Festival, and at Musicarnival in the 1954 showing. Her longevity certainly attests to her talent (everything she does in 1958 still sounds wonderfully spontaneous; by now she is beloved), but also to how well Hammerstein wrote the part. As Marlo understood, when the role is this good, there's always more to explore.

But what lifts this *Oklahoma!* to summer-stock glory is its Curly, **John Reardon**, who—like William Chapman (see *The King and I*, 1956 SEASON)—was a singing actor of the first rank, whether on the opera stage or in musicals. In 1956 he made his Broadway debut in Leonard Sillman's *New Faces* revue and his first appearance with New York City Opera; he became a principal artist there under the guidance of Julius Rudel, who also mentored Chapman, and he later appeared frequently at the Metropolitan Opera. Reardon's versatility encompassed Menotti's *The Saint of Bleeker Street* on Broadway, Musicarnival's *Damn Yankees* in 1957, and a few years later the romantic lead in Broadway's *Do Re Mi*, in which he introduced the Styne-Comden-Green hit "Make Someone Happy."

Reardon's Curly is completely original. In the role first played by the forever-macho Alfred

Drake, he gives us a cowboy whose manliness is tempered by an endearing playfulness with Laurey: “Can’t imagine how those ugly rumors start!” he says to her with feigned shock just before “People Will Say We’re in Love”; we instantly sense the flirtation will last a lifetime. Nor does Reardon shy away from revealing Curly’s awkwardness. He reminds me a bit of Laurence Guittard’s take on the character—but that came more than 20 years *after* Reardon blazed the trail with his fully dimensional Curly. And of course the vocal performance is superb: “Pore Jud” has never been sung better than in his duet with **Lawrence Brooks**.

I interviewed Reardon in 1984 when he was starring in a Cleveland Opera production of another Alfred Drake musical, *Kiss Me, Kate*, and he confessed that Curly was his favorite role in the musical theater: “The man is so smitten, so head-over-heels, and such a basically good guy, but you know, he’s not the sharpest tool in the shed, and getting inside his skin was a marvelous challenge for me.”

And to what did he attribute his success as an artist who remained as comfortable in musicals as he did in opera? “You listen to your own words that you’re singing, which apparently is no mean feat. I’ve always been the kind of singer who thinks the word is very important, and if one is acting upon it, you can hardly go wrong.”

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press* reported on a crisis barely averted: “Patricia Northrup, who plays Laurey, was told by her doctor that she should not go on, and that if she did she might be in bed today with virus pneumonia. Despite the taxing demands of her role, Miss Northrup defied medical advice and, like an old trouper, went onstage and turned in a winning performance. . . . For voice and personality I must buy John Reardon, the Curly of the story.” Arthur Spaeth in the *Cleveland News* went further: “There may have been one to equal baritone John Reardon in his way with a ballad and or comic song. Or one to match his easy way into the spirit of his chap in chaps. But certainly none surpassed him.” Spaeth also pointed out some progress in design and tech: “They have modified the stage grid this season, and now Musicarnival is ‘flying’ some of its skeletal sets. This should speed up even the breakneck scene-to-scene pace that director Don Driver has preserved to the menace of cast limb and aisle pew holders’ safety.”—**B. R.**

THE MOST HAPPY FELLA

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 16–29, 1958 (New York opening: May 3, 1956;
676 performances)

AUTHORS

Book, music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, based on the play *They Knew What They Wanted* by Sidney Howard

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Felix Knight (Tony), Betty Oakes (Rosabella), Jack Haskell (Joe), Jane Johnston (Cleo),
Tom Batten (Herman), Beatrice Krebs (Marie)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“My Heart Is So Full of You,” “Joey, Joey, Joey,” “Standing on the Corner,” “Happy to
Make Your Acquaintance,” “Big D,” “How Beautiful the Days”

SYNOPSIS

Set in California’s Napa Valley, the musical is about Tony Esposito, an aging Italian vineyard owner, who proposes by mail to Rosabella, a San Francisco waitress. She accepts, partly because Tony has sent her a photograph of Joe, his handsome and much younger ranch foreman. Rosabella is so upset at finding Tony physically unattractive that on her wedding night she gives herself to Joe. Tony is distraught over his wife’s pregnancy, but there is a reconciliation, and the vintner offers to raise the child as his own.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

For most of the six years following his triumph in 1950 with *Guys & Dolls*, Frank Loesser spent his life creating *The Most Happy Fella*, which was about as far from the earlier Times Square musical—geographically and emotionally—as one can imagine. Based on Sidney Howard’s 1924 play, *They Knew What They Wanted*, it stands as Loesser’s most ambitious work, and for it he provided both score and script.

It was quite an undertaking—the biggest musical theater work to be mounted on Broadway since *Porgy and Bess*. *The Most Happy Fella* was produced in 1956, when most musicals were scored for 26 musicians in the pit. This one had 36, plus 12 dancers and 20 singers in the chorus. And with only 20 minutes of spoken dialogue—everything else is sung—reporters badgered Loesser to admit that he had written an opera. “It’s a musical,” he insisted, “with a lot of music.” Indeed. More than 30 musical numbers in all, including arias (one of which, “My Heart Is So Full of You,” has been termed “Verdiesque”), duets, trios, quartets and choral pieces, in addition to recitative, the customary glue employed in operatic storytelling.

And yet one of the many things that’s remarkable about *The Most Happy Fella* is how skillfully Loesser combined classical forms with “pop” by writing songs like “Standing on the Corner” and “Big D.” (Said Richard Rodgers of “Corner”: “I can’t listen to it without wanting to giggle—not just at the words, but at the music.”) The original cast ranged from veterans of the Metropolitan Opera (Robert Weede, Mona Paulee) to Broadway types (Susan Johnson) to a country-western singer (Shorty Long).

Loesser was drawn to Howard’s play because he found no fewer than five love stories in it, and as he said at the time, “Love is acknowledged the world over to be a most singable subject and one which no songwriter dares duck for very long if he wants to stay popular and solvent.” The girl in the major love story is a young waitress, Amy, and the songs that Loesser wrote for her are lovely. Yet he was careful not to make them sentimental. As he advised, “the heart must bleed—not slobber.”

The man who falls in love with Amy is Tony Esposito, a lonely, aging winegrower who has seen her at a restaurant. He doesn’t even know her name, but he writes her a letter, calling her Rosabella and sending her a picture not of himself, but of his much younger ranch foreman. She becomes Tony’s mail-order bride. His deception nearly ruins both of their lives, but ultimately she forgives him because he’s a good man with a big heart.

The Most Happy Fella is a crossover work produced by both theater and opera companies. It is a “Broadway opera”—a genre that also includes Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler’s *Sweeney Todd*, Marc Blitzstein’s *Regina*, and the Elmer Rice–Kurt Weill–Langston Hughes *Street Scene*.

It is also Loesser’s most personal work for the stage. His *Guys & Dolls* collaborator, Abe Burrows, came to see it during the out-of-town tryout and raced up to Loesser at intermission to tell him all the things that made him laugh. But Loesser cut him off: “Hell, we know I can do that. Where did I make you cry?”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Musicarnival's 1958 season was a Frank Loesser Festival of sorts, with both of his major shows, *The Most Happy Fella* and *Guys & Dolls*, on view under the tent. Everybody was producing *Guys & Dolls* back then, of course, but for **Johnny Price** to tackle *Fella* in the round with limited resources is a testament to his vision and sheer chutzpah. Passionately staged and conducted, respectively, by **Don Driver** and **Boris Kogan**, the result is exemplary musical theater.

Johnny knew Loesser, and I don't imagine it took much persuading for the local impresario to obtain rights for the first summer-stock production of *Fella* in the country. Both men were voluble, funny, temperamental and driven by their work. At their core, they were also romantics. And when you add Price's formidable skill at selling tickets—which no doubt impressed the business-savvy songwriter—theirs must have been a mutual admiration society. (Johnny told me he personally invested in Loesser's 1960 Broadway musical, *Greenwillow*.)

Loesser himself picked the leads: **Felix Knight** came to Warrensville Heights with a distinguished track record at the Metropolitan Opera; **Betty Oakes** had played Rosabella on Broadway and on the national tour; and **Jane Johnston**, Musicarnival's spot-on Cleo, had been discovered by Loesser playing a small role at New York City Center.

In some ways, the hero of the production is musical director **Boris Kogan**; his work is distinguished throughout his Musicarnival tenure, but resplendent in *Fella*. A veteran of early tent theaters in Hyannis, Massachusetts, and Danbury, Connecticut, Kogan conducted all of Musicarnival's shows during this period. Russian-born, and formerly a musician with Diaghilev's storied Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, he arrived in New York in 1929 and worked his way into Broadway musical theater. (Upon hearing the *Fella* tapes, the 90-year-old Johnston told me, "Boris whipped up that fine orchestra to perfection. It seemed truly top-notch Broadway.")

A few concessions are made to the pragmatics of summer theater. At Musicarnival *Fella* is structured in two acts instead of the three in which it had been presented on Broadway, and several musical numbers are cut: "Plenty Bambini," "Benvenuto" and "Aren't You Glad?" But these decisions do not disrupt the piece as a whole.

Incidentally, Loesser had another connection to Cleveland for many years. His half brother, Arthur, was the longtime head of the piano department at Cleveland Institute of Music.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Aside from some reservations about **Jack Haskell** as Joe, critics very much appreciated this production—all the more significant given the fact that the national touring company, starring the original Tony, Robert Weede, had played the Hanna Theatre just five months earlier. Arthur Spaeth in the *Cleveland News* found Loesser's musical superior to the original Sidney Howard play (and to the already famous *My Fair Lady*), and the *Akron Beacon Journal's* Oscar Smith observed: "At times the score is so impressive you find yourself listening to the orchestra instead of the singers."—**B. R.**

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 30–July 13, 1958 (New York opening: May 16, 1946;
1,147 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Libi Staiger (Annie Oakley), Mark Dawson (Frank Butler), Lucille Benson (Dolly Tate), Tom Batten (Charlie Davenport), John Anania (Colonel Buffalo Bill), Jerry Escrow (Sitting Bull)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Doin' What Comes Natur'ly," "You Can't Get a Man With a Gun," "The Girl That I Marry," "There's No Business Like Show Business," "They Say It's Wonderful," "Moonshine Lullaby," "I Got Lost in His Arms," "My Defenses Are Down," "I Got the Sun in the Morning," "Anything You Can Do"

SYNOPSIS

Annie Oakley, an illiterate hillbilly living near Cincinnati, demonstrates her remarkable marksmanship and is persuaded—through the convincing claim "There's No Business Like

Show Business”—to join Colonel Buffalo Bill’s traveling Wild West Show. Annie, who needs only one look to fall hopelessly in love with Frank Butler, the show’s featured shooting ace, soon eclipses Butler as the main attraction, which doesn’t help the cause of romance. She exhibits her skills at such locales as the Minneapolis Fair Grounds and at Governor’s Island, New York, where, in a shooting contest with Frank, she realizes that the only way to win the man is to lose the match.—*S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Here is one of the best true stories in musical theater history. In 1945 lyricist Dorothy Fields (1905-74) has an idea: a new musical with her pal Ethel Merman playing the famous sharpshooter Annie Oakley. The plan is for Fields to handle the script with her brother, Herbert (1897-1958), and write the songs with Jerome Kern, and for Rodgers & Hammerstein—then basking in the glory of *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*—to produce the show. Merman is ecstatic. But Kern dies late in the year just as he is beginning the project, and R&H ask Irving Berlin—then 59—to write both words and music.

It took some persuasion. Berlin was worried he couldn’t write what he called “hillbilly songs.” He was perhaps also concerned about whether, in this era defined by Rodgers & Hammerstein’s naturalistic approach to musical theater, he could write music and lyrics grounded in character and situation. So he went off to Atlantic City to take a crack at the score, and at the end of one week, he returned with “Doin’ What Comes Natur’lly” (which came first), “The Girl That I Marry,” “They Say It’s Wonderful,” “You Can’t Get a Man With a Gun” and the immortal “There’s No Business Like Show Business.” No songwriter for the musical stage—before or since—has found such immediate inspiration.

Granted, *Annie Get Your Gun* never aspired to be the great American musical. Much of it is old-fashioned and predictable. But nearly all of Berlin’s songs are exceptional, and in fact, Annie is the most character-driven score he ever created. Stephen Sondheim has placed the down-home “Doin’ What Comes Natur’lly” on his list of songs he wishes he had written in whole or in part. Annie Oakley and Frank Butler’s ballad, “They Say It’s Wonderful,” at once yearning and tentative, finds just the right expression in words and music for their discovery of love. And even the rarely heard, bluesy “Moonshine Lullaby” is admired by song connoisseurs for its quirky rhythms and melodic line. An incredulous Alec Wilder asks: “Where does this man find these tunes?... It is a fantastic piece of work.”

Ethel Merman was particularly grateful. The tough-talking city dame knew that the role was the

turning point in her career, noting that “Irving’s lyrics showed that I had a softer side. And it was about time, because my hard-boiled Tessie type had become a cliché; people didn’t care about her anymore.” She returned the favor by playing Annie for the nearly three-year run of the show, less one six-week vacation.

Conceived as a star vehicle, *Annie Get Your Gun* endures because it transcends the star it was written for. In 1999 librettist Peter Stone made the musical more politically correct for the Broadway revival starring Bernadette Peters, but he did not tamper with what he called the show’s “great and original spirit.” In addition to Peters, the title role has been played by many different women in many different ways, among them Mary Martin, Dolores Gray, Judy Garland (though she was replaced in the MGM film by Betty Hutton), Doris Day, Kim Criswell and even Reba McEntire. As Martin writes in her autobiography: “A role that’s full of vitality can make milestones in the careers of entirely different personalities. Annie Oakley was one of those roles.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Musicarnival’s two leads—**Libi Staiger** and **Mark Dawson**—were Broadway veterans. Last season’s featured performers on Broadway would play starring roles this summer at Musicarnival; Dawson was direct from George Abbott’s *New Girl in Town*, and before that, Abbott’s Rodgers & Hammerstein musical, *Me and Juliet*. Staiger was also a favorite with local audiences; she had starred in five musicals during the 1956 and 1957 seasons.

Ever the showman, **Johnny Price** made Annie his attraction during the Fourth of July holiday—rambunctious Americana in the round. **Don Driver**’s production drops the secondary couple of Tommy and Winnie: no loss in terms of storytelling, but depriving us of Berlin’s delicious “I’ll Share It All With You.” **Boris Kogan** conducts something close to the 1946 orchestration by Robert Russell Bennett, Phil Lang and Ted Royal. Once Bennett revamped their work for the 1966 Lincoln Center production, the original “sound” of the show was essentially erased (except for the all-too-short cast album) until John McGlinn’s restoration in the early 1990s.

More about Driver, whose direction anchors the 1958 season. As noted, he succeeded staff director Bill Boehm, who staged virtually all Musicarnival productions from 1954 to 1957. Born in 1923, Driver had performed in many of the early shows, and Price was impressed by his work under the tent and by his New York resume in musical theater and television. When Price launched the Palm Beach Musicarnival in winter 1958, he gambled by hiring Driver to make his directing debut with all six musicals.

Though he never held the title, in essence Driver served as Price's first and only artistic director. His was a protean talent: actor, singer, dancer, choreographer, director and author, and after his tenure here in Cleveland, Driver returned to New York. There, as Donald Driver, he hit full stride, directing on Broadway the 1967 American version of *Marat/Sade*; the 1968 comedy *Jimmy Shine* starring Dustin Hoffman (critic Martin Gottfried: "a ranging sense of stage action, choreography and musicality"); and most notably, scripting and directing the Off Broadway musical *Your Own Thing*, an invigorating, contemporary and multi-media treatment of *Twelfth Night* that won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for best musical of 1968. Driver died of AIDS 20 years later.

As for Bill Boehm, his virtuosic tenor can be heard in 1958's *The Most Happy Fella*, in which he plays Doc. Soon after his stint at Musicarnival he founded and for decades led the Singing Angels, a children's chorus that achieved a national reputation.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The first paragraphs of Harlowe R. Hoyt's review in *The Plain Dealer* are so vivid that they must be quoted here: "Annie Oakley came back to her native Ohio last night in the person of Libi Staiger, one of the most popular singers to appear at Musicarnival's tent on Warrensville Center Road, where *Annie Get Your Gun* is scheduled for a two-week stay. Miss Staiger's reception was remarkable in more ways than one. To add variety to her two shooting matches with Mark Dawson, who sings Frank Butler in fine, lusty fashion, Miss Staiger was hauled down a runway and about the circular stage lashed full-length to a motorcycle discharging six shooters with each hand. A little later she was tossed [by a band of Indians] from hand to hand and rolled on the floor under the direction of Chief Sitting Bull as part of her initiation into their tribe.... With customary aplomb, Miss Staiger not only endured all this but emerged at the end in evening dress, her bosom decorated with enough medals to drive a Napoleon or a Prince Romanoff to suicide.... I consider Libi Staiger outstanding among the leading women of lighter musical roles who have appeared under Johnny Price's sponsorship."—**B. R.**

SHOW BOAT

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 14–27, 1958 (New York opening: December 27, 1927;
572 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Jerome Kern, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on the novel by Edna Ferber

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Morley Meredith (Gaylord Ravenal), Peggy Alderman (Magnolia Hawks), Lillian Shelby (Julie), Walter P. Brown (Joe), Sam Kressan (Cap'n Andy), Lucille Benson (Parthy Ann Hawks), Marian Mercer (Ellie), Jimmy Tarbutton (Frank), Pete Myers (Steve)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Make Believe," "Ol' Man River," "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," "Life Upon the Wicked Stage," "You Are Love," "Why Do I Love You?," "Bill" (lyric with P. G. Wodehouse)

SYNOPSIS

The saga covers the period from the mid-1880s to the then-current 1927, and is primarily concerned with the fortunes of impressionable Magnolia Hawks, whose father, Cap'n Andy, runs the show boat *Cotton Blossom*, and ne'er-do-well riverboat gambler Gaylord Ravenal. Meeting on the Natchez levee, the couple fall in love at first sight, then become actors on the show boat, marry and move to Chicago. After they separate when Ravenal loses his money gambling, Magnolia has a tearful meeting with her father while singing at the Trocadero on New Year's Eve. She goes on to become a musical comedy star, as does her daughter, Kim, and years later she and Ravenal are reunited aboard the *Cotton Blossom*. A secondary plot involves Magnolia's mulatto friend, the tragic Julie LaVerne, and her devotion to her man, Steve Baker.—**S. G.**

NOTES ON THE MUSICAL

Show Boat is epic theater. Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern's (1885-1945) sprawling masterwork, drawn from the novel by Edna Ferber, touches on 40 years in the lives of both whites and African-Americans. In 1927 it painted on a huge canvas. There were 150 performers in the original cast, and when the musical opened out of town, it ran four hours. As Hammerstein admitted, "*Show Boat* was born big and wants to stay that way."

Ferber thought the idea of turning her saga into musical theater was “preposterous.” But when Kern and Hammerstein performed for her the show’s thematic centerpiece, sung by Joe, a black dockhand, she could finally understand their passion for what they were creating. “Ol’ Man River” had such powerful universality that it felt like a folk song (or in critic Ethan Mordden’s view, “a combination of hymn, folk song and political act”). The novelist recalled years later: “The music mounted and mounted, and I give you my word, my hair stood on end.... I knew this wasn’t just a musical comedy number.... This was a song that would outlast Kern and Hammerstein’s day, and my day, and your day.”

Certainly nothing like *Show Boat* had ever been produced on a Broadway stage. In fact, it is the first “adult” musical in its determination to deal seriously with issues that were never acknowledged in the musical theater of that era: racism, alcohol and gambling addictions, miscegenation and marital desertion.

To use the term Hammerstein would apply to most of the musicals he later wrote with Richard Rodgers, *Show Boat* was a “musical play.” But it’s also a hybrid work, with elements of romantic operetta (in the relationship between Gaylord Ravenal and Magnolia Hawks) and musical comedy (Cap’n Andy, Ellie and Frank). After all, it was originally produced by Florenz Ziegfeld, a showman who prided himself on knowing how to please an audience, and this musical’s three generations of the Hawks family—Cap’n Andy, Magnolia and Kim, entertainers all—offer a cavalcade of late-19th- and early-20th-century American show business/popular music forms and traditions.

That *Show Boat* could deliver Ziegfeld’s own tradition of grand entertainment while challenging theatergoers with its provocative subject matter makes this musical nearly unique in the canon. Not until 1971 and the Stephen Sondheim–James Goldman *Follies* do we find a piece that deploys song and dance to explore our cultural history so provocatively. That is one reason why Harold Prince, who directed *Show Boat*’s brilliant 1994 revival (and not coincidentally, the original production of *Follies*), calls it “the first great contemporary, modern musical.”

In a sense, *Show Boat* has always been a work in progress. Kern and Hammerstein tinkered with the musical for the 1928 London production, the 1932 Broadway revival, the 1936 film and the 1946 Broadway revival. Most significantly, in a 1988 recording for Angel, the conductor and musical theater archivist John McGlinn restored the score to its full length prior to Broadway. The set features Robert Russell Bennett’s original orchestrations, which were thought to be lost until the discovery in 1982 of hundreds of musical theater manuscripts in a warehouse in Secaucus, New

Jersey. McGlinn's mammoth undertaking—which reconnects us with the dark and brooding texture that its authors conceived in 1927—essentially redefined *Show Boat* for our time.

ABOUT THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Musicarnival's *Show Boat*, directed by **Don Driver**, is a skillful if uninspired reading: It is a typical production of this musical for the 1950s—or for that matter, until conductor John McGlinn forced us to reexamine the work in his 1988 recording (see above). Its virtues include splendid choral singing (Karamu House provided the septet that backs Joe on “Ol’ Man River”) and ensemble vitality throughout. Nonetheless, most of the performances—except for **Walter P. Brown**'s Joe, **Marian Mercer**'s Ellie and **Lucille Benson**'s Parthy Ann—are bland, and the cuts in the score are disappointing, even when judged by 1958 standards. There are also two inexcusable interpolations: Fred Fisher's song “Chicago” dates from 1922, nearly 30 years after the musical's Act Two scene at the Chicago World's Fair, and “Charleston” is by Cecil Mack and James P. Johnson.

Alabaman Lucille Benson went on to a busy career as a character actress in television and film, playing Lily Sinclair in the Tom Hanks TV series, *Bosom Buddies*. And of local interest is 22-year-old Akron native Marian Mercer, one of the most gifted singer-comedians of her generation, who was tapped by Driver before she attracted attention on Broadway in Leonard Sillman's *New Faces of 1962*. Mercer later starred in Driver's 1968 Off Broadway hit, *Your Own Thing*, but she left the production for a featured role in Broadway's Neil Simon–Burt Bacharach–Hal David musical, *Promises, Promises*, for which she won a Tony Award. Mercer's career was cut short by a prolonged illness.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The reviews could not be more positive, but the critics admired a *Show Boat* that left the dock long ago. The adjectives that turn up time and again are “nostalgic,” “warm,” “beloved,” “enchanting,” “charming” and “captivating”—with nary a paragraph on the musical's daring. Harlowe R. Hoyt in *The Plain Dealer* “presumes” that it is the “nostalgic note that makes *Show Boat* so popular after all these years. That and [the score], one of the best ever put together in any of the lighter musical concoctions.” If only he knew the *Show Boat* of the past 30 years. Still captivating, to be sure, but so much more.—**B. R.**

FINIAN'S RAINBOW

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 28–August 10, 1958 (New York opening: January 10, 1947;
725 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Burton Lane, lyrics by E. Y. (Yip) Harburg, book by Harburg and Fred Saidy

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Martyn Green (Finian McLonergan), Mimi Kelly (Sharon McLonergan), John Craig
(Woody Mahoney), Lou Kristofer (Og), Sam Kressen (Senator Billboard Rawkins)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“How Are Things in Glocca Morra?,” “Old Devil Moon,” “Look to the Rainbow,”
“If This Isn’t Love,” “That Great Come-and-Get-It Day,” “When I’m Not Near the Girl I Love”

SYNOPSIS

Finian McLonergan, an Irish immigrant, is in Rainbow Valley, Missitucky, to bury a crock of gold, which, he is sure, will grow and make him rich. Also part of the story are Og, the leprechaun whose crock has been stolen; Finian’s daughter, Sharon, who dreams wistfully of Glocca Morra; Woody Mahoney, a labor organizer who blames that “Old Devil Moon” for the way he feels about Sharon; and a bigoted Southern senator, Billboard Rawkins, who—as one of the three wishes—turns black. At the end, everyone comes to understand that riches are found not in gold but in people trusting one another.—*S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

E. Y. (Yip) Harburg (1896–1981), the principal creator of *Finian’s Rainbow*, said, “I’ve always been aware of the idiocy of the Establishment,” and this passionate son of Russian Jewish immigrants knew how to fight it: “For me, fantasy is great for pricking balloons.... And satire is a weapon. I want to tackle problems that have depth and real danger ... by reducing them to

absurdity and destroying them with laughter.”

Best known as the lyricist of the 1939 MGM film musical *The Wizard of Oz* and the Depression-era theater anthem “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?,” Harburg crafted *Finian* with fellow scriptwriter Fred Saidy and composer Burton Lane (1912-97). Their blazingly imaginative 1947 show prompted a succinct telegram from fellow lyricist Oscar Hammerstein: “Yip, I love you. Will you marry me?”

No one but Harburg could have told, on one stage, a story featuring a racist senator and his good-ol’-boy cronies, the village’s exploited black and white sharecroppers, a union organizer, an Irish immigrant and his daughter, and a puckish leprechaun and his pot of gold. *Finian* is social satire, fantasy, comedy, political tract, romance and fable rolled into one, to say nothing of the solid-gold Lane-Harburg score. Alec Wilder, in his landmark book, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators: 1900–50*, singles out “Old Devil Moon” for its adventuresome “modal writing, which must have come as a great surprise [in 1947].”

The most pointed satire is fueled by anger, and so it is with *Finian*. Beneath the surface is Harburg’s contempt for congressmen who were out to destroy the nascent civil rights movement of the mid-1940s, and his conviction that “racial prejudice is generated partly because of economic greed” and the inequities of capitalism. Social psychologist Ernie Harburg, Yip’s biographer and son, believes *Finian* to be “the only socialist American musical”—all the more remarkable considering that it was first produced at the height of post–World War II prosperity.

As the composer said to me a few years before his death, “This musical couldn’t have been riskier.” But *Finian*’s themes, addressed by the writers in stunning wordplay and stupendous songs, rang out with liberation. Particularly gratifying was the response of the African-American press: “It has been accomplished,” wrote critic Miles Jefferson, “in the best of taste and with great style.”

Harburg’s literary heroes included W. S. Gilbert, James M. Barrie, George Bernard Shaw and Jonathan Swift. All of them can be found, in one form or another, in his mythical Rainbow Valley, the imaginative leap of a dreamer who claimed the role of Broadway’s social conscience. “I want to send people out of the theater with the glow of having had a good time,” Harburg explained, then added: “But I also believe the purpose of a musical is to make people think.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Johnny Price's casting coup was bringing to town the delightful **Martyn Green**—for years the ranking Gilbert & Sullivan comedian of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company—to play the title role: Green relishes Harburg's whimsy. And typical of Musicarnival productions of the time, the leading players came to Warrensville Heights with strong Broadway credits: **Mimi Kelly**, a member of the original cast, replaced Ella Logan as Sharon and toured with the national company, and **John Craig** (Woody) arrived from Broadway's *Li'l Abner*. Director **Don Driver** had played Og the leprechaun in the 1954 New York City Center revival.

When I took on this curatorial assignment, *Finian's Rainbow* was the first live recording I listened to, and one minute into the overture, conducted by **Boris Kogan**, I knew I had opened an amazing time capsule. The orchestral work is splendid, benefiting from the presence in the pit of numerous Cleveland Orchestra musicians in this pre-Blossom Music Center era. But beyond their proficiency, the summer air is charged with artists and audience sharing a great musical in the repertoire. It is tangible.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Reviews of this production are uniformly favorable. Don Driver was credited by H. L. Sanford in the *Shaker Heights Sun* with “making the [musical] completely modern with its social implications, political chicanery and screwball economy of burying gold.” *The Cleveland Press* judged it the top live show in this area,” praised its “meticulous company,” and took special note of the emotional connection between Mimi Kelly and Martyn Green: “Their father-daughter relationship always is touching.... Their scenes give us a sort of Irish conversation that wins literary prizes.”—**B. R.**

PETER PAN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 12–24, 1958 (New York opening: October 20, 1954;
152 performances)

AUTHORS

Conceived by Jerome Robbins, book by James M. Barrie (uncredited adaptation by Robbins), lyrics by Carolyn Leigh, music by Moose Charlap, additional lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, additional music by Jule Styne

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Mimi Kelly (Peter Pan), Martyn Green (Captain Hook/Mr. Darling), Peggy Alderman (Wendy), Mary Ann Niles (Tiger Lily)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I’ve Gotta Crow,” “I’m Flying,” “I Won’t Grow Up” (Charlap-Leigh); “Never Never Land,” “Hook’s Waltz,” “Distant Melody” (Styne-Comden-Green)

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Jerome Robbins’s adaptation of *Peter Pan* is one of the great baby-boomer musicals, and I speak from experience. One night when I was five years old and in kindergarten, my parents told me I could stay up late and watch television. Little did I know that I was in for *Peter Pan*, only recently on Broadway and now on our black-and-white Philco.

I had no idea who Peter Pan was, nor had I ever heard of Tinker Bell or Captain Hook or Tiger Lily or the Lost Boys or Nana the Dog. And that’s only the beginning of what I didn’t know. For example: that the show’s star, Mary Martin, then reigned as the queen of the American musical; that her Captain Hook, Cyril Ritchard, had been delighting audiences here and abroad with his foppish characters since the 1920s; that three of its songwriters, Jule Styne, Betty Comden and Adolph Green, were among the most respected on Broadway; and that for the past decade Jerome Robbins (1918-98), the show’s director and choreographer, had been revolutionizing the way musicals moved.

When it was all over, I was exhausted—because like millions of my fellow baby boomers, I had been on a deeply emotional journey. Thanks to television and the DVDs of later stage productions starring Sandy Duncan and Cathy Rigby, this journey probably has been taken by more children than any other classic American musical, with the exception of *The Sound of Music* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

Not bad for a show that ran into trouble during its tryout engagement. Robbins brought in

Styne, Comden and Green to supplement the work of newcomers Moose Charlap (1928-74) and Carolyn Leigh (1926-83). The threesome sequestered themselves in a San Francisco hotel room and produced eight songs (roughly half the score) in a week, including the tender theme, “Never Never Land.” (A few years before he died, composer Styne, best known for his hard-driving scores for *Gypsy* and *Funny Girl*, told me that “Never Never Land” was one of his most treasured creations: “It’s such a pretty song, and the opening sounds like it’s from a Glazunov symphony.”) Fortunately, the work of the two songwriting teams meshed well; in fact, *Peter Pan* boasts one of the most unified Broadway scores of its era.

The show opened in New York in autumn 1954 to enthusiastic reviews, yet despite Tony Award-winning performances by both Martin and Ritchard, the musical was not a big hit at the box office. Apparently, audiences on Broadway had had enough of the Boy Who Never Grew Up: A New York revival of Barrie’s straight play, with a handful of songs by Leonard Bernstein, had triumphed just a few years before, and Robbins also had Walt Disney’s recent animated treatment to contend with.

Under normal circumstances the musical would have ended its run in red ink, but television came to the rescue of the theater. Before Robbins’s *Peter Pan* even opened on Broadway, the contracts had been signed for a live TV special, which, when broadcast in early 1955 on NBC’s *Producers’ Showcase*, attracted the new medium’s largest audience to date. The show was given a second live airing a year later, and in 1960 it was videotaped, turning the musical into an annual bonanza.

What is it about Robbins’s treatment that made *Peter Pan* the ever-so-rare musical equally beloved by children and adults? Robbins infused the fantastical Barrie story with terrific showmanship and the most contagious kind of American spirit. It’s not surprising that some years later Rigby, a former Olympic gymnast, would want to attack the title role; the athleticism she brought to the stage was a big part of what made the Robbins-Martin production literally soar.

In her autobiography, Martin reports that it was her idea for the director-choreographer to invent a flying ballet for Peter and the children. Robbins set that in motion—singing included—with an invaluable assist from the Foys, the family of flying technicians who had been sending stage Peter Pans aloft since 1904. Moreover, this musical is fueled by songs of bountiful imagination, wit, charm, and at just the right moments, heart. As a five-year-old I cried when Peter sang the final half-chorus of “Never Never Land” to Young Wendy. I still do.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

This *Peter Pan* is, in a sense, a textbook case of what often made American summer stock so adventurous in the 1950s. While they were still performing in *Finian's Rainbow*, stars **Mimi Kelly** and **Martyn Green** were rehearsing for their back-to-back engagement in **Peter Pan**—quite a feat for Kelly given the aerial maneuvers required by the title role.

Peter Foy himself was here to supervise the flying, but pulling it off in a theater with no ability to conceal the apparatus presented challenges. A huge scaffold was built over the tent; it included—according to a press release—an “intricate arrangement of pulleys and invisible wires.”

As for the production itself, **Johnny Price** and **Don Driver's** objective was made clear by critic Bill Kirtz: “It's strictly for fun.” The tapes document the presence of hundreds of laughing, clapping, cheering youngsters; and Driver takes liberties with the text to enhance their enjoyment. He has Kelly invite a horde of children up onstage for a lesson in crowing from Peter. Critic H. L. Sanford reported that “a happy riot ensued, [and] Johnny had to help locate some of the ‘lost parents’ when the noise subsided.”

Unfortunately, Driver also allows Green's Hook to indulge in gratuitous anachronisms, promoting the upcoming production of *Carousel* and referencing the biggest flying story of the past year, the launching of Sputnik. More damaging is the director's elimination of any dark corners in the story (even the musical has some). At Musicarnival, Peter's haunting and vulnerable lullaby, “Distant Melody”—a memory of his mother “once upon a time and long ago”—is given to Wendy.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

No critical naysayers for this production, one of the most popular in Musicarnival's first decade (special matinees were added to accommodate the demand for tickets by entire families). Reviewers lauded the performances of Kelly and Green. Kelly was called “vivacious” and “enchanting,” and *The Plain Dealer's* Harlowe R. Hoyt noted, “There may have been better Captain Hooks, but I have not found them. Martyn Green is in his element again. There is much in his characterization reminiscent of his Gilbert & Sullivan days.”

FROM A PERFORMER'S PERSPECTIVE

Martyn Green, speaking to theater students from Western Reserve University then apprenticing at Musicarnival, opined that British actors have an edge over Americans when it comes to

straight plays, but “as regards musicals, I don’t think there is anyone in the world who can touch American musicals. Even Viennese operettas—you’ve gone way ahead of that.”—**B. R.**

GUYS & DOLLS

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 25–September 7, 1958 (New York opening: November 24, 1950;
1,200 performances)

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL DIRECTOR

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Mark Dawson (Sky Masterson), Don Driver (Nathan Detroit), Joan Bentley (Miss Adelaide), Peggy Alderman (Sarah Brown)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Fugue for Tinhorns,” “I’ll Know,” “Adelaide’s Lament,” “Guys & Dolls,” “If I Were a Bell,” “My Time of Day,” “I’ve Never Been in Love Before,” “More I Cannot Wish You,” “Luck Be a Lady,” “Sit Down, You’re Rockin’ the Boat”

SYNOPSIS

The high-minded lowlifes of Times Square come colorfully alive in such characters as Sky Masterson, the bet-on-anything gambler; Nathan Detroit, the perpetually harried organizer of the Oldest Established Permanent Floating Crap Game in New York, who bets Sky he can’t make the next girl he sees fall in love with him; Miss Sarah Brown, who is the next girl Sky sees and who does succumb; and Miss Adelaide, the main attraction at the Hot Box nightclub, whose psychosomatic perpetual cold stems from her being engaged to Nathan for 14 years. This so-called Musical Fable of Broadway relates the tale of how Sarah (of the Save-a-Soul Mission) saves the souls of assorted Times Square riffraff.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

One wonders what Damon Runyon would have to say about his diehard New Yorkers gathering not at Lindy's but under a tent in what was still the countryside of Warrensville Heights, accompanied (and this can be heard in the tapes) by a chorus of crickets. Oh for the days of American summer stock!

Johnny Price first scored with this musical in 1955, and here is the Burrows-Loesser smash hit just three years later in a crackerjack production directed by **Don Driver**. Price's show-biz caninness is, as usual, on display. Providing another cameo appearance, he can be heard reprising his Rusty Charley in "Fugue for Tinhorns." Former prizefighter turned nightclub entertainer **Slapsie Maxie Rosenbloom** is on hand as the formidable but dim Big Jule, a role he played in the national tour. And noted classical actress **Mary Morris**—the original Abbie in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*—makes a suitably earnest General Matilda Cartwright.

But it is in the performances of the principals that this *Guys & Dolls* truly delivers. Driver doubles as performer with a very funny Nathan Detroit (he was a member of the original 1950 cast), and playing opposite him is **Joan Kibrig Bentley**, reprising with brio her 1955 Adelaide. Bentley's New York credits were substantial, and the same goes for **Mark Dawson** (Sky Masterson), who had starred with Libi Staiger in Musicarnival's *Annie Get Your Gun* earlier in the season. Even in this audio document you can see him swagger.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

When this musical premiered on Broadway, critic Walter Kerr turned to his wife and asked, "Am I wrong, or isn't this the greatest musical we've ever seen?" From then on, critics have been hard-pressed to carp about *Guys & Dolls*. The 1958 Musicarnival production is no exception, with *The Plain Dealer's* Harlowe R. Hoyt devoting most of a column to the genius of Damon Runyon: "He endowed his creations with fantastic names and into their mouths put not the wisdom of babes but the world-weary philosophy of hangers-on."

Two critics even filed their reviews in Runyon lingo. Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press*: "I like this broad tabbed Joan Bentley [as Miss Adelaide]. This Miss Joan double-barreled. Great in the singing department and great with the regular conversation." Indeed, all four leads won high marks. Perhaps most gratifying, though, was the closing paragraph from Arthur Spaeth in the

Cleveland News in appreciation of Johnny's arrangement with Western Reserve University to use acting students as apprentices: "This ensemble of youngsters has come so far.... It is my hope that some night before the season closes, the entire audience of the big tent will rise to give them a special and exclusive round of applause."—**B. R.**

THE BALLAD OF BABY DOE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

September 8–14, 1958 (World premiere: Central City Opera, Central City, Colorado, July 7, 1956;
New York premiere: New York City Opera, April 3, 1958)

AUTHORS

Music by Douglas Moore, libretto by John Latouche

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Beverly Sills (Baby Doe), Walter Cassel (Horace Tabor), Margery Mayer (Augusta), Beatrice Krebs (Mama McCourt), Wayne Mack (William Jennings Bryan), Howard Fried (Old Silver Miner, Father Chapelle, Stage Doorman), William C. Boehm (Chester A. Arthur), Tom Batten (Hotel Clerk)

HIGHLIGHTS

"Willow Song," "Warm as the Autumn Light," "Dearest Mama (Letter Aria)," "Gold Is a Fine Thing (Silver Aria)," "The Fine Ladies," "Augusta! Augusta! How Can You Turn Away?" "Always Through the Changing"

SYNOPSIS

In 1879, the beautiful young Elizabeth "Baby" Doe arrives in Leadville, Colorado, with her sights set on the middle-aged silver baron Horace Tabor. Tabor is immediately smitten with her and soon leaves his wife, Augusta, to live with Baby. Their relationship scandalizes respectable society in Colorado and in Washington, D.C., where Tabor is appointed an interim senator and the two are married in a lavish ceremony in 1883. Financial troubles begin for Tabor during the Panic of 1893—when he refuses to heed Augusta's warning about the imminent collapse of

the silver standard—and he lost his fortune completely in 1896 after “Free Silver” presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan loses the election to William McKinley. In 1899 Tabor dies a broken man, with Baby at his side pledging her undying love.—**R. P.**

ABOUT THE OPERA

In the 1920s American operas, heretofore written in a European style, began to reflect a broad range of American sources, including jazz, folk music and Tin Pan Alley. When *Porgy and Bess* burst onto Broadway in October 1935, it set the standard—and though there have been several notable American operas in the ensuing years, only a few have joined the Gershwin masterpiece in the standard repertory. One of them is *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, with music by Douglas Moore (1893-1969) and libretto by John Latouche (1914-56).

Moore, a graduate of Yale and from 1921 to 1925 the music director at the Cleveland Museum of Art, wrote romantic music with a distinctly American sound. His 1939 folk opera *The Devil and Daniel Webster* premiered on Broadway (conducted by Fritz Reiner), and Moore was awarded the 1951 Pulitzer Prize for his opera *Giants in the Earth*, based on the novel by O. E. Rølvaag about Norwegian immigrants in the American heartland.

But it is *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, a vibrant tale of Colorado at the turn of the last century, for which the composer will forever be remembered.

In March 1935 Moore saw an article in *The New York Times* about Elizabeth “Baby” Doe, who at 80 (the *Times* misreported her age as 73) froze to death in the Leadville, Colorado, mining shack where she had kept vigil for over 35 years since the death of her husband, the “Silver King” Horace Tabor. Moore thought the story had the makings of an opera but put the idea aside until 1953, when Colorado’s Central City Opera coincidentally invited him to write an opera about Horace and Baby Doe Tabor. Delighted with the commission, Moore tapped Broadway’s John Latouche to write the libretto (after Moore and an earlier librettist-designate, Paul Green, failed to ignite any sparks), and work proceeded apace, though not without an occasional glitch. When Latouche—best known for the musicals *Cabin in the Sky* and *The Golden Apple*, not to mention the artful and sly “additional lyrics” he supplied at the eleventh hour for *Candide*—was tardy in supplying the lyric for Baby Doe’s luscious first-act “Willow Song” (which culminates in a high D), the composer wrote it himself.

The opera is a deeply moving romantic triangle as well as a marvelous historic panorama. The score is equal parts musical comedy and grand opera—a mix of lilting waltzes, precision marches, wistful ballads and rousing ensemble numbers.

The Ballad of Baby Doe premiered at Central City Opera on July 7, 1956, starring Dolores Wilson, Martha Lipton and Walter Cassel, and was a success. There was talk of bringing it to Broadway, but the plans fell through. *The Ballad of Baby Doe* had its New York premiere in April 1958—the opening night of New York City Opera’s American Festival. Cassel and Lipton reprised their original roles of Horace and Augusta (with Emerson Buckley conducting, as he had done at Central City), and they were joined by a new Baby—Beverly Sills. There were audible sobs in the audience during the final scene, when Cassel’s Horace—now a broken man and dying—sang to Sills, “You were always the real thing, Baby.” The next morning a review on the front page of the *New York Herald Tribune* hailed the work as “one of the few operas that is authentically American in style, spirit and subject.” *Baby Doe* had truly arrived.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Though **Johnny Price** had planned to follow up 1957’s *Tosca* with another Puccini opera, *La Bohème*, he changed gears after Julius Rudel’s New York City Opera presented the East Coast premiere of *The Ballad of Baby Doe* in April 1958. The opera was a hit for the company and a personal triumph for **Beverly Sills** as Baby, and Price immediately obtained the rights to produce the Midwest premiere of the opera with Sills and **Cassel**. **Beatrice Krebs**, a Cleveland Institute of Music graduate who played Baby Doe’s mother in Central City and at New York City Opera, was also signed for Musicarnival—as was **Howard Fried**, who essayed the roles of the Old Miner, Priest and Stage Doorman in Central City and New York. In the ensemble were two young actresses who were Broadway bound: **Marian Mercer**, a future Tony Award winner for her featured role in *Promises, Promises*; and **Gaylea Byrne**, who replaced **Joan Diener** as Aldonza in *Man of La Mancha*.

Two popular Cleveland performers, singer **William C. Boehm** and radio personality **Wayne Mack**, were cast as President Chester A. Arthur and William Jennings Bryan. Mack apparently did not have the requisite operatic bass voice to sing Bryan’s stirring oration; instead, he speaks the “Cross of Gold” speech. The result, unfortunately, is to slow down the pace and quash the energy of the Matchless Mine election rally scene.

Musicarnival’s music director, **Boris Kogan**, worked wonders with his 20-piece orchestra—and by all accounts **Don Driver**’s stage direction in the round was also effective. This Musicarnival recording, taken almost exclusively from the performance of September 12, represents the second unofficial recording of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*. In 1956 Walter Cassel had taped Central City performances with himself and Leyna Gabriele, who alternated with Dolores Wilson as Baby. The Musicarnival recording predates by a year the classic 1959 MGM recording with cast

and orchestra members of New York City Opera, including Sills, Cassel and Frances Bible—who succeeded Martha Lipton as Augusta and became closely identified with the role. Bible had other engagements in the summer of 1958, and New York City Opera veteran **Margery Mayer** was cast as the Musicarnival Augusta. She gives a commendable performance as Tabor’s spurned first wife—though her big second-act aria “Augusta! Augusta!” does not quite live up to Bible’s moving rendition. (Note: Listeners should disregard Johnny Price’s comment, “In this performance, Beatrice Krebs is playing the role of Augusta.” Margery Mayer in fact sings Augusta on this recording. Since there was no extant Price intro for the performance of September 12, we transposed his remarks from September 14 to provide a “taste” of the irrepressible impresario.)

The Musicarnival recording, except for some miking problems, manages to capture the excitement of the production. Interestingly, Sills and Cassel each take their famous Act One, Scene 2 arias (Baby’s “Willow Song,” immediately followed by Horace’s “Warm as the Autumn Light”) at a slightly slower pace than on the City Opera recording. The 10 additional seconds per number only serve to heighten the beauty of the lyrics and the yearning of the characters.

Douglas Moore attended the opening night of the Musicarnival production. (John Latouche, a heavy drinker, had died of a heart attack a month after the Central City premiere.) As a special touch, Price had the playbills printed in silver ink. Musicarnival ticket holders were so taken by the story—and by the resplendent singing and acting of Sills and Cassel—that they continued applauding after the curtain calls.

Barring the William Jennings Bryan blunder, this was a first-class production that worked on all levels. But—as often happens with new operas—attendance dropped after opening night and Price lost nearly \$15,000 on *The Ballad of Baby Doe*. This would be the last summer for bona fide opera at Musicarnival.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Wrote Harlowe R. Hoyt in *The Plain Dealer*: “Most noteworthy of all productions at Musicarnival’s tent since its beginning on Warrensville Center Road... I have seen Miss Sills in all of her appearances at Musicarnival, including Tosca and Carmen. As Baby Doe she surpasses these performances. She was never in better voice than yesterday.” “Cassel is a superb singing actor and the best in the cast from the standpoint of enunciation,” said Oscar Smith in the *Akron Beacon Journal*. “Boris Kogan and the hard working orchestra should certainly receive credit for their help in spreading the gospel of American opera,” Ethel Boros duly noted in the *Cleveland News*.—**R. P.**

PORGY AND BESS

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

September 29–October 12, 1958 (New York opening: October 10, 1935;
124 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by George Gershwin, libretto by DuBose Heyward, lyrics by DuBose Heyward and Ira Gershwin, based on the play *Porgy* by DuBose Heyward and Dorothy K. Heyward

PRODUCER

Jack Lenny and Nat Debin

DIRECTOR

Ella Gerber

MUSICAL DIRECTION

William Jonson

CHORAL DIRECTION

Eva Jessye

LEADING PLAYERS

Andrew Frierson (Porgy), Urylee Leonardos (Bess), John McCurry (Crown), Avon Long (Sportin' Life), Beatrice Rippy (Serena), Martha Flowers (Clara), Joseph Boatner (Jake), Georgia Burke (Maria)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Summertime,” “A Woman Is a Sometime Thing,” “My Man’s Gone Now,” “I Got Plenty o’ Nuthin’,” “Bess, You Is My Woman Now,” “It Ain’t Necessarily So,” “I Loves You, Porgy,” “There’s a Boat Dat’s Leavin’ Soon for New York,” “Oh Bess, Oh Where’s My Bess?,” “Oh Lawd, I’m on My Way”

SYNOPSIS

Set in the black neighborhood of Catfish Row on the Charleston, South Carolina, waterfront, *Porgy and Bess* is the story of the crippled Porgy and the beautiful Bess, who tries to overcome her former life as a prostitute and drug addict. After her menacing stevedore boyfriend Crown commits a murder, he flees—leaving Bess among the mostly unsympathetic townspeople and the seductive drug dealer Sportin’ Life. Porgy offers Bess shelter and the two fall in love as the residents of Catfish Row slowly begin to accept her. A hurricane and Crown’s return bring tragic consequences; Porgy kills his rival and is taken away by the authorities—and Bess succumbs to Sportin’ Life’s offer of “happy dust” and goes with him to New York. When Porgy returns from jail and learns that Bess has fled, he vows to go to New York to find her—ordering his goat cart

and driving through the gate of Catfish Row “on my way to a Heav’nly Lan’.”—*R. P.*

ABOUT THE OPERA

“Summertime and the livin’ is easy. Fish are jumpin’, and the cotton is high.”

The world’s best-loved aria begins with these poetic words by DuBose Heyward (1885-1940). The work for which it was written weaves together African-American spirituals, Broadway show tunes and jazz—and today is known as the Great American Opera.

But it wasn’t always thus. When *Porgy and Bess*, with music by George Gershwin (1898-1937) and lyrics by Heyward and Ira Gershwin (1896-1983), premiered on Broadway, audiences came out humming the catchy tunes, but the classical music critics gave it a trouncing. Virgil Thomson (a critic and opera composer—talk about a conflict of interest!) managed to damn and praise the work and its composer at the same time: “Gershwin does not even know what an opera is; and yet *Porgy and Bess* is an opera and it has power and vigor.”

The opera was adapted from the 1925 novel *Porgy* by Heyward about life among the poor black residents of his native Charleston. The eponymous hero is based on a real-life person, Sammy Smalls, who had lost the use of his legs and traveled around Charleston in a small cart that was pulled by a goat. George Gershwin read the novel in 1926 and was inspired by its operatic potential. Heyward, however, was already committed to collaborating on the stage version of *Porgy* that his wife, Dorothy Heyward, was creating for the Theatre Guild. The show opened in 1927 and was a hit.

Six years passed before the two men seriously turned their attention to working on the opera. In the interim George Gershwin wrote eight Broadway shows and toyed with making S. Ansky’s *The Dybbuk* into an opera, which Otto Kahn at the Metropolitan Opera offered to commission, but the rights were unavailable.

On a 1933 trip to Charleston, Gershwin “soaked up” the sights and sounds, including the Gullah language of the black residents, and in February 1934 he began composing *Porgy and Bess*. That summer he spent time with the Heywards on Folly Island, South Carolina. Though there was talk of *Porgy and Bess* having its premiere at the Met, the august company turned it down, and the Theatre Guild stepped in to produce the “folk opera,” as it was billed.

Heyward wrote the libretto and the majority of the lyrics, including “Summertime,” “My Man’s Gone Now” and “I Loves You, Porgy.” Stephen Sondheim has praised Heyward’s lyrics as “the

most beautiful and powerful in our musical theater history.” (He is less kind about Ira Gershwin’s flashy lyrics for “It Ain’t Necessarily So” and “There’s a Boat Dat’s Leavin’ Soon for New York.”)

The Boston premiere of *Porgy and Bess* on September 30, 1935, starred the classically trained singers Todd Duncan and Anne Brown in the title roles and the vaudeville hooper John Bubbles as Sportin’ Life—and lasted four hours. The composer agreed to make cuts—excising nearly a quarter of the score, including the blues music played on the piano by Jasbo Brown at the beginning of the opera; Porgy’s “Buzzard Song”; and the stirring trio portion of Porgy’s “Oh Bess, Oh Where’s My Bess?”

When *Porgy and Bess* opened at Broadway’s Alvin Theater on October 10, 1935, newspapers sent both their drama and classical music critics to review it. The initial Broadway run was not a success and closed after 124 performances.

But that was just the beginning.

A concert version of *Porgy and Bess* played in Los Angeles (where the Gershwin brothers were working on three films) in February 1937 to SRO crowds—leading to a staged version in L.A. later that year (following George Gershwin’s untimely death from a brain tumor) with most of the same cast and the same director, Rouben Mamoulian, as the Broadway production. Lawrence Tibbett’s recording of “I Got Plenty o’ Nuthin’ ” was a hit on the radio. So were “Summertime” and “It Ain’t Necessarily So.”

In 1942 *Porgy and Bess* returned to Broadway in a streamlined version with recitatives replaced by spoken dialogue. This time around it was a hit, running for 286 performances and touring the nation.

Between 1952 and 1956, a two-act version of *Porgy and Bess* directed by Robert Breen was seen in 22 countries, including the Soviet Union under the sponsorship of the State Department. The first cast of this goodwill tour featured William Warfield and Leontyne Price, with Cab Calloway as Sportin’ Life.

Otto Preminger’s 1959 feature film of *Porgy and Bess*, starring Sidney Poitier, Dorothy Dandridge and Sammy Davis, Jr., received mixed reviews. In the 1960s, during the civil rights era, *Porgy and Bess* was perceived as racist and fell out of fashion, but in 1976 the Cleveland

Orchestra under Lorin Maazel released a complete recording of the work and Houston Grand Opera produced a glorious staged revival conducted by John DeMain in which all of the cut material was reinstated. *Porgy and Bess* finally arrived at the Metropolitan Opera in 1985 (its 50th anniversary), and in 1986 Trevor Nunn directed a production at England's Glyndebourne Festival that got rid of Porgy's traditional goat and cart. (The 2012 revisionist production of *Porgy and Bess* on Broadway was also performed sans goat.)

Not a year goes by without performances of *Porgy and Bess* in far-flung places across the globe, from Montreal to South Africa. Time has told us exactly what a huge triumph it is for American music. My own introduction to this masterpiece came at the tender age of three as I sat beneath a pair of Steinway pianos with Crayola crayons and a Shirley Temple coloring book while my mother—a classically trained pianist—and her teacher rehearsed Percy Grainger's *Fantasy on Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess."* In one fell swoop I was hooked on Gershwin, on opera, and on Broadway musicals.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The 1958 production of *Porgy and Bess* presented by **Johnny Price** at Musicarnival represents one of only two shows (the other was *West Side Story* in 1960) during the theater's so-called "production years" (1954 to 1965) that was not produced by Price but was instead put together by the Debin Agency as a traveling road show for summer tents.

Johnny made the right call in booking this particular production, which is a real gem—featuring the legendary choral director **Eva Jessye** (who trained the chorus for the 1935 premiere of *Porgy and Bess* and all subsequent revivals, including this road production) doing double duty as the Strawberry Woman; **Avon Long**, George Gershwin's own second choice for the role of Sportin' Life, in that very role—using his distinctive tenorish voice and unusual line readings (with understated phrases that pack a wallop) to create a memorably insinuating character; and many of the performers from the Robert Breen–Blevins Davis goodwill touring production sponsored by the State Department between 1952 and 1956.

This *Porgy and Bess*—recorded on closing night—hews very closely to the two-act performing version used by Breen, with the first act lasting 64:30 (vs. 62:08 on the live 1952 recording of the Breen production) and the second act clocking in just shy of 77:00 (vs. 77:17 on the Breen). As might be expected, the extended "Jasbo Brown Blues" and "Buzzard Song" were not performed at Musicarnival. But it comes as a real surprise to find there is no banjo accompaniment on "I Got Plenty o' Nuthin'"—and, even worse, Porgy's climactic number "Oh Bess, Oh Where's

My Bess?” is *severely* truncated. (I assumed that the trio portion of the number with Maria and Serena would be missing but was horrified that Porgy did not get to count the days that he was gone till he “got home to see her face.”)

Top among the veterans of the Breen production is Cleveland-born **John McCurry**, who performed in several plays at the storied Karamu House and proves himself a powerful, terrifying Crown. Porgy is **Andrew Frierson**, a graduate of Juilliard (and acclaimed for his portrayal of Cal in Blitzstein’s *Regina* at New York City Opera) who has a magnificent, stirring voice and fine enunciation. **Urlyee Leonardos** as Bess—a role she alternated with Leontyne Price in the Breen production—is not captured to best effect by the theater’s audio system, and she has some intonation problems, but she is moving in her duets with Porgy and Crown. **Martha Flowers**, another Bess on the Breen tour, delivers a lovely “Summertime” as Clara on this performance, and **Beatrice Rippy** is a strongly drawn Serena, delivering a heartbreaking “My Man’s Gone Now.”

The large cast, which is without an exception a notable one, includes **Lillian Hayman**, who 10 years later won a Best Supporting Actress Tony Award for Broadway’s *Hallelujah, Baby!*, as Lily and **Georgia Burke** as Maria; and Canton, Ohio, native **Irving Barnes** as Jim and the Undertaker. (The printed Musicarnival program lists **Irving Barnes** as Jake and **Joseph Boatner** as Jim, but as intermission begins a voice over the PA system announces that “at this performance” the role of Jake would be played by Boatner and the roles of Jim and the Undertaker would be played by Barnes. Role changing was common among the close-knit company and there “were no small roles...,” as the saying goes; when the Breen production was performed at the famed opera house La Scala in Milan, **Joe Attles**—Musicarnival’s Crab Man—had alternated with two others in the role of Sportin’ Life and Irving Barnes was one of the Porgys.)

This traveling production was directed by **Ella Gerber**, who had been Robert Breen’s assistant director and acting coach for the international tour and subsequently directed many productions of *Porgy and Bess* in the United States and abroad (including an acclaimed production in New Zealand). Gerber was known for her skillful direction and by all accounts was unperplexed by the confines of working in a theater-in-the-round.

The conductor of this summer tour, **William Jonson**, had a direct pipeline to the original production of *Porgy and Bess*: His mentor Alexander Smallens conducted the opera’s 1935 premiere, plus the 1942 Broadway revival and the Breen tour.

Speaking of direct pipelines, DuBose Heyward's widow, **Dorothy Heyward**, who was born in Wooster, Ohio, had attended the opening night of the production at Musicarnival and was reportedly quite pleased with it.

Johnny Price, in his opening comments to the audience, reminds them to turn in their ballots listing the shows they'd like to see performed the following year. He took the vote very seriously: *The King and I*, which he said was overwhelmingly leading the pack in number of votes, was the opening production of the 1959 season.

Following the curtain calls, the audience joined in singing "Auld Lang Syne." The enthusiasm with which everyone sang seems to indicate that the 1958 season at Musicarnival—which began with *Oklahoma!* and ended with *Porgy and Bess*—had been a very satisfying one indeed.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The critics couldn't find enough superlatives to praise the opera and this production. Jack Warfel of *The Cleveland Press* called it "one of the tent's most ambitious and rewarding efforts of any season," and Harlowe R. Hoyt of *The Plain Dealer* wrote: "*Porgy and Bess* still occupies a niche of its own above all others, as proved by this superb company at Musicarnival."—**R. P.**



President Robert H. Bishop III

1959 Season (Palm Beach)

THE KING AND I

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 10–22, 1959 (New York opening: March 29, 1951;
1,246 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on the novel *Anna and the King of Siam* by Margaret Landon

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER

Mara

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

William Chapman (The King), Irene Manning (Anna Leonowens), Joy Clements (Tuptim), Tom Batten (Lun Tha), Asako Tomita (Lady Thiang), Larry Brown (Captain Orton/Sir Edward Ramsey)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Whistle a Happy Tune,” “My Lord and Master,” “Hello, Young Lovers,” “March of the Siamese Children” (instrumental), “A Puzzlement,” “Getting to Know You,” “We Kiss in a Shadow,” “Shall I Tell You What I Think of You?,” “Something Wonderful,”

“I Have Dreamed,” “Shall We Dance”

SYNOPSIS

The story is set in Bangkok in the early 1860s. Anna Leonowens, the new governess and teacher to the King of Siam’s many children, has frequent clashes with the autocratic, semibarbaric ruler, but eventually—and discreetly—comes to love him. She exerts great influence in helping to democratize the country. A tragic secondary plot concerns the furtive romance between Tuptim, one of the king’s wives, and her lover, Lun Tha.—*S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1956 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

See 1959 SEASON (Cleveland)

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Helen Van Hoy Smith in the *Miami Herald* can speak for her colleagues: "William Chapman is masterful... Irene Manning is lovely to look at and delightful to hear... The cast is large and the big arena is alive with dancing girls, members of the court and the royal children (show stoppers and heart stealers)."—**B. R.**

THE STUDENT PRINCE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 24–March 11, 1959 (New York opening: December 2, 1924;
608 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Sigmund Romberg, book and lyrics by Dorothy Donnelly

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Richard Casey

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Robert Rounseville (Prince Karl Franz), Joy Clements (Kathie), William Chapman (Dr. Engel), James Harwood (Lutz), Lucille Benson (Grand Duchess Anastasia)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Golden Days," "To the Inn We're Marching," "Drinking Song," "Deep in My Heart, Dear," "Serenade," "Just We Two"

SYNOPSIS

The story is set in 1860 in Heidelberg, the German university town where Prince Karl Franz has gone with his tutor, Dr. Engel, to complete his education. He meets Kathie, a waitress at the Inn of the Golden Apple, and they fall in love. But his carefree days are abruptly ended when he is

called home to become king. Two years later, Karl Franz returns to Heidelberg. Even though seeing Kathie again has rekindled his love, he must once more heed the call of duty. This time he leaves forever, as he has already promised to marry Princess Margaret.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Of the 56 musicals composed by Hungarian-American Sigmund Romberg (1887–1951), *The Student Prince* belongs in a class by itself. It's not only his longest-running Broadway show (and 10 companies toured it for years after the New York engagement), but the work that has taken on iconic status: When given a good production, this is an operetta that truly touches the heart and perhaps even opens the mind a bit, a distinction it shares with one other 1920s musical, *Show Boat*.

But how different the two works are! Despite some operetta trappings, *Show Boat* is American through and through. *The Student Prince* tells a mid-19th-century German tale set at Heidelberg University and at the castle of royalty. Yet the bittersweet musical is so dramatically cohesive that it carries with it universal implications.

First produced in 1924, and titled *The Student Prince in Heidelberg* throughout its Broadway run, it's based on a German play that the Shubert brothers had mounted early in the 20th century. The producers saw its potential as a musical and brought to the project Romberg and one of the few female librettists of the era, the former actress Dorothy Donnelly (1880–1928), who had collaborated with the composer on 1921's *Blossom Time*. The Shuberts were convinced that *The Student Prince* could top the earlier musical's success; they were right.

What made them anxious, though, was the serious tone of some of the writing (“too Metropolitan Opera,” said the Shuberts), the expense of hiring a male chorus of 40 (*The New York Times* would later pronounce the operetta “prodigious”) and the risk of asking audiences to accept a musical with an unhappy ending, when the love between Karl Franz and Kathie is thwarted. But Romberg stood up to his bosses, and though the composer was at one point barred from the theater, he and Donnelly prevailed with their vision of the piece.

Co-starring were two marquee names: Ilse Marvenga, who played Kathie more than 3,000 times, and Howard Marsh, who coincidentally (or perhaps not) created the role of Gaylord Ravenal three years later in *Show Boat*.

The word most often used to describe the operetta is “sentimental,” but that does it a disservice:

The sorrow at the final curtain is truthful writing, not excess emotion. Our rose-colored glasses come off as we see the denouement of a love story doomed by classism (Karl is royalty, Kathie a waitress), and as we are challenged to confront the dangers of nostalgia. “Golden Days” is the credo in song of Karl’s mentor, Dr. Engel, who accompanies the prince to his alma mater in part to recapture his own youth. But that is an illusion, as is Karl’s hope that he and Kathie can reunite.

Significantly, soon after *The Student Prince* premiered on Broadway, Oscar Hammerstein II—then 29 and just three years away from *Show Boat*—commented: “The history of musical comedy has passed through a variety of phases, but the type that persists . . . is the operetta—the musical play with music and plot wielded together in skillful cohesion.”

In other words, there is more going on here than gorgeous melodies. Surprisingly, *The Student Prince* actually has something to say. Reading the libretto and meeting up with a full production for the first time in decades, I found myself crying, not out of sentimentality, but because Romberg and Donnelly had asked me to accept one of life’s painful truths.

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Although workmanlike, this one-week mounting directed by **Richard Casey**, who had recently been named resident director at Palm Beach, feels like a run-up for its two-week stint in Cleveland in August, where it would be restaged by **Don Driver**, that company’s resident director. (The absence of Cleveland Orchestra musicians in **Boris Kogan**’s pit is a body blow to a Romberg score.) My comments will be saved for that entry, except for this note: The Palm Beach cast starred three notables: tenor **Robert Rounseville**, bass-baritone **William Chapman** (a favorite of **Johnny Price** and only 25 when he took on the role of Dr. Engel, a man twice his age) and coloratura soprano **Joy Clements**, who was on the verge of her New York City Opera debut. Unfortunately, Chapman did not repeat his role during the Cleveland run, but in this recording we can hear him together with Rounseville in a transcendent reprise of “Golden Days.”

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

The unnamed critic of the *Palm Beach Times* provided the best overview: “The big Musicarnival stage was full of swirling color Tuesday night, and the tent theater full of swirling, melodious sound. The lilting Sigmund Romberg melodies . . . and the gay waltzes of Old Heidelberg seemed to be made for this theater and this audience. . . . None of the magic of the wonderful ‘Serenade’ has vanished, and the song, as Robert Rounseville sings it, brings a deep hush to the giant tent. . . . This is a show which brings beloved memories to those who go back far enough, but it is also a

splendid opportunity for junior to find out what wowed Mom and Pop in the old days.”

Rounseville was the subject of a feature story by Helen Van Hoy Smith in the *Miami Herald*. “Everybody should have the privilege of attending and enjoying grand opera,” said Rounseville, “—the man in the street, the housewife, the career woman, the business man. Everybody should know great music.”—**B. R.**

GUYS & DOLLS

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 3–15, 1959 (New York opening: November 24, 1950;
1,200 performances)

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Richard Casey

MUSICAL DIRECTOR

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Lawrence Books (Sky Masterson), Tim Herbert (Nathan Detroit), Joan Kibrig (Miss Adelaide), Peggy Alderman (Sarah Brown)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Fugue for Tinhorns,” “I’ll Know,” “Adelaide’s Lament,” “Guys & Dolls,” “If I Were a Bell,” “My Time of Day,” “I’ve Never Been in Love Before,” “More I Cannot Wish You,” “Luck Be a Lady,” “Sit Down, You’re Rockin’ the Boat”

SYNOPSIS

The high-minded lowlifes of Times Square come colorfully alive in such characters as Sky Masterson, the bet-on-anything gambler; Nathan Detroit, the perpetually harried organizer of the Oldest Established Permanent Floating Crap Game in New York, who bets Sky he can’t make the next girl he sees fall in love with him; Miss Sarah Brown, who is the next girl Sky sees and who does succumb; and Miss Adelaide, the main attraction at the Hot Box nightclub, whose psychosomatic perpetual cold stems from her being engaged to Nathan for 14 years. This so-

called Musical Fable of Broadway relates the tale of how Sarah (of the Save-a-Soul Mission) saves the souls of assorted Times Square riffraff.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The show is jump-started by **Johnny Price** delivering his usual welcome to the audience—but in character for his cameo appearance as Rusty Charlie, extolling the “Musical Carnival” [sic] in Runyon lingo.

But from there it’s downhill most of the way. If you’re convinced that this perfect musical comedy had no choice but to be funny, listen to director **Richard Casey**’s flat-as-a-pancake rendering. **Joan Kibrig** gets away with her rather ordinary Adelaide, which she had played for Johnny in 1955 and again in 1958, and **Peggy Alderman** reprises her 1958 Sarah Brown, though with less charm. The principal men are woefully miscast: Operetta’s earnest **Lawrence Brooks** doesn’t have a step of the swagger (or the irony) needed for Sky Masterson, and **Tim Herbert** completely misses the New York Jewish milieu of Damon Runyon’s world. Ironically the one “guy” who rings the bell is an untrained actor, former boxing champion **Slapsie Maxie Rosenbloom**; not for nothing did Runyon himself bestow the nickname. Just hear him deliver Abe Burrows’s little gem of a speech, as Big Jule defends himself to the Mission’s General Cartwright: “Well, I used to be bad when I was a kid, but ever since then I have gone straight, as I can prove by my record: 33 arrests and no convictions.” Musical comedy heaven! It takes a cockeyed style to pull that off; only Kibrig and Rosenbloom have it.

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

The reviews are remarkably tepid for a musical that is anything but. Jonathan Koontz in the *Palm Beach Post* praised Joan Kibrig for having “the surest comic touch in the show”—not a good sign when all four principals must have it. Though the *Palm Beach* critics bent over backward to be positive during the early years of Johnny’s residence there, Helen Van Hoy Smith in the *Miami Herald* wins points for her candor: “As Sky Masterson, Lawrence Brooks lends his opera-quality voice and fine looks to the role, but try as he may, he does not have the Runyonesque touch.”—**B. R.**

THE PAJAMA GAME

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 17–22, 1959 (New York opening: May 13, 1954;
1,063 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by George Abbott and Richard Bissell (based on Bissell's novel *7½ Cents*), music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Richard Casey

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Lawrence Brooks (Sid Sorokin), Joan Kibrig (Babe Williams), Chele Graham (Gladys), Tim Herbert (Hines), Lucille Benson (Mabel), Tom Batten (Prez), Lynne Osborne (Mae), James Harwood (Hasler)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"I'm Not at All in Love," "Hey, There," "Once-a-Year Day," "Small Talk," "There Once Was a Man," "Steam Heat," "Hernando's Hideaway"

SYNOPSIS

The musical is concerned with the activities at the Sleep-Tite Pajama Factor in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where Sid Sorokin, the new plant superintendent, has taken a shine to Babe Williams, a union activist. Their romance suffers a setback when the workers go on strike for a seven-and-a-half-cent hourly raise, but eventually management and labor are again singing a tune.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1957 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Yet again **Lawrence Brooks** is miscast, so this is a good time to point out a challenge for **Johnny Price** in operating Musicarnival during the winter months. During the boom years of summer stock in the 1950s and '60s, the New York theater scene always quieted down after

Memorial Day, and major musical theater talent was eager to work for the best producers. But how do you attract those performers to Florida in March—particularly when there wasn't the same kind of tent-theater "circuit" operating in the winter?

To Johnny's credit, he was a pioneer in launching Palm Beach Musicarnival, but the venture could be an uphill battle: The audience was smaller and lacked the sophistication of the Cleveland market (in Johnny's nightly welcomes, we repeatedly hear him encouraging folks to be more vocal in their response). And though the talent pool he presented on the beach was usually solid in the ensemble and supporting roles (this was a true company that established itself in both venues), it was generally not as impressive in the leads.

That being said, this *Pajama Game* is a crowd-pleaser. His *Silk Stockings* excepted, Brooks doesn't have the versatility and sense of fun to handle musical comedy (these are pop songs, for heaven's sake), but **Joan Kibrig** contributes a fine, feisty Babe. And three featured players stand out: **Chele Graham**'s Gladys (she had in fact played the role for six months on Broadway); **Lucille Benson**'s Mabel (she went on to lots of work in film and television, including the Tom Hanks sitcom, *Bosom Buddies*), and best of all, **Tim Herbert**'s Hines. Reprising his 1957 stint in Cleveland as the jealous efficiency expert, he captures the audience; just listen to the applause he wins at the final curtain.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Chele Graham and Tim Herbert got the most ink. Writing in the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, Dick Hoekstra praised Graham as "definitely Broadway material" and Herbert for his "eccentric dancing, mugging and posturing." All in all, "most delightful."—**B. R.**

BRIGADOON

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 24–29, 1959 (New York opening: March 13, 1947;
581 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Frederick Loewe, book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Richard Casey

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Lawrence Brooks (Tommy Albright), Peggy Alderman (Fiona), Joan Kibrig (Meg Brockie), William T. Skelton (Jeff Douglas), Tom Batten (Charlie Dalrymple), Ian Guthrie (Harry Beaton), James Harwood (Mr. Lundie)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Waitin’ for My Dearie,” “I’ll Go Home With Bonnie Jean,” “The Heather on the Hill,” “Come to Me, Bend to Me,” “Almost Like Being in Love,” “There but for You Go I,” “My Mother’s Wedding Day”

SYNOPSIS

Two hikers from the United States stumble upon the mist-clouded town of Brigadoon in the Scottish Highlands. Brigadoon has a secret: It appears only once every 100 years. Tommy, the more romantic of the two, falls in love with Fiona, but he is unable to commit to the restrictions imposed by living in the town. He and Jeff, a cynical New Yorker, return to the States, but Tommy can’t get Fiona out of his mind. He returns to Brigadoon only to find an empty meadow where the town once stood. But the force of his love brings the town back, and he and Fiona join together for eternity.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

I’ve begun to feel cranky about my response to **Lawrence Stewart**, but in his woodenness, he once again misses what’s compelling about a character—or in this case, half of it, anyway. Tommy Albright is a man whose heart is running on empty (Stewart gets that), but we have to sense that, like Alan Jay Lerner himself, Tommy is a romantic who has the capacity to love deeply, and yes, to believe in miracles. Even at the musical’s no-holds-barred finale, it’s not there.

In other respects, this is a well-sung and convincingly acted *Brigadoon*, with two Musicarnival regulars—**William Skelton** as Jeff and **James Harwood** as Mr. Lundie—repeating their 1955 Cleveland roles. And the production’s Fiona, **Peggy Alderman**, is a far lovelier Scottish lass than Salvation Army worker. **Boris Kogan**’s choral direction is superb, but the letdown is how much we yearn to see the choreography. *Brigadoon* is graced with what is perhaps the most

beautiful dance music ever created for Broadway, and **Johnny Price** engaged an esteemed ballet choreographer, the Metropolitan Opera's **Zachary Solov**, to give it wing. And for a run of only six nights!

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Johnny closed his second season in Palm Beach with a winner. "The Musicarnival folks will not be like the Arabs," wrote Evelyn Andrews in the *News Tribune*, "folding their tents and quietly stealing away. Instead they will leave this area for the present in a blaze of glory after this Sunday's final performance of *Brigadoon*, one of the finest productions of this season."—**B. R.**



Musical director Boris Kogan

1959 Season (Cleveland)

THE KING AND I

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

May 29–June 14, 1959 (New York opening: March 29, 1951;
1,246 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on the novel *Anna and the King of Siam* by Margaret Landon

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER

Mara

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

William Chapman (The King), Irene Manning (Anna Leonowens), Shireen Subramanya (Tuptim), Jerry Lawrence (Lun Tha), Jean Sanders (Lady Thiang), Richard Oberlin (Captain Orton/Sir Edward Ramsey)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Whistle a Happy Tune,” “My Lord and Master,” “Hello, Young Lovers,” “March of the Siamese Children” (instrumental), “A Puzzlement,” “Getting to Know You,” “We Kiss in a Shadow,” “Shall I Tell You What I Think of You?,” “Something Wonderful,” “I Have Dreamed,” “Shall We Dance”

SYNOPSIS

The story is set in Bangkok in the early 1860s. Anna Leonowens, the new governess and teacher to the King of Siam’s many children, has frequent clashes with the autocratic, semibarbaric ruler, but eventually—and discreetly—comes to love him. She exerts great influence in helping to democratize the country. A tragic secondary plot concerns the furtive romance between Tuptim, one of the king’s wives, and her lover, Lun Tha.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1956 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The sixth season of Musicarnival gets a fanfare from **Johnny Price**, who in his welcome to the audience heralds the brand-new espresso coffee shop on the grounds and urges all to attend Cleveland native **Bob Hope**'s return to his hometown. Hope was appearing at Cain Park to help rescue it from financial distress—and as Johnny notes, “all of us are graduates of [that stage].”

This is a disappointing reprise of *The King and I*, first produced at Musicarnival three years earlier. On the credit side, **William Chapman** is back as the King of Siam; his career in the ascendant at New York City Opera, Chapman is given billing above the title. It's interesting to trace his growth as an actor from the time of the 1956 production, when he was 22 and far too young for the part. Even then he made a compelling and wise-beyond-his-years monarch, though he sometimes confused passion with yelling. This time around, though he is still underage, the performance is modulated and more disciplined; the actor is in control. And once again, it's a treat to hear the role played by a man who actually sings it.

The Anna, **Irene Manning** (also billed above the title), sings well enough, but as an actor she is no more than adequate playing one of Rodgers & Hammerstein's most dimensional heroines. Manning never touches us—not even in the sublime “Hello, Young Lovers.”

It seems as though **Mara**, who choreographed the 1956 production (and served as technical consultant for the Broadway original), goes beyond her skill set in directing the musical for the first time. There is little real drama to be found under the tent. (It can't be denied, however, that Johnny got his money's worth; Mara performed the “Flame Dance” herself and appeared in the “Small House of Uncle Thomas” ballet.)

Of note to Clevelanders: The roles of Captain Orton and Sir Edward Ramsey are ably enacted by the young **Richard Oberlin**, who in later years served as director of the Cleveland Play House, the nation's oldest resident theater (in this production he is four years out of the College of Wooster). And I am happy to report that the infernal Hammond organ has at last been barred from **Boris Kogan**'s pit (though it could be heard in the February production in West Palm Beach—most aggravatingly in “Getting to Know You”).

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The critics were divided. For Harlowe R. Hoyt in *The Plain Dealer*, this *King and I* “ranks among the best offerings made [at Musicarnival] by producer John Price in the last three

seasons.” But Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press* disagreed: “An old reliable needs a bit of sparking. It’s extremely pleasant but doesn’t rise to any heights.”—**B. R.**

THE BOY FRIEND

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 15–28, 1959 (New York opening: September 30, 1954;
485 performances)

AUTHOR

Book, music and lyrics by Sandy Wilson

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Eric Berry

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Liza Stuart (Polly Browne), Douglas Deane (Tony), Gabrielle (Madame Dubonnet), Eric Berry (Percival Browne), Gerriane Raphael (Maisie), Vincent Lynne (Bobby Van Heusen), Lynn Osborne (Hortense), Margot Harley (Dulcie)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“The Boy Friend,” “Won’t You Charleston With Me?,” “I Could Be Happy With You,” “A Room in Bloomsbury”

SYNOPSIS

The tale is set in 1926 on the Riviera, where Polly Browne, an English heiress attending Madame Dubonnet’s finishing school, meets Tony, who, though of noble lineage, is posing as a delivery boy. They fall in love to such sentiments as “I Could Be Happy With You (If You Could Be Happy With Me),” and though they have the expected misunderstanding, are happily reunited when, costumed as Pierrette and Pierrot, they both show up at the Carnival Ball.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

When *The Boy Friend* opened on New York in 1954, it was that rare musical created in Britain—a 2,048-performance smash—that also won success on these shores. It’s best known, of course, for introducing the 18-year-old Julie Andrews to Broadway, but it offered many other

pleasures. As conceived by composer/lyricist/book writer Sandy Wilson (b. 1924), *The Boy Friend* is what's called an "affectionate spoof": in this case, of musical comedies in the 1920s.

In script and score, then, it is a pastiche—a conscious imitation (for purposes of generating comedy and charm) of styles that by the 1950s seemed downright quaint. In a sense, it's an inside joke. Which is a risk, because unless you know what's being spoofed, you can easily feel left out of the fun.

But if Americans do not automatically warm up to a story set in a girls' finishing school on the Riviera, Wilson's songs evoke a welcoming American tone in music and lyrics: "The Boy Friend" is his version of Rodgers & Hart's "The Girl Friend" (in a splendid homage to early Hart, he rhymes "psychic" with "I kick"); "You-Don't-Want-to-Play-With-Me Blues" recalls the Gershwins' "(You-Don't-Know) the-Half-of-It, Dearie, Blues"; his "A Room in Bloomsbury" harks back to Kern and Wodehouse's "Bungalow in Quogue"; and so forth. And the songs delight because the music and lyrics are by no means slavish imitations of Jazz Age pop. Wilson writes in his own voice—albeit one filled with warm feelings for the past.

The 1950s was the right time to seize *The Boy Friend's* joy. The musical was revived in New York in 1970 with Judy Carne and Sandy Duncan, and most notoriously, Ken Russell put his stamp on it as a 1972 film with Tommy Tune and Twiggy. But by then the show had become a piece of camp, overblown and constantly commenting on itself.

What Sandy Wilson had in mind was something that in its merely clever and modest way still comes from the heart.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Johnny Price practically guaranteed success by bringing to Cleveland a trio of *Boy Friend* veterans: Director **Eric Berry** was featured as Percival Browne in the original cast and toured nationally as well. **Douglas Deane**—the juvenile, Tony—played opposite Julie Andrews for part of the Broadway run. And **Gabrielle** performed her Madame Dubonnet on the national tour.

The challenge of this piece, as I indicated in the note above, comes with the territory in doing a pastiche: What if the audience doesn't "get it"? The typewritten script adds an optional pre-show "curtain speech" (apparently added post-Broadway), the likes of which I have never seen before. In it, a member of the company (Deane at Musicarnival) explains lightheartedly—but still explains—the nature of a theatrical spoof. Good idea. Even with this context laid out, the

Musicarnival audience takes a while to roll with the musical's conceit.

Director Berry's long participation in the musical on Broadway suggests that here at Musicarnival we are witnessing something fairly close to what captivated New York audiences. What we do not have, of course, is Julie Andrews as Polly. (This is the role that got Andrews Eliza Doolittle.) Broadway new face **Liza Stuart** is good, but for the most part she lacks the charm that has always come so naturally to Andrews. Polly is an "ingénue" in the truest sense of the word; we must believe in her innocence as much as we believed that "all [Eliza wanted] was a room somewhere / Far away from the cold night air." Stuart finds it in the reprise of "I Could Be Happy With You"; her sweetness makes for my favorite moment in the show.

Musicarnival's *Boy Friend*—despite the variable English accents and a female chorus whose flapperish stridency more than gives voice to the stage direction of "extreme animation"—is still a "first-class romp" (Johnny's term), and it's a treat to hear this long-forgotten musical comedy in a full-length recording.

If Johnny sounds particularly happy in his nightly welcome, the enthusiasm goes beyond the pride of a producer. He is a proud father announcing the birth of daughter Madeleine Emma. In its sixth season, the Musicarnival audience receives the news like the extended family it has become.

Performer footnote: The cast includes as Dulcie **Margot Harley**, who received training as a dancer from the likes of Doris Humphrey, José Limón and Martha Graham, and studied acting with Uta Hagen. Harley was destined for prestigious things in the theater. In 1972 at the Juilliard School, she and John Houseman founded the Acting Company, an important ensemble that carries on to this day, numbering among its alums Mandy Patinkin, Patti LuPone and William Hurt.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Paul Mooney in *The Cleveland Press* makes us long for a film of this production: "The largest orchids must be tossed to **Birgitta Kiviniemi** and **Gordon Marsh**, the young married couple who arranged the choreography. It was the dancing that made this show.... It is almost a revue of dance styles for the first quarter of the 20th century." Added Harlowe R. Hoyt in *The Plain Dealer*, "The dances are flawless."—**B. R.**

THE GREAT WALTZ

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 29–July 12, 1959 (New York opening: September 22, 1934;
298 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Johann Strauss (father and son), book by Moss Hart, lyrics by Desmond Carter

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Irra Petina (Countess Olga), Stan Page (Johann Strauss, Jr. [Schani]), Beverly Allyson (Resi), John Bankhurst (Leopold [Poldi]), William T. Skelton (Johann Strauss, Sr.), Birgitta Kiviniemi (Premiere Danseuse), Gordon Marsh (Premier Danseur), Lynn Osborne (Greta), Frank Shaw Stevens (Ebeseder), Tom Batten (Hirsch)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“You Are My Songs,” “Love Will Find You,” “Like a Star in the Sky,” “With All My Heart,” “While You Love Me,” “The Blue Danube”

SYNOPSIS

The operetta deals with the rivalry between Johann Strauss, Sr. and Johann Strauss, Jr. After jealously thwarting his son’s advancement, the old Waltz King is duped by the Countess Olga (who champions the son) into missing a performance. In the show’s spectacular climax at Doumayer’s Garden, Johann Sr. must reluctantly abdicate his title when the younger man takes over the baton to conduct “The Blue Danube.”—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

The saga of this operetta’s road to Broadway is one of the more intriguing and convoluted in Broadway history, but the impetus can be summarized thus: *The Great Waltz* is based on *Waltzes From Vienna*, an English version of a 1930 Viennese musical titled *Walzer aux Wien*. Broadway’s Hassard Short directed it in London, and he convinced New York producer Max Gordon that it could succeed in America if the book was completely rewritten by Moss Hart (the lyrics by

Britain's Desmond Carter would be retained), and if no expense was spared in the physical production.

Hart (1904-61), at 30 already one of Broadway's brightest lights, signed on soon after his triumph with *As Thousands Cheer* (1933), the snappy topical revue he created with Irving Berlin. Operetta Land was a very different proposition, however, and Hart admitted he had spent much of his life "avoiding it." But from the outset it wasn't his show nearly as much as it was Short's, who received billing in the program twice as large as Hart's and Carter's. In addition to which, at the bottom of the page Short was credited with "lighting, staging, scenic and mechanical effects."

Musical theater historian Stanley Green described the musical as "one of the truly mammoth undertakings of the mid-1930s." During one of the dreariest years of the Great Depression, producer Gordon spent a fortune on *The Great Waltz*, mounting it at the 3,822-seat Center Theater (part of Rockefeller Center) with 23 actors, 77 singers, 33 ballet dancers, 53 musicians, 90 backstage technicians and more than 500 costumes. Astonishingly, it turned a profit with a run of 298 performances.

Borrowing some of the gravitas from the father-son conflict in his 1930 play *No Retreat*, Hart was determined that his *Great Waltz* would skirt the clichés of operetta: With regard to the libretto, he said he "tried to write a play that stands on its own, aside from the songs and dances that will accompany it ... a story of real people who might conceivably have dwelt in 19th-century Vienna, and not the stock characters that usually have the larger musical attractions."

Though by no means prime Hart, *The Great Waltz* still provides thematic interest. Johann Jr. expresses every new generation's fervency and rejection of the old when he says, "Oh, I'm sure [my father] thinks I'm a bad composer. No composer, in fact. You see, I break the rules, I know; but they mustn't be prison bars. Music should be free, intoxicating." By the same token, what older generation has not declared, as father does to son, "About a great many things I know nothing. About one thing I know a great deal. ... *This is not music.*" And one of the Countess's speeches to Johann Jr. encapsulates the plight of the artist: "You are set apart from the rest of us—marked! There are some people who are born lonely. You must accept that. You pay a price for the gift that is yours." Think Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park With George* (1984).

Moreover, in a score of mostly nostalgic waltzes—indisputably beautiful but providing no opportunity for lyric wit—Hart invents humor in a shop owner who has no use for Viennese charm ("I hate it!"), a music publisher who admits he doesn't much like music and a Russian

countess who is a 19th-century sexpot trailed by a male entourage.

But whatever the literary flourishes of Hart's contribution (including the rather bold notion of making the action continuous in each act), they were quickly forgotten whenever the spectacle kicked in. Writes Hart biographer Steven Bach: "The grand finale was preceded by a fireworks display simulated by 5,000 tiny bulbs responding to 1,000 tiny switches on a massive light control board especially designed and installed for the occasion."

Then, according to historian Ethan Mordden, "A garden set was changed into a ballroom with the addition of 10 colossal columns, the lowering of eight gigantic chandeliers, and the raising of the orchestra out of its pit onto the stage to move to the rear as the playing area was overrun with hussars in shakos, rhapsodically swirling couples and Jr. himself, to lead the orchestra of 53 in 'The Blue Danube.'"

By comparison, a falling chandelier in 1986's *The Phantom of the Opera* is child's play. By the way, the story of *The Great Waltz* was compelling enough to drive two film treatments (1938 and 1972). And in 1965 Edwin Lester produced yet another gargantuan stage version (Jerome Chodorov wrote yet another libretto for it) at his Los Angeles Civic Light Opera.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The question is, what attracted **Johnny Price** to this piece of musical theater esoterica? Despite sporadic popularity, *The Great Waltz* is not an operetta title to be reckoned with; the score produced no hit songs; and as we've seen, wherever the show was produced, it relied on spectacle—not a plus for a tent theater-in-the-round.

I'm betting the musical found a place in the repertoire as a follow-up for **Irma Petina** to her 1957 Musicarnival debut in *Song of Norway*, in which she re-created her Broadway role of an opera diva. The Russian-born mezzo—a 10-year veteran of the Met—had a terrific flair for comedy; listen to her nail "I Am Easily Assimilated" on the cast album of another one of her Broadway triumphs, Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*. The role of the scheming Countess in *Waltz* could have been written for her. Surely Petina begged Johnny to build the show around her.

Though we'll never know about that, we can tell from the tapes that **Don Driver**'s production is not at all dusty. He makes some smart internal cuts, and wherever Hart's script indicates comic "business," the audience response indicates that Driver delivered. To his credit, the director respects the material; it's played straight—though **Stan Page**'s Johann Jr. is overwrought: soggy

operetta all the way. **Beverly Allyson** is quite wonderful as the ingénue. And the classy bonus is the presence of **Birgitta Kiviniemi** and **Gordon Marsh** (the husband-and-wife team who had just choreographed Johnny's *The Boy Friend*) as the principal dancers in the second-act ballet. They stop the show with their Adagio.

A final note: It seems that beginning with this 1934 piece, Moss Hart developed a love for theatrical spectacle that he carried with him to the end. He died just two years after Musicarnival's *Waltz*, and his final musical on Broadway was Lerner & Loewe's behemoth, *Camelot*.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

They recognized a true star when they saw/heard one: Oscar Shaw in the Akron Beacon Journal: "I remember [Petina's] vivid portrayal of Carmen in her Met days. Monday night she made an entirely different kind of character ... come to life with the same authority." *The Cleveland Press's* Stan Anderson: "Of all those this reporter has seen at Musicarnival, none has played the entire arena audience with Miss Petina's expertise. If she demands this privilege, so much to her credit." Harlowe R. Hoyt in *The Plain Dealer*: "She dominates the situation whenever onstage."—**B. R.**

WISH YOU WERE HERE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 13–26, 1959 (New York opening: June 25, 1952;
598 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Harold Rome, book by Arthur Kober and Joshua Logan, based on Kober's play *Having Wonderful Time*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

LEADING PLAYERS

Stewart Rose (Chick Miller), Beverly Allyson (Teddy Stern), Tom Williams (Itchy Flexner), Bill Parker (Pinky Harris), Helen Baisley (Fay Fromkin), William T. Skelton (Lou Kandel)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Ballad of a Social Director,” “There’s Nothing Nicer Than People,” “Shopping Around,” “Could Be,” “Where Did the Night Go?,” “Don Jose of Far Rockaway,” “Flattery,” “Summer Afternoon,” “Wish You Were Here”

SYNOPSIS

The musical is set at Camp Karefree, an adult summer camp “where friendships are formed to last a whole lifetime through,” and is concerned with middle-class New Yorkers trying to make the most of a two-week vacation in the Catskills. Mainly it’s about Teddy Stern, a secretary from Brooklyn, who finds true love—after a series of misunderstandings—with Chick Miller, a law student working as a camp waiter by day and a dancing partner for the guests by night.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Four years after **Johnny Price** gave *Wish You Were Here* one of its first summer-stock productions at Musicarnival, he brought it back—and in a much more persuasive showing directed by **Don Driver**.

Even in 1955, virtually all of the comedy played well in this city that boasted a large contingent of transplanted New York Jews; you got the sense the audience was letting their hair down. But credit Driver with knowing how to capitalize on the show’s potential. The character actors (especially **Tom Williams** and **William T. Skelton**) are pluperfect; the musical as a whole registers as “more Jewish”; and the sexy kids in the company put out a tremendous energy that feels absolutely true to the world of the play. It’s all a hoot where it should be (nary a joke fails to land) and romantic in the other places (**Stewart Rose**’s rendition of the hit title song is the epitome of that period’s Broadway ballad). Even though the story runs out of gas in Act Two, this is one joyful night under the tent.

As he did in 1955, Johnny moved the orchestra into a shell-like sound board behind the last row (**Boris Kogan** conducted with the aid of a headset from the “upper regions of Section 7,” as one critic noted), transforming the pit into the show’s working swimming pool. The producer didn’t have to do that, you know. Theaters at the time could license one of two scripts: “with pool” and “without pool.” Naturally, Johnny took the plunge.

Though Driver cuts the song “Everybody Loves Everybody” (no loss), he provides Harold Rome’s virtually unknown Broadway parody of 1950s bebop in the wacky reprise of “Where Did

the Night Go?": "Where, dig that crazy PM, / Where did it lullabaloo to? / Lullabaloo, / Goom bye! / Who's the square who tooled off / With the Bulova tick tock? / Only a riff and a ruffle, a moo or two ago or so...."

Near the end of Act Two, Teddy's uptight fiancé, Herman Fabricant, describes Kamp Karefree as "a wild place." May the heavens be praised—he is correct.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Hal Barger in the *Hudson Times*: "Whenever Musicarnival decides to try something, there is no half-way attempt. Once again, that was the case when *Wish You Were Here* opened for a two-week splash.... Don Driver has created one of the most exciting and colorful productions in the tent for some time."—**B. R.**

KISMET

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 27–August 9, 1959 (New York opening: December 3, 1953;
583 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest from themes of Alexander Borodin, book by Charles Lederer and Luther Davis, based on a play by Edward Knoblock

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Lawrence Vincent

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Earle MacVeigh (a public poet, later called Hajj), Beverly Allyson (Marsinah, his daughter), Helen Baisley (Lalume), Stan Page (Caliph), Eugene Green (Wazir)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Rhymes Have I," "Not Since Nineveh," "Baubles, Bangles and Beads," "Stranger in Paradise," "Night of My Nights," "And This Is My Beloved," "The Olive Tree"

SYNOPSIS

In this “Musical Arabian Night,” the action occurs within a 24-hour period from dawn to dawn in ancient Baghdad, where a roguish public poet assumes the identity of Hajj the beggar and has a series of unlikely adventures. By the time they have ended, he has drowned the wicked Wazir, has seen his daughter, Marsinah, wedded to the handsome Caliph, has been appointed Emir of Baghdad, and has gone off to the desert with the Wazir’s luscious wife, Lalume.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1956 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Although the cast is somewhat less notable (it lacks Doretta Morrow, Michael Kermoyan and Libi Staiger), **Johnny Price**’s 1959 go-round of *Kismet* is in general more satisfying than his 1956 production. Credit **Lawrence Vincent**, longtime director of the Musicarnival School—and here given his first mainstage directing assignment—for approaching the material with a crisp respect for the elevated, quasi-poetic language in book and lyrics. This *Kismet* feels almost “classical,” and given Vincent’s background as a college professor of theater (and a working professional actor), he is well suited for it.

Of course, I doubt he had much to do with **Earle MacVeigh**’s performance. There was no need for that, MacVeigh having succeeded Alfred Drake in the role of the poet-beggar, Hajj, on Broadway and having starred in the national tour. This is a more American and less magnetic Hajj than Drake created, but who could ever match Drake’s star power? (MacVeigh feels more like Howard Keel in the film version.) But he finds all the wit in the role just the same, upholding *Kismet*’s reputation—in the words of critic Walter Kerr—for wearing “a fresh and winning grin on its face from the outset.” And Johnny’s Lalume, **Helen Baisley**, tops Libi Staiger by resisting the temptation to italicize every double entendre.

Musical director **Boris Kogan** once again wins two medals for his work with the orchestra and chorus; this is one of his finest Musicarnival gigs.

We have selected the August 8 performance for its superior sound, but we’ve tacked on Johnny’s August 7 welcome to the audience because he wants us to know it is MacVeigh’s 1,001st performance as Hajj—as befits “an Arabian Night fairy tale.”

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Harlowe R. Hoyt and I agree: "A particular word is due this week to Lawrence Vincent's direction. . . . His work is smooth and authoritative, and the players respond to his quiet suggestions."—**B. R.**

LI'L ABNER

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 10–23, 1959 (New York opening: November 15, 1956;
693 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Norman Panama and Melvin Frank (based on characters created by Al Capp), lyrics by Johnny Mercer, music by Gene de Paul

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Norman Eskow

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

John Craig (Li'l Abner), Barbara Lee Smith (Daisy Mae), Tom Batten (Marryin' Sam), T. J. Halligan (General Bullmoose), Maggie Dillon (Mammy Yokum), Jerry Rice (Pappy Yokum), Larry Ward (Earthquake McGoon), Lynn Osborne (Appassionata Von Climax)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"If I Had My Druthers," "Jubilation T. Cornpone," "Namely You," "The Country's in the Very Best of Hands," "I'm Past My Prime," "The Matrimonial Stomp"

SYNOPSIS

The denizens of Dogpatch lead their quiet hillbilly lives, with Daisy Mae forever trying to get dimwitted Abner Yokum to marry her, until they discover that the government plans to wipe them out due to their very "unnecessariness." But Mammy Yokum's Yokumberry Tonic proves to be a medical miracle, transforming scrawny men into muscle-bound hunks (but with the unfortunate side effect of eliminating their libido). With the discovery of a proclamation by none other than Abraham Lincoln, the day is saved for Abner, Daisy Mae and the other Dogpatchians.—**K. B., S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

To borrow a phrase that no doubt enjoyed some currency in Dogpatch, these days Broadway's *Li'l Abner* "don't get no respect." Or not nearly enough of it, anyway. For starters, you can't beat the source material: The fans of Al Capp's comic strip, which ran for 43 years, included Charlie Chaplin, John Steinbeck and John Updike. Like the strip, the musical comedy produced in 1956 is deceptively simple-minded; underneath Capp's outlandish comic-strip characters and their hokey hillbilly talk is a jaundiced commentary on being an American during the Eisenhower years.

In fact, in some ways Ike himself inspired the tale when he warned us of the dangers of the military-industrial complex. It's all here in this musical's comic villain, whose henchmen proclaim, "What's good for General Bullmoose [read: General Motors] is good for the USA!" (and whose theme song is "Progress Is the Root of All Evil"). In Feds joyfully eager to find new sites to test the atom bomb. And in a do-nothing Congress: "They sits around in this place they're at," sing Abner and Sam, "...Jes sits around on their excess fat." American conformity takes some hits, too; for example, in a "Norman Vincent Peale pill."

Today *Li'l Abner* is mostly remembered for Michael Kidd's lusty "Sadie Hawkins Ballet." But the work of all the principal creators meshed gloriously: scriptwriters Norman Panama (1914-2003) and Melvin Frank (1913-88)—then red hot from Hollywood's *White Christmas* and *The Court Jester*—with their tricky mix of sweet innocence (Abner) and abject cynicism (Bullmoose); composer Gene de Paul (1919-88) with his foot-stomping Broadway hoedowns; and perhaps most gratifying, songwriter Johnny Mercer (1909-1976) with a collection of lyrics that rank with Yip Harburg's verse in *Finian's Rainbow*.

Mercer had notoriously bad luck on Broadway, but not this time. He does more than his share to re-create Al Capp's mythical world for the stage, and his range here is astonishing: from Abner's charmingly poetic "If I Had My Druthers" ("While you'd druther hustle, / Accumulatin' muscle, / I'd druther watch daisies grow"), to the scientists' scarily prescient vision of the future, "Oh Happy Day" ("We'll walk and talk and live like automatic metronomes / When assembly-line husbands, / Conveyor-belt wives / Go to bed in push-button homes").

Thus *Li'l Abner* now belongs on the underappreciated—in some quarters, forgotten—musicals list. But in 1959, following its long run and basking in the release of its faithful film version, the musical was still a hot property that validated Whitney Bolton's Broadway review: "Mr. Capp's unwashed mountaineers may be creatures of sloth and squalor, but they are also magnificent commentators on the foolishness of our times."

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Although **Johnny Price**'s welcome to the audience is incomplete in this live recording, we get the gist of it when he cues **Boris Kogan** in the pit with a hillbilly-tinged "Let's have some Dogpatch music!"

Johnny's company is directed on this occasion by **Jerome Eskow**, fresh from Off Broadway, where he premiered another rural musical—but this one based on *Of Mice and Men!* Though the Musicarnival outing is generally well cast, the standouts include the two leads—**John Craig** in the title role and **Barbara Lee Smith** as the eternally pining Daisy Mae. Both were veterans of the Broadway show as understudies, with Craig going on for Peter Palmer more than 100 times.

It's an appropriately uninhibited kind of evening for both actors and audience, and this is one of those times where I'd give anything to see some film footage. I want to know what choreographers **Birgitta Kiviniemi** and **Gordon Marsh** did "in the round" with the show's "Sadie Hawkins Ballet"—especially because the two of them had already worked their way through the stylistic challenges of this season's *The Boy Friend*, *The Great Waltz*, *Wish You Were Here* and *Kismet*—with *The Student Prince* looming. Their work, which was highly regarded by the Cleveland critics, is a testament to what was routinely expected of musical theater artists during the heyday of American summer stock.

The production is a lot of fun—the best part being that this company has vividly imagined Al Capp's Dogpatch and committed themselves to bringing it to life. My only reservation is that the powers that be seem to have intentionally weakened the authors' satire in the treatment of some dialogue scenes and the deletion of "Oh Happy Day," with its mordantly funny lyric by Johnny Mercer. And dragging in references to Shaker Heights and the Cleveland Browns is bush-league.

Other than that, what a pleasure to hear this document not long before the country made a sharp turn into the dramatically different 1960s, a time when Capp himself—a staunch FDR Democrat—defected to the political center.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

John Craig stole the notices: "A perfect embodiment of the lovable yokel," wrote *The Plain Dealer's* Harlowe Hoyt, who added, "Al Capp's cartoons have been studied by him, and the hero's angular antics are reproduced with careful gesticulations." And for Oscar Smith in the *Akron Beacon Journal*, "Craig looks as if he stepped out of the Capp comic strip." One thing is missing, though, in all of the reviews. There is virtually no mention of the excellence of either

script or score. All too often, authors like Panama, Frank, Mercer and de Paul—artists who “take light entertainment seriously,” as George Abbott used to say—are not given their due.—**B. R.**

THE STUDENT PRINCE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 24–September 6, 1959 (New York opening: December 2, 1924;
608 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Sigmund Romberg, book and lyrics by Dorothy Donnelly

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Robert Rounseville (Prince Karl Franz), Joy Clements (Kathie), Earl MacVeigh (Dr. Engel), Don Driver (Lutz),
Mary Morris (Grand Duchess Anastasia)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Golden Days,” “To the Inn We’re Marching,” “Drinking Song,” “Deep in My Heart, Dear,” “Serenade,” “Just We
Two”

SYNOPSIS

The story is set in 1860 in Heidelberg, the German university town where Prince Karl Franz has gone with his tutor, Dr. Engel, to complete his education. He meets Kathie, a waitress at the Inn of the Golden Apple, and they fall in love. But his carefree days are abruptly ended when he is called home to become king. Two years later, Karl Franz returns to Heidelberg. Even though seeing Kathie again has rekindled his love, he must once more heed the call of duty. This time he leaves forever, as he has already promised to marry Princess Margaret.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1959 SEASON (West Palm Beach)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

In his welcome to the audience, Johnny Price remarks that *The Student Prince* may be the “best-loved operetta in the English language.” So it would seem, based on the response in Cleveland to this eminently satisfying production, which set a new attendance record for Musicarnival, then winding up its sixth season.

The production beats the one mounted earlier in the year in West Palm Beach, even though the two leads—**Robert Rounseville** and **Joy Clements**—are the same. **Don Driver** directed this one, and it shows—even in an audio recording. He has raised the stakes for the 1924 musical in both its romance and comedy. The entire evening is charged with energy, and Dorothy Donnelly’s libretto—which is habitually ignored by critics when the musical is revived—can be seen as the fine piece of work it is: Everything about *The Student Prince* is theatrically conceived and motivated, as befits a woman who spent the early part of her career as an actress.

Driver’s production is not polite; student life at Heidelberg feels like an 1860 German version of *Animal House*. And why not? By the same token, he understands that Donnelly’s foppish valet, Lutz—whom Driver himself plays in Cleveland—is not just comic relief: In the best tradition of classical theater, the character is low comedy to the max. There are times when Driver verges into hambone territory (a slap on the wrist for adding some anachronistic lines of dialogue), but for the most part this is a brilliant comic turn.

As for Rounseville and Clements: they can do no wrong. In 1956 tenor Rounseville claimed his place in musical theater history playing the title role on Broadway in the Bernstein–Wilbur–Hellman *Candide* (his performance opposite Barbara Cook is preserved on the cast recording) and giving us a memorable Mr. Snow in the film version of Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *Carousel*. Between the Palm Beach and Cleveland engagements of *The Student Prince*, Clements debuted with New York City Opera; her work in the 1960s with that company and the Metropolitan Opera made her one of the country’s leading sopranos. She and Rounseville are perfectly paired in this production—not just vocally but in their approach to the characters. She is an exceptionally spirited ingénue; his hero is layered with a touching inner sadness. They make us care about Karl Franz and Kathie.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

The critics all waxed enthusiastic. Stan Anderson’s salute to Rounseville in *The Cleveland Press* must be quoted in its entirety: “There is the singer who never managed to gain more than thoracic power. Then there is the one who progresses to the diaphragmatic. And finally, there is that one

who progresses even further and sings from his very legs. Such a one is Robert Rounseville, that tenor who is now engaged in bringing the wealth of his voice to Musicarnival. . . . His command of diction is a fine asset in playing theater-in-the-round. Rounseville treats everybody in the tent like a special customer.”—**B. R.**

BELLS ARE RINGING

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

September 7–20, 1959 (New York opening: November 29, 1956;
924 performances)

AUTHORS

Book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, music by Jule Styne

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Joan Kibrig (Ella Peterson), Stewart Rose (Jeff Moss), Tom Batten (Sandor), Doreen McLean (Sue), William T. Skelton (Barnes), Don Driver (Dr. Kitchell)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“It’s a Perfect Relationship,” “I Met a Girl,” “It’s a Simple Little System,” “Long Before I Knew You,” “Just in Time,” “Drop That Name,” “The Party’s Over,” “I’m Goin’ Back”

SYNOPSIS

A shy switchboard operator for Susanserphone named Ella Peterson meddles in her clients’ lives, disguising her voice as different characters. She falls in love with one of her subscribers, Jeff Moss, a playwright with writer’s block. Among others whose lives she anonymously fixes are a songwriting dentist and Blake Barton, a Brandoesque actor. Simultaneously, the owner of Susanserphone is being swindled by her boyfriend, who is secretly running a numbers racket out of her establishment. Hilarity ensues.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Sometimes the spirit of fun that has gone into writing an American musical comedy is everywhere apparent: We can imagine the authors delighting themselves as they invent each song and scene. And in the case of composer Jule Styne and book and lyric writers Betty Comden and Adolph Green, whatever we can imagine cannot possibly do justice to their hyperkinetic collaboration.

In all, they wrote eight Broadway musicals together, and their 1956 *Bells Are Ringing*—produced when Styne was 51 and Comden and Green 10 years younger—not only enjoyed the longest run (924 performances) but four years later spawned a hit movie version. It's one of the best musicals of the decade, which is all the more significant considering *Bells* is an original that's not based on a film or play.

The premise itself: gangbusters. The team loved telling the story of how they finally got to write a show for their friend Judy Holliday. In 1997, in a published collection of three of their “New York Musicals,” Comden and Green captured in prose the moment when the notion was hatched—an idea that seems fascinatingly far removed from our social media-driven world: “Our eyes happened to light on the back of the telephone book, where an ad for an answering service showed rows of girls wearing earphones, seated at banks of switchboards, wires growing out of their heads, seemingly plugged into the entire city. A possible idea. We decided to visit [Adolph's] answering service . . . and instead of what we expected, walked into the cellar of a dilapidated brownstone . . . In the center [was] one lone switchboard at which sat a very large young woman plugging in and saying, ‘Gloria Vanderbilt's residence.’ A very possible idea.

“We called Jule, and he, with customary restraint, yelled, ‘They have got to fall down!!!,’ meaning that critics and audiences alike would be so entranced with it they would simply collapse on the floor in adoration.”

Which they did, thanks to a stellar production starring the 35-year-old Holliday (her first musical) and Sydney Chaplin, directed by Jerome Robbins and co-choreographed with Bob Fosse.

Critic John Lahr once saluted the writers as “merry pranksters and up-to-the-minute satirists.” *Bells Are Ringing* is Exhibit A. Comden and Green. Colorful New York characters abound, and the satirical targets include Marlon Brando, Madison Avenue, celebrity worshippers and bad pop music. Quoth Dr. Kitchell, their songwriting dentist: “First you fill my heart with pain / Then your kiss is novocaine.” (By the way, “The Midas Touch” is only one of a half-dozen terrific comedy songs in the score.)

But ultimately what distinguishes this musical is its big heart. As Green said, “Judy played [Ella Peterson], an answering service operator who felt that people should care about each other every day, the same way they seem to only in times of crisis. She puts her philosophy into practice by trying to help her unseen subscribers. Her need to help others may make her atypical as a New Yorker, but there *are* such people, and that is why the Big City works.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Here’s **Johnny Price** producing the second of Comden and Green’s two most successful 1950s shows; he took on *Wonderful Town* (1953), with music by Leonard Bernstein, in 1956.

Not coincidentally, he and director **Don Driver** cast **Joan Kibrig** as Ella. Kibrig had also played Ruth Sherwood in Johnny’s *Wonderful Town*, and she had a sharp sense of Comden and Green’s comic slant. (She also had a big following at Musicarnival: her bio informs us that it’s her 15th show at the Cleveland or West Palm Beach tents.)

She doesn’t quite fill the bill as Ella, but who could? This is one of a handful of roles—Henry Higgins and Harold Hill also come to mind—that were so meticulously (and lovingly) created for the original stars that Rex Harrison and Robert Preston and Judy Holliday may in fact be irreplaceable. Kibrig lacks Judy Holliday’s warmth. But so did a big star of the 1990s, Faith Prince, when *Bells* was given its only Broadway revival and closed after a short run.

On the other hand, Kibrig, unlike Holliday, is a real singer, and she gives a fine account of “The Party’s Over” and “Long Before I Knew You,” besides which, she and this production’s Jeff, **Stewart Rose**, have good chemistry. Anybody know what happened to this almost-pop star whose hit record “Hold Me, Hold Me, Hold Me” was being peddled that week by Johnny?

In this production Driver cuts the dance number “Hello, Hello There.” Hard to tell why, since he had two husband-and-wife choreographers, **Birgitta Kiviniemi** and **Gordon Marsh**, at his disposal all summer. It’s a loss. And a recording could not be found of two scenes in Act One. On the plus side: We get “You’re Better Than a Dream,” written after the Broadway opening and used in the 1960 film, plus lots of dialogue (some of it delightfully risqué) *not* used in the movie.

All told, this is a lively and engaging production. It’s fun to hear a more-or-less-complete *Bells* so soon after it closed in New York.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Stan Anderson's review in *The Cleveland Press* opens a window onto Don Driver's vision:

"Driver must have had more than one good session with [set designer] Frederika Merriman in making this simple set design fit his total concept of the piece. For the first time in my tent-going experience the setting brings **Boris Kogan's** orchestra into the actual stage setting. Except for a lot of plain workshop stools, **Connie Price's** design is based on geometric patterns. Triangles, circles and diamonds of glass have been inserted in the stage floor, and mood lighting is shot through these with tremendous effectiveness. This is some of the best lighting I have ever seen in any musical." —**B. R.**



Joan Kibrig in Bells Are Ringing

1960 Season (West Palm Beach)

KISMET

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 9–14, 1960 (New York opening: December 3, 1953;
583 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest from themes of Alexander Borodin, book by Charles Lederer and Luther Davis, based on a play by Edward Knoblock

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Jay Harnick

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Earle MacVeigh (a public poet, later called Hajj), Lillian Bozinoff (Marsinah, his daughter), Joan Kibrig (Lalume), Harry Theyard (Caliph), Alfred Medinets (Wazir)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Rhymes Have I,” “Not Since Nineveh,” “Baubles, Bangles and Beads,” “Stranger in Paradise,” “Night of My Nights,” “And This Is My Beloved,” “The Olive Tree”

SYNOPSIS

In this “Musical Arabian Night,” the action occurs within a 24-hour period from dawn to dawn in ancient Baghdad, where a roguish public poet assumes the identity of Hajj the beggar and has a series of unlikely adventures. By the time they have ended, he has drowned the wicked Wazir, has seen his daughter, Marsinah, wedded to the handsome Caliph, has been appointed Emir of Baghdad, and has gone off to the desert with the Wazir’s luscious wife, Lalume.—*S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1956 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Johnny Price's third and final trip on a "magic carpet ride" (his phrase) to Arabia: In Cleveland he produced *Kismet* in 1956 and again in 1959 (six months before the Palm Beach mounting). This fan of classical music and opera must have loved the "crossover" nature of the work—and of course by now *Kismet* could claim status as one of most popular musicals in the repertoire of the 1950s.

The show was staged by a different director each time: William C. Boehm in 1956, Lawrence Vincent in 1959 and **Jay Harnick** in this production. The brother of lyricist Sheldon Harnick, he began his career as a performer, then moved to directing, and for many years served as artistic director of TheatreWorks USA, the much-praised touring youth theater company he founded.

The performing constant in the three Musicarnival production is star **Earle MacVeigh**, who succeeded Alfred Drake in the role of the poet-beggar, Hajj, on Broadway and took on the national tour. By the time he got to Florida, MacVeigh had played the role over 1,000 times. As previously noted, his is a more American and less magnetic Hajj than Drake created, but who could ever match Drake's star power? (MacVeigh feels more like Howard Keel in the film version.) But he finds most of the wit in the role just the same, upholding *Kismet*'s reputation—in the words of critic Walter Kerr—for wearing "a fresh and winning grin on its face from the outset."

For the first time at either Musicarnival tent, we hear as the Caliph (the Richard Kiley part) **Harry Theyard**. Theyard would later become a star of New York City Opera and make frequent appearances with the Metropolitan Opera. On Broadway in 1965, he played the Muleteer in Kiley's *Man of La Mancha*, sharing the stage with another Musicarnival alum, Gaylea Byrne. It's exciting to hear the Caliph portrayed by a real tenor (Kiley was a baritone who pushed himself beyond the top of his natural range). Musicarnival veteran **Joan Kibrig** tosses off Lalume's sexual double entendres with sultry aplomb, but Canadian export **Lillian Bozinoff**'s Marsinah lacks the endearing quality required of all ingénues.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

In this third winter season in Palm Beach, Joe Sullivan of the *Fort Lauderdale News* praises a "scintillating" and "fast-moving" production boasting "uniformly splendid music, dances and voices.... It is a show well worth seeing."—**B. R.**

THE DESERT SONG

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 23–28, 1960 (New York opening: November 30, 1926;
471 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Sigmund Romberg, lyrics by Otto Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein II, book by Harbach, Hammerstein and Frank Mandel

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Jay Harnick

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Earle MacVeigh (Pierre Birabeau/Red Shadow), Claire Alexander (Margot Bonvalet), Joan Kibrig (Susan), Tom Williams (Benjamin Kidd), Harry Theyard (Sid El Kar), William Skelton (General Birabeau), William Armstrong (Paul Fontaine), Alfred Medinets (Ali Ben Ali), Celeste Cronise (Azuri), Lynn Osborne (Clementina)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“The Riff Song,” “Romance,” “I Want a Kiss,” “The Desert Song,” “Let Love Go,” “One Flower Grows Alone in Your Garden,” “One Alone”

SYNOPSIS

The Red Shadow, the leader of a rebel band known as the Riffs, kidnaps Margo Bonvalet, a comely Frenchwoman. In a twist, the true identity of the Red Shadow is Pierre, the ostensibly milquetoast son of the governor of Morocco, General Birabeau. When the rebel band is tracked down, the Red Shadow finds himself in the unenviable position of having to duel with his own father. He backs down, much to the derision of the Riffs. General Birabeau’s aide, Captain Paul Fontaine, is determined to bring the Red Shadow to justice until a jealous Arab girl, Azuri, reveals the true identity of the mystery man to him. Fontaine does the only decent thing, showing the general the burnoose of the Red Shadow and declaring him vanished. The secret is kept forever by Paul, the general, Pierre and Margo (who was in love with the Red Shadow and can now marry Pierre).—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

It is traditionally billed as Sigmund Romberg's *The Desert Song*, but as sweepingly romantic as the music is, there's more to the piece than that. Oscar Hammerstein II, then 31, had been writing for the musical theater for only five years when he got the idea for a topical operetta—nearly unprecedented at that time: “It started by my reading an account in the newspaper of the Riff trouble in Morocco. I gave it to Frank Mandel, and Frank and I started to write the story, having evoked Romberg's enthusiasm to do the score. After we got him underway we then went to Otto [Harbach] and invited him into the collaboration. The three of us worked on the book, and Otto and I collaborated on the lyrics.”

As usual with Hammerstein, *The Desert Song*—exotically set in modern French North Africa—would be invested with vital themes. The “Riff trouble” refers to the uprisings of guerillas against the French rule of Morocco in the mid-1920s, and their cause was just. (“Who is this blessed man?” a minor character asks about the masked Red Shadow, leader of the Riffs. “He must be Mohammed's own son, sent to save the oppressed.”)

There is also the authors' exploration of male sexuality, personified with stunning success by Rudolph Valentino in *Son of the Sheik*, a film released while *The Desert Song* was on the drawing board. In the operetta, the Frenchwoman Margo is inescapably drawn to the Red Shadow despite his danger. “It's awful,” she confides to Pierre, son of the governor, who pretends to be a sexually neutral man to hide his identity as the Red Shadow. “When I am with him, I'm afraid of the future. I hold him off. I lie to him. But when he is gone, I want him back. . . . Oh, Pierre, sometimes I wish he were even more of an outlaw and a ruffian. I wish he wouldn't listen to my lies and my excuses. I wish he would make the decision for me.” She and the Red Shadow underline Hammerstein's famous dictum that “the only thing worth writing about is sex.”

Typical of 1920s operetta, the libretto and lyrics by Hammerstein, Mandel and Harbach (1873-1963)—Hammerstein's mentor during those years—are today judged “overripe,” to use Stephen Sondheim's word, but the essentially serious story fascinates despite its sentimentality and the excesses of the secondary comic couple, Benjamin and Susan. This is Hammerstein still in training but learning fast. It's staggering to consider that just a year later he and Jerome Kern would virtually reinvent the American musical with *Show Boat*, and that in the 1940s and '50s he and Richard Rodgers would do so all over again.

The moment when *The Desert Song* can most clearly be seen as a harbinger of the modern musical is in “Eastern and Western Love,” a character-driven sequence of three songs that offer

differing perspectives: Ali's "Let Love Go," Sid's "One Flower Grows Alone in Your Garden" and the Red Shadow's ringing declaration of monogamy, "One Alone." The scene has real power in its lyrics and in Romberg's dramatically charged music.

Writes operetta historian Richard Traubner: In 1926–27 "millions of women dreamed of being in the arms of the masked Red Shadow, while men imagined how easily they could conquer." *The Desert Song* has been filmed no fewer than three times. And Ken Bloom notes in his book *Broadway Musicals: The 101 Greatest Musicals of All Time* that "it is still performed to enthusiastic audiences almost 90 years after its premiere."

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Perhaps the pressures involved in getting the huge *Kismet* and *The Merry Widow* onstage in back-to-back weeks marred **Johnny Price**'s production of *The Desert Song*, directed by *Kismet*'s **Jay Harnick**. It sounds slapdash. Even musical director **Boris Kogan**, a champion of operetta, doesn't seem inspired to reveal the full splendor and beauty of Sigmund Romberg's music.

Disconcerting liberties are taken with the published script: There is much reordering of the dialogue, along with cuts and additions. And the score is performed without lyrics for "One Good Boy Gone Wrong" (also known as "Bold Woman"); with the interpolated (from heaven knows where) "Back in the Old Routine," music credited to Wilson Stone; and without "It," the comedy song about sex, which features one of Hammerstein's most playful early lyrics, including witty references to Freud and the "It Girl" herself, novelist Elinor Glyn.

Most damagingly, **Earle MacVeigh** and **Claire Alexander**—both remaining for the season at Johnny's Palm Beach stage—play the romantic leads without any particular conviction, and director Harnick allows his comic couple—**Tom Williams** and **Joan Kibrig** as Benjamin and Susan—to throw the show off-balance, virtually stealing it from the principals. The question, of course, is this: How did a company of mostly young artists feel about performing a 1926 operetta at the dawn of the 1960s? The answer would seem to be that just about everyone lacked faith in the material.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

I represent the minority view here. The reviews are all positive, although MacVeigh and Alexander are upstaged by Williams and Kibrig—not a good sign. The most perceptive notice comes from "J.K." in the *Palm Beach Post*; he/she praises the young **Harry Theyard** (as Sid El Kar) thus: "You don't need Musicarnival's new sound system to hear Theyard. The voices just

don't come much better than the one this youngster demonstrates. There will come a time when his name will draw people, as if by magic, into a theater. He has plenty to learn about acting ... as he adds to his 23 years, but as of right now he ranks with the very best."—**B. R.**

DAMN YANKEES

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 1–6 (New York opening: May 5, 1955;
1,019 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, book by George Abbott and Douglass Wallop, based on Wallop's novel *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Jay Harnick

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Stephen Douglass (Joe Hardy), Joan Kibrig (Lola), Tom Williams (Applegate), John L. Price, Jr. (Van Buren), Lynn Osborne (Gloria Thorpe), Earle MacVeigh (Joe Boyd), Harry Theyard (Rocky)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Heart," "Shoeless Joe From Hannibal, Mo.," "A Little Brains—A Little Talent," "Whatever Lola Wants," "Near to You," "Two Lost Souls"

SYNOPSIS

In this variation on the *Faust* legend, a middle-aged Washington Senators fan [in this production, the Kansas City Athletics] is so devoted that he sells his soul to the Devil (Mr. Applegate) just for a chance to play on his favorite team. Suddenly transformed into a young man, now named Joe Hardy, the fan not only joins the team but becomes its ace pitcher and hitter. Fortunately for him, there is a contractual escape clause, and Applegate—even aided by the seductive Lola, who usually gets what she wants—cannot prevent Joe from returning home to his wife at the end of a year.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1957 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Johnny Price's 1957 production of this musical in Cleveland felt special; this one doesn't, despite a more capable director (**Jay Harnick**, as opposed to William C. Boehm) and the presence of **Stephen Douglass**, reprising his Broadway role of Joe Hardy.

Here the musical is set not in Washington, D.C. (the original) or in Cleveland (1957 at Musicarnival), but in Kansas City, home of the cellar-dwelling Athletics. But sports fan, impresario and occasional actor Price is again on hand to offer a socko turn as Van Buren, manager of the team. His beleaguered ballplayers include the young **Harry Theyard**, cast delightfully against type as Rocky.

Admittedly, it's fun to get a sense of the Broadway show through Douglass's presence, and to hear him do his thing without being overshadowed by Gwen Verdon, who received her first billing above the title in 1955. But as usual with Douglass, his matinee-idol features and robust (he could have invented the term) baritone somehow feel insufficient, lacking John Reardon's winsome boyishness in the earlier Musicarnival mounting and Tab Hunter's vulnerability in the film version. He's just too foursquare for my taste.

Tom Williams's campy Applegate reminds me of Don Driver's performance in 1957—but without Driver's wit. **Joan Kibrig** is a funny but touching Lola, however, and it's nice to see her move up from the Cleveland production, in which she played newspaper reporter Gloria Thorpe. Speaking of the pleasures of a repertory company, here we have a brief encounter with **Earle MacVeigh** as the old Joe; MacVeigh had starred in *Kismet* two weeks earlier.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Never one to miss an opportunity for publicity, Johnny reaped columns of it by welcoming Kansas City Athletics teammates to his tent on opening night. "T.P." in the *Palm Beach Daily News* noted the "change of pace from the past two weeks of operetta to a stellar production of musical comedy, with Douglass, Kibrig and Williams scoring heavily in the infield as a fine cast gave them great support from the outfield." And in the *Fort Pierce News*, Howard Sharp reported that even Palm Beach could pose meteorological challenges to live theater: "What can you say to describe a show that will draw 1,000 people to a drafty tent on a bitter cold night? Although topcoats and blankets were in profusion, the audience warmed up to a show that at times had everyone rocking in gales of laughter and applause."—**B. R.**

NAUGHTY MARIETTA

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 8–13, 1960 (New York opening: November 7, 1910;
136 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Victor Herbert, book and lyrics by Rida Johnson Young

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Jay Harnick

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Robert Rounseville/Harry Theyard (Captain Richard Warrington, aka Captain Dick), Claire Alexander (Marietta d'Altena), Earle MacVeigh (Etienne Grandet), Joan Kibrig (Lizette), Lynne Osborne (Adah), Tom Williams (Silas Slick)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!,” “Naughty Marietta,” “Neath the Southern Moon,” “Italian Street Song,” “I’m Falling in Love With Someone,” “Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life”

SYNOPSIS

Set in New Orleans in 1780, the story tells of Marietta, who arrives there to escape from an unwanted marriage in France. Captain Dick is in New Orleans to lead his Rangers against a pirate gang led by Bras Piqué. Though Marietta is first attracted to Etienne Grandet, the son of the lieutenant governor, when he is revealed to be the pirate leader she is happy to sing her romantic duets with Captain Dick.—*S. G.*

NOTES ON THE MUSICAL

The unsung heroines of American operetta are not actresses. They’re the artists who wrote the scripts and lyrics for these entertainments drenched in melody and dominated by composers—shows that proved so popular in the first 30 years of the 20th century.

And unsurprisingly, the two writers who have been virtually ignored both in our time and in

theirs are women: Dorothy Donnelly (see *The Student Prince* in the 1959 SEASON in West Palm Beach) and Rida Johnson Young (1875–1926), librettist and lyricist for *Naughty Marietta*.

Even the respected musical theater historian Stanley Green ignores her in his many books on the subject, with the exception of his encyclopedia, in which he merely acknowledges her prolific career (30 plays and musicals; lyrics for 500 songs) in a few sentences.

In a 1917 interview with the Baltimore *Sun*, Young was asked how much an author of a musical counts for. “Precious little,” she replied. “Everybody looks at the humble author if he [sic] ventures a suggestion. It’s a good deal like being a dressmaker, I suppose. You can make the costume, but you’re not supposed to dictate to the purchaser how, what and where to wear it.”

Although Young collaborated not only with Herbert but also with Sigmund Romberg and Rudolph Friml, she is best remembered (when she is remembered at all) for Herbert’s greatest success, *Naughty Marietta*, which in 1935 became a marvelous film in the hands of Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald. Looking back on her contribution to the art form, it’s clear this dedicated artist (“I never go anywhere without taking my work with me”) had a progressive view of musical theater, even in the storybook world of operetta. “I think [these shows] can and should be made as coherent and as logical as a play, but it’s a long, long way to that part of Tipperary.... I try to put the real thing [plot] into mine, not merely a shadowy hint of one.... [And] I have a hard and fast prejudice that the songs ought to be written about the action.”

Marietta is Rida Johnson Young at her most accomplished. A former actor, she brought to her work a keen sense of theater; this libretto is consistently stageworthy. Together she and Herbert capture the color of late-18th-century New Orleans, and she gives us character-based comedy that’s really funny, a love story to care about, and some delicious theatrical conceits along the way. For example, there’s Marietta’s recurring vocal fragments of her childhood “Dream Melody,” the song “Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life”: The heroine knows—it has been “foretold” to her—that the man who can finish the song will be her true love. That would be Captain Dick. Charming!

But of course, in 1910 Herbert (1859-1924) stole the notices in a lavish production starring Emma Trentini and Orville Harrold. This from *Musical America*: “The entire orchestral part is replete with felicitous touches better than anything of their kind their writer has yet done.... At the close of the first act the enthusiasm was positively rapturous.” So are the compositions: the “soft and low” music of dawn at curtain’s rise; the winsome music written for the marionettes;

the ravishing quartet built around “Live for Today”; the jubilant “Italian Street Song” and so much more. But these are gracefully conjoined with Young’s memorable phrases in verse such as “Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life,” “I’m Falling in Love With Someone” and “Neath the Southern Moon.”

Even the comedy songs, so frequently tossed off in operetta, sparkle: “So sometimes I get dreamin’,” Silas confesses, “As a feller will, you see, / Of the kind of a sort of a ‘me’ it’d be / If I wasn’t the me that’s me.” If the inflated language for Young’s ballads tends to be dismissed by our contemporary sensibility, the lyrics were apposite for the era, and her line “Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life” entered the language and stayed there.

Victor Herbert was a lucky man.—**B. R.**

ABOUT THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

In the souvenir program, **Johnny Price** describes *Naughty Marietta* as a “light-hearted romantic adventure [from a time when] France ruled Louisiana and pirates ruled the seas.” It holds the distinction of being the oldest American musical theater work he ever produced, and he did it proud. This West Palm Beach mounting, which was never seen in Cleveland, has everything that his *Desert Song* did not: effective casting, energy and flair.

One could carp that again director **Jay Harnick** (or whoever) has tampered with a classic operetta, futzing with the script, cutting several numbers and interpolating “Neapolitan Love Song” from Victor Herbert and Henry Blossom’s *Princess Pat*—apparently for no reason other than to give the show’s Etienne, **Earle MacVeigh**, an additional vocal showcase.

But this time it’s only quibbling. The accents may be dreadful, but the performances are just fine. And chief among them is the Captain Dick of **Harry Theyard**, the 23-year-old new face who was in residence throughout the winter. The announced star of the production, Robert Rounseville, could not make the weekend performances, and the only archive recording is from Saturday night. Theyard—a future luminary at both New York City Opera (where Julius Rudel affectionately dubbed him “Harry the Yard”) and the Metropolitan Opera—covers gloriously here. It’s his most self-assured performance of the season, and with “I’m Falling in Love With Someone” he stops the show.

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

In the *Palm Beach Times*, “J.K.” noted that **Claire Alexander**, the *Naughty Marietta* of the

production, sings beautifully... gives the part more sparkle than in her previous appearances here.... This the kind of show you take home in your head. Don't be surprised if the bathtub baritone on your block starts giving out with 'Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life' this week." —**B. R.**

SOUTH PACIFIC

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 22–27, 1960 (New York opening: April 7, 1949;
1,925 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan, adapted from James A. Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Jay Harnick

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Joan Kibrig (Ensign Nellie Forbush), Earle MacVeigh (Emile de Becque), Lynne Osborne (Bloody Mary), Tom Williams (Luther Billis), Harry Theyard (Lieutenant Joseph Cable)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"A Cockeyed Optimist," "Some Enchanted Evening," "Bloody Mary," "There Is Nothin' Like a Dame," "Bali Ha'i," "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair," "A Wonderful Guy," "Younger Than Springtime," "Happy Talk," "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," "This Nearly Was Mine"

SYNOPSIS

Emile de Becque, a middle-aged French planter, falls in love with the nurse Ensign Nellie Forbush. One of the islanders, the crafty Bloody Mary, has her eyes on the handsome Lieutenant Cable for her beautiful daughter, Liat. They fall in love, but Cable finds it difficult to reconcile their different races. Nellie, meanwhile, meets de Becque's children and is shocked that they are of mixed race; she ends the relationship. De Becque and Cable are recruited to spy on Japanese troop movements in a dangerous mission. While they are away, Nellie bonds with the children

and grows to love them. Cable and de Becque's mission is successful, but Cable is killed by the Japanese. De Becque returns home to find Nellie and his children waiting with open arms.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

South Pacific was a cash bonanza for **Johnny Price**, and I don't mean that cynically. His three previous productions in Cleveland (the first in 1955, and two in 1957) broke box-office records, not only because the musical still tapped into our memories of the war, but also because he rendered it so well.

Jay Harnick directed the eagerly anticipated West Palm Beach outing—an “added attraction” to the regular season and the first to be done in Florida aside from the national tour—with all the integrity the piece deserves. What his two leads (**Joan Kibrig** and **Earle MacVeigh**) lack in sexual chemistry, they mostly make up for in sincerity; and **Tom Williams's** Billis is the actor's best performance in the 1960 gallery of five comic characters I heard on tape. Only the Bloody Mary of **Lynne Osborne** isn't believable: Her vocal power can't mask her white-bread-ness.

The transcendent moment: **Harry Theyard** caressing “Younger Than Springtime,” then giving it all the passion that is at the core of this classic.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Rhapsodic: “J.K.” in the *Palm Beach Post* found the production “so good it is really a little hard to believe.... You will go a long, long way before seeing a better one than can be seen this week at the big tent on the polo grounds.” And in the *Palm Beach Daily News*, “T.E.P.” noted that “many people filed out with praise for John Price and Jay Harnick”—how rare to witness a producer given his due in print.—**B. R.**

1960 Season (Cleveland)

WEST SIDE STORY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 1–19, 1960 (New York opening: September 26, 1957;
732 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Arthur Laurents (based on a conception by Jerome Robbins), music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

PRODUCER

Jack Lenny and Nat Debin

DIRECTOR

Gerald Freedman

MUSICAL CONDUCTOR

Gregory Millar

LEADING PLAYERS

Marlys Watters (Maria), Lester James (Tony), Yvonne Othon (Anita), Jim Moore (Riff), Erin Martin (Anybods), Stephan Zema (Bernardo), Michael Bennett (Baby John)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Something’s Coming,” “Maria,” “Tonight,” “America,” “Cool,” “One Hand, One Heart,” “I Feel Pretty,” “Somewhere,” “Gee, Officer Krupke,” “A Boy Like That,” “I Have a Love”

SYNOPSIS

Tony, once the leader of the Jets street gang in New York City, now tries to keep his distance from his former group and the rival Puerto Rican Sharks. He becomes particularly committed to peaceful coexistence once he meets a girl named Maria at a high school dance, and—with Maria’s fire escape as a balcony—they express their mutual devotion to the soaring sentiments of “Tonight.” But after Tony kills Maria’s brother, Bernardo, while trying to break up a rumble, warfare erupts anew, and even Maria’s best friend, Anita, urges her to stay away from Tony. In the end, Tony is killed by one of the Sharks and Maria is left grieving over his body.—*S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

The impetus for *West Side Story* has always fascinated me. Director-choreographer Jerome

Robbins recalled: “What was important was our aspiration. I wanted to find out at that time how far we, as ‘long-haired artists,’ could go in bringing our crafts and talents to a musical. Why did we have to do it separately and elsewhere? Why did Lenny [Bernstein] have to write an opera, Arthur [Laurents] a play, me a ballet? Why couldn’t we, in aspiration, try to bring our deepest talents together to the commercial theater in this work? That was the true gesture of the show.”

The trio’s 1957 experiment for Broadway had actually begun in 1949 with Robbins’s original concept: *East Side Story*, a modern-day adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* that explored the conflict between Italian Roman Catholics and Jews in New York. Soon abandoned due to the creators’ scheduling conflicts, the project reconvened in 1955 when newspaper headlines suggested a more compelling story: the gang wars in the West Side’s Hell’s Kitchen that pitted Italian-American youth against teenage Latinos. With the 24-year-old Stephen Sondheim invited to write lyrics, the creative team became a foursome.

The musical was groundbreaking in its content, to say nothing of its form. Said Laurents: “Bigotry, race, rape, murder, death were dealt with . . . as seriously as they would be in a play.” The theme: how love is destroyed when violence and hate close in.

But what was it, anyway? “We couldn’t define it,” wrote Laurents in his memoirs. “‘Musical theater’ would have been fine with me, but Lenny was conducting the Philharmonic and Jerry had begun working at Balanchine’s New York City Ballet; their aspirations were higher, grander. We settled for ‘lyric theater.’ It sounded good. What it meant, the work would say.”

But every producer in town was afraid of it—even the usually daring Cheryl Crawford, who dropped the musical out of fear that it would go too far. Said Robbins: “Producers didn’t like the score, they didn’t like the idea, they didn’t like what it was about. They didn’t like anything about it.” Laurents, who had never written a musical before, recalled an early backers’ audition in which “the opening number, performed with great gusto, went well; the next number went less well; the ones that followed less and still less. The gusto became terminal. There was no way to make a romp of the end of the first act with two dead bodies littering the stage; the response was nil unless boredom qualifies as a response.”

When Crawford exited, the entire project seemed doomed, but Sondheim’s friend Harold Prince jumped in at the eleventh hour with his partner Robert E. Griffith and Roger Stevens, and *West Side Story* would establish Prince’s reputation for producing cutting-edge musical theater on Broadway.

Astonishingly, *West Side Story* became a hit and had an even longer run in London, followed by the 1961 film version, which won the Academy Award for best picture. Its revivals include the successful 2009 production both directed and revised by Laurents, who commented at the time: “The musical theater and cultural conventions of 1957 made it next to impossible for the characters to have authenticity. Every member of both gangs was always a potential killer even then. [But] now they actually will be. Only Tony and Maria try to live in a different world.”

Laurents’s dedication to raising the stakes more than 50 years after this musical’s premiere affirms its importance in the canon. *West Side Story*—like *The Cradle Will Rock* before it and *Hair* and *Rent* after it—is one of the few musicals to take a fiercely pressing social issue right off the streets and put it on a Broadway stage.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The *West Side Story* presented by **Johnny Price** in 1960 is one of only two occasions during the production years (the other is 1958’s *Porgy and Bess*) when he booked in a musical that was touring summer tent theaters. And what Cleveland audiences received in this opening attraction of the seventh Musicarnival season stands as a high point in the theater’s history.

Great care and preparation were invested by Lenny-Debin Productions in making sure this 14-week tour of the musical adhered as closely as possible to the Broadway and London originals, despite the limitations imposed by staging the show in the round instead of on a proscenium stage.

Three artists were crucial to its success. Director **Gerald Freedman**—coincidentally a native of Lorain, Ohio—had served as Jerome Robbins’s assistant on the musical in both New York and London (a position he also held on two other Robbins shows: *Bells Are Ringing* in 1956 and the landmark *Gypsy* in 1959). Freedman was just beginning a notable career in the theater: The summer this *West Side Story* toured, he staged an Obie Award-winning *Taming of the Shrew* for Joseph Papp’s fledgling Shakespeare company in Central Park—the first of many Shakespeare productions there that would make Freedman a leading American director of the Bard. By 1967 he had become Papp’s artistic director of the newly formed Public Theater, where Freedman directed the world premiere of *Hair*. And his 50-year career ranged from musical theater and straight plays on Broadway and off, to operas at New York City Opera and San Francisco Opera, to a long tenure as artistic director of Cleveland’s Great Lakes Theater. Certainly no one but its creators knew *West Side Story* as intimately as he did.

Literally reproducing Robbins’s choreography was his Anybodys from the original cast,

Lee Becker, who as Lee Theodore went on to choreograph Broadway's *The Apple Tree* and *Baker Street* and founded the American Dance Machine, the self-proclaimed "living archive" of Broadway choreography. And at the time of this production, Leonard Bernstein had recently appointed musical director **Gregory Millar** the assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic.

The fidelity to Robbins's conception also extends to performers on the tour, including two veterans of the London production, **Marlys Watters** (Maria in this production and for 18 months in London) and **Yvonne Othon** (Anita, the role she understudied in London); a member of Robbins's Ballet USA, **Erin Martin** (Anybodys); and a member of the original cast, **Stephan Zema** (Bernardo in this production). Of special interest to musical theater mavens is the first non-ensemble work from the 17-year old **Michael Bennett** (Baby John), who revered Robbins and was influenced by his work in conceiving his own *A Chorus Line* and *Dreamgirls*.

The point is, even acknowledging the reduced size of the orchestra, this audio recording comes as close as we are likely to come to the sound, pacing and overall approach to performance of Robbins's original. Pirated full-length recordings of the 1980 Broadway revival do exist, but as far as we know, this is the only document recorded with a live audience in any proximity to the 1957 original—at least, the only recording that is available to the public.

The jolt of the production is omnipresent, and the seamless flow of theatrical elements (book, song, dialogue and dance music) designed by the creators remains awesome. More so than the film, the stage musical is truly *lean* and mean, and it's clear from the get-go that on one level this is a period piece reflecting a powerful moment in the urban zeitgeist of the late 1950s. Among the striking musical performances are the orchestra's rendering of "Cool," **Lester James's** (as Tony) exciting "Something's Coming" and the Watters-James duets on the propulsive "Tonight" and their deeply affecting "One Hand, One Heart."

Laurents was proud of the "economy" of his book; the published script for the second act numbers only 20 pages. But that also suggests a certain style for performing the dialogue—a style that must be respected. Laurents has written of the difficulty choreographers often encounter in directing actors, and he means Robbins when he observes, "Especially difficult for choreographers who have trouble with words is directing dancers speaking words for the first time." To Robbins's everlasting credit, part of his vision for this musical was to create a company in which all could sing, dance and act—standard practice now but unheard of at the time. He sought a Method approach to the acting, keeping the performers who played the Jets separate

from those playing the Sharks throughout the eight-week rehearsal process. He wanted each group to become its own clique; he wanted each gang to sound and look *real*.

We can appreciate this even in the audio recording, because in fact Gerald Freedman was brought into the production in 1957 to take the lead in directing the book scenes. They are naturalistic and stunningly taut to an extent we find in no other musical of the period, achieving Laurents's objective of dealing with the content of *West Side Story* as "seriously as [it] would be in a play." And so Freedman must be acknowledged here; it is significant that Carol Lawrence and Chita Rivera from the original production—both of them trained as dancers—have always bowed to the director who taught them how to act.

Musicarnival's *West Side Story* goes well beyond "summer stock."

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Interesting to read these from a year that predates the hit film, because as Stephen Sondheim has pointed out, until the movie took off, the songs in the score had not become hits, and the musical itself was still being eyed by many with suspicion. The Musicarnival presentation received a great deal of press—most of it positive—but no writer mentioned Sondheim's contribution, and only one acknowledged the work of Arthur Laurents. The most intriguing notice came from Arthur Spaeth in the *Sun Newspapers*: "*West Side Story* took on more urgency at Musicarnival. On Broadway, it was a framed animated picture. Stirring to eye and ear and heart, but remote and objective. At Musicarnival I experienced an odd change of status.... I became an actor in the drama: the helpless onlooker, aware of the impending tragedy but unable to stop it. This subjectivity—the sense of participation—is facet and asset of theater-in-the-round. But never before has it been so sharp." And in *Fine Music* magazine, James B. Gidney ended his review thus: "Johnny Price continues to earn our gratitude by his refusal to stick only to sure-fire commercial successes."—**B. R.**

ANYTHING GOES

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 20–July 3, 1960 (New York opening: November 21, 1934;
420 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse, revised by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, music and lyrics by Cole Porter

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Wilson Stone

LEADING PLAYERS

Joan Kibrig (Reno Sweeney), Gabriel Dell (Dr. Moon), Naomi Collier (Hope Harcourt), Marcella Dodge (Bonnie), William Skelton (Sir Evelyn Oakleigh), Lucille Benson (Mrs. Harcourt)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Get a Kick Out of You,” “You’re the Top,” “All Through the Night,” “Blow, Gabriel, Blow,” “Anything Goes,” “Be Like the Bluebird”

SYNOPSIS

Colorful characters decorate this show, set on board a ship bound from New York to London: nightclub singer Reno Sweeney; her chum Billy Crocker, who stows away to be near Hope Harcourt, the debutante he loves, who is engaged to a foolish Brit, Sir Evelyn Oakleigh; and Moon-Face Mooney, who masquerades as the clergyman Dr. Moon to avoid the long arm of the FBI.—**S. G.**

NOTES ON THE MUSICAL

Historians are prone to label *Anything Goes* the “quintessential” musical comedy of the 1930s, and I suspect it’s because the show insists on going its own merry way despite the backdrop of the Great Depression. There’s only one direct reference to the era in the script—when the captain of the musical’s ship mentions to stowaway Billy Crocker, “Do you know who once occupied that space? Herbert Hoover.” “Hoover?” Billy replies. “I never heard of him.”

So be it. What Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse crafted in this, the beginning of their amazing 30-year collaboration (which included *Life With Father* and the book for *The Sound of Music*), is Broadway bliss, and that’s to say nothing of the score by the man who’s usually given sole credit for the musical’s success. But revisiting the script (a “revision” that amounted to a virtual

reworking of the book by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse) uncovers a memorable mistaken-identity farce laced with magnificent songs.

Apparently the title was chosen to give the troika license to toss in anything they pleased. Yet this musical—the fourth-longest-running show of the decade—doesn't feel slapdash. It's very well constructed, with five characters competing for our attention: the evangelist-turned-nightclub singer Reno Sweeney (Ethel Merman); the stowaway-disguised-as-a-sailor Billy Crocker (William Gaxton); the object of Billy's affection, lovely Hope Harcourt (Bettina Hall); her ineffectual fiancé, Sir Evelyn Oakleigh (Houston Richards); and a fugitive from the law disguised as the Rev. Dr. Moon (Victor Moore).

Thus *Anything Goes* is more than the star vehicle for Merman that it's often portrayed to be, though it was certainly a big break in her career. In this, her second co-starring role in a book musical, she shared the stage with Gaxton and Moore, whom she praises in her autobiography as the “finest comedy team who ever worked.” The most telling photo taken of this show in 1934 lines them up left to right, looking concerned that some jig or other is up. To be sure, Merman won raves for her belt (serviced by Porter in “Blow, Gabriel, Blow” and the infectious title song), but also for her skill as a comedian.

One can only marvel at the methods by which the best shows of this period were concocted, since the authors had to embrace the idea of working around the talents of their star performers. Merman tells us: “In old-school musical comedy, the writers who used to think up the [scripts] ... started from scratch. When I met Lindsay and Crouse to talk about my part, they didn't even have a character in mind.... A producer would say, ‘I've signed Victor Moore. Get goin', buddy. Make with the Moore-type juks.’” (For example, “If you can't find me in the bar, look for me in the chapel.”) Or as Lindsay told Miles Kreuger, “[Crouse] and I would ask Bill [Gaxton], ‘What are you good at?’ He said, ‘Well, I do Chinese very well, and I do an imitation of a woman.’ And things like that.” But “somehow,” as Merman knew, “it all came together.”

The Porter score needs no boosterism from this corner; along with *Kiss Me, Kate*, it's regarded as his finest work for Broadway. But we're apt to forget that audiences found these witty, hyper-literate songs to be *hip* in 1934. *Time* magazine pointed out that the lyrics instantly became so popular that “it is now considered the smart thing to know them all by heart, to rattle them off loudly.” Russel Crouse recalled hearing Porter demonstrate the songs: “Beethoven, Bach, Wagner, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Debussy, Chopin, Verdi, Offenbach, Strauss, Haydn and Francis Scott Key could have marched in the room and I wouldn't have looked up.” An often-overlooked

gem is “Be Like the Bluebird,” written for Moore, in which Porter mocks the countless (and mostly idiotic) lift-your-spirits songs written during the Depression: “Be like the bluebird who never is blue, / For he knows from his upbringing what singing can do.”

Anything Goes is the most frequently revived American musical of the 1930s, but its evolution is a story in itself. Comparing the Musicarnival production with the original script issued by Broadway producer Vinton Freedley calls attention to the changes made by Lindsay and Crouse for the 1948 revival starring Gertrude Niesen and subsequently licensed for stock: particularly the first two scenes, which deprive Porter of the chance to open the musical with a ballad, “I Get a Kick Out of You,” which in 1934 expressed Reno’s unrequited love for Billy. Two later Porter songs were interpolated: “Count Your Blessings” and “Easy to Love” (though this was originally written in 1934 for Gaxton). “There’ll Always Be a Lady Fair” was cut.

Two years after Musicarnival mounted *Anything Goes*, a popular Off Broadway revival featured another revision by Guy Bolton with no fewer than six interpolated songs—but in the 1987 Lincoln Center and 2011 Roundabout productions, though interpolations remained, there was strong loyalty to the Lindsay and Crouse script (newly adapted by Thomas Crouse and John Weidman) and Porter’s original score.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Of all the **Johnny Price** Musicarnival productions I have curated to date (and I work in chronological order), this one is significant for the nearly uninterrupted laughter generated by the book scenes. Even more laughs—and many of them are belly laughs—than that well-nigh-perfect American musical comedy *Guys & Dolls*.

Several factors account for its success: As noted above, the script by Lindsay and Crouse is genuinely funny, with twists and turns that delight. This sort of piece—more farce than comedy—was a natural for director **Don Driver**, whose zany, multimedia take on *Twelfth Night*, given the hippieish title *Your Own Thing*—rocked Off Broadway in 1968.

And finally, his cast is boffo—so well balanced in the leads that one gets a sense of how the Merman-Gaxton-Moore trio played off each other 26 years earlier. **Joan Kibrig**, making her 10th appearance under the tent, seems to be channeling Merman in this one. **Robert Gallagher** fast-talks his way through all the escapades but emerges a credible romancer as well. And **Gabriel Dell**’s performance is particularly notable. One of the original slum kids in Sidney Kingsley’s drama *Dead End*, both on Broadway and in the film version, Dell was an actor of

impressive versatility whose musical theater work included Stephen Sondheim and Arthur Laurents's storied *Anyone Can Whistle* (as the funny/chilling Comptroller Schub). Trained at the Actors Studio, Dell presents a Dr. Moon who has nothing to do with Victor Moore's persona, but the comedy always rings true.

Whether or not *Anything Goes* was consciously programmed by Johnny to follow the tragic *West Side Story*, it's a testament to the range of theatergoing experiences he wanted to offer Cleveland. And here's some big news in 1960: For the first time (except for two booked-in productions) since the founding of the theater, **Boris Kogan** is not in the orchestra pit. The musical director was replaced after six seasons in Cleveland and two in Palm Beach. No one seems to know why, although there is talk among Musicarnival alums that Kogan and his producer argued constantly about tempos. Johnny thought Kogan's were too fast. (For whatever it's worth, not me.)

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

What's not to like? But what's fitting is that Porter, Lindsay and Crouse, Kibrig, Dell, Gallagher and director Driver ("with him it's now automatic," wrote Paul Mooney in *The Cleveland Press*) all won their share of plaudits. By the way, this was Driver's 19th show as director.—**B. R.**

THE VAGABOND KING

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 4–17, 1960 (New York opening: September 21, 1925;
515 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Rudolph Friml, lyrics by Brian Hooker, book by Brian Hooker, Russell Janney and W. H. Post, based on Justin McCarthy's *If I Were King*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Wilson Stone

LEADING PLAYERS

William Chapman (François Villon), Naomi Collier (Lady Katherine), William Skelton (King Louis XI), Al Medinets (Guy Tabarie), Dorothy Dallas (Huguette)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Song of the Vagabonds,” “Some Day,” “Only a Rose,” “Huguette Waltz,” “Love Me Tonight,” “Love for Sale,” “Nocturne”

SYNOPSIS

The central character is François Villon, the 15th-century French vagabond poet, who is appointed King of France for a day by Louis XI in order to save both his neck and Paris by leading his rabble of low degree against the Duke of Burgundy’s forces. In the battle with the Burgundians, Villon is rescued by his peasant sweetheart, Huguette, who gives up her own life to save his. As a fitting caper to his successful endeavors, Villon even wins the hand of the aristocratic Katherine de Vaucelles.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

The Vagabond King belongs to a subgenre of operetta: it’s a period piece that’s also an *adventure*, a species now extinct save for the anomalies of *Les Misérables* (1985) and Frank Wildhorn’s *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1998). Of the three major composers of American operetta—Victor Herbert, Sigmund Romberg and Rudolf Friml—it’s Friml (1879-1972), a native of Prague, who seems to have had the most abiding affection for musical adventures: In addition to his 1925 triumph, *Vagabond*, he composed the definitive swashbuckler, *The Three Musketeers*, three years later, and the year before *Vagabond*, he had filled the stage with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in *Rose Marie*.

As early as the 1930s, Friml’s kind of show had become obsolete on Broadway, and he knew it. “I like books with ... the old things,” he once said, “the finest things that were done long ago.... [Today there is] no romance, no glamour and no heroes. I can’t write music unless there are romance, glamour and heroes.”

Justin Huntly McCarthy’s 1901 play *If I Were King*, a heavily fictionalized account of French poet François Villon’s derring-do, gave Friml and his librettists the kind of source material the composer longed for. Born for operetta, McCarthy’s Villon is an outlaw, a romantic and a hero rolled into one; he flippantly describes himself to Lady Katherine as “one who steals without shame, perhaps. Or sticks a dagger into his enemy and sleeps with a clear conscience.” Yet he also declares, “When we who eat are hungry, when we who drink are dry, when we who glow

are frozen, our master to rebellious Burgundy will be the same. This is our answer—this and the drawn sword.”

Taking the lead with script and lyrics was Brian Hooker (1880-1946), an English professor at Yale University, an acclaimed translator of Edmund Rostand and an adaptor of W. S. Gilbert. As Friml’s biographer William Everett notes, Hooker’s presence “increased the intellectual level of the show.”

My friend Burton Lane (the composer of *Finian’s Rainbow* and *On a Clear Day...*) saw *Vagabond* on Broadway as a kid, and 60 years later he still lit up when he recalled the virile Dennis King—a trained Shakespearean actor—claiming the stage in the title role: “To hear him do ‘Song of the Vagabonds’ with male chorus—that was goose bumps: ‘Onward! Onward! Swords against the foe! / Forward! Forward! The lily banners go!’” Critic Percy Hammond enthused, “He has the voice of a canary, the grace of a swallow and the valor of an eagle.” (King’s performance was preserved on disc in three minutes to be savored. He also reprised the role in the 1930 film version co-starring Jeanette MacDonald.)

Thrilling is what these musical adventures aspired to be. *Vagabond* was billed as the “New Spectacular Musical Play”—and the script and lyrics by Hooker and Russell Janney (who doubled as producer), with an assist from W. H. Post, are dramatically effective, including some surprisingly good comedy when needed. It’s an operetta that women didn’t have to drag their husbands to. And thematically, this is worth noting: The show includes a female character (the prostitute Huguette) strong enough to save Villon’s life, losing her own in a duel.

Can you believe that producer Janney originally envisioned *Vagabond* with a score by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart? With all due respect to the young turks, this was Friml territory and his favorite work.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

It was one thing for **Johnny Price** to give Cleveland such beloved operetta chestnuts as *The Student Prince* and *The Desert Song*. But to produce *The Vagabond King*—that’s betting the store. And to mount it (as directed by **Don Driver**) with a straight face, except where the script’s comedy kicks in—that’s admirable.

Even for a middle-aged-and-older audience in 1960, *Vagabond* would have been virtually unknown. Thirty-five years after its Broadway run, the operetta had only been revived in New

York in a recent staging at the Metropolitan Opera, and Paramount's 1956 Technicolor treatment was not successful.

But by then, audiences clearly trusted the Price-Driver team. Lucky break: *Greenwillow*, the Frank Loesser Broadway musical that had **William Chapman** in a featured role, was a commercial failure (interestingly, Johnny invested in it), and this brilliant young artist, a four-time veteran of Musicarnival shows, was available to play the eponymous king-for-a-day. I can't imagine a more commanding presence. Chapman gets everything right, from the march for social justice, "Song of the Vagabonds," to that most tender of ballads, "Love Me Tonight," to Villon's roguish wit. What a shame that Julius Rudel, Chapman's longtime champion at New York City Opera, never called on him to essay the role in Manhattan.

The women are first-rate, too: Chapman's New York City opera colleague, the soprano **Naomi Collier**, as Katherine, and contralto **Dorothy Dallas** as the fiery prostitute Huguette (right after playing Sister Berthe on Broadway in *The Sound of Music!*). New company member **Al Medinets** nicely handles the bulk of the comedy, along with the troupe's utility actor, **Lawrence Vincent**, mostly underutilized onstage while directing the Musicarnival School offstage.

Friml would surely applaud the musical and choral direction of newcomer **Wilson Stone**, who in back-to-back productions—this operetta and the boisterous musical comedy *Anything Goes*—was nicely (if temporarily) filling the shoes of Musicarnival's founding conductor, Boris Kogan.

Regrettably, two pieces ("Drinking Song" and "Scotch Archers' Song") were cut from the Friml-Hooker score, but in all other ways, Driver's production is a very smart conception of *Vagabond*, with some helpful internal cuts and a restructuring from the old-fashioned four acts to two.

Even the melodramatic underscoring comes off beautifully here. Too bad this production didn't tour the tent-theater circuit. As the tapes demonstrate, the audience took *The Vagabond King* to their adventurous hearts.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Paul Mooney in *The Cleveland Press* was too young to surrender to the special theatrical allure of operetta: "*The Vagabond King*," he wrote, "is ready to enter the status of classics, where the audience is willing to forgive the outdated book and outmoded lyrics because the music is so beautiful." Describing Dorothy Dallas's Huguette as "a Medieval beatnik," however, was right on the money—and a compliment to Driver. H. L. Sanford in the *Sun Newspapers* understood

that “it takes producer Price, director Driver and a star like Chapman to give the story and the music its full impact.”—**B. R.**

PAL JOEY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 18–31, 1960 (New York opening: December 25, 1940;
374 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Lorenz Hart, book by John O’Hara

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Wilson Stone

LEADING PLAYERS

Richard France (Joey), Helena Bliss (Vera Simpson), Bobby Franklin (Linda English), Marcella Dodge (Gladys Bumps), Mildred Slavin (Melba), Al Medinets (Ludlow Lowell)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Could Write a Book,” “You Mustn’t Kick It Around,” “Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered,” “What Is a Man?,” “Our Little Den of Iniquity,” “Zip,” “That Terrific Rainbow,” “Take Him”

SYNOPSIS

Joey, a small-time Chicago entertainer, gets a job at Mike’s Club, where he is attracted to Linda English but drops her in favor of the rich Vera Simpson. Vera builds a glittering nightclub, the Chez Joey, for her paramour, but she soon tires of him, and at the end—after an encounter with blackmailers Ludlow Lowell and Gladys Bumps—Joey is off in search of other conquests.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

John O’Hara was no fool. In 1940 the singular, high-profile short-story writer and novelist, then 35, published a series of *New Yorker* stories—all in the form of letters—about a second- (or perhaps third-) rate nightclub entertainer named Pal Joey.

Listen to Joey's voice: "Pal Ted: Well, Chum, the poor man's Bing Crosby is still making with the throat here in Chi, but if the present good fortune keeps up I ought to be getting the New York break pretty soon. The trouble is up to now the good fortune has been keeping so far up it is up in the stratuspere [sic] out of sight. But never out of mind, kiddy. Never out of mind. N.Y. is where I belong. N.Y. or Hollywood or will settle for both. . . . Well, speaking of the charming opposite sex I have a little spot of anecdotes (I dote on anecdotes) to tell you which may amuse the chappies around Lebusen and give them all my best excepting those that I would not say I would not spit on them as I can hardly wait to spit on them. Well this is the story and not only a story but also a good thing to keep in mind in case you get in the same situation sometime yourself."

"Cocky, amoral, fiercely ambitious and incurably second-class," O'Hara's *New Yorker* colleague Brendan Gill once observed of Joey. To say nothing of delusional. Also an absolute original, with a strangely poetic nature that, when combined with the seedy nightclub milieu in which he thrived, made Pal Joey a candidate for the musical stage. O'Hara knew it and pitched the idea to Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, and with producer, director and (uncredited) book writer George Abbott in tow, the musical *Pal Joey* was born. Drawing from a number of the stories, it opened on Broadway on an ironically moral night: Christmas 1940.

The gestation wasn't easy—"problems right from the start," says Rodgers in his memoirs. As Abbott told me, O'Hara was an alcoholic, and like Hart, he couldn't be counted on to work regular hours. Abbott, a master architect of musicals, took it upon himself to significantly edit and rewrite the script as necessary—but that's not to take anything away from the creator's vision. Abbott also testified: "O'Hara would usually come in late in the day, if he came in at all. He'd take what I'd written, and then he'd add that Joey lingo that he alone could invent." In other words, truly realistic dialogue—a first for a musical. The crux of the show: the cynical, mutually opportunistic affair between Joey (Gene Kelly) and his benefactress, Vera Simpson (Vivienne Segal).

Much has been written about this show as a milestone: how it generated the first true heel (or if you prefer, antihero) on the musical stage; how Rodgers & Hart threw themselves into it (after all, Hart had been frequenting what O'Hara called "neighborhood joints" all his life); how the musical marked Kelly's only starring role on Broadway before setting his sights on Hollywood; and most famously, how Broadway's most respected critic, *The New York Times*'s Brooks Atkinson, distanced himself from the musical in 1940, calling it "odious," which was at least a defensible position. There's a reference to cocaine as early as the second page of the script, and the song "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" rejects romance in favor of unapologetic sex. "Although it

is expertly done,” Atkinson concluded, “can you draw sweet water from a sour well?”

But by the time of its Broadway revival in 1952—eight years before the Musicarnival production—the show’s stock had gone up; as Rodgers noted, *Pal Joey* was now regarded as the “freshest, most exciting musical of the season.” Half of the score is diegetic, and these “tacky” nightclub numbers (Rodgers’s apt term) were great fun. But it’s the character-driven pieces that endure: besides “Bewitched” in its unexpurgated form, the sardonic “Take Him” and “What Is a Man?” Another treasure, Joey’s rueful cut song, “I’m Talking to My Pal” (“I can’t be sure of girls, I’m not at home with men—I’m ending up with me again”), has gained currency through the years in cabarets.

When the revival opened, Rodgers wrote a piece for the Sunday *New York Times*, and it illuminates why the O’Hara–Rodgers–Hart team struck gold: “Larry Hart knew what John O’Hara knew—that Joey was not disreputable because he was mean, but because he had too much imagination to behave himself and because he was a little weak. While Joey himself may have been fairly adolescent in his thinking and his morality, the show bearing his name certainly wore long pants and in many ways forced the entire musical-comedy theater to wear long pants for the first time.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Undoubtedly **Johnny Price**’s decision to program *Pal Joey* was at least partially driven by the success of the 1957 film starring Frank Sinatra, Rita Hayworth and Kim Novak. But the audiences who thronged under the tent must have been surprised by what Johnny and director **Don Driver** served up, because Hollywood’s *Pal Joey*—sanitized and ultimately sentimental—is not the stage version by a long shot.

The tapes reveal, however, that the Cleveland crowd bought into the often-downbeat story. Though he played the title role on Broadway for a short time in the 1952 revival, and then in London, **Richard France** lacks the seedy allure of Harold Lang; not enough “anti” in this antihero. But in her utter world-weariness, **Helena Bliss**, who had first portrayed Vera Simpson the year before at Paper Mill Playhouse and had given New York City Opera an acclaimed Julie in *Show Boat*, projects star quality all the way.

Musicarnival’s Linda, **Bobby Franklin**, is much too legit to make us believe her innocence in “I Could Write a Book,” but comic actors **Al Medinets** and **William Skelton** as, respectively, blackmailer Ludlow Lowell and club owner Mike paint O’Hara’s world in bold colors. As

Melba, **Mildred Slavin** offers a “Zip” that lands with the audience as much as possible given the inside-joke nature of Larry Hart’s topical satire on Gypsy Rose Lee.

Driver follows the original, except for two distressing changes in the score: cutting one of the best of the diegetic numbers, “Happy Little Hunting Horn,” and interpolating Rodgers & Hart’s “My Funny Valentine”—a choice that panders to the *Pal Joey* film audience. In the movie they heard it for the first time in a show that wasn’t *Babes in Arms*, from whence it came.

I can’t resist an aside about Don Driver, whose program bio got longer each year (here it’s a full page). For this production he gives himself not only “Entire Production Directed by” billing, but a box surrounding it. Do you suppose he got the idea from Jerome Robbins or Bob Fosse?

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Both major papers gave this musical the space it deserved. For Harlowe Hoyt in *The Plain Dealer*, Richard France was a “most estimable young man” as Joey: “He makes this odiferous character a believable crumb from a nightclub waiter’s napkin.” But it was Helena Bliss’s Vera who stole the notices from all corners. “The name of Helena Bliss in this production,” wrote Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press*, “should be forever blessed, for she is a pro among pros. . . . Regardless of what this performer is doing, she can immediately toss herself into a song and belt it to all corners of the tent. Nobody else in the cast can do this. It is natural. She commands the scene with the same nonchalance that you may eat your breakfast eggs.”—**B. R.**

FANNY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 1–14, 1960 (New York opening: November 4, 1954;
888 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Harold Rome, book by S. N. Behrman and Joshua Logan, based on the trilogy by Marcel Pagnol

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Wilson Stone

LEADING PLAYERS

Joshua Hecht (César), Al Medinets (Panisse), Laurie Franks (Fanny), Harry Theyard (Marius), Lucille Benson (Honorine), Dave Williamson (The Admiral)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Restless Heart,” “Never Too Late for Love,” “Why Be Afraid to Dance?,” “Welcome Home,” “I Like You,” “Fanny,” “I Have to Tell You,” “To My Wife,” “Love Is a Very Light Thing,” “Be Kind to Your Parents”

SYNOPSIS

The tale concerns Marius, who yearns to go to sea; his father, César, the local café owner; Panisse, a well-to-do middle-aged sailmaker; and Fanny Cabanis, the girl beloved by both Marius and Panisse. Though Fanny conceives a child with Marius just before he ships off, Panisse marries her and brings up the boy as his own. When Marius returns, demanding both Fanny and their son, César convinces him that Panisse has the more rightful claim. Years later, however, the dying Panisse dictates a letter to Marius offering him Fanny’s hand in marriage.—*S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Critic Walter Kerr was seldom a perceptive judge of musical theater, but in 1954, his review of *Fanny* for the *New York Herald Tribune* beautifully captured what its authors intended: “The combination of sentiment, surprise, humor and plausible psychology is virtually irresistible.”

Sounds like Kerr is reviewing a Rodgers & Hammerstein show. And in fact, the Masters came very close to taking on this musical adaptation of Marcel Pagnol’s epic trilogy of films, *Marius*, *Fanny* and *César*. In the case of the Broadway *Fanny*, however, we should be grateful that the task fell to noted playwright S. N. Behrman, director (and co-librettist) Joshua Logan and composer-lyricist Harold Rome. Because what the three men fashioned is their own laudable version of a serious-minded Rodgers & Hammerstein “musical play”: dramatically impeccable, to be sure, but in this case with an added layer of earthiness rarely seen in our musical theater. It took some three years to prepare.

Fanny is the only musical ever penned by the prolific Behrman (1893-1973), best known for stylish Broadway comedies that are essentially character studies. On the Marseille waterfront of *Fanny* he found four people to love: two aging friends, César and Panisse, who have been comically sparring all their lives, and two young people, Fanny and Marius, whose passion for each other creates a

tangled emotional web for all four. At first, it may not seem like a Behrman project, but his writing had great warmth (revisit his famous *New Yorker* profiles), and honest sentiment was one of the hallmarks: Josh Logan called him “the only man [he] knew who could charm birds off trees.”

And then there was Harold Rome, a splendid songwriter of satirical revues whose first book show, the 1952 musical comedy *Wish You Were Here* (produced by Musicarnival in 1955), offered the first real indication of his own humanism—so generously shared in *Fanny*, and strengthened by soaring, nearly operatic music (“Restless Heart,” “Welcome Home,” the title song) that takes your breath away. In Logan’s view, it was “one of the solid great scores of all time.”

As for Logan: The man was an innovator in musical theater realism and stagecraft (consider 1949’s *South Pacific*, produced at Musicarnival a whopping six times), and his contribution to *Fanny* cannot be overestimated. For example, the powerful moment at the end of the first act that begins with Fanny leading Marius to his bedroom and cinematically dissolves to the dock, where César clutches his son’s hat as the chorus accompanies the young sailor’s departure on the ship *Malaisie*. Logan continued to work through the early 1970s on Broadway and in films, but his later musicals all proved to be problematic, including the film versions of *South Pacific*, *Camelot* and *Paint Your Wagon*.

However, more than 60 years after its debut, *Fanny*, produced by David Merrick, is one of the towering achievements of the American musical in the second half of the 20th century. The cast album is treasurable, and just listen to Logan identify his extraordinary cast: “Ezio Pinza, tired of Hollywood, agreed to play César because Raimu, who played the role in the French [trilogy], reminded Pinza of his father. Walter Slezak was persuaded to play Panisse, and we got two young people with beautiful voices for the young lovers, [the 20-year-old] Florence Henderson and Bill Tabbert [Lieutenant Cable in Broadway’s *South Pacific*].”

What made Johnny Price think he could pull off this daunting musical under a tent in summer stock?

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Casting, as they say, is more than half the battle, and **Johnny** and director **Don Driver** gave Cleveland a cast for *Fanny* that would be the envy of any city in America at that time. In his welcome to the audience, the impresario tells us point-blank that this is “one of our best productions in seven seasons.” It is.

The four principal roles are beautifully played. Musicarnival’s long relationship with New

York City Opera—then the most adventurous opera company in the land—supplied three of the four. As César, the 30-year-old **Joshua Hecht**, already the company’s leading basso, made his Musicarnival debut, singing the role with more passion than Ezio Pinza (if that’s heresy, keep in mind that the former Metropolitan Opera star and matinee idol in Broadway’s *South Pacific* was at the end of his career) and acting it with more subtlety. Listen to Hecht’s “Welcome Home” and you’ll find a very different, but equally convincing, interpretation of this Harold Rome gem. In his memoir *First and Lasting Impressions*, former NYCO general director Julius Rudel describes Hecht as “the kind of performer who felt himself *being* the role and could completely immerse himself in a character. Our company was so versatile, it seemed anybody could do anything.”

As previously noted, tenor **Harry Theyard** was also a Rudel protégé at NYCO, and by the time he got to playing the sea-obsessed Marius in Cleveland’s *Fanny*, he had exercised his musical theater chops in five different roles at Palm Beach Musicarnival. Extreme versatility was part of Theyard’s credo as well: In early 1960 the roles ranged from the royal Caliph in *Kismet* to Rocky, the intellectually challenged ballplayer in *Damn Yankees*. As with Hecht, Theyard’s Marius is just as good as, if not better than, the original Broadway performance. William Tabbert’s shimmering voice did not always make up for his stolid acting.

Laurie Franks, who began her career in 1956 as an ensemble player at Musicarnival, understudied Florence Henderson on Broadway in the title role; her *Fanny* is a nuanced struggle with emotional conflict. And **Al Medinets**, another NYCO veteran, reaches out to the audience with Panisse’s huge heart.

Wilson Stone’s work with the chorus is majestic, but encountering the show after many years, I was struck by how surprisingly intimate this musical is—another reason why presenting it up close and in the round worked so well. Musicarnival’s quartet of singing actors do full justice to *Fanny*, so that Johnny’s invitation to the audience just before the overture rang true: “And now, laugh with us, cry with us.”

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Jim Herron went all out in his *Cleveland Press* caricature for *Fanny*: drawings of six of the characters, including the belly dancer! And *Press* critic Paul Mooney tells us why: “An assemblage of extraordinarily fine voices gives Musicarnival its brightest show of the season.... Harold Rome’s songs always identify themselves with the action perfectly. And that is the magic of *Fanny*, the bitters-and-butter musical.... Hecht and Medinets feud, fight and fuss all during the proceedings, only to tear your heart out in a deathbed farewell.” Wrote Harlowe R. Hoyt in *The*

Plain Dealer: “Don Driver displays his directorial ability in surprise situations . . . It appeals to me as the best offering staged by [Musicarnival] this season.”—**B. R.**

REDHEAD

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

September 5–18, 1960 (New York opening: February 5, 1959;
452 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Albert Hague, lyrics by Dorothy Fields, book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, Sidney Sheldon and David Shaw

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Wilson Stone

LEADING PLAYERS

Mara Lynn (Essie Whimple), Nolan Van Way (Tom Baxter), Don Driver (George), William Skelton (Howard Cavanaugh), Imogene Bliss (Sarah Simpson), Georgine Cleveland (Maude Simpson), Al Medinets (Inspector White), Stanton Downs (Sir Charles Willingham)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“The Right Finger of My Left Hand,” “Just for Once,” “Merely Marvelous,” “The Uncle Sam Rag,” “Ernie Fitch’s Twitch,” “My Girl Is Just Enough Woman for Me,” “Look Who’s in Love”

SYNOPSIS

The story takes place in London in the early 1900s. At the Simpson Sisters’ Waxworks, where the wax images are made by the Cockney lass Essie Whimple, a model of a recently murdered young woman offends the victim’s brother, Tom Baxter. Essie and Tom join forces to solve a murder, which, after Essie gets the chance to perform “Ernie Fitch’s Twitch” at the Odeon Music Hall, they do.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL, A NOTE ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION,
AND CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Researchers exploring the Musicarnival Audio Archive are probably making one of their first stops at this junction: the crossroads of a piece of Broadway esoterica and **Johnny Price's** theater in Cleveland, soon after *Redhead's* New York run ended. **But there is bad news: Of the hundreds of extant reel-to-reel tapes made at Musicarnival between 1954 and 1965, the *Redhead* recording—one performance only, September 18, 1960—is one of several tapes that is unlistenable due to egregious distortion throughout.** The tape has been preserved for its historical significance, but even with the script at your side, you will be thwarted.

Redhead is one of only a few musical comedy whodunits; the other notable specimens are Rupert Holmes's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1985) and *A Gentlemen's Guide to Love and Murder* (2012). Each was a hit in its day, but although the three murder mysteries won the Tony Award for best musical of their respective seasons, none found a permanent place in the repertoire. What distinguished *Redhead* were Tony Award performances by Gwen Verdon and Richard Kiley, a disarming score by Albert Hague (his first since *Plain and Fancy*) and the great Dorothy Fields, and both choreography and direction by the unstoppable Bob Fosse.

The pedestrian script, which I had never read before I began this project (nor have I ever seen the musical; who has?), offers little indication that *Redhead* was a smash in 1959. The cast album exudes energy, but not enough to tell us what made the musical work besides Verdon. Ethan Mordden does, however, in *Coming Up Roses: The Broadway Musical in the 1950s*: "It was Fosse's idea, I surmise, to create a musical so smart and tense and sexy that he didn't want a strongly written show: he wanted a show that he could stage strongly, a presentation piece, Fosse as super-director.... *Redhead* was about making a hit musical out of nothing but imagination and fun.... [It] was a museum of the grotesque, sex and tricks and murder: but stupendous fun."

So we probably haven't missed much in being deprived of the Musicarnival production (though **Don Driver** was such an imaginative director that it would be fascinating to know his take on it). And there's no star power in Musicarnival's version of Verdon and Kiley: just a reputable dancer, **Mara Lynn**, and a reputable baritone, **Nolan Van Way**—both with Broadway credits.

We can't leave the audio train wreck, however, without noting the *Cleveland Press* review, because it points to a problem looming in the background of Johnny's tent and others like it. "Not one of Musicarnival's best offerings," wrote the diplomatic Stan Anderson. "The musical seems to have a tough time living up to the reputation it somehow acquired in New York City....

Musicarnival looked vulnerable when it booked some old shows for this season. As it turned out, the old ones have had more punch than the new ones.”

Johnny told his audience at *Redhead* that he was negotiating to produce *The Music Man*, *Flower Drum Song* and *My Fair Lady* in 1961. (He would have to wait until 1962 for the first two and 1964 for the third.) Paul Mooney, in a piece for *The Cleveland Press* headlined “Tent Shows Reflect Broadway Drought,” worried about the lack of new product: “There is no possible way out of the dilemma but for the producers to schedule the tried and true.... Musicarnival, which has more venerable shows this season than ever before, believes in the formula. Its biggest gross last year came on *The Student Prince*.... Musicarnival is doing what most of the other 25 members of the Musical Arena Theater Assn. are giving their audiences this summer—with one exception. For the first time in its seven-year history, there is no Rodgers & Hammerstein musical slated.... The recent lean years for musicals on Broadway have caught up with the tent theaters. The successes are long-run untouchables and the others are hardly worth doing.”

An overstatement, to be sure, but a sign of trouble. The last five seasons of Musicarnival’s “production years” would be more challenging than the first seven. (Total audience attendance in 1960 was a mind-boggling 220,000.) *Redhead*’s audio distortion is in some ways a metaphor.—**B. R.**



Harry Theyard and Laurie Franks in Fanny

1961 Season (West Palm Beach)

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 28–March 5 (New York opening: May 16, 1946;
1,147 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Joan Kibrig (Annie Oakley), Lawrence Brooks (Frank Butler), Lucille Benson (Dolly Tate), David Davis (Charlie Davenport), Charles Reynolds (Colonel Buffalo Bill), Alfred Dennis (Chief Sitting Bull), Barbara Bostock (Winnie Tate), Tommy Keeler (Don Sky)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Doin’ What Comes Natur’lly,” “You Can’t Get a Man With a Gun,” “The Girl That I Marry” “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” “They Say It’s Wonderful,” “Moonshine Lullaby,” “I Got Lost in His Arms,” “My Defenses Are Down,” “I Got the Sun in the Morning,” “Anything You Can Do”

SYNOPSIS

Annie Oakley, an illiterate hillbilly living never Cincinnati, demonstrates her remarkable marksmanship and is persuaded—through the convincing claim “There’s No Business Like Show Business”—to join Colonel Buffalo Bill’s traveling Wild West Show. Annie, who needs only one look to fall hopelessly in love with Frank Butler, the show’s featured shooting ace, soon eclipses Butler as the main attraction, which doesn’t help the cause of romance. She exhibits her skills at such locales at the Minneapolis Fair Grounds and Governor’s Island, New York, where in a shooting contest with Frank, she realizes that the only way to win the man is to lose the match.—*S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1958 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

With this production—the opening of **Johnny Price**'s fourth season in West Palm Beach—director **David Davis** gives the audience a sparkling account of the Irving Berlin–Dorothy and Herbert Fields classic: In fact, it's as good as Don Driver's Cleveland mounting in 1958.

Since *Annie Get Your Gun* was created as a vehicle for Ethel Merman, the first and most important question will always be: How's the Annie? And the answer is: splendid. Musicarnival loyalist **Joan Kibrig** (formerly Joan Bentley) provides the best evidence to date that only bad luck kept her from achieving stardom on Broadway. In her bio, there's some language that feels like it comes right from Johnny, who adored her: "Joan Kibrig means something very special to Musicarnival and its audiences. First of all, because we have never had a season—winter or summer, Palm Beach or Cleveland—without at least one appearance from the incomparable Joan. Secondly, because she has performed an array of parts that usually call for three distinctly different types of actresses, and has done every one of these roles to perfection."

Kibrig's Annie ranks with the best. Merman, of course, famously declared that with this show, Irving "made a lady" out of her. Kibrig goes deeper. She gets all the laughs—even in the lyrics—and she's got the feistiness, but she's also wonderfully natural and vulnerable: She gives the marvelous "Moonshine Lullaby" a tender high note at the end that none of her predecessors had ever tried. In this, her eighth season with Johnny, she's at the top of her game.

The welcome surprise in the production is her Frank Butler, **Lawrence Brooks**, best known for creating the role of Edvard Grieg in the 1944 Broadway operetta *Song of Norway*. Brooks reprised the role in Cleveland for Johnny to deserved acclaim, but his work in truly contemporary pieces like *Silk Stockings* usually disappointed. Too stiff! At 49, he was much too old for Frank, but he convinces here. He and Kibrig work well together.

The whole enterprise hits the mark, and we may even excuse some of the political incorrectness in the Fieldses' portrait of the Indians. That's because Kibrig's openhearted Annie Oakley embraces all cultures, and by comparison, characters like Dolly Tate (**Lucille Benson**) can be seen as the racists they are.

One dramaturgical note: The Musicarnival production was one of the last to retain the secondary

couple, Tommy Keeler (**Don Sky**) and Winnie Tate (**Barbara Bostock**), who sing and dance two neglected numbers with verve, “Who Do You Love, I Hope?” and the swinging “I’ll Share It All With You.” Five years later, in the Lincoln Center revival starring Merman, Tommy and Winnie had been banished from the musical.

And a word about the audience: As we’ve noted, Johnny had some teaching to do in the first few seasons in West Palm Beach, where professional live theater was a fairly new concept. The response of the audience was often tepid, which must have been dispiriting for the performers. Whether the difference here is Johnny’s tutelage (he used to chide them gently in his welcomes: “This isn’t television, you know!”) or the high quality of this *Annie*, the audience is large and fully engaged—the first time in Florida that I’ve heard applause for actors’ entrances and exits.

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Unfortunately, no reviews of this production appear to have survived, but a feature story on Johnny is useful in understanding the Musicarnival “brand” as it developed in Palm Beach. The *Palm Beach Times* noted: “With this year’s improved weather and with the larger attendance as residents and visitors have become more aware of the lively entertainment offered in the colorful tent theater, its owner feels better about prospects for the future.... The name of John L. Price brings to their minds a picture of exuberance, friendliness and an energetic personal drive.... ‘It’s very unusual,’ Joan Kibrig says of Price’s feelings toward those working for him. ‘And we all think the world of *him*.’ ”—**B. R.**

FANNY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 7–12, 1961 (New York opening: November 4, 1954;
888 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Harold Rome, book by S. N. Behrman and Joshua Logan, based on the trilogy by Marcel Pagnol

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Joshua Hecht (César), Alfred Dennis (Panisse), Christine Matthews (Fanny), Richard Ambruster (Marius), Lucille Benson (Honorine), Jack McCormack (The Admiral)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Restless Heart,” “Never Too Late for Love,” “Why Be Afraid to Dance?,” “Welcome Home,” “I Like You,” “Fanny,” “I Have to Tell You,” “To My Wife,” “Love Is a Very Light Thing,” “Be Kind to Your Parents”

SYNOPSIS

The tale concerns Marius, who yearns to go to sea; his father, César, the local café owner; Panisse, a well-to-do middle-aged sailmaker; and Fanny Cabanis, the girl beloved by both Marius and Panisse. Though Fanny conceives a child with Marius just before he ships off, Panisse marries her and brings up the boy as his own. When Marius returns, demanding both Fanny and their son, César convinces him that Panisse has the more rightful claim. Years later, however, the dying Panisse dictates a letter to Marius offering him Fanny’s hand in marriage.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1960 SEASON (Cleveland)

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

This *Fanny* is in some respects a rerun of **Johnny Price**’s production in Cleveland just seven months earlier. Three principals reprised their performances in Palm Beach: New York City Opera’s **Joshua Hecht** (a magnificent César), **Alfred Dennis** (formerly Al Medinets as Panisse) and Johnny’s favorite female character actor, **Lucille Benson** (Honorine).

In general, however, it must be said that this go-round is not as proficient as the Cleveland original. **Richard Ambruster** (Marius), who had a long career in theater, film and television, lacks **Harry Theyard**’s from-the-gut intensity as Marius, and **Christine Matthews** misses the torment of **Laurie Franks**’s Fanny. Director **David Davis**, unlike 1960’s Don Driver, allows actors to overplay, throwing some fragile scenes off-balance. And **Boris Kogan**’s orchestra is occasionally ragged.

Yet what’s remarkable about the evening is the audience’s connection to a demanding and essentially serious musical theater piece. Johnny truly helped to develop the taste of this Florida community.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

This production generated the most informed review I've seen thus far in the Palm Beach newspapers. Jonathan Koontz in the *Palm Beach Times* noted: "One of the best books on the American musical stage.... Musicarnival's *Fanny* is the most interesting show of the season. Most exciting of the newcomers is Joshua Hecht, whose bass is one of the finest ever heard here, and whose acting ability matches the voice.... The play has much more depth than the average musical. True, it has lots of laughs, lots of songs and plenty of dancing. But it also has some serious things to say, and it does not dodge."

Although for obvious reasons these annotations seldom delve into the physical productions, a story by Margaret Buhrman in the *Palm Beach Post* is quotable: "Musicarnival, we have learned, is five to 10 years ahead of contemporary tent theaters in design and equipment. It has already served as a model for theater-in-the-round in Buffalo, NY. And many of the features incorporated into the Musicarnival settings here and in Cleveland have been adopted by a theater at Fort Worth, Texas.... The huge grid towering above the stage can handle more than a ton of scenery that can be lowered onto the stage. Clowns in the arena theater's production of *Fanny* this week use the grid in a circus scene that features dance, trapeze and wire-walking acts.... Light boards were custom-designed, and the sound system boasts 72 amplifiers, placed above the audience, eight in each section, for the purpose of clear enunciation."—**B. R.**

CAROUSEL

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 14–19, 1961 (New York opening: April 19, 1945;
890 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Boris Kogan

LEADING PLAYERS

Lawrence Brooks (Billy Bigelow), Christine Matthews (Julie Jordan), Joan Kibrig (Carrie Pipperidge), Glenn Burris (Enoch Snow), David Davis (Jigger Craigin), Lucille Benson (Mrs. Mullin)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Carousel Waltz” (instrumental), “You’re a Queer One, Julie Jordan,” “Mister Snow,” “If I Loved You,” “Blow High, Blow Low,” “June Is Bustin’ Out All Over,” “When the Children Are Asleep,” “Soliloquy,” “What’s the Use of Wondrin’?,” “You’ll Never Walk Alone”

SYNOPSIS

Billy Bigelow, a boastful and sometimes violent carnival barker, catches the eye of Julie Jordan, a local factory worker, and soon they fall in love and get married. Julie finds herself pregnant, and Billy begins to doubt his ability to provide for his offspring, especially if it’s a girl. He gets involved with a ne’er-do-well, Jigger Craigin, who convinces Billy to join him in a scheme to rob a wealthy businessman. The robbery is botched, and Billy, knowing he will be caught, kills himself. After he spends 15 years in purgatory, the Starkeeper, in heaven, suggests that Billy might redeem himself by doing a good deed and allows the young man one day back on earth. Billy returns to find his daughter, Louise, grown up and ready to graduate from high school. He tries to reach out to his insecure daughter, but in frustration ends up hitting her. The slap does not sting, since it is motivated by love, not hate. Somehow, though unseen by her, he manages to instill a confidence in her exemplified by the song “You’ll Never Walk Alone.”—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1958 SEASON (Palm Beach)

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Talk about derring-do: What tent-theater producer other than **Johnny Price** would have attempted back-to-back productions of *Fanny* and *Carousel*, two of the most demanding pieces in the repertoire? This time not even Johnny could succeed.

Compared to his 1958 production in Palm Beach, this *Carousel* seems aimless. Three years earlier Stephen Douglass and Arlyne Frank, his Billy Bigelow and Julie Jordan, may have been uninspired, but they were reputable. This time around, **Lawrence Brooks** and **Christine Matthews** are downright incapable of grappling with their characters’ riveting complexities—most damagingly in a heavy-handed bench scene. And Brooks, who was admittedly a singer first, actor second, gets lost in the vocal arc of “Soliloquy.” All he has to show for Rodgers & Hammerstein’s seven minutes of great writing is a blow-the-house-down climax.

David Davis, who directed, plays Jigger Craigin in a performance that is so self-indulgent—so disrespectful of the authors’ intentions—that it’s no wonder the production as a whole fails. To make matters worse, reducing the orchestration to just 12 musicians in **Boris Kogan**’s pit harms a spectacular score.

Who’s good? Two actors who played the same roles in 1958: **Joan Kibrig** (such warmth as Carrie) and **Lucille Benson** (a touchingly frustrated Mrs. Mullin). And **Alfred Dennis** moves from his co-starring role in *Fanny* to a brief but knowing appearance as Mr. Bascombe.

It’s telling that the only vociferous applause of the evening is for a guest in the audience introduced by Johnny during the pre-show welcome: former world heavyweight boxing champion **Ingemar Johansson**.

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Mine is again the minority view. Jonathan Koontz in the *Palm Beach Post* found Brooks and Matthews to be the “most satisfying things” in the production, and in the *Daily News* Pat Parrish predicted, “*Carousel* will be hard to top this season.”—**B. R.**

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 21–26, 1961 (New York opening: December 8, 1949;
740 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Leo Robin, book by Joseph Fields and Anita Loos, adapted from her novel

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Boris Kogan (this performance conducted by Larry Brown)

LEADING PLAYERS

Joan Kibrig (Lorelei Lee), Christine Matthews (Dorothy Shaw), Karen Jensen (Gloria Stark), Charles Reynolds (Sir

Francis Beekman), Judith Daykin (Lady Beekman), Lawrence Brooks (Gus Edmond), Glenn Burris (Henry Spofford)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Bye, Bye, Baby,” “A Little Girl From Little Rock,” “Just a Kiss Apart,” “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend”

SYNOPSIS

Set in the 1920s, the musical occurs mostly aboard the *Ile de France*, which is taking Lorelei Lee and her chum Dorothy Shaw to Paris, courtesy of Lorelei’s generous friend, button tycoon Gus Esmond. En route, the girls meet a number of accommodating gentlemen, including Sir Francis Beekman, who loses a diamond tiara to Lorelei (who thereby wins a best friend), and Henry Spofford, a Philadelphia Main Liner who loses his heart to Dorothy.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1957 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

“Style” is an essential element of the success of some musicals, and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is one of them. Anita Loos’s comic novel (and her 1949 musical adaptation with Joseph Fields) is nothing *but* style—an off-the-wall take on the gold diggers who helped define the Roaring Twenties. **Johnny Price**’s 1957 production in Cleveland, though less than top-notch, had it; this iteration in Palm Beach, directed by **David Davis**, doesn’t.

Joan Kibrig, who I’d assumed could do no wrong, just isn’t funny here and seems trapped by an attempt to imitate Carol Channing’s notorious “little girl from Little Rock,” Miss Lorelei Lee. Perhaps Kibrig was tired by the time March rolled around, having played in *Can-Can* (lead), *Annie Get Your Gun* (lead) and *Carousel* (featured role). There are limits, after all, to even the most accomplished performers. Falling short are **Christine Matthews**, **Lawrence Brooks**, **David Davis** (doubling as an actor) and virtually everyone but Johnny’s always dependable comic **Lucille Benson**.

Oh, and one performer whose career would take her in an entirely different direction. **Judith Daykin** was a sophomore studying stage design at the University of Iowa when she took a semester off from school to join the Musicarnival staff as a scene painter. She spent a number of years at Musicarnival in both Cleveland and Palm Beach, winding up as Johnny’s production manager. And long story short: In New York she later held leadership positions with the Paul Taylor Dance Company and Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). Perhaps most notably, Daykin served as president and executive director of City Center, where in 1994 she and Ted Chapin

masterminded the Encores! series of Great American Musicals in Concert. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Daykin has a small part as Lady Beekman (made even smaller by the cutting of one of her scenes), but she nonetheless registers as a very smart actor who can etch a character with little help from the script.

The big news in Johnny's welcome is the appointment of a new musical director, **Larry Brown**. Apparently **Boris Kogan**—who had held the post since Musicarnival's founding in 1954—was suddenly fired, and his assistant, Brown (a native of Florida), picked up the baton and conducts this performance. Veteran observers recall that the once-brilliant Kogan had become increasingly lackadaisical. Brown does not impress here, but he's hampered by a meager nine-piece orchestra that can hardly do justice to Jule Styne and Leo Robin's snappy 1920s pastiche score.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Joe Bryant in the *Fort Lauderdale News*: "After riding atop the breaker for four successive weeks, Musicarnival hit its low ebb of the season this week with *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*." I rest my case.—**B. R.**

LI'L ABNER

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 28–April 2, 1961 (New York opening: November 15, 1956;
693 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Norman Panama and Melvin Frank (based on characters created by Al Capp), lyrics by Johnny Mercer, music by Gene de Paul

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Larry Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Chet Sommers (Li'l Abner), Patricia Northrup (Daisy Mae), Alfred Dennis (Marryin' Sam), T. J. Halligan (General

Bullmoose), Diana Banks (Mammy Yokum), Jerry Rice (Pappy Yokum), Charles Reynolds (Earthquake McGoon)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“If I Had My Druthers,” “Jubilation T. Cornpone,” “Namely You,” “The Country’s in the Very Best of Hands,” “I’m Past My Prime,” “The Matrimonial Stomp”

SYNOPSIS

The denizens of Dogpatch lead their quiet hillbilly lives, with Daisy Mae forever trying to get dimwitted Abner Yokum to marry her, until they discover that the government plans to wipe them out due to their very “unnecessariness.” But Mammy Yokum’s Yokumberry Tonic proves to be a medical miracle, transforming scrawny men into muscle-bound hunks (but with the unfortunate side of eliminating their libido). With the discovery of a proclamation by none other than Abraham Lincoln, the day is saved for Abner, Daisy Mae and the other Dogpatchians.

—*K. B., S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1959 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The West Palm Beach production of this musical comedy treasure is every bit the equal of **Johnny Price**’s 1959 showing in Cleveland. All the leading players shine (and the only actor reprising his role is the young **Jerry Rice** as the old Pappy Yokum); and from the audience response, one can only assume that choreographer **Don Sky** nailed the uproarious “Sadie Hawkins” ballet.

What comes through more than anything is that actors will be actors. When given first-rate material such as this in script, music and lyrics, good performers thrive.

Again I must register regret that Johnny Price cut Johnny Mercer’s trenchant comment on American conformity, “Oh, Happy Day”—apparently he wasn’t convinced it would land with audiences in either Cleveland or West Palm Beach. But all in all, this is splendid work, and I was struck by his welcome to this, the final production of his fourth season in Florida. “It’s so heartening,” he says, “to feel that we finally belong here—that we have set down roots.”

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Woody Varivoorhees’s comments in the *Palm Beach Post* are typical: “Jubilation reigned in Dogpatch as the colorful characters of Al Capp came to life at Musicarnival. Dogpatch and its

many residents, which have become a national institution, were paced by the beautiful voice of **Chet Sommers** as Li'l Abner and the lovely figure of blonde **Patricia Northrup** as Daisy Mae.” As was the case in Cleveland, the authors of *Li'l Abner* got barely a nod from the critics. What a shame! This is one of the best American musical comedies of all time.—**B. R.**





Monte Amundsen in the Rodgers–Hammerstein–Driver Cinderella

1961 Season (Cleveland)

CINDERELLA

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 5–18, 1961 (National television broadcast: March 31, 1957)

AUTHORS

Book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, music by Richard Rodgers, adapted for the stage by Don Driver

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Monte Amundsen (Cinderella), Tommy Rall (Prince), Bill McDonald and Leonard Drum (Stepsisters), Alfred Dennis (King), Lucille Benson (Queen), Dortha Duckworth (Plume Lady)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“In My Own Little Corner,” “A Very Special Day,” “A Lovely Night,” “Boys and Girls Like You and Me,” “Impossible,” “Waltz for a Ball” (instrumental), “Ten Minutes Ago,” “Stepsisters’ Lament,” “Do I Love You Because You’re Beautiful?”

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Cinderella was the only musical Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II ever created for television, which made it a big, big event on March 31, 1957, when it was broadcast live and in color on CBS.

They certainly didn’t have to write it. They were the titans of Broadway, the team that had reinvented the American musical with *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *Allegro*, *South Pacific* and *The King and I*—and in the mid-1950s they produced and personally supervised the film versions of *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific*. On the other hand, their most recent Broadway musicals—*Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream*—had been less than entirely successful, so their next project needed to be.

But why television? In the 1950s TV was still pretty much uncharted territory for musicals. The

possibilities excited them—and not only R&H: During that decade many of their colleagues explored the new medium, including Cole Porter, Hugh Martin, Arthur Schwartz, Jule Styne, Dorothy Fields and Burton Lane.

And there was another reason why R&H took the plunge: They got a call from Julie Andrews’s agent asking them if they might be interested in writing a *Cinderella* for his client, who was then just 21 but already the darling of Broadway in *My Fair Lady*. As Rodgers later said, every songwriter he knew dreamed about writing for Andrews.

As for Cinderella herself, the iconic young woman was a natural for them because the story deals with one of Hammerstein’s major themes. As he tells us in the song “Happy Talk” from *South Pacific*, “You gotta have a dream” to be fully alive, and nobody ever dreamed bigger than Cinderella.

They made two major decisions early on. In a television interview the week before their musical aired, R&H told Ed Sullivan they had resolved not to update the story—or “trick her up,” as Hammerstein put it. He said: “She would not become a shop girl from Macy’s who is spotted by the proprietor’s son and wafted to El Morocco. . . . We wanted to do a musical version of the story that everyone remembers from childhood.”

Since there was little use of videotape at the time, they understood that there would be just one live broadcast. (Fortunately, the musical was preserved on black-and-white kinescope.) The stakes couldn’t have been higher, so to ensure the impeccable quality that was their hallmark, they decided to write, prepare and rehearse their new musical as carefully as if it were a Broadway show.

The end result was a triumph (“artistry of the first order,” opined *Variety*); you can see for yourself via the DVD of the kinescope that’s now commercially available. Hammerstein humanizes the characters: Cinderella has a sense of humor, imagination and pluckiness, and the Fairy Godmother is a gorgeous young woman who clearly understands not only fantasy but reality. She functions as what we would call Cinderella’s “life coach,” advising her that she must *work* at achieving her dream. And though Hammerstein makes the Stepsisters truly comic characters, they have believable wants and needs.

This is R&H’s most charming score, and Rodgers was proud of that. In his memoirs he calls it “an example of what theater music is all about: a cohesive entity whose words and music are

[true] expressions of the characters singing them... Like a symphony, concerto or opera ... it is the work as a whole that makes the overall impression.”

Their *Cinderella*—produced when Hammerstein was 62 and Rodgers 55—boasted a cast featuring some of Broadway’s finest: Kaye Ballard and Alice Ghostley as the Stepsisters, Ilka Chase as the Stepmother, and Dorothy Stickney and Howard Lindsay as the Queen and King, with newcomer Jon Cypher as the Prince. The 90-minute “spectacular” was seen by 107 million people, the largest TV audience up to that time and more than 60 percent of the country—a mind-boggling example of how united the American middle class was during that period. Rodgers liked to point out that the broadcast aired on the 14th anniversary of the opening night of *Oklahoma!*—a show that on Broadway took over five years to play to four million people, and 10 years on the road to play to 8 million people. In one night with *Cinderella* they reached 100 million parents, children and grandparents.

And yet ... the theater was their first love, and they talked about writing a stage adaption of the teleplay. But at the time of Hammerstein’s death, the project remained unrealized.

Enter Johnny Price, Don Driver and Musicarnival.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

With this production Musicarnival made national news: When **Don Driver**’s stage adaptation of *Cinderella* had its world premiere under the Warrensville Heights tent on June 5, 1961, it represented the first time Richard Rodgers had permitted an American writer-director to significantly alter a Rodgers & Hammerstein musical.

Rodgers’s willingness came during a time in his life marked by new turns. After Hammerstein’s death in August 1960, the composer could have retired while *The Sound of Music* was still selling out on Broadway. Instead, Rodgers threw himself into projects including a remake of *State Fair*, R&H’s only film musical, writing both music *and lyrics* for a half dozen new songs. He also served as producer, composer and lyricist for *No Strings* (1962), his first post-Hammerstein Broadway musical, surrounding himself with much younger artists, such as orchestrator and jazz musician Ralph Burns, dance music arranger Peter Matz and director Joe Layton.

Musicarnival’s Driver was just 37 when **Johnny Price** proposed to Rodgers that he write the stage version of *Cinderella* that R&H had contemplated following the single broadcast of their TV musical in 1957. Rodgers and Driver conferred throughout the winter of 1960–61, and

the composer granted the young artist enormous latitude: Driver could alter Hammerstein's characterizations, and he could also interpolate lesser-known songs from other R&H musicals.

For his part, Johnny committed to a budget for the show that made *Cinderella* Musicarnival's most expensive undertaking to date. Press materials announced: "Musicarnival has given *Cinderella* all the care and attention usually lavished on a Broadway production." And he arranged for the musical to be mounted within a few months of the Cleveland showing at three high-profile summer theaters: St. Louis Municipal Opera, Kansas City Starlight Theatre and Sacramento Music Circus.

Shortly before *Cinderella* went into rehearsal, Driver was interviewed by William Wolf of the Associated Press, who noted, "Clevelanders are about to take a look at the product of a new combination: Rodgers, Hammerstein and Driver." Wolf reported that this *Cinderella* would be "different, different, different . . . with a devastating comical treatment [applied] so that it would become an adult story with a new plot."

Driver gave him a glimpse of his reconceptualization: "The two wicked Stepsisters—they're played by men," he disclosed. "There's rowdy humor in the situation, and I've written a special comedy lyric for the 'sisters' to some incidental music [the 'Gavotte'] that Rodgers had composed. It's called 'Ladies in Waiting.' I had an idea for doing it and hesitated to supply lyrics to Rodgers's music, but he said it was delightful." In fact, wrote Wolf, "Driver was pleased to report that Rodgers was satisfied with the project."

Driver's work on *Cinderella*, though not completely successful, is nonetheless the work of a theater man loaded with ideas. Less than half of Hammerstein's dialogue remains. Casting the Stepsisters in drag had been done in 1958 in Tommy Steele's London pantomime version, but Driver invests the conceit with cheeky American humor—anticipating his book, seven years later, for the award-winning Off Broadway musical *Your Own Thing*. Gone is the Stepmother (except as an offstage voice), and his King and Queen are little more than further opportunities for laughs. This robs the musical of a good bit of Hammerstein's warmth; his King may be a bumbler, but the Royal Couple are bonded in love for each other, and for their son, the Prince. Likewise, Driver's *Cinderella* is missing some of the inner strength Hammerstein gave her. But here the Fairy Godmother is at first the Plume Lady, a woman from the village who has strange powers, and her presence in the community adds a layer of interest to the story.

What is most striking in this treatment is Driver's notion of the Prince and his relationship with

Cinderella, which actually runs deeper than Hammerstein. The song that introduces us to him is “A Very Special Day,” a Rodgers-approved interpolation from *Me and Juliet*, in which we sense his vulnerability. And soon we learn that the Prince has his own dream: He wants to become the “boy next door” and fall in love with an ordinary girl.

The Prince’s most important scene with Cinderella happens well before the ball when, disguised as a chimney sweep, he meets the girl of his dreams on her own turf. Driver resequences and reassigns musical numbers so that “When You’re Driving Through the Moonlight” and “A Lovely Night” are duets for Cinderella and the chimney sweep in which they imagine the ball. And the scene is capped by a song that upstages “Do I Love You Because You’re Beautiful?” as their major love ballad. It’s “Boys and Girls Like You and Me,” an R&H cut song that had been looking for a home for nearly 20 years (since *Oklahoma!*), unknown except to mavens until Driver made it a true character song for the couple. Here their love for each other has real substance.

Thus the ball and the resolution of the piece turn out very differently (and more affectingly) in Driver. The Prince knows her identity, but she doesn’t know he’s the ordinary man who charmed her at her home. And when the glass-slipper moment finally occurs, Cinderella declares she cannot marry the Prince because she loves another. So Driver flips the “reveal”; here it’s not Cinderella who makes herself known to the Prince, but vice versa.

Driver cast a charismatic married couple as his leads: **Tommy Rall** (the brilliant dancer-singer-actor featured in several MGM musicals; immediately after *Cinderella* he played a major role in Jerry Herman’s *Milk and Honey* on Broadway) and the beautiful, classically trained **Monte Amundsen**, who had already established herself as a singer who crossed over nicely from opera to musical theater. **Alfred Dennis** and **Lucille Benson** as the King and Queen, and **Bill McDonald** and **Leonard Drum** as the Stepsisters, are all crowd-pleasers. And Clevelanders will note the name in small print of **Ernest Horvath** as one of the Servants; a dozen years later Horvath and Dennis Nahat founded Cleveland Ballet.

I assume that Driver mandated the gossamer musical fabric for the piece, which spins out in reams of incidental music. For the first time in a Musicarnival production, the orchestrator is credited: Rodgers’s estimable longtime collaborator Robert Russell Bennett.

Although Driver doesn’t achieve the apposite mix of romance and comedy that came so naturally to Hammerstein, his adaptation nonetheless remained the authorized stage *Cinderella* for 20

years; then a new version was developed by the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization that hewed more closely to Hammerstein's teleplay. The adaptation that seems destined to last is the marvelous 2013 Broadway production—a top-to-bottom rethinking—with book by playwright Douglas Carter Beane.

Nevertheless, it was Musicarnival's Don Driver who paved the way.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

What's most unexpected in examining these reviews from more than 50 years ago is the assumption that the original television musical was not top-drawer R&H; time has proven otherwise. Wrote Harlowe R. Hoyt in *The Plain Dealer*: "Cinderella was a special job by the two collaborators as a pretentious TV offering.... Space restrictions hampered the action, and Rodgers's music, while tuneful, was not out of the ordinary. This is what Driver has expanded into a full evening's entertainment in the round. [New Musicarnival designer] **Paul Rodgers** has furnished elaborate and eye-filling backgrounds from a decorative arena top to a kitchen fireplace. The royal staircase runs a full aisle for Cinderella's triumphal entry and ignominious exit.... All participants labor lustily to bring *Cinderella* to the stage. Only time can tell the success of their efforts." And Paul Mooney in *The Cleveland Press* concluded that Driver's reworking of the television spectacular "has made it engaging stage fare, but too much of the dullness of the original remains." H. L. Sanford in the *Akron Beacon Journal* was more positive: "The brilliant production techniques of John Price and the precision directing of Don Driver ... make it a colorful, delightful experience."—**B. R.**

THE RED MILL

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 19–July 2, 1961 (New York opening: September 24, 1906;
274 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Victor Herbert, book and lyrics by Henry Blossom, adaptation by Milton Lazarus, additional lyrics by Foreman Brown

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Coley Worth (Kid Connor), Leonard Drum (Con Kidder), Lee Cass (Governor), Gaylea Byrne (Gretchen), William Lewis (Captain), Karen Jensen (Tina), Renee Orin (Juliana), Alfred Dennis (Franz), Lucille Benson (Wilhelmina)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“The Isle of Our Dreams,” “When You’re Pretty and the World Is Fair,” “Ev’ry Day Is Ladies’ Day With Me,” “The Streets of New York,” “Because You’re You”

SYNOPSIS

Kid Connor and Con Kidder, two American nincompoops abroad, are stranded and broke in Katwyk-aan-Zee, Holland. The two innocents undergo a series of farcical adventures with the comely Gretchen, who loves Captain Karl Van Damm, while her father wishes her to wed the Governor. Connor and Kidder contrive to bring Gretchen together with her intended, despite making an enemy of the Governor. A daring rescue in the titular red mill and a hilarious series of impersonations by Connor and Kidder follow. At the end it is revealed that Van Damm is set to inherit a vast fortune, at which point Gretchen’s father removes all objections to the union.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

The Red Mill, which ran longer on Broadway than any of Victor Herbert’s many operettas, is a hybrid work. But winningly so, combining the composer’s beautiful melodies with the knockabout, eccentric comedy of its two star actors.

In fact, the show was conceived as a vehicle for the vaudevillians David Montgomery and Fred Stone, who three years earlier had stolen the original stage version of *The Wizard of Oz* out from under its Dorothy, Anna Laughlin. Montgomery was the Tin Woodman, Stone the Scarecrow—critics hailed them as the leading comedians on Broadway.

In Henry Blossom’s tale of *The Red Mill*, they were two innocents abroad (in Holland), and Blossom (1866-1919), a prolific and underrated librettist, gave them plenty of leeway to take the stage in their signature mix of antic and deadpan. Somehow the musical also found room for one of Herbert’s grandest designs: a score replete with solos, duets and ensembles in more than 20 lovingly crafted songs outfitted with Blossom’s lyrics. So-called middlebrow culture (Herbert) and lowbrow (Montgomery and Stone) coexisted synergistically.

Someday a master’s thesis will be written about alterations to *The Red Mill* over the decades. A

piece written for such specific talents and a much earlier era faced inevitable revisions, and the first (and finest) was written in 1945 by Milton Lazarus, best known as the librettist for *Song of Norway*. Edwin Lester produced this revival of *The Red Mill* at his Los Angeles Civic Light Opera, and when the show was done on Broadway, it enjoyed a longer run than the original: 16 months during the heyday of Rodgers & Hammerstein. Discarding Victor Herbert's original orchestrations in favor of new ones by Edward Ward, the production also created a star in Eddie Foy Jr., who played Kid Connor.

Since then, everyone from George Abbott to Musicarnival's Don Driver has reworked *The Red Mill*; Goodspeed Musicals' Scherer Library of Musical Theatre stacks three different adaptations on its shelves. Audiences embraced the show for most of a century.

Footnote on the glorious Broadway tradition: The 1906 *Red Mill* at the Knickerbocker Theatre (now the Richard Rodgers) was promoted by producer Charles Dillingham with the first moving electric sign on the Great White Way.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The Red Mill was made to order for **Don Driver**. Although the adaptation is credited to Milton Lazarus, Driver didn't hesitate to supply his own changes to the text, as he had done in the summer 1960 production of Herbert's *Naughty Marietta* (those tapes do not survive). After all, if Richard Rodgers could give him license to go his own way with R&H's *Cinderella*, a 55-year-old operetta could only benefit from being refashioned by contemporary hands.

It raises an intriguing question—one that musical theater professionals tend to view differently now than they did in 1961. Critic Paul Mooney began his review by acknowledging that “there is always a certain amount of danger” in reviving a piece this old, and he and his colleagues applauded Driver for making it “fresh” by way of further revisions. But ever since the 1983 archival reconstructions of Rodgers & Hart's *On Your Toes* and Kern & Hammerstein's *Show Boat*, the trend has favored loyalty to the original. As directors often say, they want to “trust the material” and find ways to make it work on its own terms.

But *The Red Mill* undoubtedly became more viable on the stage as a result of Driver's edit, just as it had in 1945 when Lazarus had his way with it. Musicarnival's director shows his respect for turn-of-the-20th-century Broadway—even with regard to style—but knows that certain elements of Lewis and Stone's vaudeville would die a quick death in 1961.

I regret the interpolation of “Thine Alone” from *Eileen*, a Herbert-Blossom operetta written 11 years later; it’s a great song that nevertheless does not belong here. I regret the further truncation of the score. I regret Driver’s mostly clumsy anachronisms: e.g., “Any friend of Zorro’s is a friend of mine” and “I feel like an ad for Old Dutch Cleaner” and “That’s just our Bill.” And yet groaners were essential to Lewis and Stone. “*Burgomeister*: You Americans are so droll. *Kid*: I have an aunt who has a Southern droll.” Where does one draw the line?

Driver cast *The Red Mill* well, with two expert comedians—Gilbert & Sullivan whiz **Coley Worth** and **Leonard Drum** in the Lewis and Stone roles—and three excellent voices doing justice to Herbert’s tunes: Broadway’s **Lee Cass** as the Governor and the Metropolitan Opera’s **William Lewis** as the Captain; and as Gretchen, **Gaylea Byrne**, whom **Johnny Price** had first hired for the chorus three years earlier and who went on to major roles in national tours and on Broadway, including replacing Joan Diener in *Man of La Mancha*.

Listening to the live recording, you get the feeling that Driver just couldn’t keep his hands off the piece, and ultimately his gusto is contagious. He walks the tightrope that has always defined *The Red Mill*, balancing shameless farce with romantic melodies unsurpassed in their glow.

Purists beware. But know that for two weeks under the tent, thousands of Clevelanders unhesitatingly bought what he was selling.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Everything that Don Driver was going for registered with the critics. Glenn C. Pullen in *The Plain Dealer* loved the comedy but also noted that Driver and musical director **Lawrence Brown** “treat Victor Herbert’s evergreen songs with great respect. . . . [The ballads] are more enchanting than most of the ditties heard in today’s hit parade.” Same for Paul Mooney in *The Cleveland Press*; he singled out Gaylea Byrne, Lee Cass and William Lewis for “giving all of the familiar Herbert tunes their full measure of beauty”; and he rhapsodized about the comedy: “Ah, those performers! Driver lets the comedy go wide open in the show. . . . Coley Worth is the best comedian to hit the circular stage at Musicarnival since Don Driver. A lot of Driver’s style is pure Worth, but Coley has so much depth in his characterization that it is hard to imagine anybody else in the part of Kid Connor. Worth combines soft-shoe dancing, a burlesque veteran’s timing and sass and a hilarious stage presence to steal almost every scene he is in. His American buddy, Con Kidder, is portrayed riotously by Leonard Drum, who gained a large local liking as one of the terrible Stepsisters in Cinderella. . . . Here again is proof that an old chestnut can be as satisfying as the latest Broadway show, if it is done right. Musicarnival serves it up with style and distinction.”—**B. R.**

TAKE ME ALONG

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 3–16, 1961 (New York opening: October 2, 1959;
448 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Bob Merrill, book by Joseph Stein and Robert Russell, based on the play *Ah, Wilderness!* by Eugene O'Neill

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Charles Reynolds (Nat Miller), Alfred Dennis (Sid), Lucille Benson (Essie), Renee Orin (Lily), Ray Chabeau (Richard Miller), Florence Willson (Muriel Macomber), Diana Price (Mildred)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Would Die,” “Sid, Ol’ Kid,” “Staying Young,” “I Get Embarrassed,” “We’re Home,” “Take Me Along,” “Promise Me a Rose,” “Nine O’Clock,” “But Yours”

SYNOPSIS

The action takes place in the cozy environs of Centerville, Connecticut, during July 1910. Young Richard Miller, the son of newspaper editor Nat Miller, ardently woos Muriel Macomber by quoting literary morsels that her father finds so objectionable he withdraws his advertisements from Nat’s paper. With Muriel forbidden to see him, Richard goes on a binge; once they are reconciled, he gets ready to go to Yale. A secondary plot concerns Sid’s repeated efforts to quit drinking, get a steady job and marry Nat’s spinster sister, Lily.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Take Me Along is one of the neglected gems of the 1950s. Though its run of 448 performances wasn’t enough to make it profitable, this musical based on Eugene O’Neill’s only comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!*, is a work of distinction and integrity.

It was created in the usual atmosphere of *sturm und drang* that was the specialty of producer David Merrick, which is to say that firings abounded. But somehow the crises never hampered the work; the irony is that Merrick seems to have been touched by O'Neill's play from the time he saw it as a young man, with George M. Cohan starring as newspaper editor Nat Miller. With the working title of *Connecticut Summer*, he began planning it as early as 1953—even before his first Broadway hit, *Fanny*.

He chose writers who were ideal for the piece. Composer-lyricist Bob Merrill (1921-98) was a former pop song writer whose common touch and empathy for characters had served him well in a recently completed adaptation of another O'Neill play, *Anna Christie*, which became the Gwen Verdon vehicle *New Girl in Town* (1957). And the lead scriptwriter, Joseph Stein, had already demonstrated his understanding of family and community in the 1955 musical *Plain and Fancy*.

Set in a decidedly more innocent time, *Take Me Along*, like *Ah, Wilderness!* before it, weaves three stories filled with bright humor, but with some shadows in the background: Son Richard (Robert Morse), ever the romantic, feels the tragic, self-indulgent pain of growing into manhood. Parents Nat (Walter Pidgeon) and Essie (Una Merkel) hold on to the comfort of their marriage amid Nat's unsettling worries about his own aging. And spinster Aunt Lily (Eileen Herlie) and her perpetual beau, Sid (Jackie Gleason), sweep Sid's alcoholism under the rug. (O'Neill was, after all, the American theater's expert on codependent relationships.)

Stein's script adheres closely to O'Neill, while creating with Merrill delightful and often moving opportunities for song; the two clearly love their denizens of small-town Connecticut. We know we're in good hands when the chorus, celebrating the town's new fire engine on July 4th, declare in the first minute of the opening number: "We were mad, we were hoppin' darn mad / When the sauerkraut fact'ry burned down." And has a midlife crisis ever been dealt with more sensitively than by Merrill in this song for Nat? "The moon has a few new wrinkles, / He shines a bit more silver now than gold. / I'm staying young, I'm staying young, / But everything around me's growing old."

Take Me Along is warm, funny, affectionate and daringly gentle: The show's eleven o'clock number, "But Yours," is actually a charm song—which may be the first and only time that has occurred in our musical theater. It all feels right.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

We're told that the Broadway production of *Take Me Along* was thrown off balance by casting

television's "Great One"—Jackie Gleason—in the featured (as opposed to starring) role of the boisterous Sid. That may be, but it should be noted that the writing itself did not contribute to the problem. This musical was created for an ensemble.

And that is exactly what it gets in **Don Driver**'s knowing—even quiet—production, a surprising achievement coming on the heels of his frenetically swirling *Red Mill*. These are fine, generous actors—particularly **Charles Reynolds** as Nat, **Alfred Dennis** as Sid and, in her most nuanced performance to date, **Lucille Benson** as Essie. **Renee Orin** (wife of Broadway composer Albert Hague) breaks my heart with the pathos of her forever-disappointed but never self-pitying Essie. The only performances falling short come from **Ray Chabeau** and **Florence Willson**, who fail to tap into the tricky mix of teenaged ardor and angst in Richard and Muriel.

It's also been said that both O'Neill's play and the Stein–Merrill musical are easy exercises in nostalgia. That does the works a disservice. While the backdrop is the Fourth of July, with its inherent high spirits, there's darkness here as well, and Driver's production is committed to exploring more than the sunny side of the street. It was a pleasure to find this seldom-performed work in such respectful hands.

Miscellaneous note: With this production, new musical director **Lawrence Brown**, who replaced Boris Kogan near the end of the West Palm Beach season, hits his stride. It may be significant that this is one of the first times in Musicarnival's production years that we are presented with a complete overture. Orchestrated by Philip J. Lang, it's a pip.

And what a nice—and marketable—touch for **Johnny Price** to produce this musical on July 4th and the week thereafter.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Although all the reviews were positive, Oscar Smith in the *Akron Beacon Journal* was the only critic to fully appreciate Bob Merrill's score and its tight integration with the Joseph Stein book: "It is an acting musical more than a singing one, despite the fact that some of its songs are blended subtly with the spoken word. Indeed, some of the songs are almost spoken with orchestral accompaniment."—**B. R.**

PAINT YOUR WAGON

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 17–30, 1961 (New York opening: November 12, 1951;
289 performances)

AUTHORS

Book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Loewe

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Don Driver (Ben Rumson), Richard Armbruster (Julio), Norma Joseph (Jennifer), David Aiken (Steve), Robert Bernauer (Mike), Alfred Dennis (Jacob), Providence Hollander (Elizabeth)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I’m on My Way,” “I Talk to the Trees,” “They Call the Wind Maria,” “I Still See Elisa,” “Another Autumn,”
“What’s Goin’ on Here?,” “Wand’rin’ Star”

SYNOPSIS

Ben Rumson is a grizzled prospector whose daughter, Jennifer, discovers gold near their camp. Word of the strike quickly spreads, and before long there are over 4,000 inhabitants of the new town of Rumson. Jennifer, who has fallen in love with Julio, a Mexican prospector, goes East to school but returns to Julio when the gold strike peters out. Rumson is now virtually a ghost town, and Ben is left with nothing but his hopes and dreams.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Alan Jay Lerner tried three times to make *Paint Your Wagon*, his California Gold Rush musical play written with Frederick Loewe, work: for the original Broadway production in 1951 (a box-office failure at 289 performances); in his rewritten book for the short-lived national tour in 1952–53 (the basis for Musicarnival’s production); and nearly two decades after Broadway, in the misbegotten (though financially lucrative) film adaptation, for which Paddy Chayevsky created the “story” for Lerner’s screenplay.

Through it all, his dream remained unrealized—and more's the pity, because it was an admirable dream. Written in the period during and after World War II when “Americana” musicals proliferated in the theater and on film—roughly beginning with *Oklahoma!* in 1943 and extending through MGM's *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* 11 years later—*Paint Your Wagon* had an arresting notion at its core. The musical's gestation began with a visual metaphor that came to Lerner shortly after the opening of *Brigadoon* in early 1947: two covered wagons passing onstage—one “rushing hopefully” to gold country, the other “limping” in the other direction in “despair.” “I wanted to tell the story of these two wagons,” he later remarked, “and what lay between their coming and going. Actually, as things developed, I finally decided to write the life and death of a ghost town and do it in a serious tone....”

“I wanted to write a musical that would embrace all the robustness and vitality and cockeyed courage that is so much a part of our American heritage.”

Early on, he realized that “it wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. I had a great deal of respect for the ghosts that the mere mention of 1849 evoked. They were not musical comedy characters. They were full-blooded men and women. They had created a legend. They had cleaved a world.”

Composer Fritz Loewe, trained in the Viennese school of operetta, responded to the challenge of this very different musical world: “We tried to write real Americana, with all the roughness that went with the lives of the men of the Gold Rush.”

Authentic, serious, passionate and scrupulously researched: that was *Paint Your Wagon*'s blessing and curse. With its story of a perpetually wandering prospector, widower Ben Rumson; his feisty but illiterate daughter, Jennifer; and Julio, the Mexican prospector she falls in love with, Lerner's saga is richer in atmosphere than just about any other musical of the era. And producer Cheryl Crawford, Lerner & Loewe's champion on *Brigadoon*, gave it a stunning production choreographed by Agnes de Mille, directed by Daniel Mann, designed by Oliver Smith and starring James Barton (the original Jeeter in *Tobacco Road*) as Ben.

But *Paint Your Wagon* turned out to be, in the words of Lerner's mentor Moss Hart, a “succès d'estime—a success that ran out of steam.” Brook Atkinson raved in *The New York Times* (“a bountiful and exultant musical jubilee”), but Walter Kerr in the *Herald Tribune* regretted its lack of humor, and other critics also found fault with the book. Lerner subsequently admitted, “I think that I became so impassioned with realistic values that I forgot that musical theater is not really that kind of truth.”

There are, however, marvelous things in it, most notably the Lerner & Loewe songs and the lusty male chorus (“They Call the Wind Maria,” “There’s a Coach Comin’ In” and more). The original-cast album from 1951 is one those theater discs that historian/critic Ethan Mordden finds misleading; the score is such a compelling listening experience that the recording convinces us this musical must have been a hit. And Lerner’s script does have some terrific (and yes, funny) writing, including Ben’s trial of a man accused of stealing gold. Waxing sentimental, Ben concludes by picturing an idyllic Thanksgiving complete with mince pie and hot rum cake: “We’ll sit together and throw a song o’ Thanksgiving to the hills and the world will be happy. But you, Reuben Sloane, you son of a bitch, you won’t be here to see it.... By the order of this court you’re gonna be hung tomorrow from the tallest tree in town. Now get the bastard out o’ here!” (It’s based on a famous speech from history.)

Reading and hearing the show for the first time as a whole, it seems to me the major problem is that none of the relationships is truly explored—a reminder of how difficult it is to write a musical without the foundation of previous source material. In his preface to the published edition, “Advice to Young Musical Writers,” Lerner acknowledges the difficulty: “The book is all-essential. It is the fountain from which all waters spring. So start off on the right foot and select a story that is all prepared for you.” Five years later ... voilà! *My Fair Lady*.

And yet, Lerner believed in the story he invented for *Paint Your Wagon*. Reflecting on his rewrite for the post-Broadway tour, he asserted: “My original intentions for the show [were] still valid and worthwhile. I believe in an honest reproduction of life on the musical stage. I believe in the gutsy musical I tried to do. I believe that musical theater has to welcome that kind of treatment of earthy people.”

Incidentally, the musical was revived with relative success in 2015 by New York City Center Encores!, although the book was once again criticized.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

I wonder whether **Johnny Price** and **Don Driver** consciously designed their 1961 season as a celebration of Americana, or if that’s just how the pieces came together. Setting aside the premiere of *Cinderella* and Johnny’s second go-round with *Fledermaus*, the summer was chock-full of the American Experience: the turn of the 20th century in *Take Me Along* and *High Button Shoes*, the pre-Civil War era in *Bloomer Girl*, and most authentically, World War II in *South Pacific* (though not set on these shores, the musical is animated by the navy sensibility) and the mid-19th century in *Paint Your Wagon*.

It's a bracing lineup of musicals—perhaps the most daring of Johnny's production years; for aside from the cultural icon that was and is *South Pacific*, the Americana under the tent in 1961 comes in the form of not-very-well-known shows.

As for *Paint Your Wagon*, it could have been an act of hubris on Driver's part: not only "Entire Production Directed and Choreographed by Don Driver," but *starring* the Musicarnival director in the James Barton role of Ben Rumson. How did the man do it? And more to the point, given summer stock's harsh assembly line, how did he do it so well?

And yet, it's a fine production—the 25th he directed for the tent and the 36th he performed in—and though we have no way of knowing, I imagine he found more humor in Lerner's script and lyrics than Barton did. As an actor, Driver makes it clear that Ben is a star role and that he is a star performer (a new dimension compared with such previous featured roles in Cleveland as Will Parker in *South Pacific* and Mr. Applegate in *Damn Yankees*). His rendition of "I Still See Elisa" is the most disarming I've ever heard.

The changes in Lerner's architecture for this version (it's his rewrite for the national tour in 1952–53) are sound: clearer storytelling; more comedy; the deletion of Jennifer's "All for Him"; the use of Ben's "Wand'rin' Star" at the front end of the show in addition to the back); and the addition of a new character song for the prospector, "Take the Wheels Off the Wagon." Those who know the piece only from the cast album will also enjoy two songs not heard on the recording: the men's "Movin' " and "Trio," written for the Mormons—Jacob and his wives, Elizabeth and Sarah—in which (in Rodgers & Hammerstein fashion) we hear the secret thoughts of the two women.

Those who were there for the Musicarnival production, including Johnny's daughter, **Diana Price**, still recall Driver's finale: the prospectors' stationary march to "Wand'rin' Star," anticipating by more than 25 years the staging of "Do You Hear the People Sing?" in *Les Misérables*.

There's a standout performance from **Richard Ambruster** (back at Musicarnival for the first time in four seasons) as Julio, and two very good women in this company later did important things in Cleveland. Within a year, **Norma Joseph** (Jennifer) would become the leading lady at Great Lakes Theater, demonstrating her prowess with Shakespeare for a decade, and **Providence Hollander** (Elizabeth) would soon become the town's musical theater/cabaret diva, most memorably in the long-running production of *Jacques Brel*... that saved the Playhouse Square theaters from the wrecking ball.

The work here is so strong that it nearly restores one's faith in the musical itself. Lerner would have been pleased.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

In a pre-opening commentary, *Cleveland Press* critic Paul Mooney gave Don Driver some much-deserved approbation: "The little dynamo was in the first Musicarnival show in 1954, playing Will Parker in *Oklahoma!*, and has gone on to be the biggest asset the theater has in all phases of production." When it came time to review the show, Mooney remained in Driver's corner: "Some of the best music Lerner & Loewe ever wrote rolled into the tent theater in an overall excellent production.... Driver is amazing in his multiple-talent chores.... Of course, he is to be commended for his lively direction and spirited choreography, but from the audience standpoint it is Driver the performer who wins its heart." And Harlowe R. Hoyt in *The Plain Dealer* recognized the special nature of Lerner's concept: "This is a Western, mind you, but it is nearer to what actually happened than are Wyatt Earp's television adventures or the movies of Billy the Kid. This was the West where men are men and women a rarity. They took their liquor neat, quarreled and fist-fought, gambled, prayed for women and even bought them, but there was little gunning.... It is good fun and fast-paced. Driver introduces a few dance steps, just to prove that once he was with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo." So fast-paced, observed Oscar Smith in the *Akron Beacon Journal*, that "the trouble with *Paint Your Wagon* is that it is over too soon.... At the end you wanted to go on with ribald old Ben wherever his 'Wand'rin' Star' would take him."—**B. R.**

HIGH BUTTON SHOES

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 31–August 13, 1961 (New York opening: October 9, 1947;
727 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Sammy Cahn, book by Stephen Longstreet
(George Abbott and Phil Silvers uncredited)

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Lou Nelson (Harrison Floy), Jacqueline James (Mama), Walter Long (Papa), Richard Armbruster (Oggle), Florence Colins (Fran), Alfred Dennis (Mr. Pontdue), Don Driver (Uncle Willie)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Can’t You Just See Yourself?” “There’s Nothing Like a Model T,” “Papa, Won’t You Dance With Me?” “I Still Get Jealous,” “On a Sunday by the Sea”

SYNOPSIS

In the plot, set mostly in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1913, Harrison Floy hoodwinks the Longstreet family into letting him sell some of the valueless property they own. After running off with the profits to Atlantic City (where Jerome Robbins’s classic “Keystone Cops Ballet” is staged), Floy loses and recovers the money—then loses it forever by betting on the wrong college football team.—*S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

High Button Shoes—Jule Styne’s first Broadway success—has the reputation of being formula musical comedy, but there’s a bit more to the 1947 show than that. It actually taps into another recurring theme in the literature of Americana: the character of the brash con man who makes a profession of getting rich quick by swindling the rubes.

The musical was Styne’s idea. He had read a favorable review in *The New York Times* of Stephen Longstreet’s semiautobiographical novel, *The Sisters Liked Them Handsome*, which recaptured life in 1913 in what we might call an early “suburb”: New Brunswick, New Jersey. The story’s most colorful character—Harrison Floy—saunters into New Brunswick ready to fleece the good but rather dim-witted people there. A natural role for Styne’s friend Phil Silvers, who leaped at it.

But the musical required some solid Broadway know-how from 60-year-old writer-director George Abbott before it was funny and focused enough for a Broadway audience. Longstreet had insisted on writing the book himself (his first and only foray into musical comedy), and when it proved to be unworkable, Abbott did a complete rewrite with help from Silvers, who, according to Abbott, “had a great many funny things to suggest.” (By the way, Longstreet refused to share credit for the book with Abbott and Silvers. In his memoirs, Abbott writes that Silvers is said to have told Longstreet, “You’d better be careful—some night we might play your original version.”)

A huge contribution was also made by the young Jerome Robbins, whose witty choreographic comments on the period included a tango, a picnic polka (to Styne and Sammy Cahn's (1913-93) hit song "Papa, Won't You Dance With Me?"), a soft shoe (to another hit, "I Still Get Jealous") and a takeoff on the Keystone Cops (the "Bathing Beauty Ballet") that was immediately hailed as a classic. Nanette Fabray won a Donaldson Award as Sarah Longstreet (Mama). As for the Styne-Cahn catalogue, it delights. Years later, no less a composer than Milton Babbitt singled out "Can't You Just See Yourself?" as notable Styne, who was then newly arrived from Hollywood and had contributed to 20 mostly forgettable movie musicals. Writes Babbitt: "Styne [had] already adapted to a Broadway stage that had been rurally electrified by *Oklahoma!* [The song] fits comfortably in his evolution from 'Anywhere' to 'The Party's Over.'" And it should be added that Styne himself composed the music for Robbins's "Bathing Beauty Ballet"; those admiring his handiwork in 1947 included Duke Ellington.

Not to be overlooked is Hugh Martin, whose sometimes daring vocal arrangements for the Styne-Cahn tunes polish them to a fare-thee-well, especially in the encore refrain to "Papa." (Listen closely to "There's Nothing Like a Model T" and you'll hear a sly reference to Martin's own ode to 20th-century transportation, "The Trolley Song," from the film *Meet Me in St. Louis*.)

Although *High Button Shoes* is pretty much forgotten today (the musical never received a film version despite its run of nearly two years), its touch of satire still seems fresh. Silvers created the Harrison Floy character a few years before he gave us television's companion piece, the immortal Sergeant Bilko, in the series *You'll Never Get Rich*. Brooks Atkinson's notice in the *Times* suggests the energy that this great comic invested in the musical: "He has the speed, the drollery and the shell-game style of a honkey-tonk buffoon."

And looking back on the show, it can be seen as the progenitor of another con man's jubilee, *The Music Man*, produced a decade later. Both musicals are set in the early 20th century. In *High Button Shoes*, Floy charms the Ladies Birdwatching Society. In *The Music Man*, Harold Hill sets his sights on the wives of the school board. Floy has a partner in small-time crime in Mr. Pontdue (the marvelous fellow burlesque comic Joey Faye); Professor Hill's accomplice is Marcellus. Oogle isn't buying the pitch in *High Button Shoes*; in *The Music Man*, it's Marian who sees through the con. In each musical, how dumb can the townspeople be? Very.

The Music Man is a Broadway masterpiece, of course. But if Harrison Floy in the farcical *High Button Shoes* doesn't share the pedigree of Meredith Willson's more fully dimensional Professor Hill, *High Button Shoes* is grand Americana just the same.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

In his welcome to the audience, **Johnny Price** says, “We’re all going to have quite a romp!” Admittedly, it takes a while for the audience to warm to **Don Driver**’s less-than-stellar production—owing mostly, I think, to a less-than-magnetic performance from **Lou Nelson** in the Phil Silvers role—but once the fun of the swindle begins to heat up, *High Button Shoes* is hard to resist.

A shame that we can’t see what choreographer **Jack Beaber** fashioned here, because his “Bathing Beauty Ballet,” “Tango” (featuring Driver and **Donna Rae**), “Papa, Won’t You Dance With Me?” (led by **Jacqueline James**) and “I Still Get Jealous” (with James and **Walter Long**) are all showstoppers, demonstrating that *High Button Shoes*, thanks to Jerome Robbins, is very much a dance musical. Driver cast a nine-year-old local, **Pam McChisney**, as Stephanie (the character is actually Stevie, loosely based on the young Stephen Longstreet). She’s adorable.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

They all had a good time. Harlowe R. Hoyt in *The Plain Dealer*: “*High Button Shoes* is a little bit of burlesque, vaudeville and musical comedy.... But it’s all buttoned up, no buttons lost, and good hot-weather entertainment.” “Lou Nelson,” wrote Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press*, “has the flair and the timing we have come to expect from his director—that Driver again.... The 14-year-old musical is smartly done.” Anderson did, however, express one reservation: “I recall pieces of this production more than I recall the whole.”—**B. R.**

FLEDERMAUS

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 14–27, 1961 (World premiere: Vienna, April 5, 1874; New York premiere: November 21, 1874)

AUTHORS

Music by Johann Straus II, libretto by Carl Haffner and Richard Genée; adapted as *Rosalinda* by Gottfried Reinhardt and John Meehan, Jr., based on the Max Reinhardt and Eric Wolfgang Korngold version of *Die Fledermaus*; English lyrics by Paul Kerby

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Leyna Gabriele (Rosalinda Eisenstein), Paul Franke (Henry Eisenstein), Monte Amundsen (Adèle), Thomas Hayward (Alfredo Allevanto), Alfred Dennis (Blint), Clifford Harvuot (Momo Falke), Robert Bernauer (Richard Frank), Don Driver (Prince Orlofsky), Donna Rae (Fifi), Judith Lerner (Première Danseuse), Roy Harsh (Premier Danseur), Coley Worth (Frosch)

HIGHLIGHTS

“Serenade,” “Oh Jiminy,” “Strip Duet,” “Chacun à Son Goût,” “Laughing Song,” “Czárdás,” “Watch Duet,” “Champagne Is King,” “Brother Mine, Sister Mine,” “Audition Song”

SYNOPSIS

Alfredo, an opera singer, serenades his former girlfriend Rosalinda as Rosalinda’s maid, Adele, schemes to attend Prince Orlofsky’s ball. Rosalinda’s husband, Eisenstein, is due to begin a short jail sentence that very evening for a minor infraction, but his friend Falke persuades Eisenstein to go with him instead to Prince Orlofsky’s party. Rosalinda gives Adele the night off, and Alfredo reappears at Rosalinda’s home—where he is mistaken for Eisenstein by the prison director, Frank, and hauled off to jail. Rosalinda goes to Orlofsky’s party disguised as a Hungarian countess and runs into Adele (who is pretending to be an actress) and Eisenstein, who unknowingly woos his own wife. At dawn, Eisenstein hurries off to jail and turns himself in, but the jailer Frosch believes Alfredo is Eisenstein. The complications are happily resolved when everyone gathers at the jail after the party has ended. —*R. P.*

ABOUT THE WORK

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Though opera was one of **Johnny Price**’s consuming passions, his efforts to bring operatic fare into the repertory of Musicarnival met with mixed results. Though the productions received enthusiastic reviews from music and theater critics alike, operas under the blue tent were box-office poison, incurring heavy losses (\$15,000 for *Carmen* in 1956 and again for *The Ballad of Baby Doe* in 1958). The 1955 production of *Fledermaus* starring Beverly Sills proved to be less of a liability—almost breaking even!—and in 1961 Johnny returned to the tried and true with a new production of *Fledermaus* that again utilized the Broadway adaptation of the Strauss operetta known as *Rosalinda*. In his opening remarks for this recorded performance, Johnny alludes to his top-drawer cast: “Just like a ball team, when they’re up for a game you get the best

game.... You're going to get a very memorable performance tonight not only from our stars but from our resident company.”

Music director **Lawrence Brown** does away with most of the famous overture (no doubt to pare down the running time—a common practice with the musicals as well) and begins the show with a few bars of Strauss's “Tales from the Vienna Woods.” For the most part he keeps the musical proceedings animated, though his conducting lacks a certain *je ne sais quoi* displayed by Boris Kogan on the 1955 Musicarnival recording.

The eminent cast includes three Metropolitan Opera stalwarts: the uncommonly fine tenor **Thomas Hayward** as the hammy opera singer *Alfredo*—a role he also performed in the 1953 *Omnibus* telecast of *Die Fledermaus*; **Paul Franke** as a smooth-voiced Eisenstein; and **Clifford Harvuot** (who played the prison warden Frank in Musicarnival's 1955 *Fledermaus*) as a dapper Falke.

Overall it's an enjoyable performance. One cavil is that the Rosalinda, **Leyna Gabriele** (best known for her starring role in the Central City, Colorado, world premiere production of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*), has a bright, technically agile voice that seems more suited for Adele—which means that she and **Monte Amundsen**, the beguiling Adele (who had enchanted audiences in Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Cinderella* a few weeks earlier in the Musicarnival season), sound more like vivacious twin sisters than a glamorous lady and her maid.

Director **Don Driver**'s Prince Orlofsky is low-key and droll, and “His Royal Highness” is surrounded in the second-act party scene by a particularly robust and well-rehearsed chorus. Among the ensemble members is **Providence Hollander**, who went on to local fame as one of the four original cast members of the long-running 1970s Playhouse Square production of *Jacques Brel...*

Coley Worth is a delight in the spoken role of the jailer Frosch, instinctively making every phrase and sentence he utters (“I guarantee that within three months you will be with the Metropolitan—selling life insurance”) a Groucho-like gem. Worth—New York City Opera's Frosch of choice for many years—had previously charmed Musicarnival audiences with a featured role in *The Red Mill*. He and the entire *Fledermaus* cast exude the good humor and bonhomie that were part and parcel of the Musicarnival experience.

The fickle summer weather also played a role in the proceedings. At the end of Act I, a rainstorm can be heard on the tent rooftop, turning into a downpour that actually stops the stage action for

a few minutes—which prompts the orchestra to spontaneously launch into some rather jazzy renditions of (what else?) “Singin’ in the Rain” and “Alexander’s Ragtime Band.”

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

“The production is fast and very shiny. Don Driver has done himself proud with a show that sings and plays to every seat in the tent. The singing is done with great effect by superb voices owned by people who also can play a role and project,” Frank Hruby of *The Cleveland Press* wrote in his highly enthusiastic review. H. L. Stamford seconded that emotion in *The Sun Messenger* of Cleveland Heights, calling Musicarnival’s *Fledermaus* “one of the most magnificent productions in a long history of magnificence for which the big blue tent is famous.”—**R. P.**

BLOOMER GIRL

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 28–September 10, 1961 (New York opening: October 5, 1944;
654 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Harold Arlen, lyrics by E. Y. Harburg, book by Sig Herzig and Fred Saidy, based on an unproduced play by Dan and Lilith James

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Monte Amundsen (Evelina Applegate), Chet Sommers (Jefferson Calhoun), Lucille Benson (Dolly Bloomer), Jerry Laws (Pompey), Karen Jensen (Daisy), Charles Reynolds (Horatio Applegate)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“When the Boys Come Home,” “Evelina,” “It Was Good Enough for Grandma,” “The Eagle and Me,” “Right as the Rain,” “T’morra, T’morra,” “Sunday in Cicero Falls,” “I Got a Song”

SYNOPSIS

The action occurs in Cicero Falls, New York, in 1861, and covers the rebellion of Evelina Applegate against her tyrannical father, a manufacturer of hoopskirts, who wants her to marry one of his salesmen. Evelina is so provoked that she joins her aunt, Amelia “Dolly” Bloomer, in both her crusade for more practical clothing for women and her abolitionist activities. Evelina’s convictions, however, do not prevent her from falling in love with Jefferson Calhoun, a visiting Southern slaveholder, who is eventually won over to her cause.—S. G.

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

The 1944 *Bloomer Girl* was for all intents and purposes conceived by Yip Harburg (1896-1981), the great lyricist and script editor of *The Wizard of Oz* and, a few years later, lyricist and co-librettist of *Finian’s Rainbow*.

Two writer friends of his proposed a musical based on their unproduced play set on the eve of the Civil War. They got as far as an outline, but Harburg replaced them with two screenwriters he had worked with in Hollywood, Sig Herzig and Fred Saily. He brought in his frequent collaborator Harold Arlen (1905-86) as composer. (Their scores included *Oz* and *Life Begins at 8:40*.) Harburg wrote the lyrics—but more, he controlled the creation of the piece all the way through the directing (well, co-directing) of it on Broadway. Though it’s a word used mostly in film, Yip Harburg was a theater “auteur.”

He was also the social conscience of the American musical, and never more so than with *Bloomer Girl*. Like 1943’s *Oklahoma!*, the musical premiered during wartime, so stories of Americana resonated for audiences. But Harburg’s notion of Americana was proudly progressive. In this musical he and his colleagues take a stand on smug capitalism and on both racial and gender equality—what he called “the indivisibility of human freedom.” (Says a character early on in the show: “Freedom is without sex and without color.”)

Bloomer Girl is the story of Evelina Applegate (Celeste Holm), the smart and independent protégée of her aunt, Amelia “Dolly” Bloomer, who was in real life a dedicated abolitionist and feminist, and the inventor of bloomers (i.e., trousers), then considered radically unfeminine. Evelina must confront two unenlightened men: her hidebound father, the Lincoln-hating hoopskirt maker Horace, whom she will never change, and her suitor, the slaveholder Jeff Calhoun, a decent man who, thanks to Evelina, comes to see the profound error of his politics.

Though the piece wields the Harburgian weapon of satire more than it does Oscar Hammerstein’s

signature earnestness, what the two musicals have in common is a dedication to well-motivated storytelling. *Bloomer Girl*, like *Oklahoma!*, is (to use the then-current term) a beautifully “integrated” unfolding of dialogue, song and dance. The latter was choreographed by one of *Oklahoma!*’s visionaries, Agnes de Mille, whose second-act “Civil War Ballet” is heart-piercing. De Mille called it “a serious ballet about women’s emotions in war,” and even Harburg found it too somber until it drew cheers from the wartime audience on opening night out of town.

The Arlen-Harburg score is among the finest of its period. There is a good dramaturgical reason for every one of these songs, which range from the witty feminist anthem “It Was Good Enough for Grandma” to the gorgeous ballad “Right as the Rain” to a moment in the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* show-within-a-show that is as eloquent, both in words and in music, as anything in *Porgy and Bess*: “But Lord / If the going is cruel, / Then let him die like man, / Not live like mule.” The second-act opener, “Sunday in Cicero Falls,” is a witheringly scornful meditation on middle-class repression. And Harburg’s son and biographer, Ernie Harburg, identifies “The Eagle and Me,” the stirring declaration of the runaway slave Pompey (Dooley Wilson), as the “first theater song of America’s fledgling Civil Rights Movement.”

Never filmed by Hollywood, *Bloomer Girl* was given an exemplary 90-minute adaptation in 1956 for NBC-TV’s *Producers’ Showcase*. The live broadcast from New York starred Barbara Cook as Evelina, Keith Andes as Jeff and Paul Ford as Horace, with Agnes de Mille re-creating her dances. The DVD of the kinescope is now commercially available.

It must have been exhilarating to witness the one-two punch of *Oklahoma!* and *Bloomer Girl* in 1943–44. Critic Arthur Pollock did: “Both are so curious as musical comedies that it becomes unnecessary to describe them as something more heightened than that, so they are often spoken of as folk opera. Whatever the name by which you prefer to have them go, they are the best blend of comedy and music this country has ever seen.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

When **Don Driver** was interviewed by the Associated Press shortly before the opening of *Cinderella* in June, he told William Wolf: “When **John Price** believes in something, it could be wrong but he doesn’t let up in pursuing his goal.... [There is a] truly creative atmosphere [at Musicarnival].” Wolf reported that “Driver enjoys returning each year because Price gives him the leeway to attempt whatever he feels should be done.”

Johnny could not have given him much more leeway than to program *Paint Your Wagon*, *High Button Shoes* and *Bloomer Girl* in the same season. These were hardly galvanizing “titles,” as

theater marketing people say, and *Bloomer Girl*, in particular, must have been a tough sell. In his welcome to the audience on closing night, the usually upbeat producer laments, “I’m just sorry there aren’t more of you here this evening.”

Think of it: a by-then obscure musical without a hit song and, as we’ve noted, with a script and score stuffed with social commentary, given a full two-week run in a theater seating 2,000.

To Johnny’s credit, he mounted it in honor of the first year of the Civil War centennial, and to Driver’s credit, the rarely seen musical gets a production that is in most ways outstanding: funny, spirited and moving where it should be. As Evelina, **Monte Amundsen** brings authority and wit to the role; it’s a performance much stronger than her work in *Cinderella* (probably because that part was underwritten by Driver). And her second-act “Lullaby” is meltingly beautiful. In short, she wears her bloomers well.

I wish we could see them, and more than anything I wish we could see **Zachary Solov**’s choreography. Driver had the savvy to hire the man who for the past 10 years had served as choreographer for the Metropolitan Opera Ballet—the only way to go for a musical utterly dependent on classical dance. The audience appears to be fully engaged. If **Alfred Dennis** can’t quite find the ridiculous bluster in Horace that Paul Ford displayed in the 1956 TV version, **Lucille Benson** as Aunt Dolly is all we could wish for. The only real disappointment in the company is **Jerry Laws**, who, despite several decades identified with various roles in *Porgy and Bess*, drops the ball vocally in two great Arlen-Harburg numbers, “The Eagle and Me” and, with the elimination of the character Alexander, “I Got a Song.”

Some of **Lawrence Brown**’s tempos are too fast for the Harburg lyrics to sink in, but this is still a fine account of a distinguished score—the only time Musicarnival performed the music of Harold Arlen.

Never again would Johnny be in a position to take so many artistic risks in one summer. It was a slate of musicals that cried out for the more protective infrastructure of nonprofit theater. In the freedom he gave his director, he was truly ahead of his time.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Clayton Zeidler in *Fine Arts* came straight to the point: “Three cheers for *Bloomer Girl* ... splendid singing, captivating acting.... Fundamentally there is no reason why this show should remain unfamiliar to today’s theater audiences.” In *The Plain Dealer*, Harlowe R. Hoyt declared,

“This period material remains as fresh and entertaining as it was years ago.... Director Don Driver makes *Bloomer Girl* artistic in detail with the support of choreographer Zachary Solov and the orchestral direction of Lawrence Brown.” Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press* praised Solov’s work as “some of the best choreography I have seen in the tent.” But the grace and style of the score was entirely lost on him: “Much of the music is pedestrian and even the best of this is nothing they will gleefully dig out of archives 50 years from now.” Hardly.—**B. R.**

SOUTH PACIFIC

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

September 11–17, 1961 (New York opening: April 7, 1949;
1,925 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan, adapted from James A. Michener’s *Tales of the South Pacific*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Joan Fagan (Ensign Nellie Forbush), Webb Tilton (Emile de Becque), Rosetta LeNoire (Bloody Mary), Don Driver (Luther Billis), Chet Sommers (Lieutenant Joseph Cable)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“A Cockeyed Optimist,” “Some Enchanted Evening,” “Bloody Mary,” “There Is Nothin’ Like a Dame,” “Bali Ha’i,” “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair,” “A Wonderful Guy,” “Younger Than Springtime,” “Happy Talk,” “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” “This Nearly Was Mine”

SYNOPSIS

Emile de Becque, a middle-aged French planter, falls in love with the nurse Ensign Nellie Forbush. One of the islanders, the crafty Bloody Mary, has her eyes on the handsome Lieutenant Cable for her beautiful daughter, Liat. They fall in love, but Cable finds it difficult to reconcile their different races. Nellie, meanwhile, meets de Becque’s children and is shocked that they are of mixed race;

she ends the relationship. De Becque and Cable are recruited to spy on Japanese troop movements in a dangerous mission. While they are away, Nellie bonds with the children and grows to love them. Cable and de Becque's mission is successful, but Cable is killed by the Japanese. De Becque returns home to find Nellie and his children waiting with open arms.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Johnny Price was such a master of hyperbole that my guard went up as he promised his opening-night audience: “You’re in for a rare evening of entertainment. I honestly believe this is the greatest company we have ever assembled to do this show.”

But he was right. The 1961 Cleveland *South Pacific* followed four previous productions under the tent (1955 and 1957 in Cleveland, both directed by Bill Boehm; a second 1957 production in Cleveland, directed by Johnny himself; and 1960 in Palm Beach, directed by Jay Harnick). The fourth time up north is the best to date.

Why? Because **Don Driver** is in charge and, supported by musical director **Lawrence Brown**, he paces the show brilliantly, in the best sense milking the piece for all of the rich comedy and real drama that Rodgers, Hammerstein and Joshua Logan built into it.

And because this is the only one of the five Musicarnival productions in which four out of the five principals truly hit the mark: **Webb Tilton** had played de Becque for two years in the national company. The Nellie, **Joan Fagan**, was the leading lady in the recent *Donnybrook!* on Broadway (had the show succeeded, this vivacious performer would have become a star). Their romance is so strong that the musical, by now 12 years old, seems new.

Rosetta LeNoire (Bloody Mary) was already firing up a long career that would include television (Mother Winslow in *Family Matters*) and the formation of AMAS Repertory Theatre Company, a fine interracial theater in New York. (In 1999 she received the National Medal of Arts.) And **Driver** as Billis is a hoot, just as he had been in 1957. Only **Chet Sommers** at Cable seems out of his league.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The headline of Oscar Smith's review in the *Akron Beacon Journal* speaks for all of the critics:

“*South Pacific* Clicks for Umpteenth Time.” In *The Cleveland Press*, Stan Anderson began his notice this way: “Just as I get to the point when I wonder whether there really are enough singers and actors to play competently in theater-in-the-round, along comes a company to dispel my worries for the moment.... The *South Pacific* company now at Musicarnival is one of the most satisfying I have heard out there.... I’ve seen all sorts of Bloody Marys, including the one fashioned by Juanita Hall.... Rosetta LeNoire tops them all.”—**B. R.**



The theater’s most frequently produced musical, South Pacific, featuring Don Driver as Billis

1962 Season (Palm Beach)

FLOWER DRUM SONG

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 20–25 (New York opening: December 1, 1958;
600 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, book by Oscar Hammerstein II and Joseph Fields,
based on the novel by C. Y. Lee

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Yau Shan Tung (Mei Li), James Stevenson (Wang Ta), Tim Herbert (Sammy Fong), Cherry Davis (Linda Low),
Charles Reynolds (Master Wang Chi Yang), Thelma Salvesen (Madam Liang)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“You Are Beautiful,” “A Hundred Million Miracles,” “I Enjoy Being a Girl,” “I Am Going to Like It Here,” “Don’t
Marry Me,” “Grant Avenue,” “Love, Look Away,” “Sunday”

SYNOPSIS

The musical deals with the conflict between San Francisco’s traditionalist older Chinese-Americans and their Americanized children, who are anxious to break away. Mei Li, a timid “picture bride” from China, has arrived to fulfill her contract to marry Sammy Fong, a local nightclub owner. But Sammy prefers Linda Low, who quite obviously enjoys being a girl. The problem is resolved when Sammy’s friend Wang Ta conveniently falls in love with Mei Li.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

You probably know the famous quote from Oscar Hammerstein about 1958’s *Flower Drum Song*, which was R&H’s penultimate musical, followed by *The Sound of Music* and Hammerstein’s death in August 1960. He called it his “lucky hit.”

One wonders exactly what he meant by that. A hit it was at 600 performances—by no means a blockbuster, but surpassing the total number of performances for the two R&H Broadway shows that preceded it, *Me and Juliet* (1953) and *Pipe Dream* (1955). It received a national tour, a long-running London production, a loyal film version in 1961 produced by Ross Hunter (in which Miyoshi Umeki and Juanita Hall reprised their Broadway roles), and a flurry of stock productions such as the one at Musicarnival.

But *Flower Drum Song* was very much of its time, and it virtually disappeared until its first and only Broadway revival in 2002, a careful, effective and politically correct rethinking of the musical by the contemporary playwright David Henry Hwang.

Back to 1958. Based on a best-selling novel by C. Y. Lee, the story was a natural for Rodgers & Hammerstein: a study in contrasts among generations of Chinese-Americans, the tension arising from differing points of view about assimilation (a challenge faced by American Jews throughout much of the 20th century). Oliver Smith captured the metaphor in his set design for the living room of Master Wang Chi-Yang: “The house is architecturally Victorian with Chinese decoration superimposed.”

For only the second time in his collaboration with Rodgers (the first was *South Pacific*), Hammerstein worked with a co-librettist, the veteran playwright Joseph Fields (1895-1966), who had brought the idea to them. What the three men fashioned was never less than professional, albeit not consistently inspired. The critics’ response to director Gene Kelly’s production—his only musical as a director on Broadway—ranged from “a pleasant interlude” (Brooks Atkinson) to “a world of woozy song” (Kenneth Tynan punning on Off Broadway’s then-current romantic drama, *The World of Suzy Wong*).

Hammerstein’s “lucky” phrase may suggest he came to realize that he and his colleagues were too old—and too white—to be fully in sync with such a contemporary and culturally specific piece (he and Fields were 63, Rodgers 56). This was a culture they had no firsthand knowledge of. Unsurprisingly, their writing for the kids is unhip (“What language are you speaking?,” asks father Wang Ta, to which his son, San, replies, “That’s bop, Pop!”), as is Linda’s impromptu demonstration of rock ’n’ roll: “You be the rock, / I’ll be the roll; / You be the soup, / I’ll be the bowl...” It’s startling to contemplate that this musical and *West Side Story* ran concurrently on Broadway.

To the collaborators’ credit, however, it should be said that as good liberals, Hammerstein and

Fields didn't lose their ability to laugh at themselves: Wang Ta confesses, "All white men look alike," a twist on the sort of racial stereotyping that we learned to condemn in the 1960s, our consciousness having been raised.

And one of the virtues of the piece is that, as always, R&H are in search of universals. The song "Chop Suey" springs from the Chinese-Americans' attempt to make sense of a postwar media explosion that has only become louder and more frantic in the ensuing decades. Hammerstein's helter-skelter hodgepodge is now irrelevant: "Hula Hoops and nuclear war, / Doctor Salk and Zsa Zsa Gabor, / Harry Truman, Truman Capote and Dewey— / Chop suey!" But *all* Americans could have related to the theme then, and can't we easily imagine replacing the lyrics now with images from our own culture?

Where *Flower Drum Song* charms is in its depiction of the 18-year-old "picture bride," Mei Li, an entirely original character on our musical stage. Described as "shy" by Stanley Green, she goes much deeper than that: Mei Li is exquisitely quiet—which imbues her scenes with an aura that we seldom encounter in an art form that's mostly about high energy. As played by the luminous Miyoshi Umeki, the young woman is what we call today "centered."

And therefore wise. Hammerstein must have cherished the time he spent writing for her, expressing his own philosophy along the way: "A hundred million miracles are happening every day. / And those who say they don't agree, / Are those who do not hear or see." Note that such lovely serenity runs through the first *two* songs in the score: Mei Li's "A Hundred Million Miracles" comes soon after the opener, Ta's "You Are Beautiful," which he shares with his mother while revealing his own dream of love: It is R&H's way of telling us that he and Mei Li belong together.

The songs for Mei Li, Ta and Helen Chao ("Love Look Away") are rendered with great sensitivity. For that reason and many others, the success of this musical, though not unqualified, wasn't lucky at all, but rather the result of all that R&H had learned since their partnership began in 1942. There is love in their conception for *Flower Drum Song*.

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

David Davis, back for his second season as resident director in West Palm Beach, falls short with *Flower Drum Song*. His touch is not light enough to make the musical's delicate Orientalism shimmer; nor is it bold enough for the full-out Broadway brassiness of, say, the show's hit song, "I Enjoy Being a Girl." The girl, **Cherry Davis**, never convincingly embodies Hammerstein's

“filly who is ready for a race,” a star-making turn for Pat Suzuki in the original production.

Johnny Price, unlike many of his fellow tent-theater impresarios, was unfazed by producing a show following the release of the film version; he found audiences eager to see the musical live, and *Flower Drum Song* did well for him, even though he mounted it quite soon after the 1961 Universal picture came out. What’s best about it are two performers who had recently played these roles in the London company: **Yau Shan Tung** as the fetching Mei Li and **Tim Herbert** as Sammy Fong, the amusingly opportunistic nightclub owner. Whenever they’re onstage we know what Rodgers, Hammerstein and Fields had in mind.

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Though the critics all failed to deal with the musical’s unusual themes, they were in agreement about the fun of the production. Wrote Helen Van Roy Smith in the *Palm Beach Herald*: “East meets West with only the happiest results in Rodgers & Hammerstein’s [musical]. The circular stage is filled with young, fresh-faced performers wearing fresh new costumes; and they sing and dance engagingly.”

A piece on Johnny Price that ran in the *Palm Beach Post* the day before the opening of the fifth season contains an illuminating statement about how successfully and sincerely the Cleveland producer had anchored his satellite theater. The reporter, who is not bylined, observes: “Price is so intensely interested in the theater—and all genuine attempts at mirroring life—that he has become vitally involved in the area, which has become his home for much of the year. . . . He has been known to give stalled cars a push, to give old ladies a thrill by picking them up and carrying them to a waiting bus in wet weather, and to take over directing traffic when a policeman was ill. . . . [And of course] there is the business of saying goodbye in the parking lot. Rain or shine . . . the head man will be there to wave a cheery goodbye and to thank one and all for coming. This is more than a trademark. It is a natural outcome of a firm conviction that customers in a theater are your guests—and when your guests leave, it is a natural and friendly thing to go to the door and bid them good night.”—**B. R.**

ANYTHING GOES

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 27–March 4 (New York opening: November 21, 1934;
420 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse, revised by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, music and lyrics by Cole Porter

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Marilyn Child (Reno Sweeney), Robert Smith (Billy Crocker), Tim Herbert (Dr. Moon), Beverly Weston (Hope Harcourt), Karen Jensen (Bonnie), David Davis (Sir Evelyn Oakleigh), Ellen Jaine (Mrs. Harcourt)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Get a Kick Out of You,” “You’re the Top,” “All Through the Night,” “Blow, Gabriel, Blow,” “Anything Goes,” “Be Like the Bluebird”

SYNOPSIS

Colorful characters decorate this show, set on board a ship bound from New York to London: nightclub singer Reno Sweeney; her chum Billy Crocker, who stows away to be near Hope Harcourt, the debutante he loves, who is engaged to a foolish Brit, Sir Evelyn Oakleigh; and Moon-Face Mooney, who masquerades as the clergyman Dr. Moon to avoid the long arm of the FBI.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1960 SEASON (Cleveland)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

This Cole Porter classic, a hit for **Johnny Price** in Cleveland in 1960, rang the bell in West Palm Beach, too—commercially if not artistically. The cast of **David Davis**’s production, though respectable, can’t match Don Driver’s Warrensville Heights company, which featured Joan Kibrig as Reno and the wonderful Gabriel Dell as Moon-Face. And Davis is no match for Driver’s commitment to style—especially with something as wacky but well-crafted as this 1934 farce.

He gets props, though, for sticking more closely to the Lindsay & Crouse script than his predecessor, and as Lincoln Center audiences would learn 25 years later in the Patti LuPone revival, that script works no matter what: “I’m not really a clergyman,” confesses Moon. “I’m a crook. I’m wanted in America.” Says Billy: “What do they want with another crook in America?” Or fake Evangelist Reno Sweeney’s fractured Biblical references: “You can start right now—lead them beside distilled waters.” This is the uniquely American rhythm of gags, and Lindsay & Crouse were masters.

Yes, there are interpolations (as usual): in this production, “From This Moment On” (1950) and the closer-to-period “Just One of Those Things” (1939). These we can live with. What’s deplorable is **Tim Herbert**, as Moon-Face, pandering for laughs with anachronisms that range from stupid references to Musicarnival’s upcoming *Bye Bye Birdie*, to astronaut Alan Shepard, to the “rocking chair administration” of John F. Kennedy. Herbert, who was so good in *Flower Drum Song*, spends most of the evening aping Victor Moore’s vocal inflection, but minus that actor’s endearing persona. He insists on stealing the show.

Robert Smith is an adequate Billy in the comedy scenes, but he can barely handle the two interpolated songs. The most interesting casting is **Marilyn Child**, then 32, in the Merman role. Child is one of those performers who just kept working. She began as a noted folk singer, sharing album credit with Glenn Yarbrough as early as 1958, and she came close to something big theatrically when Leonard Sillman featured her on Broadway in *New Faces of 1968*. Child’s colleagues Madeline Kahn and Robert Klein won the notices, but she hung on and shaped a career guesting on every TV series imaginable. Child throws herself into the Reno Sweeney role, and though she can’t blow the house down à la Merman, she nails “I Get a Kick Out of You” and exploits all the comedy that’s to be had.

Just three months after this production, Guy Bolton’s revision of Lindsay & Crouse’s revision of Bolton and Wodehouse (!) opened Off Broadway and gave the 1934 musical a new lease on life. Can you imagine? Eileen Rodgers, Hal Linden, Mickey Deems, Barbara Lang and Margery Gray in their prime. But it will never end, as Sutton Foster and Joel Grey demonstrated in 2011. Wherever and whenever, as Mr. Porter would say, “Bon Voyage.”

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

My reservations notwithstanding, David Davis’s production satisfied both audiences and critics. Wrote Joe Bryan in the *Fort Lauderdale News*: “The show is as delightfully funny now as it ever was.... Everybody, including the cast, has a riotous time.” “It’s an evening of pure, uninterrupted

fun,” declared Josh Crane in the *Palm Beach Times*. “Whether you live here or are just visiting, whether you’ve been to a play this week or you haven’t seen one in your life, do yourself a favor and see *Anything Goes*.”—**B. R.**

BYE BYE BIRDIE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 6–11, 1962 (New York opening: April 14, 1960;
607 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Michael Stewart, music by Charles Strouse, lyrics by Lee Adams

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Tim Herbert (Albert Peterson), Patti Karr (Rosie Alvarez), David Davis (Mr. MacAfee), Marian Mercer (Mae Peterson), Barbara Gayle (Kim McAfee), Richard France (Conrad Birdie)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“An English Teacher,” “The Telephone Hour,” “Put On a Happy Face,” “One Boy,” “One Last Kiss,” “A Lot of Livin’ to Do,” “Baby, Talk to Me,” “Kids”

SYNOPSIS

Albert Peterson’s longtime girlfriend, Rosie, yearns for him to be an English teacher, but contents herself as secretary to Albert’s music business, as he writes pop songs and manages the Elvis-like Conrad Birdie. After Conrad is drafted, Albert and Rose cook up a scheme for Conrad to appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and give one last kiss goodbye to a lucky female fan. This scheme carries them all to the heart of small-town America, where everyone learns a little something about life, love and celebrity.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Just what has made *Bye Bye Birdie* one of the most frequently produced musicals in America, aside from its good-natured spoof of Elvis Presley and the onslaught of rock 'n' roll in the 1950s?

Of course, it hasn't hurt this musical that its cast is fueled by a large contingent of teenagers, making *Birdie* a natural choice for high school drama departments. Or that, as its lyricist, Lee Adams (b. 1924), says, "Ever since Elvis became a myth, *Birdie* has played more and more."

But even those factors don't fully account for the show's astonishing success. The fact is that what *Birdie* does, it does splendidly. Not only is it suffused with an energy that is irresistible; it surprisingly reveals much of what is funny, trivial and touching about the manners and mores of suburban life. If musical comedy is a uniquely American art form, then *Birdie* is one of the most endearingly American pieces in the canon.

This musical sniffed the clear morning air of its fictional setting—Sweet Apple, Ohio—at a time of tremendous, even unprecedented prosperity for the white middle class, and when the lifestyle skewered in *Bye Bye Birdie* was itself a phenomenon.

The American suburb as we know it sprang up almost overnight in the early 1950s, a product of the postwar baby boom, the development of President Eisenhower's interstate highway system (41,000 miles of mobility and convenience—the largest public project in history), and advances in construction that made it possible to create entire neighborhoods in weeks, sometimes days (in fabled Levittown, New York, a new prefabricated house went up every 15 minutes).

The upshot: During the decade, 30 million Americans would find an affordable home in suburbia. They would be linked not only by their community centers, churches and PTAs, but (also unprecedented) by millions of antennas wired to electronic boxes. The boxes glowed with Walter Cronkite's fatherly concern, Lucy's shenanigans and the stone-faced awkwardness of an unlikely impresario, Ed Sullivan, in whose Sunday-night company you could thrill to "acts" that ranged from the Metropolitan Opera's Birgit Nilsson to Memphis, Tennessee's Elvis Presley—all in the course of one hour spent on the sofa with the whole family.

Significantly, many pop music historians date the massification of rock 'n' roll from Elvis's three notorious appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in late 1956 and early 1957; 82.6 percent of the country's viewing audiences caught the King's first guest shot, and in eight galvanic minutes—in a hips-swiveling medley of "Hound Dog," "Don't Be Cruel," "Love Me Tender" and "Ready

Teddy”—the generational fault line was drawn right down the middle of your suburban living room. Choose your side: This was either the liberation or the vulgarization of popular culture.

Enter the creators of *Bye Bye Birdie*, who were hell-bent on writing something we seldom find on the musical stage anymore: a fresh, satiric look at contemporary America. Lyricist Adams gets credit for the idea of playing off the 1958 headlines announcing that Elvis had received—gasp!—his draft notice. Charles Strouse (b. 1928), *Birdie*'s composer, recalls that at the time it was “odd, even ground-breaking, for us to do a show on the subject.”

They had the talent, but what Strouse and Adams and their collaborators didn't have was a Broadway pedigree. Adams's day job was that of journalist; Strouse had most recently served as a rehearsal pianist; scriptwriter Michael Stewart (1924-87) had penned sketches for television and a few modest Off Broadway revues; and director-choreographer Gower Champion (1919-80) was a well-known dancer who had never before staged or choreographed a Broadway book musical. If that inexperience didn't make it hard enough to raise money for the show, producer Edward Padula was also a neophyte, and the big names the team wanted for the leading roles of Albert and Rose—Jack Lemmon and Eydie Gormé—turned them down flat.

All told, it took two and a half years to get *Birdie* onstage. Along the way, Padula hosted 85 backers' auditions, and the creators were forced to settle for two young performers—Dick Van Dyke and Chita Rivera—playing starring roles on Broadway for the first time.

Opening in mid-April 1960, *Bye Bye Birdie* was an immediate hit that proved to be a star maker for Van Dyke and Rivera (and for Paul Lynde as a sputtering Mr. MacAfee). And countless revivals later, this musical continues to entertain Americans of all ages.

On one level, *Birdie* is pure nostalgia. Stewart once observed: “Now the audience looks back at the MacAfee family and laughs at their happy innocence.” The show made its debut before Vietnam and Watergate, before the Kennedy and King assassinations, before we had lost our own innocence as a society.

But *Birdie* keeps flying, thanks to the pointedness tempered by “affection” (Charles Strouse's word) of its satire. These characters—even when they are caricatures—are eminently likeable, and aren't we apt to find in the mirror of this musical our own faces? Who among us hasn't been a willing victim in the cult of celebrity, whether the star is Elvis, Madonna or Lady Gaga? And Charles Repole, who directed a national tour of *Birdie*, asks: “When 15-year-old Kim MacAfee

sings ‘How Lovely to Be a Woman,’ doesn’t that capture something true about human nature?”

And please note, *Birdie* eschews a *Father Knows Best* or *Leave It to Beaver* fantasy land of 1950s suburban tranquility. The musical turns that stereotype on its ear in the subversive little cartoon it draws: that of a fraught and manic nuclear family whose conformity is a way of coping with middle-class stress. The show’s writers know that too many barbecue pits and car pools can drive you over the edge; that worshipping Ed Sullivan—as the MacAfees do in Strouse and Adams’s brilliant mock chorale—is a sure sign of suburbanites going bonkers. (Fast-forward to soccer moms and helicopter parents; it’s all the same.)

Interesting, isn’t it, that demographers have been telling us for some time now that the majority of Americans live in the Sweet Apples of this country? It would seem that *Bye Bye Birdie*’s high-spirited joke is on us.

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Three of **Johnny Price**’s 1962 West Beach productions—*Flower Drum Song*, *The Music Man* and *Bye Bye Birdie*—were being primed for Cleveland that summer. While I’m sure the strategy created welcome efficiencies in terms of the physical productions, artistically speaking the trio of musicals together provide the best evidence to date of the differences between the two theaters—especially **David Davis**’s direction (West Palm Beach) versus **Don Driver**’s (Cleveland).

Birdie should have been a knockout here—a real surprise for the audience. The one-week run in March predated the film version by more than a year, so unless you had seen the national tour or the original Broadway production, you would have no way of knowing what a satirical delight it is. And with **Patti Karr** (Chita Rivera’s standby and one of Leonard Sillman’s *New Faces of 1962*) as Rosie and future Tony Award winner **Marian Mercer** as Mrs. Peterson, this shouda-coulda taken off.

But it sounds as though no one was directed by Davis—including Davis, who plays Mr. MacAfee (one of Michael Stewart’s best creations) as if clueless about what to do with the character’s outrageous tantrums; instead of fussing and fuming, he just yells. **Tim Herbert** as Albert misses all the charm built into the part, and **Richard France**’s Conrad Birdie is nothing but a cartoon.

Even **Lawrence Brown**’s music direction is bland (including the usually foolproof “Telephone Hour”). Way too many laughs are missed in Palm Beach. How can anybody do a listless *Bye Bye Birdie*? Onward to Cleveland!

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

It's always instructive to chart the critical response to a new musical. Ken Bloom, in his 2004 book *Broadway Musicals: The 101 Greatest Shows of All Time*, includes *Birdie* among the 101. But in 1962, Joe Bryant, in the *Fort Lauderdale News*, lamented the “so-so story ... and “tunes that show a spark ... then are all too quickly extinguished.” Under the circumstances, Bryant praised director Davis for “making the most” of inferior material. In the *Palm Beach Times*, Josh Crane liked the musical but found the production to be “quite rough. It needs to be paced more evenly.”—**B. R.**

PAL JOEY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 13–18, 1962 (New York opening: December 25, 1940;
374 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Lorenz Hart, book by John O'Hara

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Richard France (Joey), Nancy Kenyon (Vera Simpson), Barbara Bossert (Linda English), Karen Jensen (Gladys Bumps), Joan Kibrig (Melba), Charles Reynolds (Ludlow Lowell)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Could Write a Book,” “You Mustn't Kick It Around,” “Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered,” “What Is a Man?,” “Our Little Den of Iniquity,” “Zip,” “That Terrific Rainbow,” “Take Him”

SYNOPSIS

Joey, a small-time Chicago entertainer, gets a job at Mike's Club, where he is attracted to Linda English but drops her in favor of the rich Vera Simpson. Vera builds a glittering nightclub, the Chez Joey, for her paramour, but she soon tires of him, and at the end—after an encounter with

blackmailers Ludlow Lowell and Gladys Bumps—Joey is off in search of other conquests.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1960 SEASON (Cleveland)

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Alas, once again, director **David Davis** turns in a production that suffers by comparison with one by Don Driver (1960). In the title role, **Johnny Price** gave Davis the same capable actor, **Richard France**, that Driver had to work with. By this time France may have appeared in *Pal Joey* more than anybody else (a short time on Broadway; a long run in London; lots of summer stock), but this still strikes me as too safe a characterization for John O'Hara's cocky and amoral heel, described by Mike in the first scene as a "young punk." If only we could see what Gene Kelly did with the part in 1940! Short of that, we hear lots of subtext in Harold Lang's acclaimed 1952 recording, and Peter Gallagher scored in the 1995 New York City Center Encores! revival co-starring Patti LuPone as Vera.

The rest of Davis's cast is no match for the company assembled in 1960 (that is, with the exception of **Joan Kibrig**'s world-weary Melba), and the director does the material a disservice by setting the musical in the 1950s. That works against O'Hara's lingo, which is redolent of the Depression. The decision panders to an audience familiar with the sanitized 1957 film version—a vehicle for Frank Sinatra—which was set in the present.

But I shouldn't be so cranky. On the other hand, this is a tricky show to pull off for any director. Its tone must be carefully sustained. Make one false move and the piece is mean; make another and it's sentimental. We may still be looking for the definitive production of a musical that is routinely labeled a classic—but not by anybody who ever had to stage it.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Richard France stole the notices: Wrote Josh Crane in the *Palm Beach Times*, "He acts very well, sings very well, and dances so well it's hard to believe he's real! In some marathon stints when his feet start going, Richard France flies. It is a rare opportunity to see someone this good." And for Joe Bryant in the *Fort Lauderdale News*, "*Pal Joey* has taken over Musicarnival with compelling confidence.... [The production is] sparkingly highlighted by the superb abilities of Richard France.... Back for her first time this season was Joan Kibrig, Musicarnival's undisputed 'First Lady,' who received a tremendous reception in a minor role."—**B. R.**

SOUTH PACIFIC

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 20–25, 1962 (New York opening: April 7, 1949;
1,925 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan, adapted from James A. Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Joan Kibrig (Ensign Nellie Forbush), Joshua Hecht (Emile de Becque), Lynne Osborne (Bloody Mary), Tim Herbert (Luther Billis), Richard France (Lieutenant Joseph Cable)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“A Cockeyed Optimist,” “Some Enchanted Evening,” “Bloody Mary,” “There Is Nothin’ Like a Dame,” “Bali Ha’i,” “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair,” “A Wonderful Guy,” “Younger Than Springtime,” “Happy Talk,” “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” “This Nearly Was Mine”

SYNOPSIS

Emile de Becque, a middle-aged French planter, falls in love with the nurse Ensign Nellie Forbush. One of the islanders, the crafty Bloody Mary, has her eyes on the handsome Lieutenant Cable for her beautiful daughter, Liat. They fall in love, but Cable finds it difficult to reconcile their different races. Nellie, meanwhile, meets de Becque’s children and is shocked that they are of mixed race; she ends the relationship. De Becque and Cable are recruited to spy on Japanese troop movements in a dangerous mission. While they are away, Nellie bonds with the children and grows to love them. Cable and de Becque’s mission is successful, but Cable is killed by the Japanese. De Becque returns home to find Nellie and his children waiting with open arms.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Of the seven showings of *South Pacific* produced by **Johnny Price** either here or in Cleveland, this one has in New York City Opera basso **Joshua Hecht** the finest Emile de Becque of the lot. Still in his 30s, Hecht was too young for the part, but that didn't stop him in Musicarnival's *Fanny*, either (playing César, another Ezio Pinza role). He gives us a de Becque who has amassed enough life experience for two men, and the last-chance urgency in his marriage proposal to Nellie is palpable; so, too, is the profound sadness of "This Nearly Was Mine," the planter's cri de coeur when he believes he has lost her. This must have been a signature role for Hecht in summer stock; it is stunningly polished.

I have the same reservation about **Joan Kibrig** that I did when she first essayed Nellie in Palm Beach two years earlier. Most of her career was spent playing comic roles, and while she is a grand Nellie in the lighter scenes, she never quite hits the mark when the musical's deeper material kicks in. It's in those moments that I miss Joan Fagan's Nellie from the 1961 Cleveland showing.

But you can drive yourself crazy looking for a dream cast in a work that asks so much of its principals. **Tim Herbert** is very funny as Billis (he had an affinity for "operators"; consider his Sammy Fong in *Flower Drum Song* from earlier in the season). As Lieutenant Cable, a role written for a tenor, baritone **Richard France** raised my eyebrows until I heard him find his own way with "Younger Than Springtime" (only in the reprise does he strain), and his acting is impressive. The only mistake is using **Lynne Osborne** for a second time (she's another veteran of Florida in 1960) as Bloody Mary. Osborne is simply not a credible Polynesian, and why should she be?

This is the best work I've seen (that's what these vibrant audio recordings feel like) from **David Davis** as director. Here he limits his acting to a minor role; it may be my imagination, but the entire show feels as though it was given more attention.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The lead from one review will suffice—from Jonathan Koontz: "It may be that this is the week the *Palm Beach Post-Times* runs out of the type the boys in the back shop use to set superlatives. Already, two other reviewers have dusted off words like 'greatest' and 'best' and 'wonderful'—and this makes writing a review of the current Musicarnival version of *South Pacific* impossible without using that same type over again."—**B. R.**

WISH YOU WERE HERE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 27–April 1, 1962 (New York opening: June 25, 1952;
598 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Harold Rome, book by Arthur Kober and Joshua Logan, based on Kober’s play *Having Wonderful Time*

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

LEADING PLAYERS

Richard France (Chick Miller), Laurie Franks (Teddy Stern), Tim Herbert (Itchy Flexner), David Davis (Pinky Harris), Lynne Osborne (Fay Fromkin), Marshall Stone (Lou Kandel)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Ballad of a Social Director,” “There’s Nothing Nicer Than People,” “Shopping Around,” “Could Be,” “Where Did the Night Go?,” “Don Jose of Far Rockaway,” “Flattery,” “Summer Afternoon,” “Wish You Were Here”

SYNOPSIS

The musical is set at Camp Karefree, an adult summer camp “where friendships are formed to last a whole lifetime through,” and is concerned with middle-class New Yorkers trying to make the most of a two-week vacation in the Catskills. Mainly it’s about Teddy Stern, a secretary from Brooklyn, who finds true love—after a series of misunderstandings—with Chick Miller, a law student working as a camp waiter by day and a dancing partner for the guests by night.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

The “stock” of literature goes up and down. Take for example Ernest Hemingway, who, since the 1950s, has been alternately revered and reviled, depending on the culture swirling around his work. The same thing applies to musicals: In 1946 *Annie Get Your Gun* could do no wrong, but by the late 1960s, soon after the Lincoln Center revival, its depiction of native Americans

was condemned as politically incorrect, and not until Peter Stone's 1999 revision of the book for Bernadette Peters was its reputation restored.

Here in the Musicarnival audio archives is another example: *Wish You Were Here*, first produced on Broadway in 1952. All three of **Johnny Price**'s productions of the "swimming pool musical" (two in Cleveland in the 1950s and this one in West Palm Beach) satisfied both critics and audiences. But listening to the 1962 go-round reminds us that times had changed in popular culture—especially when we encounter it in the same tent season as *Bye Bye Birdie* (bop versus rock 'n' roll!). I imagine this production was the beginning of the end for a musical that is never revived, so redolent is it of the decade ruled by Emily Post, Kinsey and Eisenhower—all of whom (along with many other icons of the period) are saluted in a Harold Rome lyric.

In the 1950s the show felt not only contemporary but amusingly, touchingly true, its stage filled with horny college waiters ("rah! rah!") and marriage-minded young women who come to "shop around" (another Rome lyric) at Camp Karefree. But by 1962, a year after the Bay of Pigs, *Wish You Were Here* had fallen out of step with the times.

The production itself is good enough, featuring resident company member **Richard France** as Chick and new face **Laurie Franks** (Teddy) getting her feet wet in Johnny's pool in preparation for the top secret (hardly!) show that followed *Wish You Were Here*. This is the best work I've heard so far from relatively new musical director **Lawrence Brown**, whose chorus caresses the lovely "Where Did the Night Go?" And **Lynne Osborne**, so embarrassingly miscast as Bloody Mary the previous week, delights as Teddy's best friend, Fay, showing off her musical comedy pizzazz in the flirty "Shopping Around" and in one of Rome's classic feel-good songs, "Ev'rybody Loves Ev'rybody."

Only **Tim Herbert** bugged me as Itchy, the embattled social director. Herbert's predicable ad libs reach a new low here, turning into a long, cheesy riff that must have been imported from his club act. The audience eats it up—but their laughter sounds different; they know he's messing around with the material (illegally, by the way). It's another sign that *Wish You Were Here*'s stock had gone down and that the company decided to give it some "help."

But all these years later, I think this Josh Logan–Arthur Kober–Harold Rome opus would be received enthusiastically at New York City Center Encores! now that we've got enough distance on the show to see it for what it is and what it has to offer, which is a lot. It just has to be mounted as a true period piece—without editorial help, but making the most of its smartass yet romantic New York Jewish milieu.

Incidentally, Johnny's publicity campaign for the closing season attraction was among his most inventive. The campaign sprang from legal restrictions on rights for summer stock, and the film version of this musical that dared not speak its name was about to be released. Johnny milked the constraints to his advantage in curtain speeches and in a full-page notice in the *Wish You Were Here* program [caps his]: "A SURPRISE SHOW! OPENING TUESDAY, APRIL 3. We are delighted to announce that we have just obtained production rights for THE SHOW YOU'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR! Because of contract restrictions we can't tell you what it is until March 31. BUT SEATS ARE ON SALE NOW AT THE BOX OFFICE." Johnny's daughter **Diana Price** recalls that in his audience welcomes leading up to the "surprise show," he even had the orchestra play a bit of "76 Trombones." Everybody got a kick out of the ploy—and seemingly everybody in Palm Beach ran to the box office. Those were the days...

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Josh Crane in the *Palm Beach Times*: "Musicarnival producer John L. Price is some sort of a magician. For this week's presentation he has chosen a very difficult show, *Wish You Were Here*, and has pulled it off apparently as easily as the proverbial bunny from the chapeau." An unnamed critic for the *Palm Beach Daily News* disagreed: "On the whole the production lacks technical and transitional polish, but *Wish You Were Here* is a vaudeville-ish slapstick evening full of light musical comedy fun."—**B. R.**

THE MUSIC MAN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

April 3–8, 1962 (New York opening: December 19, 1957;
1,375 performances)

AUTHORS

Book, music and lyrics by Meredith Willson; story by Willson and Franklin Lacey

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Mace Barrett (Harold Hill), Laurie Franks (Marian Paroo), Charles Reynolds (Mayor Shinn), Marjorie Ray (Mrs. Paroo), Lynn Osborne (Mrs. Shinn), Marshall Stone (Marcellus)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Rock Island,” “Trouble,” “Goodnight, My Someone,” “Seventy-Six Trombones,” “Sincere,” “Marian the Librarian,” “My White Knight,” “The Sadder-but-Wiser Girl,” “Lida Rose,” “Gary, Indiana,” “Till There Was You”

SYNOPSIS

The story begins on the Fourth of July, 1912, in River City, Iowa. Enter “Professor” Harold Hill, who has arrived to hornswoggle the citizens into believing he can teach the local youngsters how to play in a marching band that would rival the once-mammoth parade featuring “Seventy-Six Trombones.” But instead of skipping town before instruments arrive, Hill is persuaded to remain by the town’s librarian and piano teacher, Marian Paroo. The musical ends with the children being hailed by their parents, even though they can barely produce any recognizable sound from their instruments.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Stephen Sondheim has praised “Rock Island,” the jaw-dropping curtain raiser on *The Music Man* that’s performed by a train full of traveling salesman talking shop, as “one of the most startling and galvanic opening numbers ever devised ... the forerunner of rap.” And in some ways 1957’s *Music Man* is a startling musical comedy—more daring than people think.

Its first drum roll goes back to 1949, when author Meredith Willson (1902-84) was reminiscing about his boyhood in Mason City, Iowa. According to Willson, his friend and fellow songwriter Frank Loesser “jumped to his feet and said, ‘What an idea! Why don’t you write a musical about it.... You could tell everybody about your town. It would be real Americana!’”

Certainly Willson knew about small-town life in Iowa. In fact, most of the characters in *The Music Man* are drawn from members of his family or the townspeople when he was 10 years old. He later said, “Innocent. That was the adjective for Iowa in those years. All I had to do was remember.” And spend the next eight years of his life writing 40 drafts of this, his very first musical, which eventually became an affectionate satire on small-town life, and a love story about two seemingly incompatible people—a librarian and a con man—who learn that they were meant for each other.

When we listen to Willson wax eloquent about his show (which he does on a 1958 LP—that’s

how popular *The Music Man* became), he sounds downright folksy. But underneath his gee-whiz persona beat the heart of a sophisticated artist who became obsessed with experimenting and making musical theater songs more conversational. He wanted to write what he called “rhythmic, rhyme-less speak-song.” We hear it not only in “Rock Island,” but also in “Trouble,” “Piano Lesson,” the intro to “76 Trombones” and the lyrical but rhymeless interlude in “My White Knight” (let’s call that an art song)—all of them perfectly crafted.

As for casting the leads, Marian Paroo was easy: The 30-year-old Barbara Cook was the creative team’s unanimous choice. But finding a Harold Hill proved a vexing problem. Today, of course, we can scarcely imagine anyone but Robert Preston playing the role. But everybody and his brother was considered, and most of them turned it down: Danny Kaye, Ray Bolger, Gene Kelly, Phil Harris, Dan Dailey and even Milton Berle,. When Willson and his colleagues finally decided they wanted an actor, not a song-and-dance man, the 39-year-old Robert Preston’s name shot to the top of the list—even though he had no experience in musical theater. Preston later recalled, “They gave me ‘Trouble’ to audition with . . . and what I did for that audition didn’t change a lot right up to the performance. It all started to work from the first day, and we all knew it. The songs I had to do were perfect for the kind of voice I had.”

And Preston and Cook were supported by indelible performances from comic actor David Burns as Mayor Shinn, Pert Kelton as Mrs. Paroo (she reprised her role in the 1962 film), Iggie Wolfington as Harold’s partner-in-scam, Marcellus) and the marvelous Buffalo Bills, the nationally known barbershop quartet who played the squabbling (until they blended their voices) school board. The foursome can also be relished in the movie. Morton Da Costa directed for both stage and screen.

If it all sounds magical, it wasn’t; hence Willson’s 40 drafts. Only one record label, Capitol, was interested in recording the show, and some of Kermit Bloomgarden’s investors warned the producer, “Don’t do it, Kermit—it’s corny.” There were snobby audience members who shared that judgment, but most of the rest of us took Willson’s characters to our heart. The music, lyrics and libretto—all by Willson, with an assist on the “story” from Franklin Lacey—are so masterfully written that we may scratch our heads wondering why none of Willson’s subsequent musicals (there were three) could come close to matching the success of *The Music Man*.

But the answer is probably simple. This was the story he *had to tell*. There are many layers to that story, including a theme that runs through lots of great literature. Harold and Marian transform each other. How they get there is truthful and moving.

As for the Broadway wise guys and their charge of corniness: Bruce Pomahac, former music director of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization, told me something about Oscar Hammerstein's writing that also applies to Meredith Willson: "It's about how we have to learn to love each other, no matter how hard that is. And people say, How can we love each other? That's corny. Yes—and life is corny. Being born is corny. Growing up is corny—and having kids. It's all corny."

The Music Man is a musical comedy slice of life. Embrace the corniness.

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

This is the best example yet of **Johnny Price's** efficient use of his two theaters: Just two months after *The Music Man* closed the Palm Beach tent in early spring, it opened the summer season in Warrensville Heights with the same actors—**Mace Barrett** and **Charles Reynolds**, respectively—as Harold Hill and Mayor Shinn. And two other physical productions would also truck their way north that year: *Flower Drum Song* and *Bye Bye Birdie*.

In the plus column for this production: Barrett, who had recently played the role in another leading tent theater, Casa Mañana Theatre-in-the-Round at Fort Worth, Texas, has the requisite energy and charm for Professor Hill without in any way imitating Robert Preston; in fact, he actually sings his songs. And Reynolds finds all the small-town satire Meredith Willson wrote into the bumptious mayor. A word about the fun of repertory when the casting is right: Before arriving in River City, Reynolds began the season as Wang Ta in San Francisco's *Flower Drum Song*, then played Mr. Whitney in *Anything Goes*, Ludlow Lowell in *Pal Joey* and Herman Fabricant in *Wish You Were*—each a sharp turn in the road, and handled expertly.

Unfortunately, the minus column for this *Music Man* is longer: **Laurie Franks**, under **David Davis's** direction, hardly approaches Marian's complexity, and her soprano is too legit to mesh with her dialogue; you'd swear these were two actresses. Moreover, three of the key townspeople aren't nearly funny enough: **Lynne Osborne** as Mrs. Shinn, **Marshall Stone** as Marcellus and **Marjorie Rae** as Mrs. Paroo. None of them made the move to Cleveland.

The production truly catches fire when little **Paul Riddle**, as Winthrop, stops the show with "Gary, Indiana." Nonetheless, Johnny had happy (and full) houses all week.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

All raves. Jonathan Koontz in the *Palm Beach Post*: "There hasn't been a better cast for

theatergoers to see than this one.” And Joe Bryant in the *Fort Lauderdale News*: “Barrett brings a fine voice and wide experience to the part.... Miss Franks is completely captivating as Marian.... As usual, producer John Price has bulwarked his stars with a sturdy wall of talented supporting players.”—*B. R.*



*Don Driver and his production of
Paint Your Wagon*



1962 Season (Cleveland)

THE MUSIC MAN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 11–July 1, 1962 (New York opening: December 19, 1957;
1,375 performances)

AUTHORS

Book, music and lyrics by Meredith Willson; story by Willson and Franklin Lacey

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Mace Barrett (Harold Hill), Monte Amundsen (Marian Paroo), Charles Reynolds (Mayor Shinn), Estelle Ritchie (Mrs. Paroo), Barbara Cason (Mrs. Shinn), Tom Batten (Marcellus), Pat Plante (Winthrop)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Rock Island,” “Trouble,” “Goodnight, My Someone,” “Seventy-Six Trombones,” “Sincere,” “Marian the Librarian,” “My White Knight,” “The Sadder-but-Wiser Girl,” “Lida Rose,” “Gary, Indiana,” “Till There Was You”

SYNOPSIS

The story begins on the Fourth of July, 1912, in River City, Iowa. Enter “Professor” Harold Hill, who has arrived to hornswoggle the citizens into believing he can teach the local youngsters how to play in a marching band that would rival the once-mammoth parade featuring “Seventy-Six Trombones.” But instead of skipping town before instruments arrive, Hill is persuaded to remain by the town’s librarian and piano teacher, Marian Paroo. The musical ends with the children being hailed by their parents, even though they can barely produce any recognizable sound from their instruments.—*S. G.*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1962 SEASON (Palm Beach)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

What a treat to hear—back to back—the two productions of *The Music Man* mounted by **Johnny Price** within two months of each other. The experience affirmed my view that Meredith Willson’s show belongs on the short list of perfect American musicals. The apparent thematic simplicity of the piece is deceptive, and it makes a connection with its audience (especially in Cleveland) that is wondrous.

In addition to the excellence of its construction (every song has a purpose and relates to the overall design—even “Sincere” and, yes, “Shipooopi”), the musical brims with theatrical surprises: for example, Amaryllis’s piano lesson and the way it bonds a lovesick little girl and a lonely woman; the school board quartet and the town’s biddies singing in counterpoint; the ladies of the dance committee forming their Grecian urns; Harold and Marian on opposite sides of the stage alternating lines of “Goodnight My Someone” and “76 Trombones”—especially when she sings a line from *his* song (now we know they belong together, and of course the two songs are built on the same tune).

And what a difference a director and a leading lady can make. This *Music Man* welcomes from Palm Beach the Harold Hill of **Mace Barrett**, a veteran of the role, and **Charles Reynolds**’s Mayor Shinn, but in all other respects **Don Driver**’s muscular production is a blessed makeover. As Marian we have New York’s **Monte Amundsen**, who had graced (the only word that will do) Johnny’s stage two years earlier as Cinderella and as Evelina Applegate in *Bloomer Girl*. Amundsen seamlessly transitioned from operetta (for example, Driver’s *Fledermaus*) to musicals; she was a lovely actress whose meltingly beautiful soprano takes flight here in all of her ballads, especially the best one, “My White Knight.” She and Barrett are a fine match. The supporting cast is also superior to the one in Florida. Good old **Tom Batten** comes through again as Marcellus, **Estelle Ritchie** is a warmhearted Mrs. Paroo, and **Barbara Cason** as Eulalie Shinn is the epitome of the small-town grande dame. Surprisingly, Driver allows Reynolds too many ad libs in his mostly hilarious reprise of River City’s mayor.

This is only the second time in Musicarnival’s nine summers that Johnny risked a three-week run, and he won the bet. In the spontaneous clap-along to the bow music of “76 Trombones,” we hear 2,000 people in a state of ecstasy.

The 1962 summer would be the last season for Driver, who made his debut with the company as a performer during the first season (1954), and who just four years later became “resident director.” (He was de facto artistic director, although Johnny didn’t use the term—who did in

the musical theater in those days?) In a piece written in response to Stan Anderson's review of *The Music Man* in *The Cleveland Press* (see CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT below), the producer is a man with a mission, arguing that Musicarnival, and to a lesser extent, other tent theaters-in-the-round that sprang up during the same period, had already made a major contribution to the American theater: They had virtually reinvented the staging of musicals. Driver was the man who had to figure out how to do that here, and even though we can't see his work, our audiotapes of *The Music Man* suggest in the response of the audience what an adventuresome stager he was.

As for Johnny's essay, titled "The Future of Arena Theater in the United States," it is a long but pointed one that should be quoted at some length:

It is [Richard Rodgers's then-current Broadway musical] No Strings that has taken a leaf out of Musicarnival's book, as indeed have Carnival, A Sunday in New York and other plays and musicals of recent vintage. For the past five years Musicarnival productions have almost without exception presented new dimensions in staging of the type which No Strings has attempted to achieve within the continuing framework of the proscenium arch.... Broadway has been straining at the leash for some time now, writhing and thrashing about like a snake divesting itself of its old skin. Broadway has a problem, though. It has no new skin to exchange for its old one. Its thrashing is one of desperation and dissatisfaction. It suffers, but knows not the remedy.

The answer is very simple. It has outgrown the proscenium arch.... Sooner or later, Broadway will have to come to the arena. In the next generation—perhaps sooner—there will be "Broadway" arena houses....

And when Broadway finally "discovers" the round, what advantages will that exciting new form present? In the first place, it will have the advantage of placing its entire audience closer to the stage.... Probably the most significant advantage of arena theater ... is in its intimacy. A completely new set of values apply when you "go round." You can have seen a particular show in the proscenium a dozen times, but when you see it for the first time in the round, you receive the impression that you are seeing a brand new show; that you have never seen it before, as indeed, you have not—not in its new dimensions....

In the round the emphasis reverts to the playwright and the composer. Attention focuses on the message of the play's creators and not on the theatrical technology of the 20th

century, marvelous as it is. This, in itself, is enough to endear the medium to thousands of theatergoers who feel that the theater should be bringing them a product of far greater richness than it is today. Even if the contemporary producer of our composers and playwrights is of mediocre quality, the arena nevertheless transmits to its audience in a more highly concentrated distillation of fidelity and dramatic impact than the proscenium does.

Most otherwise knowledgeable persons are not well informed in the field of arena theater. This is because the field is in its infancy insofar as its technology is concerned, and artistically, it is still difficult to find a director who thinks in these terms. But as the arena improves its technology and as artists are developed within the framework of the arena—and as shows are written expressly for the arena—its artistic efforts will amaze even the most ardent in-the-round buffs, for we have only begun to scratch the surface.

And in the musical arena field, Musicarnival has done most of the scratching. From the basic concept of our tent top itself on through to the advanced concepts of staging, Musicarnival is the leading pioneer in the field. Musicarnival has pioneered the flying of sets in the round; the use of follow spots; the use of underlighting through plexiglass plugs in the stage floor; the regular use of trap doors in our productions; the use of aisle-long runways for scenes and montage effects; the refinement of staged scene changes as part of the show; the practically complete elimination of the old-fashioned scene changes (ours are 15 seconds to one minute done in the blackout with musical background); and many, many others. Many of these innovations are present only at Musicarnival because none of the other tents have the physical capacity to introduce them....

It is true that there are some handicaps in playing shows in the round which were written specifically for the proscenium, but that is to be expected. You will note that there is no trouble at all playing Shakespeare in the round. The answer to that is very simple. In that golden age the proscenium arch had not yet descended over the theater to warp and confine its art. Perhaps that may be one reason for the infinite variety and range of Shakespeare's plays....

Now, after three centuries of confinement, the arena is coming into its own in the regional theaters of the people, bringing the breath of artistic freedom and the freshness of invigorating experimentation with it. And sooner or later, even Broadway will get the message.

Sadly, that didn't happen. Only one Broadway theater—Circle in the Square—is equipped to deliver true theater-in-the-round (the perfect space for 2015's award-winning *Fun Home*), though Broadway did break through the proscenium arch in the 1960s with aprons that extended the stage out into what traditionally had been "the house." The place where arena stages blossomed in New York was Off Broadway beginning in the 1960s, and in the regional theater movement. As for the emphasis on technology that Johnny decries, unfortunately, it is one of the key elements driving contemporary musical theater, reflecting trends in the society at large.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

A barn burner. In *The Plain Dealer*, Glenn C. Pullen took special note of Driver's work in this season opener: "The new production has the playful kick of an Iowa mule.... Although it's skimpy on settings, the intimate arena style of stagecraft gives it a special freshness. Don Driver as director drives his company at a swashbuckling pace.... Brilliantly hued choreography has been created.... Mace Barrett and Monte Amundsen are excellent, and Barrett is far superior to Van Johnson, who appeared in the Kenley Players' version at Warren last week. It is a glib, impudent and ingratiating portrait of a musical confidence man that Barrett paints so effectively.... Miss Amundsen looks charming in her prim gowns and fits into the heroine's role delightfully." "A robust and beguiling treatment" was Arthur Spaeth's summation in the *Sun Newspapers*. "Miss Amundsen and Barrett are top-drawer." And in *The Cleveland Press*, Stan Anderson, whose review sparked Johnny Price's essay above, wrote: "Don Driver tries something offbeat in adapting this popular musical to the arena stage.... Probably borrowing from *No Strings*, Driver had his cast and crew change the show's multiple sets as an integrated part of the action.... Cast and crew skittered around, singing and dancing the while, and changed set pieces to answer locale demands.... Driver does a commendable job in getting away from stereotype tent theater."—**B. R.**

FLOWER DRUM SONG

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 2–15, 1962 (New York opening: December 1, 1958;
600 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, book by Oscar Hammerstein II and Joseph Fields, based on the novel by C. Y. Lee

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Virginia Wing (Mei Li), David Chaney (Wang Ta), Don Driver (Sammy Fong), Lillian Bozinoff (Linda Low), Tom Batten (Master Wang Chi Yang), Maria Warren (Madam Liang)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“You Are Beautiful,” “A Hundred Million Miracles,” “I Enjoy Being a Girl,” “I Am Going to Like It Here,” “Don’t Marry Me,” “Grant Avenue,” “Love, Look Away,” “Sunday”

SYNOPSIS

The musical deals with the conflict between San Francisco’s traditionalist older Chinese-Americans and their Americanized children, who are anxious to break away. Mei Li, a timid “picture bride” from China, has arrived to fulfill her contract to marry Sammy Fong, a local nightclub owner. But Sammy prefers Linda Low, who quite obviously enjoys being a girl. The problem is resolved when Sammy’s friend Wang Ta conveniently falls in love with Mei Li.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1962 SEASON (Palm Beach)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

When was the last time a production of *Flower Drum Song*—whose stage directions keep insisting “softly” and “very softly”—elicited cheers from the audience? Could be this one, directed by **Don Driver**, of course, and featuring himself as Sammy Fong. The cheers are deserved.

Although **Johnny Price**’s Cleveland stint is missing the Mei Li and Sammy Fong of the London production, who starred in Palm Beach, this one beats the winter mounting hands down: a consistently charming and apposite blend of funny and touching.

Virginia Wing (Mei Li), **Lillian Bozinoff** (Linda Low), **David Chaney** (Wang Ta), **Maria Warren** (Madam Liang) and **Leslie Daniel** (Helen Chao) make this the best-sung *Flower Drum*

Song I've ever heard (including the Broadway original). But it's more than that. Once again Driver demonstrates his skill for pacing, and for eliciting from his actors (especially **Tom Batten** as Master Wang) performances that are astonishingly nuanced given the constraints of summer stock. We get the closing night of a two-week run in this recording, but it sounds as though the company—and it's large, with 20 in the singing and dancing ensemble—have been living with the material for six months.

The audience is invested in the story all the way, and though we've always known what a fine score Rodgers & Hammerstein turned out, this production also proves what a good script Hammerstein and Joseph Fields crafted.

Driver conceived an added element for this production that easily could have backfired. The program informs us that “the magical Oriental mysteries performed in the scene changes by our Mandarin and Invisibles have been arranged for your delight and wonderment with the gracious assistance of Chan Wing, Chinese conjurer, also known as the popular Cleveland magician **Stuart Cramer**.” I was sure that these interludes would damage the rhythm of the show (or upstage the story), but the audience tells us that as usual Driver knew what he was doing.

I can't overemphasize the contribution of the Musicarnival pit. A reminder that in these pre-Blossom Music Center years, many of the musicians played for George Szell's Cleveland Orchestra the rest of the year. And it never feels as though they're slumming at Musicarnival.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The critics realized that something special was afoot. “Maybe there aren't ‘A Hundred Million Miracles,’ which *Flower Drum Song* says happen every day, but Musicarnival's smart production of this Rodgers & Hammerstein opus approaches the miraculous,” wrote H. L. Sanford in the *Sun Newspapers*. And this is the first Musicarnival review I've seen in *The Plain Dealer* from Peter Bellamy, whose tenure as a theater critic was just beginning and would last until the mid-1970s. Bellamy's notice began, “The rousing, colorful and melodious musical that is Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Flower Drum Song* received an imaginative and exuberant production at the hands of the Musicarnival troupe at its opening last night.” Here is Bellamy's take on Don Driver's risky decision to bridge the scenes with magic: “They have made a virtue out of the fact that the scenes must be changed in full view of the audience. The scene shifters are all dressed in black Chinese costumes, and each scene is introduced by ... a mandarin—a magician who materializes birds, a water fountain and flames right out of thin air.”—**B. R.**

BYE BYE BIRDIE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 16–29, 1962 (New York opening: April 14, 1960;
607 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Michael Stewart, music by Charles Strouse, lyrics by Lee Adams

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Don Driver (Albert Peterson), Susanne Cansino (Rose Alvarez), Ned Wertimer (Mr. MacAfee), Barbara Cason (Mae Peterson), Betsy King (Kim McAfee), David Chaney (Conrad Birdie)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“An English Teacher,” “The Telephone Hour,” “Put On a Happy Face,” “One Boy,” “One Last Kiss,” “A Lot of Livin’ to Do,” “Baby, Talk to Me,” “Kids”

SYNOPSIS

Albert Peterson’s longtime girlfriend, Rosie, yearns for him to be an English teacher, but contents herself as secretary to Albert’s music business, as he writes pop songs and manages the Elvis-like Conrad Birdie. After Conrad is drafted, Albert and Rose cook up a scheme for Conrad to appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and give one last kiss goodbye to a lucky female fan. This scheme carries them all to the heart of small-town America, where everyone learns a little something about life, love and celebrity.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1962 SEASON (Palm Beach)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Cleveland’s *Bye Bye Birdie*—seen a few months earlier in West Palm Beach with a different cast and director—is for the most part dandy, except for one decision that throws it off-balance: for

the first time in his tenure at Musicarnival, director and performer **Don Driver** miscasts himself.

As Albert Peterson, he is, as always, terribly funny, but unlike Dick Van Dyke, who created the role on Broadway, his performance is charmless, and it spills over to the entire show. He undercuts the sentiment of “One Boy” with comic stage business; his own “Put On a Happy Face” and “Rosie” miss the mark of two of our musical theater’s best charm songs; and in general, I’m afraid there is little sweetness in Sweet Apple, Ohio.

What we get—and it is not to be dismissed—is a kind of stupendous energy. This production has all the drive and the satirical spark—in some scenes with the kids, controlled chaos—that was missing in Florida. **Ned Wertimer**’s Mr. McAfee is too much like Paul Lynde’s hall of fame portrait onstage and screen (not surprising, since he replaced Lynde on Broadway and did the national tour), and **David Chaney** doesn’t project Conrad Birdie’s charismatic oafishness. But the rest of the cast is very good, especially dancer-singer-actor **Susanne Cansino** as Albert’s Rosie, **Betsy King** as teenager Kim, and **Barbara Cason** (later to make her name in New York theater [*Oh, Coward!*] and television) as the hilariously self-pitying Mae Peterson.

And certainly Driver follows through with his bold point of view on the material. He even extends his concept to writing lyrics (music by **Lawrence Brown**) for pastiche songs for songwriter Albert like “First You Take a Match” and “Gangster of Love,” which he’s inserted into Rose’s “How to Kill a Man” ballet (one assumes with permission!). They actually strengthen the sequence.

We also find some lines in Michael Stewart’s book that are often thrown away, including a theme that makes *Birdie* eternally relevant. Says daughter Kim to her mother: “I’m sorry, but times are changing, and you’ve got to go along with them or be left behind with the old folks.” Indeed. One of *Birdie*’s virtues is that it’s equal-opportunity satire leveled at both younger and older generations. Before this, his first musical, Stewart was a sketch writer for theater and television; he transfers that specialized skill to musical theater, and Driver understands how to make the most of it.

Don’t miss **Johnny Price**’s welcome to the audience as he delivers what amounts to a comic monologue on how to navigate your way out of the parking lot. And it’s wonderful to hear him give a passionate endorsement for Lakewood’s nascent Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival (now Great Lakes Theater), which had just opened its first summer season. It’s a reminder that Johnny’s true theatrical love was then and forever the Bard.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The two major critics felt the electricity in the guitar amp. "Let it be said that nobody is going to be bored by this one," wrote Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press*. "[It has] enough bounce and verve to launch a satellite.... It's all something of a hurricane." Peter Bellamy in *The Plain Dealer*: "Musicarnival jumps—a loud, rollicking hit ... [and] a large charge of theatrical dynamite.... Don Driver has also seen to it that the tripod that holds up the circular stage grid is festooned with colorful suggestions of the musical's juvenile motif. They include multicolored automobile tires, wire wheels, hub caps, springs, mufflers, spotlights, seat springs and exhaust pipes, suggestive of jalopies."—**B. R.**

FIORELLO!

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 30–August 12, 1962 (New York opening: November 23, 1959;
795 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Jerome Weidman and George Abbott, music by Jerry Bock, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Sorrell Book (Fiorello LaGuardia), Betty Jane Watson (Marie), Tom Batten (Ben Marino), Leslie Daniel (Thea), Ned Wertimer (Morris), Doyle Newberry (Neil)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"On the Side of the Angels," "Politics and Poker," "The Name's LaGuardia," "'Til Tomorrow," "When Did I Fall in Love?," "Little Tin Box," "The Very Next Man"

SYNOPSIS

The musical encompasses the period in Fiorello LaGuardia's life before he became mayor of

New York City. Beginning with his surprise election to Congress prior to World War I, it includes such events as his enlistment in the air force, his first race for mayor against the unbeatable James J. Walker, the death of LaGuardia's first wife, Thea, the revelation of Walker's cronies with their hands caught in little tin boxes, and the preparations for the victorious LaGuardia campaign of 1933 which he won as a Fusion candidate.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

When producer Hal Prince (b. 1928) remembers the genesis of the project, we can understand why this musical biography of New York reform mayor Fiorello LaGuardia was so appealing. “There were surprises,” writes Prince in his memoir, *Contradictions*, a title that signifies how he thrived on them. “Half Italian, half Jewish, Fiorello was at once warmhearted, ruthless, sentimental, intransigent, musical, a distracted father to his family, and omnipresent father to millions, endlessly petty, and immensely generous, a human being of heroic size.”

A musical had seldom portrayed such a complex man—and that's surely the case for musicals dealing with historical figures. *1776* took the plunge in its depiction of John Adams, but that was a decade later. In 1959 Prince and Robert E. Griffith's production was directed by the 72-year-old George Abbott and written by novelist Jerome Weidman (1913-98) and Abbott, with score by the almost-new songwriting team of Jerry Bock (1928-2010) and Sheldon Harnick (b. 1924). Their *Fiorello!* was a trailblazer.

And not just in its story, but in the way the story was told. Reviewing it in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Walter Kerr made the most perceptive judgment: “It has a curious streak of honest journalism, and a strong strain of rugged sobriety, about it. *Fiorello!* may, or may not, remind you of an exciting theatrical form once known as the Living Newspaper [produced during the Depression by the Federal Theatre Project]; in any case, it is apt to please the living daylights out of you.”

Its achievement is doubly impressive when you consider that this was the first musical for Weidman and only the second for Bock and Harnick. Let's revive that old but still-useful word “integration,” first applied in the Rodgers & Hammerstein era. Is there a better example than this musical, which was produced during the same year as R&H's last show, *The Sound of Music*? Whenever these characters sing, it's with the same rhythms, the same diction, the same tone, as when they speak. Harnick has told me what fun he and Bock had writing it with Weidman. Here's Prince on the process: “Abbott would outline a scene, Weidman would go home and write 50 pages overnight.... The material poured out of him.... Then Abbott would edit, rewrite and

structure the total.”

Fiorello! is all of a piece, and it shows. The tough-minded Abbott must be credited as a master editor. He once confessed to me how good he knew it was—including his own work. There’s a story about the opening-night party. As Prince read the reviews aloud to the company and came to Kerr’s comment that Abbott was “younger than springtime,” the director-writer smiled and said quietly: “I know I’m supposed to say I don’t care about things like that, but I do.”

The two principal male roles were especially well cast. Howard Da Silva, the estimable American character actor, had been blacklisted during the McCarthy Era. He made a triumphant return to Broadway as Ben Marino, LaGuardia’s right-hand man. As for *Fiorello* himself, first choice Eli Wallach demonstrated during auditions that he couldn’t sing well enough, so Prince and Abbott took a chance on casting the unknown Tom Bosley in the role. “He was a young man,” recalled Prince, “a little heavy, round and jowly. Not really *Fiorello*—better than that: a caricature of *Fiorello*.”

The musical won the New York theater’s triple crown: the Tony Award, the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize (a coup that wouldn’t be matched until *Rent* debuted more than 25 years later). The socially progressive, incorruptible man at its center remains an icon for New Yorkers old enough to remember him (City Center Encores! gave it a terrific revival in 2014), and over the years the musical’s themes have given it classic stature. Says Prince: “[It’s a] lament for a bygone, manageable New York, and for the loss of heroes.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

I can’t help wondering if **Don Driver** ever met George Abbott, because in their approach to musical theater they are no-nonsense simpatico, especially with regard to pacing. When Abbott co-wrote a show—for example, *The Pajama Game*, *Damn Yankees* (both produced by **Johnny Price** in the 1950s) and *Fiorello!*—the economy and punchiness of the storytelling dazzled. Abbott was praised for his “fast pace,” but he preferred adjectives like “peppy” and “snappy.” It wasn’t the speed (though that’s an element) so much as the energy.

Enter Driver, who’s cut from the same cloth. His *Fiorello!* honors the Abbott touch, and that extends to the honesty of the characterizations. His *Fiorello* is **Sorrell Boone**, and in that casting Driver was blessed. Onstage Boone had recently played the role at New York City Center (the first New York revival), and in 1960 his Senator Billboard Rawkins was the standout performance in City Center’s *Finian’s Rainbow*. He proceeded to a big career on television,

including his remarkable turn as Boss Hogg in *The Dukes of Hazzard*.

At Musicarnival Booke tears up the stage; at first it seems excessive, but bit by bit, we can see the full LaGuardia portrait in all its contrasting colors, and one of those colors, as Ben Marino points out, is “megalomaniac.” It’s an intelligent performance that one assumes Abbott would have admired, and when Fiorello faces hurdles in the second act, Booke’s Little Flower is quite touching.

Driver appropriately builds the show around him, and it’s a muscular evening, as all good *Fiorello!*s must be. **Tom Batten** as Ben is every inch Booke’s equal: loyal and street-smart, then appropriately furious, and finally accepting his boss as the “old fire eater”; and **Ned Wertimer** makes for an endearingly put-upon Morris. (Wertimer later played the doorman in TV’s *The Jeffersons*.) Both of LaGuardia’s women are fine, too: **Leslie Daniel** as first wife Thea (though her big song, “When Did I Fall in Love?,” and the scene that surrounds it, are inexplicably missing from the live recording, though not the program), and **Betty Jane Watson**, a Broadway standby for both Lucille Ball and Elaine Stritch, is an increasingly clear-headed Marie.

Notice how many times Driver moves *Fiorello!* forward by denying the audience applause after musical numbers. As Abbott would say, it’s all “for the good of the show.”

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

The critics got it—and they included the Musicarnival debut of Tony Mastroianni, a reporter-turned-critic and later entertainment editor of *The Cleveland Press* (and a good friend). His tenure on the beat lasted until the *Press* folded in 1982. Such engaging writing: “Winter theatergoers who have been shunning straw hat productions should get themselves up off their patios and see this.... It’s as though the Musicarnival people have been flexing their muscles, and doing a good job of it, as they prepared for the big one. The big one arrived last night. *Fiorello!* is a rousing, vigorous show, but it is different from the average musical comedy in several respects. It has an infinitely better book, superior drama and therefore makes a greater demand on the acting talents of the company.... [Sorrell Booke’s] energy is boundless. He never stepped upon the stage—he bounced. He ran and stopped, only to turn and run again. And when forced to stop for any length of time, he took a solid stance and threw his head back like a fighting rooster.” Glenn C. Pullen in *The Plain Dealer*: Chunky Sorrell Booke, as Musicarnival’s new guest star, and *Fiorello!*, a nostalgic chunk of Americana, were virtually made for each other. A surprisingly accurate, flavorful and exhilarating characterization is created by Booke ... a fiery actor.” And in *The Sun Press*, H. L. Sanford added: “All through *Fiorello!*, as in all Musicarnival

productions, runs the genius of director Don Driver. This unique young man, himself a finished actor and dancer, is master of the dramatic understatement, which he uses with terrific impact both in comedy and drama. We note with pleasure Driver's use of a variation of the old tableaux, once a standard and beautiful part of every musical production."—**B. R.**

THE DESERT SONG

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 13–26, 1962 (New York opening: November 30, 1926;
471 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Sigmund Romberg, lyrics by Otto Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein II, book by Harbach, Hammerstein and Frank Mandel

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Don Stewart (Pierre Birabeau/Red Shadow), Gail Manners (Margot Bonvalet), Dorothy Keller (Susan), Don Driver (Benjamin Kidd), Thomas Heyward (Sid El Kar), Walter Davis (General Birabeau), Tom Batten (Paul Fontaine), Wayne Mack (Ali Ben Ali), Gloria LeRoy (Azuri), Charles Reynolds (Hassi), Neri (Barbara Cason)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"The Riff Song," "Romance," "I Want a Kiss," "The Desert Song," "Let Love Go," "One Flower Grows Alone in Your Garden," "One Alone"

SYNOPSIS

The Red Shadow, the leader of a rebel band known as the Riffs, kidnaps Margo Bonvalet, a comely Frenchwoman. In a twist, the true identity of the Red Shadow is Pierre, the ostensibly milquetoast son of the governor of Morocco, General Birabeau. When the rebel band is tracked down, the Red Shadow finds himself in the unenviable position of having to duel with his own father. He backs down, much to the derision of the Riffs. General Birabeau's aide, Captain Paul

Fontaine, is determined to bring the Red Shadow to justice until a jealous Arab girl, Azuri, reveals the true identity of the mystery man to him. Fontaine does the only decent thing, showing the general the burnoose of the Red Shadow and declaring him vanished. The secret is kept forever by Paul, the general, Pierre and Margo (who was in love with the Red Shadow and can now marry Pierre).—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1960 SEASON (Palm Beach)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

I have this vision of **Don Driver** and **Johnny Price** tossing around ideas in a planning session for the 1962 season. Johnny says: “Look, Don, we’ve got all those costumes from *Desert Song* two years ago in Florida. The show’s a warhorse; it’s time to do it again in Cleveland.” “Gotcha,” replies Don. “Gorgeous songs. But I saw Jay Harnick’s production down there, you know, and it was deathville. The comedy stinks. And the kids in our shows—they don’t get this operetta stuff. Let me take another crack at it and make it work for today.”

And thus a concept is born, however fictionalized by me. In his welcome to the audience for August’s salute to Sigmund Romberg under the northern tent, Johnny warns everybody that “our tongues are in our cheeks”; and in the printed program, Driver announces that he directed the show “at [his] own risk.” The press doted on his chutzpah: “Driver,” wrote Peter Bellamy in a preview piece for *The Plain Dealer*, “is a wiry gentleman with a fertile brain and restless energy.... He’s one of the outstanding tent-theater directors in the nation, as well as a fine actor, comedian and song-and-dance man.... *The Desert Song* is no stranger to him, for this production will represent the third time he has rewritten all of the comedy scenes to meet changing tastes.”

Driver didn’t stop with the script. He let the audience in on the joke in the first scene, when the Riffs begin and end their bursts of communal laughter with hilarious precision. (One of those Riffs, by the way, speaks with a cowboy twang.) Driver told Bellamy that the first act would end with a series of three tableaux, and in the last of them the entire cast “will take bows regardless of whether any of its members have been killed or wounded.” **Judith Daykin**, a member of Musicarnival’s public relations staff whose career would eventually take her to New York City Center, where she founded the Encores! series of Great American Musicals in Concert, recalls: “It was, in a word, hysterical. When the Riffs got to their ‘campsite,’ they brought a campfire, which they plugged in. Got a huge laugh.”

And Driver got loads of them himself in his scenes with **Dorothy Keller**. She played Susan, the secretary to his Benjamin Kidd—a former society correspondent. Driver added so much blatant schtick to the operetta (which even in 1926 had more than its share) that some Romberg-Hammerstein-Harbach songs had to be jettisoned. There’s a dance sequence in the second act—“Fantasy in a Turkish Bath”—that was entirely his invention, requiring new music by **Lawrence Brown** and choreography, of course, by Driver.

Johnny made a point of saying the Romberg melodies (those that remained) would be performed straight, and so they were, by a cast of top-tier vocalists including New York City Opera’s **Naomi Collier** as Margot, **Thomas Hayward** (a reliable Met tenor) as Sid El Kar, Cleveland’s own **Wayne Mack** as Ali Ben Ali, and Broadway baritone **Don Stewart**—more or less direct from *Camelot*—as the Red Shadow.

The company were mostly good sports about this *Desert Song*—after all, the audience was eating out of every palm of their desert—except for the purists. Says Daykin: “When Naomi Collier got sick and had to be replaced, John brought in **Gail Manners** [the artist probably heard in this recording], another New York City Opera soprano who did the role so often, she brought her own costumes. The irony is, she played the role as she knew it, in the middle of all this complete chaos around her, and it worked. She played it straight, and everyone else was insane. She was very upset and called her opera singer husband, Walter Cassel, in New York—they were horrified!” One assumes that Romberg and Hammerstein would have been equally aghast, but they were both dead, and co-librettist Otto Harbach was five months from his own funeral. The era for American operettas had long passed.

Taking the long view of Driver’s approach—which amounts to a sort of genre travesty—could prompt an interesting discussion. The original script describes his Bennie character as “effeminate” and “so delicate,” and even in 1926 he cross-dressed late in the show—but the 1962 director doubling as performer puts Bennie *out there*. Just two years later Susan Sontag would publish her famous essay “Notes on Camp,” and in the late 1960s and early 1970s the films of Mel Brooks would send up such genres as Westerns, horror movies and mysteries.

Working in the Midwest in a very mainstream theater, Don Driver was at least a bit ahead of the cultural curve.

To be noted in Johnny’s welcome: On August 20, the night before this recorded performance, Cleveland was hit by a devastating storm. “We at Musicarnival,” wrote the producer in the

printed program for the next attraction, *Gypsy*, “feel that we can confidently make this statement: No other tent in the United States could have taken that wind without going down; if that wind had hit any other tent while there were people in it, there would have been a great many serious casualties. There were no casualties at Musicarnival, and the tent did not go down. **Robert A. Little**, Musicarnival’s world-famous architect, 10 years ago planned the safety features into the big blue top which makes it the safest tent ever built by man.”

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Clearly Don Driver figured out how to have it both ways. “This production should be subtitled *Anything Goes*,” Stan Anderson proposed in *The Cleveland Press*, “for everything does. A ridiculous plot is saved by the familiar and durable Romberg music and Driver’s uninhibited direction. . . . [In the ‘Eastern and Western Love’ sequence,] Thomas Hayward, WDOK’s Wayne Mack and Don Stewart present us with something as exciting as anything that has happened at the tent.” And in *The Plain Dealer*, Glenn C. Pullen noted that “doubling as comedian, Driver and Dorothy Keller are delightful in extravagant horseplay patterned after theatrical styles of the mid-1920s. Everybody strikes deliberately stilted poses to illustrate how amusingly quaint old operetta singers seemed in acting—were they really so bad?—during that era. . . . Some of the composer’s gayest, richest and most charming songs are woven into the durable score. Virtually all the players own excellent voices. They treat the songs so seriously, nostalgically and affectionately that the music becomes completely enchanting.”—**B. R.**

GYPSY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 27–September 9, 1962 (New York opening: May 29, 1959;
702 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Arthur Laurents, music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, suggested by the memoirs of Gypsy Rose Lee

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Susan Johnson (Rose), Tom Batten (Herbie), Naomi Collier (Louise), Susie Martin (June), Ray Chabeau (Tulsa), Gloria LeRoy (Tessie Tura), Barbara Cason (Mazeppa), Emily Kidwell (Electra)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Let Me Entertain You,” “Some People,” “Small World,” “Little Lamb,” “You’ll Never Get Away From Me,” “If Momma Was Married,” “All I Need Is the Girl,” “Ev’rything’s Coming Up Roses,” “Together,” “You Gotta Have a Gimmick,” “Rose’s Turn”

SYNOPSIS

Mama Rose is determined to escape from a life of playing bingo and paying rent by pushing the vaudeville career of her younger daughter, June; after June elopes with a hooper, she focuses all her attention on her older, less talented daughter, Louise. Eventually Louise becomes burlesque stripper Gypsy Rose Lee, and Rose suffers a breakdown—expressed through the shattering “Rose’s Turn”—when she realizes that she is no longer needed in her daughter’s career. —**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Perhaps the best evidence of *Gypsy*’s singular place in musical theater history is that no musical before or since has attracted the talents of so many ranking actresses: Ethel Merman, who created the role of Rose, that stage mother to end all stage mothers (“a mythic mesmerizing mother,” to use book writer Arthur Laurents’s phrase), had to promise the creative team that she was prepared to take emotional risks she had never known before. And following in Merman’s footsteps—each one making the role her own—were Rosalind Russell in the film, Bette Midler on television, and Broadway revivals with Angela Lansbury, Tyne Daly, Bernadette Peters and Patti LuPone. Rest assured there will be more.

Gypsy is the three-hour Olympiad of the genre for all singing actresses committed to testing their mettle; Rose has become known as the Lady Macbeth of the musical stage. And certainly the case can be made—and has been made for nearly 60 years—that *Gypsy* and *Show Boat* are the Great American Musicals, not only in the excellence of their books, music and lyrics, but in their determination to plumb thematic depths: In the case of *Gypsy*, one of those themes, according to Laurents, is that “if you live your life through your children, you end by destroying yourself.”

Such a word: “destroy.” And despite the brief moment of hope that follows “Rose’s Turn,” the harrowing soliloquy at the musical’s end, self-destruction is the truth of the matter. One of the astonishing triumphs of the piece is its ability to entertain even as it forces us into a black hole.

One can choose not to go there, I suppose, but that would be denying oneself a kind of catharsis that is unique to musical theater.

Much has been written about *Gypsy*: how Merman wouldn't accept the young Stephen Sondheim for both words and music; how in taking on the composer's job, Jule Styne tested his own mettle, producing a score that in its dramatic range and power went well beyond anything he had ever written; how director-choreographer Jerome Robbins, for perhaps the only time in his career, saw his original concept—a kind of homage to American vaudeville—usurped by writers hell-bent on telling the more psychologically probing story that captured their imagination. (Significantly, *Gypsy* is by no means a dance musical; the only number from it that Robbins chose for inclusion in his 1989 anthology, *Jerome Robbins's Broadway*, is the strippers' "You Gotta Have a Gimmick.") Yet Robbins's contribution as the Man in Charge should not be overlooked; his assistant, Gerald Freedman, likened the Broadway original to the "*Queen Mary* coming in for docking.... Just this immense, perfect machine."

All four key collaborators reflected on this piece over the years. Herewith, some of my favorite observations:

Arthur Laurents: [There was a] line no actress could have delivered more chillingly than Merman did. It was her command to her daughter, "You are going to be a star!" When Ethel Merman said that, you knew how she became a star; her determination was naked, frightening and gallant.... "Rose's Turn" takes place not in reality, but in Rose's head, where she is "better than any of you!"—the greatest performer in the world, the star she has always wanted to be.... Raunchy, funny, sexy, vulgar, and underneath, always raging, always eaten up with hunger for the star she has never had on her door.... Everyone has a need for recognition. Every single character in *Gypsy* wanted recognition, and the only one who didn't get it was the one who most needed it: the mother.

Stephen Sondheim: Best of all for both Arthur and me, Rose was that dramatist's dream, the self-deluded protagonist who comes to a tragic/triumphant end.... Self-delusion is at the heart of plays from *Oedipus Rex* to *Death of a Salesman* via *Othello* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*.... Ethel turned out to be a better actress than we'd anticipated, limited in range but capable of shading and variety and with, of course, impeccable timing. She was able to tap into the reserve of anger that fuels every comedian.... The three-minute resolution between Rose and Louise [after "Rose's Turn"] that reconciled them [makes] the most affecting point of the play: namely, that all children eventually become their parents.... Like *Citizen Kane*, arrogant though the

comparison may be, there's not a moment in *Gypsy* that isn't entertaining.

Jule Styne: The show felt good, even while Steve and I were creating it. I knew I was creating work that I'd never done before. Marvelous lyrics came to me from Steve. When you write with him, you actually feel good as a composer. He places value on the music, what kind of word fits each note. When you soar musically, he knows he must say something as important as the notes. He never asks for extra notes. And doesn't put the full value on the rhyme, like most lyricists. The thought is the main thing with Steve. In most cases, I wrote the music first, and then he wrote the lyrics. Steve said that the music must set the character as well as the words.

Jerome Robbins: *Gypsy* is a funny kind of package, like trying to wrap several watermelons into a neat bundle.... It covers a span of 10 years, roams all over the country, and has the most miscellaneous cast of characters I've ever had to deal with—children of various sizes, old vaudeville actors, strippers and all sorts of pets and stray animals. [It's a] funny show ... but sad, and pretty grim, too. A kind of tragic success story, about the great American stage mother who tries to live her life through her children.

The fact that the musical was “like trying to wrap several watermelons into a neat bundle” made it difficult to categorize, and that accounts for part of its courage. Walter Kerr admitted, “I'm not sure whether *Gypsy* is new-fashioned or old-fashioned, or integrated, or non-integrated. The only thing I'm sure of is that it's the best damn musical I've seen in years.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

In 1962 a lot was riding on **Johnny Price**'s production of *Gypsy*. It came soon after the end of the national tour—one of Ethel Merman's few tours, by the way—which had played to capacity crowds at Cleveland's 3,000-seat Music Hall. Directed by **Don Driver**, this *Gypsy* was one of the first attempts in summer stock to duplicate the seismic force of a masterwork—staged in the round with minimal sets.

And without a star. **Susan Johnson** (1927–2003) got the nod—her name best known to Broadway audiences for her featured role in *The Most Happy Fella* (Cleo) followed by three successive flops: *Oh, Captain!* (Tony nomination), *Whoop-Up* and *Donnybrook*. Broadway (and Broadway-bound) box score: eight musicals, seven of which failed. The year after this *Gypsy*, working in summer stock in Hingham, Massachusetts, Johnson was injured in a serious motorcycle accident that virtually ended her career, though she played a nun in the two *Sister Act* films. She is a should-have-been star who, through no fault of her own, never quite ascended.

Johnny first hired her in 1954 for Musicarnival's inaugural season. Apparently she played another Merman role, Annie Oakley, to the hilt, though that recording, if it was made, does not survive. Johnson's Broadway belt was formidable (we hear it on every one of her cast albums), but she was much more than an aspiring Merman. *Annie Get Your Gun* is one thing; *Gypsy* is quite another—book writer Arthur Laurents described it as a “musical for *actors*.”

And how Susan Johnson shines in this, her acid test, acting the hell out of her songs and her dialogue. We sense it viscerally in her first two scenes: charging down the runway with Mama Rose's famous cry of “Sing out, Louise!” and jubilantly declaring to her father that “Some people sit on their butts, / Got the dream—yeah, but not the guts!”

At 35, Johnson gives us one of the few Roses who is actually the right age for the role. (In 1959 Merman was 51; even Patti LuPone was 59 when she starred in the 2008 Broadway revival.) A younger Rose makes for a more affecting *Gypsy*; this mother's relationship with her kids comes into clearer focus at Musicarnival, and Johnson ages convincingly for the final devastating scenes with Louise. Hearing the audience response as they make the riveting journey with her through the nervous breakdown of “Rose's Turn” is discovering an actress who is not only the equal of her legendary predecessor but of every one of the great ladies who followed her.

Johnson's performance is one of Johnny's most important preservation efforts—and that goes for the two other principals cast by Don Driver. **Tom Batten** as Herbie and **Naomi Collier** as Louise are Johnson's co-stars in the best sense. Sadly, both are forgotten today.

Driver receives a demerit—one he shares, no doubt, with countless other directors of *Gypsy* through the years, although that's no excuse. He cuts—illegally—the final scene between mother and daughter that follows “Rose's Turn.” as Sondheim points out above, that dialogue is crucial to the story.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Susan Johnson got her due. Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press*: “*Gypsy* has been in this town before, but surely with no greater spirit. You'll be sorry if you do not catch Miss Johnson. Your friends will tell you what you missed.... She is inspired.... Although this is a bouncing and sometimes vulgar piece, Don Driver has refused to invest it with too many of his customary shenanigans. His direction has taken account of the obvious—that there is as much of pathos as there is of fun.” In *The Plain Dealer*, Glenn C. Pullen echoed the rival newspaper: “[This is a] brilliantly complex delineation of a ruthlessly ambitious mother.... She displays the ferocity of a

hungry lioness in being ready to claw the eyes out of any one opposing her... [And yet] she also manages to be more sensitive than Ethel Merman was. Johnson captures a vastly moving tone of poignancy when both her daughters and faithful admirers turn against her ... and she seems much more lyric than the brassy Ethel.”—**B. R.**

DO RE MI

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

September 10–16, 1962 (New York opening: December 26, 1960;
400 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Garson Kanin, music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Don Driver

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTOR

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Ray Stuart (Hubie Cram), Joan Kibrig (Kay Cram), Naomi Collier (Tilda Mullen), Ray Hyson (John Henry Wheeler), Tom Batten (Skin Demopoulous), Charles Reynolds (Fats O’Rear), David Davis (Brains Berman), Lloyd Battista (Moe Shtarker)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“All You Need Is a Quarter,” “Take a Job,” “It’s Legitimate,” “I Know About Love,” “Cry Like the Wind,” “Ambition,” “Fireworks,” “What’s New at the Zoo,” “The Late, Late Show,” “Adventure,” “Make Someone Happy,” “All of My Life”

SYNOPSIS

The story concerns Hubie Cram, a would-be big shot, who induces three retired slot-machine mobsters to muscle in on the jukebox racket. Though this does not make him the fawned-upon tycoon he has always dreamed of becoming, Hubie does succeed in turning a waitress, Tilda Mullen, into a singing star.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

At a symposium I produced in 1987, the 65-year-old singer-comedian Nancy Walker made an impassioned—and, of course, very funny—speech about how something had been lost ever since Rodgers & Hammerstein took over Broadway and made musicals more serious. “Hey, what about us funny ladies?” said Nancy. “Where do we go? What do we do? We’ve been pushed out. Bring back Rodgers & *Hart*! Okay, so the stories weren’t great literature, but we had fun up here, and so did the audience out there. It *is* called musical *comedy*, you know!” Whereupon the audience cheered.

Walker’s final book show on Broadway—before she defected to television—was the 1960 *Do Re Mi*, in which she starred opposite the Phil Silvers. He was small-time racketeer Hubie Cram, always searching for a new scheme (“All I need is an angle!,” he sings with operatic fervency) that will make him a “biggie.” Imagine: Two immortal performers, steeped in the low comedy of vaudeville and burlesque, on the same stage, playing their hearts out in a show assembled by first-stringers: book writer and director Garson Kanin (1912-99), whose script was based on his novella; composer Jule Styne, still beaming from *Gypsy*; and lyricists Betty Comden and Adolph Green. David Merrick produced, and though the musical’s 400-performance run made it only a quasi-hit, *Do Re Mi* gave a lotta pleasure to a lotta people.

For one thing, it’s a true stage “vehicle” in which the comedy is built around the gifts of the two stars. Silvers greets his long-suffering wife, Kay, with one of his signatures: “Baby—howaya?!” He gets terrific material to exploit all through the ride, including a scene in a recording studio where Hubie cons the orchestra into believing he knows how to produce a record, plus a tour de force in song, “The Late, Late Show,” an excuse for him to impersonate everybody on the small screen from Maurice Chevalier to Edward G. Robinson. Walker displays her patented deadpan all the while—unforgettably so in her second-act “Adventure,” in which Kay catalogues the Perils of Pauline she must survive to keep pace with her Hubie, who is always just a step ahead of the cops.

Stuffed as it is with “bits,” and though it’s short on plot (especially the romantic subplot), here’s another funny thing about *Do Re Mi*: It may have been the musical comedy Walker perpetually hungered for, but the show offered more than that. Kanin, Comden, Green and even Styne were all satirists by nature, so lots of the comedy had a point to it. The show uses the jukebox industry (quaint now, but not then, when it was big business) to mock trends in popular music. That was particularly timely during a period when the Great American Songbook had lost its luster and rock had not yet been deemed art. The songwriters merrily skewer it: “You got rockin’, you got rollin’”; “Love in Outer Space”; and “What’s New at the Zoo?,” a send-up of the population

explosion: “‘Ouch, you’re steppin’ on my pouch,’ said the kangaroo to the gnu,” accompanied by an intentionally cheesy rock beat.

Then, too, the authors’ brand of comedy is steeped in attitudes, verbal rhythms and gags that bespeak a world-weary New York Jewish perspective, all of it delineating the characters: “I can’t take much more of this,” says Hubie. “Pushed around—watching jerks like John Henry Wheeler get the front table. What’s the big deal with him? He’s got three names—what’s that? I got three names. I just don’t use Malcolm.” Advises Kay: “You better take two yellow ones tonight.”

And if Styne’s music doesn’t have the full-throttled surge of his score for *Gypsy* (what score does?), in *Do Re Mi* he’s still eagerly testing for himself what it means to be a theater composer. John Reardon, the New York Opera baritone who crossed over to Broadway to play the record mogul John Henry Wheeler (playing opposite Nancy Dussault, the other romantic lead), once told me about Styne at the session to record the cast album: “Oh, he was like a little kid; he was thrilled. He carried in with him this mound of music, because the show was loaded with his underscoring in addition to the songs. He said it was the biggest score he’d ever written, and he was so proud of it.”

That didn’t keep Styne from wanting a hit song, though. He and the lyricists got one with “Make Someone Happy,” which remains a standard. “There’s something about songs that doesn’t apply to any of the other arts as much,” he said. “You almost know when you’ve got a hit song. When you’ve got that right idea and the right words and the right music, then you go all the way with the right singer.” Outside the show, by the way, the right singer was Perry Como.

And most surprisingly in this not-so-typical musical comedy, there’s some drama, too, because Hubie makes the word “loser” his personal tragedy. Ignored by the guys in the mini-mob he desperately wants to impress, he is, as Ethan Mordden calls him, a “bitter, beaten epitaph of a living corpse.” There are real anger and what Comden and Green termed “sad self-discovery” in Hubie’s “All of My Life,” which has the eleven o’clock spot typically reserved for raising the audience’s spirits. But as we learned from “Rose’s Turn” in Styne and Sondheim’s *Gypsy*, that needn’t be the case if you know how to grab an audience. With *Do Re Mi* these writers stretched their talent, as did Silvers and Walker.

The piece requires so much of its performers that it wasn’t revived in New York until 1999, when New York City Center Encores! mounted it with a dream cast: Nathan Lane (the great musical theater vaudevillian of our time) and Randy Graff in the leads, supported by Brian Stokes Mitchell and Heather Headley.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

How enticing for **Johnny Price** to deliver a one-two punch with back-to-back productions of Jule Styne's 1959 and 1960 Broadway musicals, *Gypsy* and *Do Re Mi*. But since he knew the latter was not a "big title," he put a lid on the Cleveland tent's 1962 season with just a week's run of it. The metaphor, incidentally, turns out to be apt: In his welcome Johnny points to the "roof" of his brand-new canvas, replacing the one ripped off in the ferocious August storm that hit Cleveland during the run of *The Desert Song*.

Johnny also takes note of that evening's (September 15) capper: His musical director, **Lawrence Brown**, and *Gypsy*'s leading lady, **Susan Johnson**, are about to tie the knot at midnight. "The show usually runs two and a half hours," says Johnny, with perfectly delivered tongue-in-cheek. "Tonight I'm predicting two hours."

He wasn't too far off the mark, thanks to **Don Driver**'s invigorating rendition of what was even then a rarely produced show: the first, in fact, in the Midwest. In the performances of his two leads, this *Do Re Mi* is notable, depending on your point of view, for its authenticity, or for being an imitation—though by no means a pale one. As Hubie, **Roy Stuart** is giving us his best Phil Silvers; he just doesn't have the "size" to pack a comic wallop.

Musicarnival favorite **Joan Kibrig** was Nancy Walker's standby for Kay in the Broadway production and went on for Walker numerous times. As we've said, in those days it was customary for the stage manager to direct the standby after she had watched the star for hours, arriving at a performance that came as close as possible to replicating the original. Kibrig sounds like a Walker clone in all of the comedy scenes (no mean achievement; Walker was unique), though it seems to me her small but lovely moments of revealing her heart go deeper than Walker did.

It takes a while for the audience to tap into the New York Jewish tone of this piece, but once that happens, *Do Re Mi* is off and running. It's a splendidly written musical comedy, and in Driver's hands, Garson Kanin's story is thoroughly told. The entire company is good (especially opera singer **Naomi Collier**, who convincingly lets down her hair to become folk singer Tilda Mullen). And this production provided Musicarnival discovery **Lloyd Battista** with his first sizeable role, as mobster Moe Shtarker. An alumnus of Musicarnival's Fellowship School directed by **Lawrence Vincent**, Battista carved a solid career for himself onstage, in film and on television.

And thus ends Don Driver's Musicarnival tenure of nine summers and one winter as performer and director. The man staged nearly 50 musicals, operettas and operas during those years; he not

only lived to tell the tale of working on a nerve-wracking summer stock assembly line but also distinguished himself as a true innovator in the largely unexplored world of arena theater. (See Johnny Price's article within the annotation for the Cleveland *Music Man*.) Driver would find lots to do, as he always had, in New York—including the award-winning production of 1968's *Your Own Thing*, a show he also wrote and conceived—but he would be missed under the Cleveland tent as director, writer, actor, comedian and dancer.

He should have the last word, and these are words any respectable theater artist must live by: “The main thing about comedy is *cleanliness*, just straight down the line. It can't be clouded; every move has to be built so there is no doubt about what you have in mind. Comedy is mainly interpreting some portion of life, reaching something in the audience that is within its own experience, and then twisting it, so that it is out of proportion.”

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Sad to say, they didn't quite get the special nature of this musical—even the excellent critic Tony Mastroianni in *The Cleveland Press*: “A lightweight ... show in which the Musicarnival company is better than the material. ... Hubie Cram is the sort of man who would stock up on hula hoops just as the craze ends. ... Roy Stuart [plays him] as a wonderfully bewildered man, all arms and legs as he flounders about, yet almost poignant in his desire to be recognized.” And from the *Akron Beacon Journal*'s Oscar Smith, “Although *Do Re Mi* is not up to the standard of the other shows presented at Musicarnival this season, it has one of the best casts assembled there in a long time. Joan Kibrig ... and Roy Stuart hilariously carry off most of the comedy honors.”—**B. R.**

1963 Season (West Palm Beach)

CARNIVAL!

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 19–24, 1963 (New York opening: April 13, 1961;
719 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Bob Merrill, book by Michael Stewart (based on material by Helen Deutsch)

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Marcia King (Lili), Joshua Hecht (Paul), Rudy Tronto (Jacquot), Grant Lashley (Marco the Magnificent), Karen Jensen (Rosalie), Charles Reynolds (B. F. Schlegel)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Direct From Vienna,” “Mira,” “Yes, My Heart,” “Love Makes the World Go Round,” “Beautiful Candy,” “Grand Imperial Cirque de Paris,” “Always Always You,” “She’s My Love”

SYNOPSIS

The waif Lili, a simple country girl, arrives at a traveling European carnival looking for a friend of her late father. She immediately develops a crush on the dashing magician, Marco the Magnificent. She makes friends with four puppets, whose crippled handler, Paul, is a bitter and angry man who can express tender emotions only through them. By the end of the musical, Lili becomes aware that the puppets and puppeteer are one, and Paul is finally able to open his heart to her.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

The inspiration for *Carnival!*—and for *Lili*, the MGM musical that is its progenitor—is fascinating. It was NBC-TV’s long-running *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*: puppeteer Burr Tillstrom’s weekly series in which host Fran Allison worked without a script, creating a relationship with

loveable puppets that was disarmingly real. Then Paul Gallico wrote a short story titled “The Man Who Hated People,” retaining the idea of a TV show with a female host—in the Gallico story, a young woman who loves the puppets and a misanthropic puppeteer who hides his emotions behind the characters he gives voice to.

And then: MGM wanted a movie musical based on Gallico’s story, so he enlarged it into a novella set in a touring carnival; but the revised story seemed too dark for a 1950s movie audience, and screenwriter Helen Deutsch gave it a lighter touch and painted a world suited for Technicolor splendor. *Lili* starred an adorable Leslie Caron in the title role, giving a performance of surprising depth, with Mel Ferrer as Paul, the tormented puppeteer, and Jean-Pierre Aumont as Marco, the egotistical magician with whom the waif becomes infatuated. MGM’s *Lili* registered one of the biggest box-office successes of 1955—a nearly perfect piece of commercial cinema.

What happened next is an exemplar of theatrical risk taking. In 1960 producer David Merrick, at Deutsch’s suggestion, decided to adapt the film musical as a Broadway musical (that had never been done before). And with America’s affection for the movie still so fresh, the team he assembled seemed to be setting themselves up for failure. Director-choreographer Gower Champion had only one book musical, *Bye Bye Birdie*, to his credit; composer-lyricist Bob Merrill was best known as a writer of innocuous pop songs (e.g., “How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?”), whose two musicals produced to date were beset by problems beyond his control; and like Champion, book writer Michael Stewart, who replaced Deutsch, could point only to *Birdie* as a hit.

But then again, what Champion had in mind was unprecedented, arguably one of the first “concept” musicals, in which a singular vision brings together all of a show’s disparate elements to create a compelling, unified whole rich in metaphor. It was Champion’s notion to scale back the spectacle of the MGM film and make the carnival troupe decidedly ragtag as they toured the small towns of France. This carnival, he said, “was weather-beaten and worn, with a faded, seedy quality in the equipment, the costumes and even the people, [giving it] a beauty all its own.” (Paul describes it—and himself in it—as “a hiding place for all the misfits of the world.”)

Champion’s musical opened on a stage that aside from a tree and a cyclorama was bare: His carnival was erected before the eyes of the audience, and it was dismantled at the end of the show, which used no curtain. Imagination ruled. The director infused *Carnival!* with nearly continuous movement and (through underscoring) music, all of it character-driven; this style would become a hallmark of his later work, but in some ways he was at his best in *Carnival!*,

in which Lili wants desperately to believe every piece of magic and illusion she encounters. Champion wove the spell.

Merrill's lack of formal musical training didn't keep him from fashioning a Gallic-flavored score—26 musical numbers in all—graced with warmth and atmosphere. “Love Makes the World Go Round” delivered both—and became an immediate hit—but his score is notable for many understated gems, my favorite being “Mira,” Lili's description of the town she left. Such a comforting combination of music and words when she sings, “I came from a town, / The kind of town where you live in a house / 'Til the house fall down. / But if it stands up, you stay there. / It's funny, but that's their way there.” Interestingly, Champion at first resisted this show—until Merrill played him some songs he had already written. “That did it,” the director later admitted. “I was hooked. They immediately suggested to me just how I would like the movements and scenes of the show to take shape.” In other words, the work of a true theater songwriter.

Stewart retained the spirit—and in many cases, the letter—of Deutsch's screenplay. If the relationship between Marco and his long-suffering lover, Rosalie, too often settles for musical comedy jokes instead of actually exploring these characters, he respects what the musical is about: reality vs. illusion, a young girl reaching adulthood, and most important, a man coming to terms with his pain, both physical and emotional. Each of Paul's puppets embodies one or more of his own traits, but not until the end of the story can he integrate them and become a whole person—one who is finally able to love himself and, in a moment so honest that we cannot suppress tears, Lili.

Champion cast his musical flawlessly. Opening in the spring of 1961, it starred the 25-year-old Anna Maria Alberghetti as an enchanting Lili (at season's end she would share a Tony Award with Diahann Carroll); the magnificent singing actor Jerry Orbach, in his first musical after *The Fantasticks*, as Paul; renowned dancer-actor James Mitchell and Broadway comedienne Kaye Ballard as Marco and Rosalie; and the diminutive Frenchman Pierre Olaf as a charming Jacquot.

For me, what's best about *Carnival!* is the tone that Champion set for the entire production. In later musicals like *The Happy Time* and *Mack and Mabel*, he would be accused of emphasizing big moments and effects to the detriment of the small ones. Not so here. It's significant that although *Carnival!* opened with an exclamation point as part of the title, Champion later had it removed. Said the director: “It isn't a blockbuster. It's a gentle show.”

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Assuming that **Johnny Price** saw this musical on Broadway early on, no doubt he coveted the show for West Palm Beach and/or Cleveland: *Carnival!* at Musicarnival—perfect!—and once the stock rights became available in 1963, nearly every summer arena theater in America must have grabbed it. It was as if Gower Champion had made *Carnival!* to order for Johnny and his colleagues in the still-thriving tent-theater business.

Ironic, isn't it, that Don Driver—Musicarnival's ace director in Cleveland—was gone by now. As a pioneer in arena staging, he anticipated Champion's concept in his own work. Champion/Stewart wrote this note in the script: "There is a convention in the show that the Roustabouts who set up the carnival in the Prologue also make all the shifts during the course of the play, thus allowing the action to flow without pause from scene to scene." That sort of thinking was tantamount to Don Driver and Johnny Price's manifesto—stagecraft that Johnny was convinced would ultimately change the Broadway theater.

The point is moot, of course, since except for his trial season in West Palm Beach (1958), Driver had virtually no presence there during his Musicarnival tenure, so it fell to resident director **David Davis** to stage this most hospitable show at the Florida satellite theater. Though we can't see the results, the critics for the most part were receptive (see below).

What we can judge are the performances, and as usual in a Davis production, they are a mixed bag. **Marcia King**, just 19, was the right age (and with the requisite training) for Lili and impresses in what was apparently her first major professional role anywhere. Sad to say, hers was a career that never took hold; within five years King's legit soprano "type" was virtually unmarketable on Broadway.

The most interesting casting is rising New York City Opera star **Joshua Hecht** as Paul. Johnny had used him in productions of the two Ezio Pinza musicals, *South Pacific* and *Fanny*—and Hecht's bio, probably edited by Johnny, tells us why: "He is a leading member of the new generation of American singers who believe that opera should be acted as well as it is sung." Commendable—but here, in a role that's less grand than those in the other two musicals, his acting is fine (including the four puppet voices: delightful), but he oversings much of the material. We'll blame Davis for that.

Husband and wife **Grant Lashley** and **Karen Jensen** as Marco and Rosalie are inexplicably off the mark—how can this be, when Champion had put them in the musical's national company,

where Lashley understudied Marco and eventually took over the role? In parts that Michael Stewart's script somewhat burlesqued to begin with, they seem to care only about catering to the audience.

The real find is **Rudy Tronto**, who played Jacquot for much of the Broadway run, which he helped close a month before this Palm Beach production. Everything about his work is good: This is a lovable, layered performance—a harbinger of Tronto's later work at Musicarnival and in New York in the 1960s and '70s.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Jonathan Koonz in the Palm Beach *Daily News* gave a rapturous welcome to new face Marcia King, noting that she “has the difficult job of carrying the part of Leslie Caron.... She does her job brilliantly, triumphing over the difficult conditions at Musicarnival with a surprisingly full voice coming from such a small person.” And Koontz joined me in recognizing something special about Rudy Tronto: “He plays Jacquot as though he and the gentle character are really the same person.” Joshua Hecht received an insightful notice from Josh Crane in the *Times*: “His voice is as magnificent as you would expect it to be; it fills the big tent. But here it is his acting that is prominent.” The production as a whole was praised by most critics, although Alice McKee in the *Ft. Lauderdale Daily News* offered this caveat: “Pace is the real delinquent.... Director David Davis needs to speed up the entire show and allow a sensationally beautiful musical score to carry along scenes.”—**B. R.**

THE STUDENT PRINCE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 26–March 3, 1963 (New York opening: December 2, 1924;
608 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Sigmund Romberg, book and lyrics by Dorothy Donnelly

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Howell Harris (Prince Karl Franz), Marcia King (Kathie), Joshua Hecht (Dr. Engel), Rudy Tronto (Lutz), Rosanna Huffman (Grand Duchess Anastasia)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Golden Days,” “To the Inn We’re Marching,” “Drinking Song,” “Deep in My Heart, Dear,” “Serenade,” “Just We Two”

SYNOPSIS

The story is set in 1860 in Heidelberg, the German university town where Prince Karl Franz has gone with his tutor, Dr. Engel, to complete his education. He meets Kathie, a waitress at the Inn of the Golden Apple, and they fall in love. But his carefree days are abruptly ended when he is called home to become king. Two years later, Karl Franz returns to Heidelberg. Even though seeing Kathie again has rekindled his love, he must once more heed the call of duty. This time he leaves forever, as he has already promised to marry Princess Margaret.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1959 SEASON (West Palm Beach)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Here is Johnny’s third iteration of a standard piece in the repertoire: It’s the second *Student Prince* in West Palm Beach (the first was in 1959), and he produced the show in Cleveland, also in 1959. Interestingly, it marks the final American operetta to be mounted on either one of his stages. The “Golden Days” (to quote a Romberg-Donnelly song title) for this repertoire had faded.

Going through a lengthy compare/contrast would simply be an academic exercise, but I’ll note that the best directed remains Don Driver’s production in Cleveland, in which the University of Heidelberg became a world unto itself: both romantic and strangely real. Nonetheless, the best baton is wielded by **Lawrence Brown** in West Palm Beach (impressively in command in this, his third season); the best Lutz is **Rudy Tronto** in this version (not as foppish or showy as master comic Driver’s portrayal, but a character the audience takes to its heart over the course of the evening); the best Franz and Kathie are also here—because **Howell Harris** and **Marcia King** are the youngest, which makes their ill-fated love the most poignant (and King’s high Cs are spectacular); and the best “Golden Days” also comes from under the Florida tent in the tenor/bass duetting of Harris and the thrilling **Joshua Hecht**.

Johnny's casting coup was signing the so-called "marvel ballerina," **Claudia Cravey**, then 14 years old and under contract to MGM. A native of Palm Beach, Cravey loved homecomings. Though a hoped-for acting career failed (unlike her dancing) to take wing, she never lost touch with her roots, and in 2010 was named ballet mistress of Florida Classical Ballet Theater. In *The Student Prince* she is the première danseuse (opposite choreographer **Jack Beaber**) in the Act Two "Grand Ballet Romantique." Cravey's presence can be felt in the recording; the audience goes wild in appreciation of a young phenom who had just been featured in *Seventeen* magazine.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Johnny's last American operetta appropriately went out with a flourish. Wrote John Crane in the *Palm Beach Times*: "High, wide and handsome. An exceptional production that is excellent from the leads down to the last chorus member." And the show worked its magic on Bob Kreiner in the *Daily News*: "If the night had been warm and quiet, and perhaps if a bit of the scent of summer had been in the air, it would have been quite possible that the entire audience could have been transported for an hour or two into the romantic and swashbuckling Bavaria of the past century."—**B. R.**

THE UNSINKABLE MOLLY BROWN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 5–10, 1963 (New York opening: November 3, 1960;
532 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Meredith Willson, book by Richard Morris

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

David Davis

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Susan Johnson (Molly), Robert Cosden (Johnny), Ralston Hill (Prince De Long), George Blackwell (Shamus), Rosanna Huffman (Mrs. McGlone), Walter Davis (Christmas)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Ain’t Down Yet,” “Belly Up to the Bar, Boys,” “Colorado, My Home,” “I’ll Never Say No to You,” “My Own Brass Bed,” “Are You Sure?,” “Dolce Far Niente”

SYNOPSIS

The musical retells the saga of a near-legendary figure in the Colorado silver mines who rose from a poverty-stricken background in Hannibal, Missouri, through her spunky determination to be “up where the people are,” and by having the good fortune to marry a lucky prospector, Leadville Johnny Brown. After failing to crash Denver society, Molly drags Johnny off to Europe, where, despite her gaucheries, or because of them, she becomes a social leader in Monte Carlo. Molly almost loses Johnny, but after the heroism she displays during the sinking of the *Titanic*, she wins back her husband and wins over the elite of Denver.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

The Unsinkable Molly Brown, Meredith Willson’s follow-up to *The Music Man*, got mixed reviews when it opened on Broadway in November 1960. Some critics rather aggressively charged that the new musical, with script by his first-time collaborator, Richard Morris (1924-96), paled by comparison with Willson’s earlier triumph; that neither score nor script caught fire; that you couldn’t understand enough of what star Tammy Grimes was saying (no surprise there); and that it lacked genuine humor.

But when I interviewed Grimes in 1990, she had nothing but praise for the musical that won her a Tony Award in 1961 (her first of two). And that is significant, because Grimes was among the most insightful actors of her generation. “Molly Brown—what a great role for me, and for anyone lucky enough to play her,” she said. “Molly is the spirit of our country, isn’t she? Whatever the obstacle, she won’t give in. I never got tired of playing her.” And in fact, not only did Grimes play the entire Broadway run of 522 performances; she and her leading man, Harve Presnell, did the national tour.

“The spirit of our country,” asserted Grimes. Therein lies this musical’s attraction, and for many, its letdown. Beginning with *Oklahoma!* in 1943, and stretching as far as *The Music Man* in 1957, there were lots of musicals that explored the idea of what it means to be an American. Many achieved enormous popularity—especially those that were actually set in the heartland. They were in sync with the mood of the country.

Granted, some Broadway types scorned *The Music Man*, finding it impossibly corny. But corny was where the Iowa-born (1902) Willson lived—we even find it in his only urban show, *Here’s*

Love (based on the film *Miracle on 34th Street*), in 1963. The question is: Did the humor ring true? The answer is: Always. Willson's optimism never flagged, and it's telling that he was also drawn to the times in which he lived. *The Music Man* is set in 1912, and the tale of Molly Brown—a character loosely based on history—begins just two months earlier than Harold Hill's arrival in River City. It would have been fun to see the two musicals in repertory.

But that didn't happen—because by 1960 the country was changing too much to embrace Willson's meat-and-potatoes Americana. The 1964 movie version (screenplay by Helen Deutsch) tells Molly's saga a bit more convincingly than Morris did (with a crackerjack performance by Debbie Reynolds, and with Harve Presnell reprising his stage role), but not enough of Willson's exuberant songs were retained, and it never turns up, as it should, on any critic's list of high-ranking MGM movie musicals. Though Dick Scanlon worked for some years on a new version that was finally given a full production in Denver in 2014, we are not likely to see a Broadway revival anytime soon, or maybe ever. Sadly, in early-21st-century America, *Molly's* time has passed.

So it's time to listen, as I did, to the Musicarnival production, and to the superlative original-cast album from 1960. Yes, Willson repeats himself in giving Molly (in her theme song, "I Ain't Down Yet") a variant of the rhythmic dialogue-in-song he had used so memorably for Harold Hill. But we know this was a form he was hungry to explore. His voice is still fresh here, and it's equally justified coming from the mouths of Harold Hill, Molly Brown and (in *Here's Love*) Fred Gaily.

And this score, like that of *The Music Man*, has a marvelous variety that ranges from the quirky back-room anthem "Belly Up to the Bar, Boys," to the revivalist pulse of "Are You Sure?," to the charm of Johnny's "Chick-a-Pen," to the lusty, full-throated masculinity of his "I'll Never Say No," to the aching vulnerability of Molly's "My Own Brass Bed": "Stars shining on my own brass bed, / Stars shining far over my head. / Oh, what a beautiful place to cry! / I'd learn to sleep with one eye just to look at you. / I'm trembling to look at you now." Like Marian Paroo's "My White Knight," it borders on art song.

Conventional wisdom mostly dismisses *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, but conventional wisdom is wrong. Meredith Willson remains an American treasure.

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

This was another victory for **Johnny Price**: The first run of the show outside Broadway, and

not much more needs to be said about it than **Susan Johnson**. Here's the perfect musical theater performer for the role; she sings and acts it to a fare-thee-well (and unlike the eccentric Grimes, you never miss a syllable).

Palm Beach audiences were blessed. In that winter of 1963, they got a double jolt of Johnson's electricity: Though the tapes no longer exist, she followed Molly Brown with *Mama Rose in Gypsy*—tapes that *were* preserved from Cleveland Musicarnival's 1962 summer. And it must have been a delightful winter for her: She had recently married the musical director of the two tents, **Larry Brown**, who provides her with a big boost from the pit. The bliss, however, was short-lived: The next summer Johnson was seriously injured on a motor scooter. Though she eventually recovered, the accident halted her career and ended her marriage.

The Unsinkable Molly Brown was, of course, written to be dominated by two actors, and **Robert Cosden**, whose career on Broadway was brief and insignificant, is fine as Johnny. Meredith Willson's office probably recommended him; he had toured in *The Music Man*.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The fullest appreciation of this production came from the typewriter of Josh Crane (*Palm Beach Times*): **David Davis**, the director, has paced the show at a breath-catching rate. . . . He has also helped create an esprit de corps that welds cast and chorus into an obviously fun-loving unit. Susan Johnson at the helm is another very good reason that this show is so good. . . . The warmth and congeniality she projects permeates the entire production. It was interesting to note that her own cast was as enthusiastic at the curtain call as the applauding and cheering audience. Molly's man, Leadville Johnny Brown, is portrayed by Robert Cosden, who looks enough like the character he's playing to have been born into it. His singing voice is full, and he has the rugged good looks to balance what could have been an overpowering Molly."—**B. R.**



Susan Johnson in The Unsinkable Molly Brown

1963 Season (Cleveland)

CAN–CAN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 24–July 7, 1963 (New York opening: May 7, 1953;
892 performances)

AUTHORS^{ww}

Music and lyrics by Cole Porter, book by Abe Burrows

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Joan Kibrig (La Mome Pistache), Robert Brooks (Judge Aristide Forestier), Alan Kass (Boris Adzinidzinadze), Jeri Barto (Claudine), Richard Tone (Hilaire Jussac)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“C’est Magnifique,” “Come Along With Me,” “I Am in Love,” “Allez-Vous-En,”
“It’s All Right With Me,” “I Love Paris,” “Can–Can”

SYNOPSIS

Set in 1893, *Can–Can* tells of La Mome Pistache, who is so distressed about the investigation of her Bal du Paradis—where the chief attraction is the Can–Can—that she tries to vamp the highly moral investigating judge, Aristide Forestier. Eventually the two fall in love, and when the case comes to trial, Forestier himself takes over the defense and wins acquittal.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1957 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Since audio recordings of *Carnival*, the first production of **Johnny Price**’s 1963 Cleveland season—Musicarnival’s tenth—were never made or were lost along the way, this is our first

listen to the work of **Otto W. Pirchner**, who succeeded Don Driver as Cleveland's resident director (and de facto artistic director, though Johnny was not inclined to use the term).

His bio—probably guided by the producer—gives him a nice buildup as “the country's youngest director [at 25] of a major professional theater.” It's a theater story all the way: He was the son of Otto W. Pirchner, Johnny's crony and the impresario of Cleveland's popular Alpine Village nightclub, which presented not only singers and bands but musicals in shortened “tab” versions. And to his credit, the young Pirchner worked himself all the way up. A graduate of Euclid High School, he studied at Ballet Theatre in New York, and at Musicarnival he learned at the feet of directors Bill Boehm (1954–57) and Driver (1958–62). You name it, he did it: apprentice (during the second season), head of properties, assistant stage manager, set designer, singer and dancer.

Johnny took a chance in hiring in-house, but like Hal Prince, who became a Broadway director only after watching George Abbott for eight years, Pirchner knew the drill, and delivers a solid *Can-Can*. In fact, of the three that Johnny put onstage (prior to this one, James Nygren's 1957 production in Cleveland and Driver's 1958 shot in West Palm Beach), this is the one that most successfully solves the problems inherent in the script. And in casting **Joan Kibrig** and **Robert Brooks** in the leads, he fires up this musical's first real romance under the tent.

Everything hums: **Lawrence Brown**'s musical direction is all-knowing when it comes to the late but spirited Cole Porter score. In the first eight bars I was sure that his ultraslow tempo on “I Love Paris” would kill it, but by the end, he and Kibrig convinced me I had just heard the first version that was truly a love song. And even when Abe Burrows's book bogs down (and when has it not?), Pirchner and his cast—most notably **Alan Kass** in the Hans Conried role of the pretentious sculptor, Boris—find all the laughs, though they may be broad. There is less showmanship and imagination now than during Musicarnival's Driver era, but Pirchner's work often stands on its own merits, and the recording itself is a treat because the sound is so good.

My only carp is that he cut “Live and Let Live”—which is nothing less than the theme of the musical. But when you're only 25, such mistakes are still allowed.

Footnote: In the small role of the artist Hercule is **John Schuck**, who has done it all in theater and on television and holds the record for the most performances of Daddy Warbucks in *Annie*.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Tony Mastroianni in *The Cleveland Press* did not mince words in appraising the musical itself: “The Musicarnival production makes this show seem better than it is. *Can-Can* is the sort of

show that needs the professional polish this group gives it. Anything less and it would fall flat.... [The script] does not show off the talents of writer Abe Burrows at his best.... Joan Kibrig is both cynical and witty as the dance hall proprietor who gets in trouble with the law. Robert Brooks as the idealistic judge has the voice and physical bearing of a leading man.”—**B. R.**

THE MERRY WIDOW

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 22–August 4, 1963 (World premiere: Vienna, Theater an der Wien, December 30, 1905;
New York premiere: New Amsterdam Theatre, October 21, 1907)

AUTHORS

Music by Franz Lehár, libretto by Viktor Léon and Leo Stein. With English lyrics by Adrian Ross.

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

PRINCIPAL ROLES

Claire Alexander (Sonia), Robert Rounseville (Prince Danilo), Richard Hermany (Camille de Jolidon), Nancy Foster (Natalie), Frank Shaw Stevens (Popoff), Susan Romann (Madame Nova Kovich), Walter Davis (Nova Kovich), Art Wallace (Khadja), Karen Bair (Madame Khadja), Michael Bloom (Nish), John Schuck (Marquis Cascada), David Welsh (Raoul de St. Brioche)

HIGHLIGHTS

“A Dutiful Wife,” “In Marsovia,” “Maxim’s,” “Vilia,” “Women, Women, Women” “Love in My Heart,” “The Girls at Maxim’s,” “Farewell to Paris,” “The Merry Widow Waltz”

SYNOPSIS

Ambassador Popoff is hosting a party at the Marsovian Embassy in Paris. One of the guests, Sonia, is newly widowed after the death of her much older husband. To keep her wealth in Marsovia, Popoff and others have concocted a plot to marry off Sonia to Prince Danilo, the dashing but impoverished scion of the Marsovian royal family. When Danilo arrives at the embassy party after a bit of carousing at Maxim’s, he and Sonia instantly recognize each other

and recall their former romance—which ended when Danilo’s family refused to let him marry a commoner. Now their financial fortunes are reversed, but the spark is still there, though Sonia and Danilo play a cat-and-mouse game (which intertwines with a flirtation between Popoff’s young wife, Natalie, and the French attaché Camille de Jolidon) before they finally give in to love and agree to marry.—**R. P.**

ABOUT THE WORK

See 1956 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Musicarnival’s second production of *The Merry Widow* has a dynamite cast and straightforward direction, in contrast to the fussy “revisal” in 1956 (a production which, in spite of its flaws, had a couple of good things going for it—Beverly Sills and Mace Barrett). This time around, the book stays faithful to Viktor Léon and Leo Stein’s original German libretto, and the tried-and-true lyrics by Adrian Ross allow Lehár’s music to shine.

A mere minute of the overture is performed by the proficient conductor **Lawrence Brown** and the orchestra, no doubt to allow for the 10 minutes at the end of Act I devoted to Brown’s own composition, “Ballet: Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra” (for which he is also the pianist). Brown’s music includes echoes of “The Dying Swan,” *Scheherazade* and Errol Flynn swashbucklers—yet it is oddly bland (though it would have been fascinating to see the dancing of prima ballerina **Mary Gelder** and premier danseur **Eliot Feld**—who, in addition to later forming his own important company, portrayed Baby John in the 1962 film *West Side Story*).

But who cares about some throwaway ballet music when you have a pair of stars as enticing as this Widow—here called Sonia—and Danilo? Pittsburgh native **Claire Alexander** has a creamy, lovely soprano with an upper register that is full and floating; her rendition of “Vilia” is positively bewitching. There is a swell of applause for the entrance of **Robert Rounseville**—star of the 1957 and 1958 Musicarnival productions of *The Student Prince* and a quirkily endearing Mr. Snow in the 1956 film *Carousel*—who oozes charisma. His pliant voice is in top form, and toward the end of the show he delivers, resplendently, the song “Farewell to Paris” (which, I suspect, is actually the all-but-unknown number “Goodbye, Paree” from the 1946 flop Broadway operetta *Yours Is My Heart*, an adaptation of Lehár’s *Land of Smiles* starring Richard Tauber). One caveat: In their final duet, Rounseville plays a game of “anything-you-can-sing-I-can-sing-better” with Alexander and all but overpowers her, to the detriment of the recording’s tone quality. He wouldn’t have dared to try such a stunt on the famous 1952 studio recording of *The*

Merry Widow, when his soprano was the revered Metropolitan Opera star Dorothy Kirsten.

Nancy Foster and **Richard Hermany** as the secondary couple Natalie and Camille are bright-voiced and distinctive—and Hermany (a future Cornelius Hackl in the Broadway production of *Hello, Dolly!*) is also blessed with flawless diction.

The lone holdover from the 1956 Musicarnival production is **Frank Shaw Stevens**, who is top-notch as the wily-yet-clueless Ambassador Popoff. Also enjoyable are Lorain’s own **Michael Bloom** as the fuddy-duddy messenger Nish and future Broadway star **John Schuck** as Cascada. And speaking of up-and-comers, **John Ostendorf**, a music student at Oberlin College who would go on to a distinguished career in opera, is a member of the ensemble.

The sounds of airplanes overhead are distinctly heard prior to the entrance of the Widow in Act One and after the high-spirited number “Women, Women, Women” in Act Two. The planes were part and parcel of the Musicarnival experience, but this was the last time they would compete with the arias and barcarolles. This *Merry Widow* was Johnny Price’s eighth and final “experiment in opera.”

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

“This grandmother of all operettas gets the full treatment from Musicarnival, which means that it was never before produced with such dash and gusto as it gets from producer Johnny Price’s girls and boys,” raved H. L. Samford in the *Shaker Heights Sun*. “Claire Alexander is proud, gay and radiant in the title role. Robert Rounseville is a dashing, handsome Prince Danilo,” wrote Peter Bellamy in *The Plain Dealer*, calling *The Merry Widow* Musicarnival’s “finest offering of the year.”—**R. P.**

WILDCAT

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 5–18, 1963 (New York opening: December 16, 1960;
171 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by N. Richard Nash, music by Cy Coleman, lyrics by Carolyn Leigh

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Norma Doggett (Wildy), Mark Dawson (Joe Dynamite), Bill Galarno (Hank), Maryann Hillyer (Janie), Connie Price (Countess Emily O'Brien), Robert Miragliotta (Sookie), Art Wallace (Sheriff Sam Gore)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Hey, Look Me Over!," "You've Come Home," "What Takes My Fancy," "You're a Liar," "Give a Little Whistle," "Tall Hope"

SYNOPSIS

The story centers on Wildcat "Wildy" Jackson, a woman traveling through the Southwest in 1912 looking to strike it rich in the oil business. At her side is her younger sister, Janie, who has a clear-sightedness that her sibling lacks. Wildcat pins all of her hopes for finding a gusher on one man, Joe Dynamite, an itinerant derrick foreman whom she has never met. Beyond Wildy's search for oil and her relationship with Joe, there is a second-tier romance between Janie and Joe's bosom buddy, Hank, and a subplot concerning an erstwhile countess. At the final curtain, Wildy and Joe finally admit their love for each other.—*Andy Propst*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

No ranking musical theater historian has ever bothered much with Lucille Ball's only Broadway musical, 1960's *Wildcat*, about "Wildy" Jackson, a woman crazed with finding oil in the Southwest of 1912. The account we've heard over and over can be summarized thus: N. Richard Nash's original script, conceived for a performer in her 20s, gets an overhaul for Ball, who was 48 when she accepted the role; Cy Coleman (1929-2004) and Carolyn Leigh's (1926-83) infectious score (their first for the theater) elevates them from pop-songwriter status and produces, in the rousing "Hey, Look Me Over!," a hit that has outlasted the show; the musical earns praise for the score but lots of pans for the book; the show does big business as long as Ball is in it, but after she falls ill twice (or loses interest—take your pick), *Wildcat* closes at a financial loss. The song "Tall Hope" got it wrong.

We'll never get the full story of the musical's bad fortune (although Andy Propst's biography of Coleman, *You Fascinate Me So*, probably comes close), but from the beginning this star vehicle was looking for trouble. Ball was still recovering from her divorce from Desi Arnaz and terribly insecure about her vocal abilities. (Remember: her singing was dubbed in all those MGM musicals.) *Wildcat*'s musical director and dance and vocal arranger, John Morris, made the cast album exciting (and a best seller), but he told me that he constantly had to buck her up. He urged Lucille Ball to simply be "Lucy," but she never found a way to do that in song.

The "muscle" for this show was its formidable director-choreographer (and in this case, co-producer), Michael Kidd (1915-2007), a man not known for his ability to shape the literary values of a piece. According to Propst, Kidd pushed Nash to keep rewriting. The director was at his best in finding the musical comedy fun in the music and lyrics—and in creating spectacle by building an oil derrick onstage. But faced with a star who was demanding more jokes (at one point, Ball's *I Love Lucy* writers were brought in), Nash was forced to ditch most of his original conception by opening night.

And for me, that's the tragedy of *Wildcat*. Nash (1913-2000) was never a jokey writer, but instead a dramatist with a poetic sensibility (as a young man, he won the Maxwell Anderson Award), and if he had written nothing but *The Rainmaker*, he would still command respect: That 1954 work is a great American play. On paper, his preoccupations with illusion, dreams, miracles, romance, truth telling and wonderfully eccentric characters made him a natural for the musical stage, but several years after the commercial failure of *Wildcat*, another director-choreographer, Gower Champion, would excise the delicacy from Nash's musical version of the play *The Happy Time*. Only with *110 in the Shade*, the musical based on *The Rainmaker*, was he teamed with songwriters (Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt) and a director (Joseph Anthony, who had staged the play) who were in all ways sympathetic to his art. Incidentally, Nash eventually gave up playwriting for the less stressful, noncollaborative life of penning novels.

Maybe *Wildcat* never could have succeeded, even without all the potchkeying. But it tells us something that its author held it close to his heart for some three years prior to production, envisioning it as a straight play. The romantic couple at its center—like Starbuck and Lizzie in *The Rainmaker*—are worth exploring. As Hank says to Joe Dynamite near the end of the musical, "Maybe she [Wildy] *is* a liar—with her mouth! But you are a liar with your heart!"

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Despite its aborted run on Broadway, *Wildcat* won enough notoriety as the “Lucy” musical to enjoy a few seasons of summer stock with stars including Martha Raye. Unfortunately, **Johnny Price** didn’t have her to rely on for this production, directed rather indifferently by **Otto W. Pirchner**.

Norma Doggett, as Wildy, visited the tent with numerous Broadway credits—but none of them in star roles, and the canniness and vivacity that define her character rarely surface. Ironically, her Joe Dynamite, **Mark Dawson**, dominates the evening, but strange to tell, as good as he is here, he disappointed the following week in *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*. The secondary couple, **Bill Galarno** as Hank and **Maryann Hillyer** as Janie, are bland; in Hillyer’s case, not surprising, as her major credit at that time was Miss New York City of 1961. Nash’s stories always boast a few delightful eccentrics: in this department **Robert Miragliotta** shines as Sookie, but Johnny’s wife, **Connie Price**, in her Musicarnival stage debut (she distinguished herself as principal set designer during the early years), is miscast.

As a whole, the show feels underrehearsed: Musical director **Lawrence Brown** fights tempos with both chorus and principals throughout the evening, and not a relationship between or among these characters is truly explored. Unsurprisingly, the applause at the end is perfunctory.

And yet I’m grateful to have the recording (Musicarnival’s Florida production, which ran earlier that year, was taped only once, and it is unplayable). *Wildcat* is a virtually lost American musical, and the stumbling blocks notwithstanding, it is a fascinating piece to second-guess. Nash, Coleman, Leigh, Kidd, orchestrator Robert Ginzler—all top-drawer talent of the era.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

The two key critics both came away let down. Peter Bellamy in *The Plain Dealer*, while finding Norma Doggett to be a satisfactory actress, decried her weakness as a vocalist, particularly in her establishing number, “Hey, Look Me Over”: “She can hardly be heard beyond the first few rows.” But he praised Mark Dawson for his “deft way with a comedy line.” Tony Mastroianni’s capsule comment in *The Cleveland Press*: “Weak play, fair music, pleasant show....” The result, he continued, is “a long *I Love Lucy* in-the-oil-fields episode.” —**B. R.**

THE UNSINKABLE MOLLY BROWN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 19–September 1, 1963 (New York opening: November 3, 1960;
532 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Meredith Willson, book by Richard Morris

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Betty Jane Watson (Molly), Mark Dawson (Johnny), Ralston Hill (Prince De Long), Art Wallace (Shamus), Lawrence Vincent (Monsignor Ryan), Karen Kiel (Mrs. McGlone), Walter Davis (Christmas)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Ain’t Down Yet,” “Belly Up to the Bar, Boys,” “Colorado, My Home,” “I’ll Never Say No to You,” “My Own Brass Bed,” “Are You Sure?,” “Dolce Far Niente”

SYNOPSIS

The musical retells the saga of a near-legendary figure in the Colorado silver mines who rose from a poverty-stricken background in Hannibal, Missouri, through her spunky determination to be “up where the people are,” and by having the good fortune to marry a lucky prospector, Leadville Johnny Brown. After failing to crash Denver society, Molly drags Johnny off to Europe, where, despite her gaucheries, or because of them, she becomes a social leader in Monte Carlo. Molly almost loses Johnny, but after the heroism she displays during the sinking of the *Titanic*, she wins back her husband and wins over the elite of Denver.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1963 SEASON (West Palm Beach)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

This time West Palm Beach—not Cleveland—gets the prize. **Johnny Price**’s summer outing of

The Unsinkable Molly Brown, staged by Otto W. Pirchner ... sinks. (I can't resist; unfortunately, it's the best word.) A tape of only one performance of the two-week run was made or survives, and it is incomplete, missing nearly half of the second act.

But I didn't miss it. Both leads are too old for the parts: **Betty Jane Watson**'s most important work had been *Oklahoma!* (Laurey) on Broadway, in London and on tour, but by 1963 that musical was ancient history. At 36, even Susan Johnson, who triumphed in the terrific Florida production, was also technically too old—but Johnson was still a headliner in 1963. The motor scooter accident that irreparably damaged her career occurred earlier that summer, and she never made it to Cleveland to reprise the role. Watson projects none of the qualities that made Johnson's performance spectacular.

Her Johnny, **Mark Dawson**, seems lost in this role, though he had been one of George Abbott's favorite baritones in the 1940s and 1950s, playing featured roles on Broadway in the original *High Button Shoes*, *New Girl in Town*, *Fiorello!* and Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Me and Juliet*. On the local scene, Dawson had turned in very credible leading performances in Johnny Price's 1958 *Annie Get Your Gun* and *Guys & Dolls*, and earlier in August (1963) he essayed a fine Joe Dynamite in *Wildcat*.

But this couple never truly *take the stage*. No chemistry. No vocal fireworks. No show. It was Musicarnival's anticlimactic season finale, marked by a sing-along on "Auld Lang Syne" at the curtain call.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The critics typically gave Johnny Price the benefit of the doubt in Cleveland, even when the offering didn't hit the mark. Here they struggled. *The Cleveland Press* headline includes the phrase "Molly Brown OK," and Stan Anderson notes that "Miss Watson had trouble defining her character until she got to the point where she bounced into Mrs. McGlone's soiree and started to belt out 'Beautiful People of Denver.'" And in *The Plain Dealer*, the town's usual cheerleader, Peter Bellamy, wrote a lede with the phrase "several attractive qualities." Read between the lines and you feel his difficulty endorsing this one.—**B. R.**

1964 Season (West Palm Beach)

OKLAHOMA!

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

February 25–March 1, 1964 (New York opening: March 31, 1953;
2,212 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on the play *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Harry Theyard (Curly), Judith McCauley (Laurey), Margie Newby (Ado Annie Carnes), Jerry Newby (Will Parker), Lawrence Brooks (Jud Fry), Alfred Dennis (Ali Hakim), Fran Stevens (Aunt Eller Murphy)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’,” “The Surrey With the Fringe on Top,” “I Cain’t Say No,” “Many a New Day,” “People Will Say We’re in Love,” “Pore Jud,” “Out of My Dreams,” “The Farmer and the Cowman,” “Oklahoma!”

SYNOPSIS

The musical is set in Indian Territory soon after the turn of the century and is mostly concerned with whether the decent Curly McClain or the menacing Jud Fry will take Laurey Williams to the box social. Though in a fit of pique Laurey chooses Jud, she really loves Curly, and they soon make plans to marry. At their wedding, there is a joyous celebration of Oklahoma’s impending statehood; Jud is accidentally killed in a fight with Curly; and the newlyweds prepare to ride off in their surrey with the fringe on top. A comic secondary plot has to do with a romantic triangle involving man-crazy Ado Annie Carnes, cowboy Will Parker and peddler Ali Hakim.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1954 Season

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

It's surprising to me that **Johnny Price** ventured into *Oklahoma!* only three times in Musicarnival's production years: in the production that launched the inaugural 1954 season in Cleveland; in 1958 in Palm Beach; and six years later in this one. It's staged by **Otto W. Pirchner**, who was now the resident director in both venues. It doesn't have the sparkle of Don Driver's 1958 show, but it's good enough just the same—and superior to 1954.

Listening to **Harry Theyard** as Curly—by now a fixture at New York City Opera and a year away from his featured role in Broadway's *Man of La Mancha*—is always a pleasure, even if this is far from the go-for-broke characterization contributed by another NYCO guy, John Reardon, in 1958. **Judith McCauley** is, however, a darling Laurey, and she and Theyard remind us that *Oklahoma!* is the only Rodgers & Hammerstein hit whose young people are central to one of its themes. To wit: At the end of Act Two, the just-married couple are symbolically the future of the “brand-new state.”

Lawrence Brooks reprises his 1958 Jud Fry, and it's this role and Edvard Grieg in *Song of Norway* that represent his best work at Musicarnival.

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

No reviews could be found of the 1958 season in Palm Beach.—**B. R.**

CALL ME MADAM

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 3–8, 1964 (New York opening: October 25, 1950;
644 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, book by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirchner

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Joan Kibrig (Mrs. Sally Adams), Lawrence Brooks (Cosmo Constantine), Harry Theyard (Kenneth Gibson), Judith McCauley (Princess Maria)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“The Hostess With the Mostes’ on the Ball,” “Can You Use Any Money Today?,” “Lichtenburg,” “Marrying for Love,” “It’s a Lovely Day Today,” “The Best Thing for You,” “You’re Just in Love”

SYNOPSIS

According to the program, the musical takes place “in two mythical countries: one is Lichtenburg, the other the United States of America.” When Sally Adams, the hostess with the mostes’ on the ball, becomes ambassador to the tiny duchy, she surprises and charms the local gentry, especially foreign minister Cosmo Constantine, with her no-nonsense, undiplomatic manner. In a subplot, Sally’s young aide, Kenneth Gibson, finds himself falling for Lichtenburg’s Princess Maria, a condition that prompts the ambassador to itemize the symptoms in “You’re Just in Love.”—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1956 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Here is a rare example in Musicarnival’s production years of a show that was ill-advised. **Johnny Price** offered the topical satire of this 1952 piece in the 1956 Cleveland season and it still felt fresh enough, although that was less true when Palm Beach got it two years later. In 1964, four months after the Kennedy assassination, the re-creation of the Truman years seems forced, even insensitive. If this were a classic musical, maybe, but it’s not—merely a bit of fluff (albeit well crafted) that had its moment in our popular culture. And thus the lack of a complete recording of the production is no great loss.

I suspect Johnny’s reason to do it was the availability of **Joan Kibrig**, hailed in the program as “Musicarnival’s First Lady.” His two previous productions starred **Libi Staiger**, who, at least during the early years, was just as beloved by audiences and just as well equipped (to use a

Merman phrase) to play “loud-mouthed brassy dames.” To her credit, Kibrig gives the stronger performance: less tied to Merman mannerisms and spiced with deadpan wit.

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

No reviews could be found of the 1964 season in Palm Beach.—**B .R.**

KISS ME, KATE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 17–22, 1964 (New York opening: December 30, 1948;
1,070 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Cole Porter, book by Sam and Bella Spewack

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Joshua Hecht (Fred Graham/Petruchio), Gaylea Byrne (Lilli Vanessi/Kate), Joan Kibrig (Lois Lane), Jerry Newby (Bill Calhoun), John L. Price, Jr. (Baptista), Richard Keith (Harrison Howell), Alfred Dennis (First Man), Harry Theyard (Second Man)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Another Op’nin’, Another Show,” “Why Can’t You Behave?,” “Wunderbar,” “So in Love,” “I’ve Come to Wive It Wealthily in Padua,” “I Hate Men,” “Too Darn Hot,” “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?,” “Always True to You in My Fashion,” “Brush Up Your Shakespeare”

SYNOPSIS

The musical takes place backstage and onstage at Ford’s Theatre in Baltimore, from 5 PM to midnight during one day of the tryout of a musical version of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. In the plot, egotistical actor-producer Fred Graham and his temperamental co-star and ex-wife, Lilli Vanessi, fight and make up and eventually demonstrate their enduring affection for

each other—just like Shakespeare’s Petruchio and Kate. A subplot involves actress Lois Lane, whose romance with actor Bill Calhoun is complicated by Bill’s weakness for gambling.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

I’d give anything to see the reviews of this production, because for me it’s the low-water mark of **Johnny Price**’s production years in either Cleveland or West Palm Beach, despite the presence of a strong company. As Fred Graham/Petruchio, **Joshua Hecht**, the New York City Opera star who had scored memorably in four previous Musicarnival shows, spends the evening playing Emile DeBecque. (In his partial defense, Hecht was miscast; Fred calls for a romantic baritone with comic flair, not a dramatic basso.) **Gaylea Byrne**, who in 1964 was just a step away from New York (she got there), seems lost as Lilli Vanessi/Kate, and even Musicarnival’s darling **Joan Kibrig** is an unaccountably muted Lois/Bianca.

Though the recording is incomplete, it’s worth noting that there is not one full-bodied laugh from the audience for this, one of the great American musical *comedies*. Add **Lawrence Brown**’s funereal tempos and you have a debacle.

Could it be that at 25, director **Otto W. Pirchner** was simply too young to understand the style demanded by Shakespeare, Porter and the Spewacks?

Johnny Price, however, has it in spades in his minor role of Baptista. We can tell this performance is a lark for him even without knowing that his love for the Bard was boundless. (He could quote reams of verse from memory.)

Nice that *someone* under the tent was having fun.

CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

No reviews could be found of the 1964 season in Palm Beach.—**B. R.**

MY FAIR LADY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

March 31–April 5, 1964 (New York opening: March 31, 1956;
2,717 performances)

AUTHORS

Book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Loewe, based on *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL AND CHORAL DIRECTION

Lawrence Brown

LEADING PLAYERS

Ronald Drake (Henry Higgins), Gaylea Byrne (Eliza), Hugh Dempster (Colonel Pickering), Alfred Dennis (Alfred Doolittle), Harry Theyard (Freddy), Emma Trekman (Mrs. Higgins), Fran Stevens (Mrs. Pearce)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Why Can’t the English?,” “Wouldn’t It Be Lovely?,” “With a Little Bit of Luck,” “I’m an Ordinary Man,” “The Rain in Spain,” “I Could Have Danced All Night,” “On the Street Where You Live,” “Show Me,” “Get Me to the Church on Time,” “A Hymn to Him,” “Without You,” “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face”

SYNOPSIS

Eliza Doolittle, a poor Cockney flower girl plying her wares in Covent Garden, is chosen by professor Henry Higgins for an experiment in linguistics. Higgins bets his friend Colonel Pickering that he can turn Eliza into a proper lady and, in fact, pass her off as a princess. Eliza moves in with Higgins and undergoes a rigorous and impersonal training. After a false start at the Ascot Races, Eliza passes the test at the Embassy Ball with flying colors, and Higgins, a confirmed bachelor, finds that he’s grown strangely accustomed to Eliza’s being around the house.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

In 1948 George Bernard Shaw received an inquiry about allowing his play *Pygmalion* to be musicalized. He immediately squashed it: “If *Pygmalion* is not good enough ... with its own verbal music, the talent [of these writers] must be altogether extraordinary.... I absolutely forbid such an outrage!” But in 1950, at the age of 94, Shaw died, and his estate proved to be more

open-minded. Rodgers & Hammerstein were among the writers who attempted an adaptation, but neither they nor anyone else could make it work.

But the team of lyricist and librettist Alan Jay Lerner (then just 37) and 55-year-old composer Frederick Loewe became obsessed with *Pygmalion*. In 1952 they spent several months working on the play until they hit a brick wall, and Oscar Hammerstein himself told Lerner, “It can’t be done.” So many problems: How to get around all of Henry Higgins’s “talk, talk, talk” (Lerner’s phrase)? And the play was basically a drawing room comedy; how to open it up as a musical? And how to write (Lerner again) a “non-love song for Higgins?”

In 1954, after their musical *Paint Your Wagon* had closed on Broadway, they tried again, and this time they saw what Lerner termed “a distant dawn on the horizon.” The team decided, in Lerner’s words, that “the best way to do *Pygmalion* was to do *Pygmalion*, following Shaw’s [1938] screenplay more than the play, and accenting in song the emotional reality of his characters and story.”

Still, many hurdles remained. When they performed several of their songs for Mary Martin, hoping she would play Eliza, the star told her husband, “Those dear boys have lost their talent.” But actually she did them a favor. Only then did it occur to them that although Eliza Doolittle had been played by middle-aged women ever since Mrs. Patrick Campbell created the role in 1914, Shaw specified that Eliza was 18. And that’s what led them to the 18-year-old Julie Andrews, who had already made a name for herself on Broadway in the English import *The Boy Friend*.

As for Rex Harrison, he admitted years later that for months he “dithered” about accepting the role of Higgins; as a renowned classical actor, he wanted to be sure that the musical would be true to *Pygmalion*. More than half of Lerner’s script is straight out of Shaw, but that didn’t stop Harrison from questioning, says Lerner, “any speech that didn’t sound right.” Lerner called him “Shaw’s defender against the barbaric Americans.”

Harrison was tremendously insecure about handling songs, so he decided to take voice lessons with a teacher of bel canto, who taught him to sing pear-shaped tones. According to Lerner, the result was terrible—“the large end [of the pear] kept coming out first.” Fritz Loewe said, “Absolutely not!” He sent Harrison to another voice teacher with a background in theater, who told him to start not by singing the words, but by saying them. As we know, the actor turned the technique into an art. Said Harrison: “I learned to talk on pitch. That sounds easy, but it’s not. You must always be true to the note.”

Another Brit, the 66-year-old Stanley Holloway—a beloved veteran of the London music hall—would make his Broadway debut as Eliza’s father, the “rambunctious dustman” Alfred P. Doolittle. But Lerner reports that underneath Holloway’s cheerful demeanor there lurked frustration, and in early rehearsals he came close to quitting.

So despite the assemblage of major talent, *My Fair Lady* was by no means a sure thing. The key turned out to be—by Lerner’s own admission—director Moss Hart, who was also an expert playwright (of Kaufman & Hart fame). As Lerner puts it, he was a “gentleman of the theater ... and the last of his breed. [Saying he was the director of this musical] doesn’t begin to describe his contribution.”

Hart shaped the work of set designer Oliver Smith and costume designer Cecil Beaton (whose vision of black, ivory and gray for the Ascot scene was preserved in the 1964 film). And the director’s work extended to dealing with the rampant insecurities of Harrison (who, before a tryout performance in New Haven, locked himself in his dressing room, threatening not to go on), Holloway and especially the still-very-green Andrews. In her memoirs she writes: “At the reading for the audition I thought I was appalling [and when we got into rehearsal], I was completely out of my depth.... If it hadn’t been for the songs I honestly think I would have been dismissed and sent home.”

Probably right. Hart said that by the fifth day of rehearsals it became evident to him that “she didn’t have a clue about playing Eliza.” Over a weekend that has gone down in the annals of musical theater history, Hart took Andrews under his wing while he rehearsed only with her. “We went over the play,” Andrews recalls, “line by line, over and over. Moss bullied, cajoled, pleaded, scolded, encouraged.... Moss was my Svengali.”

And over the years it’s become clear that Hart’s influence on the script was also significant. Lerner was a fine but neurotic writer whose psychiatrist once told him, “You write as if your life depends on every line.” Lerner replied, “It does.” Hart actually helped him complete the script, leaving Lerner in awe: “He would put his finger on the most subtle dramatic weakness.”

What emerged, of course, is probably the wittiest, most civilized musical Broadway has ever produced. The emotional journeys of Higgins and Eliza have real depth, and is there a more thrilling moment in the repertoire than “The Rain in Spain”? As a writer, Alan Jay Lerner worked slowly and painstakingly—emphasis on pain. But he says that when it came to that song, which was Loewe’s idea, the team had an “unexpected visit from the Muse”; they wrote it

in 10 minutes. And that scene ends with Eliza's "I Could Have Danced All Night." Like "Rain in Spain," it's Lerner & Loewe taking Shaw's play one step further emotionally. In fact, every musical moment in this score—in the best Rodgers & Hammerstein tradition—is rooted in the characters.

My Fair Lady and 1960's *Camelot* were the last truly elegant evenings in our musical theater until Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* came along 17 years later—and that was the end of the line. I doubt that it would be nearly as well received all these years later in a society with far different values. If not, our loss on many levels. In 1956, *My Fair Lady*'s evocation of Edwardian England was in total sync with America in a manner reminiscent of 1943's *Oklahoma!* and 1949's *South Pacific*. Lerner reports on the opening night: When the curtain came down, "the members of the audience rose to their seats and surged forward down the aisles, crying 'Bravo!' and applauding with their hands over their heads like cymbals."

And as the last great romantic of the art form, Lerner gets the final word on another matter. As loyal as *My Fair Lady* is to Shaw, Lerner trusted his instinct that the resolution of the play would have to be changed, and in so doing, he told not only a more affecting story, but one in which he remained true to himself. His libretto begins with this note: "For the published version of *Pygmalion*, Shaw wrote a preface and an epilogue which he called a sequel. I have omitted the preface because the information contained herein is less pertinent to *My Fair Lady* than it is to *Pygmalion*. I have omitted the sequel because in it Shaw explains how Eliza ends not with Higgins but with Freddy, and Shaw and Heaven forgive me, I am not certain he is right."

NOTES ON THE PALM BEACH MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Johnny Price had to wait nearly forever for the stock rights to this one—even longer than *The Music Man*—because at 2,717 performances *My Fair Lady* amassed the longest run of any Broadway musical up to that time. Johnny produced it in West Palm Beach the same year the film was released, but the movie only seemed to bolster attendance at stages across the country. That's a testament to the excellence of the property: Although the film is good, a first-rate stage production is infinitely more satisfying, even without Rex Harrison.

And *My Fair Lady* in West Palm Beach is glorious—perhaps the finest production ever mounted there. Before the season began, **Gaylea Byrne** had just come off 18 months of playing Eliza in the national company, and we hear it in nuances we can't expect in stock productions, where there just isn't time for that kind of exploration. Though now forgotten, Byrne made it as far as the lead in Off Broadway's *All for Love*, the delightful musical adaptation of Sheridan's *The*

School for Scandal. That feels right, because her affinity was for classical material. Two weeks before Johnny's *My Fair Lady*, she essayed the title role in *Kiss Me, Kate*. Incidentally, Byrne was a Price discovery who began her career in his 1958 chorus.

Director **Otto W. Pirchner** probably had very little work to do on this one, because two of his other principals, **Ronald Drake** as Higgins and **Hugh Dempster** as Pickering, were not only Brits but longtime veterans of *Fair Lady*'s national tour. Drake avoids the Higgins trap: It's an awfully difficult role, because in addition to that daunting amount of what Lerner termed "talk, talk, talk," in the wrong hands the professor's passion for his work would seem to make him asexual. Not so, which is one reason why Harrison (known at the time as "sexy Rexy") triumphed. There must be a subtext of sexual tension between Higgins and the flower girl (at least in Lerner & Loewe's vision), and Drake and Byrne live it onstage.

Hugh Dempster is a suitably eccentric Pickering and came to the role after an impressive stage and film career that began in the 1920s. The other two principals were Americans with technique honed at New York City Opera. Musicarnival company member **Alfred Dennis** as Doolittle and **Harry Theyard** as Freddy hold their own with the Brits. The former gives a performance topped only by his Panisse in *Fanny*, and seldom has "On the Street Where You Live" been sung with more commitment than by tenor Theyard.

Sad to say, this was Johnny's final self-produced musical in Florida. His daughter **Diana Price** offers the epitaph: "The West Palm Beach tent, which was [always] propped up with Cleveland resources, opened without anything like the feasibility studies and audience demographics analyses as did Cleveland. A probable factor providing a false sense of security was the Royal Poinciana Playhouse, which always did well in Palm Beach, but they booked celebrities and catered to the jet/yacht sets. I know that my dad was discouraged by the comparative mediocrity of their productions. When RPP producer **Frank Hale** came to see the tent's *Oklahoma!* [earlier that season,] Dad gave the cast a pep talk beforehand since the competing producer would be in the audience, and in his words, the dancers' feet never touched the ground. The cast gave an absolutely outstanding performance, and afterwards, Johnny greeted Hale backstage and apologized that the performance was just a little bit off. Heh."

CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

No reviews could be found of the 1964 season in Palm Beach.—**B. R.**

1964 Season (Cleveland)

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 8–28, 1964 (New York opening: November 16, 1959;
1,443 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse,
suggested by *The Trapp Family Singers* by Maria Augusta Trapp

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirchner

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Dickson Hughes

LEADING PLAYERS

Judith McCauley (Maria), Lawrence Brooks (Captain Georg Von Trapp), Fran Stevens (Mother Abbess), Charlotte Fairchild (Elsa Schraeder), Leonard Elliott (Max Detweiler), May Keller (Liesl), Tom Rolla (Rolf Gruber)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“The Sound of Music,” “Maria,” “My Favorite Things,” “Do Re Mi,” “You Are Sixteen,” “The Lonely Goatherd,”
“So Long, Farewell,” “Climb Ev’ry Mountain,” “No Way to Stop It,” “An Ordinary Couple,” “Edelweiss”

SYNOPSIS

The musical, set in 1938, takes place in Salzburg, in the Austrian Tyrol. Maria Rainer, a free-spirited postulant at Nonnberg Abbey, has been causing her superiors concern because of her fondness for taking off to the mountains to listen to the sound of music. At the request of the Mother Abbess, Maria is hired as governess to the seven children of the wealthy, autocratic Captain Georg Von Trapp. Maria soon wins the affection of her charges, in part by teaching them songs. Though Von Trapp is engaged to the socially prominent Elsa Schraeder, he and Maria fall in love and marry. Their happiness, however, is almost immediately shattered by the German invasion of Austria. The Von Trapp family, which has become celebrated for its amateur concerts, gives a final performance before heeding the message of “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” and fleeing

over the Alps to the safety of Switzerland. A subplot concerns the teenage romance between Von Trapp's daughter Liesl and Rolf Gruber, an incipient Nazi.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

In 2014 I had the pleasure of speaking about *The Sound of Music* before a performance of the musical at the Stratford Festival. I began by saying that if anybody had told me in 1959 (when the show opened on Broadway in a production starring Mary Martin) or in 1965 (when the film version was released with Julie Andrews in the lead) that *The Sound of Music* eventually would be produced by an internationally acclaimed classical theater festival, I would have been dumbstruck.

Because in 1959 and 1965 some big-name critics gave it a decisive, even hostile thumbs-down. For example, Walter Kerr in 1959: "It becomes not only too sweet for words but almost too sweet for music.... It will be most admired by people who have always found Sir James M. Barrie pretty rough stuff." And Kenneth Tynan, also in 1959: "It is a show for children of all ages, from six to about eleven-and-a-half." Martin writes in her memoirs: "Most of the critics and the intellectuals found it impossibly sweet."

And here's a piece of a review from 1965, when the Vietnam War and the whole turbulent era of the 1960s made the musical seem, to some, irrelevant. Wrote Judith Crist: "Everything is so icky sticky purely ever-lovin' that even constant Julie Andrews admirers will get a wittle woozy long before intermission. The movie is for the five-to-seven set and their mummies who think their kids aren't up to the stinging sophistication and biting wit of *Mary Poppins*."

And yet of all R&H's 11 musicals, this is the one that is best loved throughout the world. The Stratford production was merely one recent validation. In late 2015 a new production directed by Jack O'Brien began a national tour with no end in sight.

The show's original framework could hardly have been more different from the one we know. In 1958 the director Vincent Donohue saw a German-language film based on the lives of the Trapp Family Singers and thought the story would make a terrific Broadway vehicle for the darling of the American stage, Mary Martin. Martin loved the film, and the notion was for Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse (*Life With Father*) to do the script, and for the score to comprise traditional folk songs heard when the Trapp family performed onstage.

The four of them went to R&H and asked them to write one or two songs, but the team declined.

All or nothing. And with that polite but firm ultimatum *The Sound of Music* became the last R&H musical. Rodger was 57, Hammerstein 64 when it premiered.

Interestingly, it's the only script in all of their productions that was not written or co-written by Hammerstein. R&H created only the songs—but what songs! As usual, each one moves the story forward or reveals something important about the character who is singing it. Each one is essential.

The Sound of Music opened on Broadway in November 1959 with Theodore Bikel as Captain Von Trapp. Despite some negative reviews, the show caught on instantly with audiences and ran 1,443 performances—the team's third-longest run (topped only by *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific*).

Like all of their musicals, *The Sound of Music* was done with impeccable taste and great integrity. They would never go for an easy laugh, especially if the laugh distracted us from who these characters were, and what the play was about. In his book *Rodgers & Hammerstein*, Ethan Mordden recounts a famous story about that. It takes place at a production meeting attended by the four writers and the producers—one of whom, Richard Halliday, was married to Martin. Halliday says, "So Mary enters in a tree.... She could catch her bloomers on a branch coming down." To which R&H reply: "No. Underpants humor has nothing to do with the story." And as he storms out of the room, Halliday retorts, "You know what's wrong with you guys? All you care about is the show!"

In some ways, *The Sound of Music* is a storybook romance, but what gives it classic stature is that it deals with big themes: nature, family, courage, faith and the dangers of complacency. There is real drama at the heart of this story. As Susan H. Shulman noted when she directed the 1998 Broadway revival: "It's set in a beautiful world, but that world is on the brink of destruction. That's a powerful metaphor."

As for the score, it is distinguished by a deceptive simplicity that can only be achieved in a lifetime's experience of writing. Andrew Lloyd Webber, for example, marvels at Rodgers's melody for "Do Re Mi," at once fresh and joyfully inevitable. Tracing in Hammerstein's notebook the development of his lyric for "Maria" reveals 17 days of work; only on the 16th did he find the last beautiful line, "How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand?" And "Edelweiss," so gentle on the surface, has a powerful political subtext: The Trapp Family sing it at the Salzburg Festival to express their love for their country as the Nazis invade Austria. Just 37 words—only two of them more than two syllables—and the result of five days of work for their lyricist.

It was the last lyric Hammerstein wrote—his 1,589th set of words for a song. Though he didn't know it at the time, he had cancer. He died in August 1960, nine months after *The Sound of Music* opened on Broadway.

Circling back to where we began, in an oral history for Columbia University taped soon after the film opened, Rodgers took exception to those who derided it: “I thought the movie was wonderful. I find it optimistic. I find there are a lot of good people in it. I find there are a lot of good people in the apartment house I live in. This isn't very chic of me [to say], but ... somebody has to write about the decent people.... There is no valid reason for hiding honest emotion.” And from his memoirs, published eight years later: “Had such a story come out in any way other than sentimental, it would have been false.”

The sentiment integral to *The Sound of Music* never hits a false note, and therein lies its greatness. In a radio interview broadcast six months before his death, Hammerstein made an observation that sadly carries more weight with the passing decades: “The song ‘Climb Ev'ry Mountain’ is another example of what I believe: that you should devote your life to finding out what you want to do in life, and look everywhere until you find it. Then when you find it, live that dream. I think that today we lack this positive approach. There are a great many songs and stories and novels coming out of America that are on the sick side and neglect the hope that has always been the characteristic that made us a great country. If we neglect it, we will slide back into becoming far inferior to what we have been.”

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Aside from **Charlotte Fairchild**'s zesty performance as Elsa (an early protégée of **Johnny Price**, she did well on Broadway and TV), Musicarnival's first go-round with *The Sound of Music* hasn't much to recommend it. **Judith McCauley** and **Lawrence Brooks** (too old at 51) are a ho-hum Maria and Captain Von Trapp and **Otto Pirchner**'s direction is merely workmanlike.

But what interests me is the audience. This production predates the release of the film by a year, so unless one had seen the musical on Broadway or on its national tour at Cleveland's Hanna Theatre (as I did—with Barbara Meister and the fine character actor John Myhers, both wonderful), *The Sound of Music* was brand-new. And Johnny's program note identifies it as “the last Rodgers & Hammerstein,” making the evening a bittersweet encounter for his audience, who had received a steady diet of the Masters since his first season in 1954.

And how they love this musical—a testament to the quality not only of the score, but also of Lindsay & Crouse’s script, which is forever ignored whenever the show is assessed. There are so many things to admire: the understated opening of the “Preludium” and even Maria’s introductory song; how the writers dared to avoid choreography for the first time in any R&H musical since *South Pacific* (Broadway choreographer Joe Layton’s billing was for “musical staging,” and even at Musicarnival, director Pirchner does double duty for the little choreography there is); the individuality of the seven Von Trapp children; the intimacy of the scenes between Maria and the Mother Abbess; the risk of including no less than five charm songs in the score—by contrast, the sophisticated songs for Elsa, Max and the Captain (“How Can Love Survive?” and the stinging “No Way to Stop It,” neither used in the film); and one of the best examples of combining song and spoken dialogue in all of R&H: the heartrending moment when the Captain first hears his children sing.

We never feel manipulated, even in a less-than-stellar production such as this one. Rodgers put it best: “honest emotion.”

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Nary a carp from the local critics, aside from noting Judith McCauley’s sometimes-inaudible singing voice. Tony Mastroianni in *The Cleveland Press*: “This tent-show production is done with little in the way of sets and scenery. But it is well-costumed, more than capably played and ingratiating in every way.” And in *The Plain Dealer*, Peter Bellamy wrote: “I’ve seen the show three times, and the more I see it the more I enjoy it.... Then, too, the Musicarnival cast presents it charmingly.”—**B. R.**

CAMELOT

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 29–July 19, 1964 (New York opening: December 3, 1960;
873 performances)

AUTHORS

Book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Loewe, based on *The Once and Future King* by T. H. White.

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirchner

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Dickson Hughes

LEADING PLAYERS

Harry Theyard (King Arthur), Monte Amundsen (Guenevere), Don Stewart (Lancelot), Leonard Elliott (King Pellinore), Tom Rolla (Mordred), Sondra Wolf (Morgan Le Fay), William Boehm (Merlyn)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“I Wonder What the King Is Doing Tonight,” “The Simple Joys of Maidenhood,” “Camelot,” “C’est Moi,” “The Lusty Month of May,” “How to Handle a Woman,” “Before I Gaze at You Again,” “If Ever I Would Leave You,” “What Do the Simple Folk Do?,” “I Loved You Once in Silence”

SYNOPSIS

The musical deals with the chivalrous Knights of the Round Table and the tragic romantic triangle involving noble King Arthur, his errant Queen Guenevere, and Arthur’s trusted Sir Lancelot. At the end, with his kingdom in ruins and his wife with another man, the King can still urge a young boy to tell everyone the story “that once there was a fleeting wisp of glory called Camelot.”—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Three very different Broadway musicals captured the idealism of the 1960s: near the end of the decade, the so-called “American Tribal Love-Rock Musical,” *Hair*; in the mid-1960s, *Man of La Mancha*; and ushering in those years, just a few weeks before the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe’s *Camelot*, their epic musical of King Arthur and the Round Table.

As America learned soon after the Kennedy assassination in late 1963, the president and his wife often played *Camelot*’s original-cast album before going to bed at night. Jacqueline Kennedy said the songs and story affirmed what her husband was trying to achieve in our country. That’s a powerful thought: *Camelot* is a utopian dream.

But of the three most idealistic musicals of the 1960s, *Camelot* is the only one we hardly ever get to see onstage. We can seek out the 1967 movie version, of course, which I believe is underrated. But why so few stage revivals? Because as Oscar Hammerstein once said of his own *Show Boat*, *Camelot* “was born big and meant to stay that way.”

Its birth pangs would have crushed lesser artists—and nearly destroyed the musical itself.

Lyricist and script writer Lerner was 41 when he began working on *Camelot*; composer Loewe was 54. And of course, in the five years leading up to their account of the Round Table they had created both Broadway's *My Fair Lady* and Hollywood's *Gigi*, winner of the Academy Award for best picture of the year. In 1958, during Rodgers & Hammerstein's lackluster period, Lerner & Loewe were the most important songwriters working in the musical theater.

Camelot was Lerner's idea. He knew the somber Arthurian legend to be one of the "great tales of the Western world," attracting writers as disparate as Sir Thomas Malory (in 1470), Alfred Lord Tennyson (in 1842) and Mark Twain (in 1889). In 1958, Lerner latched on to a new version by T. H. White titled *The Once and Future King*.

White, an English schoolteacher, wrote the book in four parts. His retelling of King Arthur, Queen Guenevere and Sir Lancelot has been described as "massive [and] idiosyncratic"—nothing less, in his own words, than an attempt to deal with "the clash between Might and Right, man's place in nature, the problem of war ... and with King Arthur's personal doom.... I hope the moral is not too heavy, but the story was always a deep one." Thus the four parts of White's book ran 600 pages.

Lerner limited his adaptation mostly to parts three and four, but that did not make his job much easier. Benny Green, in his excellent annotation of Lerner's lyrics, points out that in the final analysis, *Camelot* is a musical tragedy "in which the fortunes of all the principal [characters] decline in the course of the action, which slides from light-hearted contentment to doom and death."

In his memoir—65 pages of which are devoted to this musical—Lerner admits that "in *Camelot*, the first half was joyous and romantic. But the second act told the story of the disintegration of the Round Table, and it became pure drama. Unfortunately, there is no way of making a downhill story go uphill."

Nevertheless, in early 1959 Lerner & Loewe, and director Moss Hart (their collaborator on *My Fair Lady*), girded their loins with two stars ready to join them: Their Arthur was the magnetic Welsh actor Richard Burton, then 34; their Guenevere the radiant, 24-year-old Julie Andrews, who had become a star in *My Fair Lady*. And *Camelot* would bestow stardom on the 26-year-old Robert Goulet, who, as Lancelot, introduced the imperishable ballad "If Ever I Would Leave You."

It was touch and go from the beginning. Lerner and Hart loved T. H. White's book, but Loewe couldn't even finish it. And he was scared: When *My Fair Lady* opened in London in 1958, the

composer had a massive coronary; though he agreed to do *Camelot*, he warned Lerner, “My boy, I’ll try it one more time. But if it’s too tough or if I start to worry too much ... it will be my last.” (As it turned out, *Camelot* was in fact Frederick Loewe’s last new stage musical.)

Three weeks into rehearsal, Lerner sent off a letter to a playwright friend of his: “I have all sorts of lyrics to write, and the show seems to me as indecipherable as an Eisenhower press conference.... We leave Sunday for Toronto and the long out-of-town junket.... God have mercy on us all.”

The team needed it. When *Camelot* opened in Toronto, the show ran (depending on whom you believe) either three and a half or four and a half hours. Lerner later said that “only *Tristan and Isolde* equaled it as a bladder contest.” He added that their most daunting challenge was to ring down the curtain before breakfast.

And then, three days after the Toronto premiere, Lerner collapsed from a bleeding ulcer. He was sent to the hospital for a week. Moss Hart had to make big cuts in the script without him, and on the day Lerner was released—this is the truth—he was walking down the hall to an elevator with his nurse, and “I happened to look back and I saw a hospital bed, obviously occupied, being wheeled into the room I had just vacated. As we rode down in the elevator the nurse told me who it was. It was Moss [who had had a heart attack that day].”

With Hart now out of commission, Lerner took over cutting the show and directing it (with Hart’s blessing) himself. The company worked themselves to the bone through the rest of the Toronto run, then Boston. In his memoir Lerner credits Julie Andrews and Richard Burton with saving it: “In simple language, Richard kept the boat from rocking, [and] Julie meets every challenge with a smile and an unbatted eyelid that makes you wonder how the British ever lost the empire.”

Camelot opened on Broadway in reasonably good shape, though it received some tepid reviews. Once Hart recovered, he did more work on it, and then a miracle occurred: Ed Sullivan presented several scenes on television, and the musical took off at the box office, running more than two years.

I think that if Shakespeare had written musicals, he might have penned *Camelot*; what most distinguishes the piece is the *classical* dimensions of the story. Lerner averred: “All the great love stories that have endured through the ages have ended tragically. Arthur is the only tragic hero to survive the indignity of a faithless wife. But the legend of King Arthur is far more than a mere love

story.... There lies buried in its heart the aspirations of mankind.... This may seem far removed from the light entertainment of a musical play. It is not. It is the hidden guide, the silent voice that is heard when creative decisions are made.” *Camelot* was a story Alan Jay Lerner had to tell.

It is classical ... and elegant: qualities the musical shares with Stephen Sondheim’s *A Little Night Music* (1973). And that may be the end of the line. When I was working in New York in the early 1980s, I once found myself in an elevator with Lerner. His memoir, *The Street Where I Live*, had been published a few years earlier, and I cherished it. I told him: “It’s the most elegant book on the theater I’ve read since Moss Hart’s *Act One*.” To which he replied, “Dear boy, how can someone from your generation even know what elegance is?” He had a point.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Johnny Price decided to go all out with this *Camelot*, scheduling it for a three-week run and investing funds (as he so often did) to upgrade Musicarnival’s technical capacity. He knew he had a behemoth of a show on his hands and wanted to do justice to it.

As Peter Bellamy reported in *The Plain Dealer*, the theater was pioneering “a new method of changing scenes [that is] unique to tent theaters.... Unseen stagehands will be working mightily in the nine-foot basement under the circular stage to lower scenery from the last scene and change and elevate new scenery for the next scene.” The method was adapted from the proscenium stage by set designer **Edward Graczyk II**.

“The area within the circle of the stage,” wrote Bellamy, “has been divided into three squares, each of which has its own elevator. For purposes of scene changing, either one or all three of the squares may be lowered or elevated at the same time. Once the squares are in the basement, old scenery is exchanged for new and the platforms elevated to stage level.... This allows for the use of much heavier, more ornate props. In *Camelot*, for example, a bed and the furniture that goes with it will be elevated for the bed-chamber scene. A throne will be elevated for the throne-room scene. Three large braziers, to be lit by pages as they reach stage level, will also be raised from the basement.”

“The fewer blackouts in a tent theater, the better,” Graczyk told Bellamy. “I want continuity almost like that of a movie.”

If only the production as a whole fulfilled Graczyk’s vision for it. Though we have an incomplete audio recording to judge the show, **Otto W. Pirchner**’s direction is pedestrian, and Johnny’s

three leads—the usually wonderful **Harry Theyard** as Arthur and **Monte Amundsen** as Guenevere, in addition to the usually robust **Don Stewart** as Lancelot—give disappointingly low-wattage performances. These are star roles requiring star presence, and there’s no getting around it. The pallid result points up the weaknesses in Lerner’s script rather than thrilling us with its strengths. Only **Leonard Elliott** as the addled Pellinore delights the audience by finding the humor in the kingdom.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

This is one of the few times in Musicarnival’s production years when both major papers registered negative appraisals. Bellamy in *The Plain Dealer*: “The musical never makes up its mind whether it is going to be comedy, tragedy, fantasy or allegory.... The pace is slow.” And opined Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press*: “I thought most of it rather dreary, although there were a few exceptional moments. [This musical] obviously does not belong in theater-in-the-round.” —**B. R.**

THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 2–August 2, 1964 (New York opening: November 23, 1938;
235 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Lorenz Hart, book by George Abbott, based on *The Comedy of Errors* by William Shakespeare

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirchner

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Dickson Hughes

LEADING PLAYERS

Rudy Tronto (Dromio of Syracuse), Angelo Mango (Dromio of Ephesus), Harry Theyard (Antipholus of Syracuse), Alan Sanderson (Antipholus of Ephesus), Laurie Franks (Adriana), Rosanna Huffman (Luciana), Lynn Osborne (Luce), Ann Hodges (Head Courtesan), William Boehm (Aegeon), Leonard Elliott (Sorcerer)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“This Can’t Be Love,” “Falling in Love With Love,” “The Shortest Day of the Year,” “You Have Cast Your Shadow on the Sea,” “He and She,” “Sing for Your Supper”

SYNOPSIS

The action takes place in Ephesus in ancient Greece, and the mildly ribald tale concerns the efforts of two boys from Syracuse, Antipholus and his servant, Dromio, to find their long-lost twins, who—for reasons of plot confusion—are also named Antipholus and Dromio. Complications arise when the wives of the Ephesians, Adriana and her servant, Luce, mistake the two strangers for their husbands, though the couples eventually get sorted out after Adriana’s sister, Luciana, and the Syracuse Antipholus admit their love while protesting “This Can’t Be Love.”—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

“If you have been wondering all these years just what was wrong with *The Comedy of Errors*, it is now possible to tell you,” wrote Richard Watts, Jr., drama critic of *The New York Herald Tribune*, in late November of 1938. “It has been waiting for a score by Rodgers & Hart and direction by George Abbott.”

Watts was heralding the November 23rd opening, at Broadway’s Alvin Theatre, of the first musical comedy ever to be cribbed from the Bard: *The Boys From Syracuse*, based on *The Comedy of Errors*. The book (not just the direction) was by George Abbott, the music and lyrics, respectively, by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart. George Balanchine choreographed, and the cast, which came in for its own heaping portions of praise, included a young Eddie Albert, a popular vaudeville comedian named Jimmy Savo, and another comic named Teddy Hart, who doubled as the lyricist’s brother.

The musical was a palpable hit. It would run at the Alvin for 235 performances, landing Rodgers & Hart on the cover of *Time* magazine.

The mischievous ease with which Rodgers & Hart converted Shakespeare to musical comedy should come as no surprise, since the adaptation was their idea in the first place. The show that would become *The Boys From Syracuse* (credit for the title goes to Abbott) was conceived largely as a vehicle for Teddy Hart. In his 1975 autobiography, *Musical Stages*, Rodgers recalled the inspiration that visited the prolific team as they rode a train from New York to Atlantic City early in 1938 to work on *I Married an Angel*: “For some reason we began discussing

Shakespeare, which led to our discovery that no one had ever thought of using one of his plays as the basis of a musical comedy. The mere fact that it had never been done before was reason enough for us to start thinking that it should be our next project. . . . One play attracted us from the start, and for a very personal reason. Larry's younger brother, Teddy, was a clever comedian best known for George Abbott farces. He was short and dark, and although he looked a good deal like Larry, he was always being mistaken for another gifted comic, Jimmy Savo." In *Teddy Hart and Jimmy Savo*, the songwriters had their servant twins, the two Dromios.

And in George Abbott, they had not only their director, but their producer and writer. "At first Larry and I were supposed to collaborate on the script with him," Rodgers remembered, "but he had it all finished before we could get started. The book was so sharp, witty, fast-moving and, in an odd way, so very much in keeping with the bawdy Shakespearean tradition that neither Larry nor I wanted to change a line."

In terms of plot, Abbott's book closely follows Shakespeare's play, which was itself a borrowing from *Menaechmi* by Plautus. *Comedy*, in case anyone needs reminding, offers one of the oldest and most reliable springboards for farce: mistaken identify. It's the story of not one but two sets of identical twins: one pair of servants and one pair of masters. They share names, too: Not only is each servant called Dromio, but each master is called Antipholus. Separated by a shipwreck soon after birth, they comically collide in the city of Ephesus, where one set of twins now lives, and entertain us with their slapstick confusions—and bawdy ones, since one pair have wives and the other are single—until the happy and romantic resolution, when the brothers find each other and everyone finds his proper mate.

Comedy is intended—and it works excellently—as pure, roistering amusement. We have our two leading men in the twin Antipholi. The two Dromios provide plenty of pratfalls as well as the earthy and untrammelled commentary that the theatrical servant class has always been privileged to make. There's the beautiful but jealous Adriana, wife of Antipholus of Ephesus; Luciana, her equally enchanting sister, whose charms smite Antipholus of Syracuse at first sight; and Luce, the fat and lusty servant wife of Dromio E. What could be handier than these characters and this farcical plot as the basis for a sparkling, fast-paced, unashamedly escapist Depression-era entertainment? For *The Boys From Syracuse*, too, is pure amusement.

Boys is no burlesque or travesty, however. Abbott and his collaborators took the superbly constructed framework of Shakespeare's play and built a piece all their own. Abbott—known for his rapid-fire dialogue and bustling action—steps up the pace about a hundredfold, and tickles

his audience by having his tunic-clad characters speak in what one critic called “the broad vein of Broadway.” But though the show owes a certain amount of its humor to anachronism, much of its charm lies in its sheer, snappy American wit.

If you do know *Comedy* well, or if you go back to the text for some close comparison with Abbott’s script, you’ll find instances in which a Shakespearean speech has been collapsed into a line that delivers a quick, tough, marvelously American punch. When he and his master are first mistaken for their twins, Shakespeare’s Dromio of Syracuse wails: “Oh, for my beads! I cross me for a sinner! / This is the fairy land. Oh, spite of spites! / We talk with goblins, owls and sprites. / If we obey them, this will ensue— / They’ll suck our breath, or pinch us black and blue.”

With George Abbott’s Dromio, this speech becomes the slangy and succinct “Hey, Boss! We’re haunted.” In other instances, the *number* of words uttered may not change so much, but the idioms in which they’re delivered could hardly be more unlike. When Abbott’s Dromio of Ephesus arrives onstage and mistakenly collars Antipholus of Syracuse to take him home to his wife for dinner, the Shakespearean (“The clock hath stricken twelve upon the bell; / My mistress made it one upon my cheek”) becomes “She’s been bawling me out because I didn’t bring you home with me. She thinks you’re out with fast women. It’s time to eat. The meat’s cold and she’s hot.”

Though Abbott’s script packs a punch, it’s not one of punch lines; he was never a writer of jokes. Rather, the show’s humor develops out of the characters and the situations they find themselves in. In his autobiography, Abbott recalled the 1963 Off-Broadway revival of *Boys* (the version produced by Musicarnival): “I was delighted to read of its outstanding success, but disappointed and distressed that some of the reviewers referred to the old-fashioned jokes in the book. But I was puzzled when one of the reviewers cited one of these jokes, a corny pun: ‘Dozens of men are at my feet.’ ‘Yes, I know, chiropodists.’ This kind of humor is so alien to me that I knew I could never have written it; and when I got back to New York I found that the ‘old jokes’ in the revival were new jokes inserted by [the producer] to ‘modernize’ the script.”

A source of comedy in Shakespeare’s original takes center stage in Abbott: sex. When Shakespeare’s Antipholus of Syracuse, the bachelor, is cajoled and cosseted by luscious Adriana, who believes he is her husband, he wonders: “Am I in earth, in Heaven or in Hell? / Sleeping or waking? Mad or well advised? / Known unto these, and to myself disguised.” He spends the night with her—but offstage. Abbott’s Antipholus enjoys a good helping of onstage canoodling with a negligeeed Adriana that is certainly denied his Shakespearean prototype. When he finds himself promised dinner alone with this beauty, to be followed by a bath for two and

other pleasures only hinted at, the prospect is dazzling to him—and sexy and funny to us. “Ye gods,” he says, “—I wonder if I’ve been taking dope.” The updated bawdiness may be the most prominent part of the modern, wordly stamp Abbott put on his script and the songwriters put on their score: for example, in the insatiable Luce’s “What Can You Do With a Man?” (“Some men wear half pajamas; / I took a chance. / I bought the guy pajamas— / He wears the pants”).

And three ballads distinguish Rodgers & Hart’s collection of songs. In 1963 Walter Kerr marveled at them, at “the lyricist’s attitude of mind—cool but secretly confiding, ironic in the presence of poetry but not unaware that the poetry was there.... And to hear the unexpected modulations of ‘The Shortest Day of the Year’ or ‘You Have Cast Your Shadow on the Sea’ ... is a shocker. Rodgers never did live along Tin Pan Alley; he was lost at sea as a boy and, when rescued, kept hearing inappropriate sounds. They remain inappropriately perfect.”

The evergreen “Falling in Love With Love,” the third ballad, is melancholy—even bitter—and thoroughly antiromantic. Sung by Adriana, the jealous and neglected wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, this haunting waltz with its unhappy lyrics (“Caring too much is such a juvenile fancy. / Learning to trust is just for children in school”) is surely more proof that *The Boys From Syracuse* is far from a conventional musical comedy.

Changing tone again—but, as always, staying in tune with the characters who sing the songs—Rodgers & Hart give us the jazzy “The Can’t Be Love,” in which Antipholus of Syracuse—a jazzy, dashing adventurer—attempts to deny that he’s been smitten by Adriana’s sister, Luciana. The denial fools nobody, least of all the singer.

It’s clear, though, that nobody in *Boys*, to put it mildly, is what you could call happy—at least not until the show’s finale, when brothers, husbands and wives, and lovers rush into each other’s arms and reprise “This Can’t Be Love.” Besides the distressing mistakes of identity, we have, at base, two bothered and negligent young husbands (Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus), two jealous, possessive and demanding young wives. The unmarried characters, too, seem chafed by their situations.

And yet Abbott, and Rodgers & Hart, have contrived to make sure the *audience* is happy. They’ve given us the simple pleasures of boisterous farce—and, on a deeper level, they’ve given us characters who, though they may be disappointed and even embittered, still display the energy of youth (and it’s a largely sexual energy) and wholeheartedly pursue the happiness that eludes them until the play’s resolution. And isn’t that youthful, energetic pursuit the American

way? Isn't it the theme that makes *The Boys From Syracuse*—its script, its music and lyrics—the quintessence of American musical comedy?—**Barbara Perris**

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Johnny Price dubbed this show his “Merrie Midsummer Salute to Shakespeare’s 400th Birthday.” More precisely, it was Part 1: *Kiss Me Kate*, Cole Porter’s nod to *The Taming of the Shrew*, was in rehearsal during the day while *The Boys From Syracuse* kept audiences in stitches at night.

Johnny mounted *Boys* just a month after this 1963 version closed in New York, a big Off-Broadway success that ran more than twice as long as the 1938 original (albeit in a theater less than half the size of its Broadway home). And Johnny’s timing was perfect: he attracted three members of the New York company: **Angelo Mango** (Dromio of Ephesus), **Ann Hodges** (Head Courtesan) and, as Dromio of Syracuse, **Rudy Tronto**, who can be heard on the cast album as Dromio of Ephesus. (A bit later on Tronto frequently appeared with the Kenley Players in Warren, Ohio.)

As Barbara Perris points out in the note preceding this one, *Boys* is classic American musical comedy, with George Abbott, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart all at the top of their game. But she reports that unbeknownst to Abbott, the producers “modernized” his script by lacing it with gags written by (I’m editorializing here) a hack. I spent an afternoon comparing 1938 versus 1963. A few examples from the latter: “I wonder where people in hell tell each other to go,” and “What are you doing?” “Whistling a dirty song.” One more: Abbott penned, “Remember when we was in Cairo, how those dames went after you?” The rewrite: “Remember when we was in Cairo, and those vestal virgins changed their minds?” Pandering, that’s what it is—and in the live performance tape, you’ll hear the difference in the tone of the laughter. When the gags are inserted, it sounds like a different—and inferior—show. Abbott was a sophisticated farceur; why he didn’t sue is beyond me.

I will admit, however, that this version wasn’t the only victim of such skullduggery. Not until the 1980s did older material win the respect—the trust—it deserved from musical theater practitioners. The turning point: 1983, when Rodgers & Hart posthumously received their first archival reconstruction, and it was a hit: the 1936 *On Your Toes*, directed by their co-creator, Abbott, then 96. As for *Boys*, I myself participated in a historically accurate remounting for Great Lakes Theater in 1987 (directed by Gerald Freedman and supervised by Abbott a month before he turned 100), and the Encores! series at New York City Center did a splendid job 10 years later

in a production featuring Hans Spialek's original orchestrations.

So times change, and sometimes for the better. As for what materialized on the Musicarnival stage, it's well cast with the New York folks. As for the rest, the disappointment among the leads is the heavy-handed **Laurie Franks**, who makes Adriana entirely unsympathetic. It's nice to have **Lynne Osborne** back in town (she's the oversexed Luce), and **Harry Theyard** sheds the robe of his lackluster King Arthur to take on Antipholus of Syracuse, letting loose with "This Can't Be Love" and offering a gorgeous "You Have Cast Your Shadow on the Sea," one of Rodgers & Hart's most sublime creations.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Irresistible, was the consensus. "I cannot say enough for Mango and Tronto," wrote Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press*. "Each has a blessed comedy sense, and each can sing and dance with skill and verve." And for Glenn C. Pullen in *The Plain Dealer*: "It's 26 years old, yet this musical comedy set in ancient Greece has more spirited life than many of our modern tuneshows."—**B. R.**

KISS ME, KATE

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 3–16, 1964 (New York opening: December 30, 1948;
1,070 performances)

AUTHORS

Music and lyrics by Cole Porter, book by Sam and Bella Spewack

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Dickson Hughes

LEADING PLAYERS

Harry Theyard (Fred Graham/Petruchio), Joan Kibrig (Lilli Vanessi/Kate), Gloria LeRoy (Lois Lane), Rudy Tronto (Bill Calhoun), John L. Price, Jr. (Baptista), Richard Keith (Harrison Howell), Delores Martin (Hattie), Jack Riley

(First Man), Leonard Elliott (Second Man)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Another Op’nin’, Another Show,” “Why Can’t You Behave?,” “Wunderbar,” “So in Love,” “I’ve Come to Wive It Wealthily in Padua,” “I Hate Men,” “Too Darn Hot,” “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?,” “Always True to You in My Fashion,” “Brush Up Your Shakespeare”

SYNOPSIS

The musical takes place backstage and onstage at Ford’s Theatre in Baltimore, from 5 PM to midnight during one day of the tryout of a musical version of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. In the plot, egotistical actor-producer Fred Graham and his temperamental co-star and ex-wife, Lilli Vanessi, fight and make up and eventually demonstrate their enduring affection for each other—just like Shakespeare’s Petruchio and Kate. A subplot involves actress Lois Lane, whose romance with actor Bill Calhoun is complicated by Bill’s weakness for gambling.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1955 SEASON

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Hard to believe that a scant five months after **Johnny Price**’s deadly production of *Kiss Me, Kate* in West Palm Beach, the same director (**Otto W. Pirschner**) could contribute his best work to date for the same musical in Cleveland. In fact, of the four outings for this show during Musicarnival’s production, this one is the most accomplished.

Johnny’s casting would seem questionable, if not downright wrongheaded: **Joan Kibrig**, his Lilli/Kate, had performed standout comic roles since the first season, but this one requires a legit soprano who even ventures into coloratura territory. And **Harry Theyard**, though one of the most gifted young performers of his generation, mostly had been seen at Musicarnival in romantic roles; Fred/Petruchio also requires comedy ranging from brash to stylish. Besides which, the divorced couple are larger-than-life thespians for whom every moment is drama. Kibrig and Theyard wouldn’t seem to live in that world.

But they do. They are wonderfully matched, exploiting the comedy for all it’s worth and singing the heck out of Cole Porter’s score. Theyard, of course, was essentially an opera/opera guy, and Porter gives Fred/Petruchio the excuse to display his wares in “Where Is the Life That Late I Led?,” “Were Thine That Special Face” and “Wunderbar.” His performance is all the more remarkable for having to adapt his tenor to a role written for a baritone. As for Kibrig, I have

never heard anyone—not even the original Kate, Patricia Morison—milk every anachronistic joke in “I Hate Men” so successfully, and her “So in Love” is surprisingly touching. (Interestingly, Kibrig had played Lois Lane in West Palm Beach; I suspect she was delighted with her promotion.)

The secondary couple also deliver winning turns. As Bill, **Rudy Tronto**, last week’s Dromio of Syracuse, puts over “Bianca”—a song that often doesn’t land—with aplomb, and **Gloria DeRoy**, fresh from Morton DaCosta’s musical show at the New York World’s Fair, created something of a sensation, adding a striptease to Lois’s “Always True to You in My Fashion” without in the least damaging Porter’s lyrics.

The First Man and Second Man—the small-time gangsters who, if the actors are any good at all, stop the show with the uproarious eleven o’clock number “Brush Up Your Shakespeare”—are played, respectively, by **Jack Riley** and **Leonard Elliott**. In the best repertory fashion, earlier in the summer Elliott had played Pellinore in Johnny’s *Camelot* (talk about different worlds!), and in 1964 Riley was half of Baxter & Riley, the popular Cleveland radio duo that offered smart comedy—much of it improvisational—during drive time. Riley, of course, went on to play the loveable neurotic Mr. Carlin on *The Bob Newhart Show*. His Musicarnival bio tells us that the Cleveland native is making his professional stage debut.

The whole frisky undertaking proves the durability of Sam and Bella Spewack’s script (we all know the Porter songs are imperishable). There is one ad-libbed joke, normally a reprehensible practice in post-*Oklahoma!* book musicals, but I admit this one made me laugh out loud as I remembered the tempestuous political summer of 1964. Says Paul: “I haven’t been the same since Goldwater won the nomination.” And Pirchner’s inventive touches include a staged overture that interrupts Johnny’s traditional welcome to the audience, pushing the producer off the stage. He’s back in Scene 4, though, reprising his Palm Beach Baptista.

A few notes about Johnny’s welcome. Though we’ve not dealt with his Sunday afternoon jazz series, he deserves praise for bringing to town an array of notable artists: coming that Sunday was Maynard Ferguson, and, the following weekend, Lionel Hampton. Always a generous promoter of other productions in town, Johnny announces that Great Lakes Shakespeare [later Theater] Festival, then in its third season in Lakewood, is presenting *The Taming of the Shrew* in rotating repertory: a rare chance to see the play and the musical during the same week. And the two companies were about to face off for a softball game open to the public: the Musicarnival Mustangs vs. the Shakespeare Sluggers. Johnny’s PR touch: *The Plain Dealer*’s drama critic,

Peter Bellamy, as umpire.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press* was grouchy: "The production is neither as entertaining nor as smooth as its predecessor, *The Boys From Syracuse*.... A rather loose treatment.... Yet it is solid straw-hat fare." But Peter Bellamy gave it a rave in *The Plain Dealer*: "Cole Porter's best of all musical comedies ... is given a delightfully fast and funny production.... A real romp, this *Kiss Me, Kate*. I wish I had time to see it again."—**B. R.**

MILK AND HONEY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 17–30, 1964 (New York opening: October 19, 1961;
543 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Don Appell, music and lyrics by Jerry Herman

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Dickson Hughes

LEADING PLAYERS

Gene Hollmann (Phil), Terry Saunders (Ruth), Diane Goldberg (Clara Weiss), Harry Theyard (David), Martin Ross (Adi), Sondra Wolf (Zipporah), May Keller (Barbara)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Shalom," "Milk and Honey," "There's No Reason in the World," "That Was Yesterday," "Let's Not Waste a Moment," "I Will Follow You," "Like a Young Man," "Chin Up, Ladies," "As Simple as That"

SYNOPSIS

The story deals with seven American women touring in Israel and looking for husbands. Ruth meets Phil, a wealthy American contractor whose daughter is married to an Israeli farmer. Phil and Ruth fall in love, but Ruth learns that Phil is married, although separated from his wife,

who refuses to divorce him. They become involved in an affair that ends unhappily, with Ruth returning to America not very hopeful that Phil will ever be able to obtain a divorce.—*Abe Laufe*

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Thanks to a real-estate-man-turned-producer, New York got its first musical set in Israel, and the 29-year-old Jerry Herman (b. 1931), a composer-lyricist who had been writing the scores for tiny Off Broadway revues, got his first Broadway assignment.

The man was Gerard Oestreicher, who told Herman he admired his work, but “Do you think you can handle something ethnic?” In his memoirs, Herman reports: “Well, I am sitting in this very elegant restaurant, talking to this very rich businessman who can hire anybody he wants for this job, and I am not going to admit that I don’t know the first thing about Israel. So I said right away, ‘You have come to exactly the right person. I grew up in a Jewish home and I had a Jewish mother who taught Hebrew music at the YMHA in Jersey City. I am a totally American writer, but I know all those Hebrew songs.... I grew up with that heritage all around me.’ I talked a good game. And one week later I was on a plane, flying to the Middle East.”

Oestreicher put Herman together with a playwright and actor named Don Appell (1919-90), and turned them loose. *Milk and Honey*—originally titled *Shalom*—would be an original show not based on previous source material; even in 1961, such musicals were rare on Broadway. After visiting the 13-year-old state of Israel, they decided to write about a group of American tourists (all women looking for husbands) visiting Israel; that way the score could move in and out of minor keys, mixing Jewish inflections with a more American sound. Herman succeeded in both—and what’s more, in the American music he pushed himself to write melodies that ventured into operatic territory without any pretentiousness; but in fact, in its romantic leads the musical attracted two former stars of the Metropolitan Opera: baritone Robert Weede (who had already starred on Broadway several years earlier as Tony in *The Most Happy Fella*) and soprano Mimi Benzell.

As leader of the widows, they seized on the idea of casting Molly Picon, a star of the Yiddish theater who had a huge New York following but had never co-starred in a Broadway musical. Could they get her? Promised Appell: “I am going to write a part for Molly Picon that will be so delicious that she won’t be able to turn it down.” He did.

What’s interesting about *Milk and Honey* is the layers that make it more than the musical comedy Herman and Appell could have settled for. The relationship between Weede and Benzell’s

characters (Phil and Ruth) is complex: For starters, they are both middle-aged (quite unusual in musicals). They fall in love, but his wife will not grant him a divorce, though they've been estranged for years; and in 1961 a stigma remained about couples like Ruth and Phil living together. There is not a happy ending to *Milk and Honey*, though we know these two should be together. *New York Times* critic Howard Taubman rightly praised the integrity of Appell's book; what a shame that this would be his first and only musical. (He died in 1990, apparently of AIDS.)

The other layer is separate and apart from the romance. Herman and Appell came away from Israel deeply affected by the courage of the farmers: the hardships they endured for the sake of the land they treasured, and their determination to resist aggression. Says Herman: "I couldn't get over how these people had taken this barren part of the world and turned it green and fertile." Two of Appell's characters—Phil's son-in-law, David (dancer-singer-actor Tommy Rall), and the worker Adi (Juki Arkin)—embody that courage. These men are drawn in full dimensions, and though Herman made David the leader of the exultant, "flag-waving" (his term) title song, he gave Adi a portion of the song with a "darker side to give it a ring of truth. I used [this] disgruntled Israeli to contradict all the shiny, positive images. But notice, Adi still ends his tirade with 'But this lovely land is mine' The show came out a valentine, but I was proud of that gray shadow that made it truthful."

As Broadway first-timers, Appell and Herman could not have been more fortunate: They had a producer prepared to give them a first-class production. Veterans Albert Marre and Donald Saddler served, respectively, as director and choreographer. Herman praises the "elegantly simple style" of Marre, whose greatest success came four years later with *Man of La Mancha*; Saddler delivered a feast of dance that eschewed Broadway clichés for Jewish folk traditions enhanced by his own ballet training. And the music department on this show was top-of-the-line: both Hershey Kay and Eddie Sauter orchestrated the songs, with Robert DeCormier as vocal arranger and Genevieve Pitot as dance music arranger.

Certainly Oestreicher predicted a Jewish audience hungry for a Broadway musical about Israel (the show ran more than 500 performances); but *Milk and Honey* never panders, even in the shenanigans of Picon, whose showstopping march, "Chin Up, Ladies," affectionately satirizes Kern's "Look for the Silver Lining" and Rodgers & Hammerstein's "Mr. Snow" and "Climb Ev'ry Mountain."

At its core, Appell and Herman tell a sad story. One of my favorite moments comes late in the second act when Ruth opens up to Clara Weiss (Picon) about her marriage to a famous orchestra

conductor. “You see,” says Ruth, “I was brought up to believe that the function of a good wife was to serve her husband. But I had no husband.” And she sings a haunting passage by Herman that wasn’t recorded for the cast album: “I love the little things I did for him— / His breakfast and his cup of tea. / He needed all those things I did for him. / But never really me.” And the scene is further developed in both dialogue and song, leading to a reprise of the beautiful “There’s No Reason in the World.”

Postscript: Though producer David Merrick could often be heartless, it must be acknowledged that, from time to time, he could not mask his good taste. Merrick saw *Milk and Honey*, loved this confident score in which every song is a standout, and hired Jerry Herman for *Hello, Dolly!*

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

It’s nice to hear a show set in the present done under the tent. Once again, **Johnny Price** was able to cast performers from the New York production, and as a result, this outing, directed by **Otto W. Pirchner**, is exceptionally strong. Musicarnival’s Ruth, **Terry Saunders**, replaced Mimi Benzell on Broadway and toured in the role; **Diane Goldberg** played one of the widows and understudied Molly Picon; and **Martin Ross** understudied Juki Arkin (Adi) on Broadway and also toured. Among the major roles, **Gene Hollmann** (Phil) was new to *Milk and Honey* but arrived at the tent with a fine track record alternating between opera and musical theater (à la Robert Weede); and **Harry Theyard**, direct from Musicarnival’s *Kiss Me, Kate*, took on Tommy Rall’s David with conviction. Rall’s dancing was cut, of course, but Theyard’s throbbing rendition of “I Will Follow You” demonstrates why Jerry Herman loves the song so much. It is definitive.

As I’ve noted, Johnny had a large number of Jews in his audience, so this musical plays in Warrensville Heights as persuasively as it did in New York. The key, of course, is Goldberg, who nails head widow Clara, winning applause from her first exit and throughout the evening. It’s the American musical meets the Yiddish theater: Goldberg, like Picon, was a vet. Interestingly, she had played the Picon rep in engagements in Europe and South America. This is our glimpse into an important theatrical tradition that has practically vanished.

In fact, the musical itself is never revived; it’s an artifact of its times, and one I was anxious to encounter in toto on the strength of the cast album, which ranks with the best of the decade. *Milk and Honey* won the audience’s heart during those early years of the 1960s, coming out just a year after the hit film *Exodus*, and Musicarnival gives a fine account of it.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

What's not to like? Peter Bellamy in *The Plain Dealer*: "As presented at Musicarnival, the show has lost none of its sweetness and brimming movement and vitality. So a happy 'Shalom' to it." Radio critic Howard Wertheimer observed, "Hundreds of Clevelanders have made trips to the Holy Land and have become enchanted with the youngest republic of all, Israel. And in the next few years, many more hundreds will make the trip. However, I suggest that if you are contemplating such a journey, you get your initiation by driving out to Musicarnival." And in *The Cleveland Press*, Stan Anderson took a swipe—one I happen to agree with—at the rival Kenley Players when he concluded, "Here again is evidence that seasoned stage professionals, not TV celebrities, save summer theater productions. Although sometimes faltering in action, this is a sympathetic treatment of a warmhearted story."—**B. R.**

MY FAIR LADY

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 31–September 20, 1964 (New York opening: March 31, 1956;
2,717 performances)

AUTHORS

Book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Loewe, based on *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirchner

MUSICAL AND DIRECTION

Dickson Hughes

LEADING PLAYERS

Ronald Drake (Henry Higgins), Naomi Collier (Eliza), Leonard Elliott (Colonel Pickering), Lloyd Battista (Alfred P. Doolittle), Harry Theyard (Freddy), Cynthia Latham (Mrs. Higgins), Fran Stevens (Mrs. Pearce)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Why Can't the English?," "Wouldn't It Be Lovely," "With a Little Bit of Luck," "I'm an Ordinary Man," "The Rain in Spain," "I Could Have Danced All Night," "On the Street Where You Live," "Show Me," "Get Me to the Church on Time," "A Hymn to Him," "Without You," "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face"

SYNOPSIS

Eliza Doolittle, a poor Cockney flower girl plying her wares in Covent Garden, is chosen by professor Henry Higgins for an experiment in linguistics. Higgins bets his friend Colonel Pickering that he can turn Eliza into a proper lady and, in fact, pass her off as a princess. Eliza moves in with Higgins and undergoes a rigorous and impersonal training. After a false start at the Ascot Races, Eliza passes the test at the Embassy Ball with flying colors, and Higgins, a confirmed bachelor, finds that he's grown strangely accustomed to Eliza's being around the house.—**K. B.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1964 SEASON (West Palm Beach)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Johnny Price's Cleveland *My Fair Lady* was an even bigger success in summer 1964 than it had been in West Palm Beach several months earlier (he must have known that would be the case when scheduling three weeks as opposed to one); unfortunately, this production, again staged by **Otto W. Pirchner**, isn't nearly as good. Once again **Ronald Drake** splendidly portrays the misogynistic, self-isolated professor, but his Eliza Doolittle, played by **Naomi Collier**, hasn't enough spirit to crack him open—either as Cockney flower girl or as belle of the ball. It registers as a surprisingly pallid performance, even with 2,000 in the audience fueling this opening night.

Harry Theyard reprises his Freddy from winter, and we must pause to acknowledge his 1964 season: five of the six musicals, and the most impressive repertory stint in Johnny's 11 years. In addition to *My Fair Lady*, Theyard (then 35) took on King Arthur in *Camelot*, Antipholus of Syracuse in *The Boys From Syracuse*, Fred/Petruchio in *Kiss Me, Kate* and David in *Milk and Honey*. As Freddy, we have Theyard's final performance at Musicarnival. Then on to Broadway for *Man of La Mancha* (it's his "Little Bird, Little Bird" on the cast album) and the glorious *A Time for Singing*; back to New York City Opera from whence he came; and ultimately to the Met.

The treat in this production is **Lloyd Battista**'s Alfred P. Doolittle. His performance works so well because of Battista's natural wit and intelligence as an actor—qualities Johnny had spotted six years earlier when he offered Battista, then 21, a Musicarnival Fellowship. A native of Cleveland, Battista has never stopped working in New York, television and regional theaters.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

I am the minority view. Peter Bellamy in *The Plain Dealer*: "I can't recall a better Eliza Doolittle this side of Julie Andrews.... Collier has a lyric soprano with a sob in it. She is an excellent

actress.” As for Tony Mastroianni in *The Cleveland Press*: “Everyone rose to the level of the material, which is a high level indeed.”—*B. R.*



The Ascot scene from My Fair Lady

1965 Season (Cleveland)

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

June 4–13, 1965 (New York opening: November 16, 1959;
1,443 performances)

AUTHORS

Music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, book by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse, suggested by *The Trapp Family Singers* by Maria Augusta Trapp

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Wally Harper

LEADING PLAYERS

Judith McCauley (Maria), Webb Tilton (Captain Georg Von Trapp), Fran Stevens (Mother Abbess), Lynn Osborne (Elsa Schraeder), Alfred Dennis (Max Detweiler), Susan McArthur (Liesl), Tom Rolla (Rolf Gruber)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“The Sound of Music,” “Maria,” “My Favorite Things,” “Do Re Mi,” “You Are Sixteen,” “The Lonely Goatherd,” “So Long, Farewell,” “Climb Ev’ry Mountain,” “No Way to Stop It,” “An Ordinary Couple,” “Edelweiss”

SYNOPSIS

The musical, set in 1938, takes place in Salzburg, in the Austrian Tyrol. Maria Rainer, a free-spirited postulant at Nonnberg Abbey, has been causing her superiors concern because of her fondness for taking off to the mountains to listen to the sound of music. At the request of the Mother Abbess, Maria is hired as governess to the seven children of the wealthy, autocratic Captain Georg Von Trapp. Maria soon wins the affection of her charges, in part by teaching them songs. Though Von Trapp is engaged to the socially prominent Elsa Schraeder, he and Maria fall in love and marry. Their happiness, however, is almost immediately shattered by the German invasion of Austria. The Von Trapp family, which has become celebrated for its amateur concerts,

gives a final performance before heeding the message of “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” and fleeing over the Alps to the safety of Switzerland. A subplot concerns the teenage romance between Von Trapp’s daughter Liesl and Rolf Gruber, an incipient Nazi.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1964 SEASON (Cleveland)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

Johnny Price billed his June pre-season opener as an “encore production,” having scored mightily with Rodgers & Hammerstein’s last musical in 1964. With **Judith McCauley** reprising her Maria, it still feels very paint-by-numbers, though **Webb Tilton**—who stood by for Theodore Bikel on Broadway—is an imposing Captain Von Trapp. (Tilton was on Richard Rodgers’s short list for years when it came to recommending Emile de Becques.)

The audio quality of the production is so poor that we debated including it in this collection, but two things make it essential. The first is that the musical was running simultaneously with the blockbuster Julie Andrews film, then playing an exclusive “road show” engagement at the Ohio Theatre in Playhouse Square. This production adds Maria’s song “I Have Confidence” from the film—probably Johnny’s idea and probably without the sanction of the Rodgers & Hammerstein office. He must have assumed that with his Musicarnival ticket price comparable to the film’s, his audience would include moviegoers—*Sound of Music* groupies, as it were—so he’d give them a song written for the film (both words and music by Rodgers) that had already won some notoriety. The trade-off, time-wise, is director **Otto W. Pirchner**’s regrettable cutting of the “Sixteen Going on Seventeen” reprise sung by Maria to Liesl.)

This production also provides an intriguing footnote in Broadway history. The 1965 Musicarnival season marked the debut of a new conductor in the pit, **Wally Harper**, a native of Akron who at 23 was quickly establishing himself in New York as a vocal arranger (Broadway’s *Half a Sixpence*) and music director wherever he got the opportunity. His bio tells us that as a senior at Akron High School, Harper composed and orchestrated a full-length musical, and in short order he studied at Juilliard and the New England Conservatory of Music. Listen to him conduct the entr’acte and you’ll encounter the most tightly knit ensemble under the tent since the golden days of Boris Kogan. (And here’s betting that he created the orchestration for the probably illegal performance of “I Have Confidence.”)

Harper, as we know, went on to an important career as a Broadway musical director and arranger

(and sometime composer). His work included the Tommy Tune musicals *A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine*, *Nine*, *Grand Hotel* and *My One and Only*. And his nearly 30-year partnership with Barbara Cook made them the most honored and popular singer and pianist in the world of musical theater, cabaret and classic American song.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

By 1965, it was clear this musical was indestructible. "You can still choke up with old-fashioned emotion," wrote Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press*, "when the seven children, prompted by Elsa, sing the song that makes a human being of their martinet father. A neat production." And who needs the film? Peter Bellamy in *The Plain Dealer*: "*The Sound of Music* in any entertainment medium has never-failing popular appeal."—**B. R.**

THE MUSIC MAN

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

July 12–25, 1965 (New York opening: December 19, 1957;
1,375 performances)

AUTHORS

Book, music and lyrics by Meredith Willson; story by Willson and Franklin Lacey

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirchner

MUSICAL DIRECTION

Wally Harper

LEADING PLAYERS

Mace Barrett (Harold Hill), Leslie Daniel (Marian Paroo), Alfred Dennis (Mayor Shinn), Pat Prechtel (Mrs. Paroo), Lynn Osborne (Mrs. Shinn), William Boehm (Marcellus), Andy Chapin (Winthrop)

OUTSTANDING SONGS

"Rock Island," "Trouble," "Goodnight, My Someone," "Seventy-Six Trombones," "Sincere," "Marian the Librarian," "My White Knight," "The Sadder-but-Wiser Girl," "Lida Rose," "Gary, Indiana," "Till There Was You"

SYNOPSIS

The story begins on the Fourth of July, 1912, in River City, Iowa. Enter “Professor” Harold Hill, who has arrived to hornswoggle the citizens into believing he can teach the local youngsters how to play in a marching band that would rival the legendary parade featuring “Seventy-Six Trombones.” But instead of skipping town before instruments arrive, Hill is persuaded to remain by the town’s librarian and piano teacher, Marian Paroo. The musical ends with the children being hailed by their parents, even though they can barely produce any recognizable sound from their instruments.—**S. G.**

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

See 1962 SEASON (Palm Beach)

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

With **Mace Barrett** back as Harold Hill from Johnny Price’s 1962 production, this *Music Man* mostly holds its own, though **Otto W. Pirschner**’s direction lacks the slam-bang appeal of Don Driver’s. The comic roles are well cast, with the dependable **Alfred Dennis** as perpetually irascible Mayor Shinn (his performance is a sort of homage to W. C. Fields), **Lynn Osborne** as his wife and a surprisingly effective **William Boehm** (the tent’s first director and its customary tenor in the operettas) as Marcellus. **Andy Chapin** is an adorable Winthrop. The disappointment is **Leslie Daniel** as Marian: her voice is too classically trained even for the piano teacher of River City, and her acting shies away from the poignancy of the librarian’s so-called spinsterhood and shunned position in the town.

In some ways the star of the show is musical director **Wally Harper**, fulfilling the promise he displayed in his *Sound of Music* debut. The orchestra is so polished, so in sync with the performers and such a driving force that it’s hard to believe this is summer stock.

CLEVELAND CRITICS’ ASSESSMENT

Plain Dealer classical music critic Robert Finn, subbing for Peter Bellamy, found it “bright, brassy and vastly entertaining.” And listen to him describe the feats of scenic designer **Edward Graczyk II** and the Musicarnival crew: “They seem to enjoy tackling staging problems. They have worked wonders in this show with a series of simple wooden frames. These do duty as door frames, library shelves, an upright piano, a train interior, a footbridge and so on. The resulting stylized stage illusions are quite charming.” Wrote Stan Anderson in *The Cleveland Press*: “Mace Barrett is an alert actor, and every scene in which he appears is sure to be a lucid one.... He can sing better, much better, than Robert Preston and Forrest Tucker, the two who were best known in the wintertime theater ... version of the musical comedy.” —**B. R.**

SING OUT, SWEET LAND!

MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION DATES

August 9–22, 1965 (New York opening: December 27, 1944;
102 performances)

AUTHORS

Book by Walter Kerr (the score comprised folk songs arranged by Elie Siegmeister)

PRODUCER

John L. Price, Jr.

DIRECTOR

Otto W. Pirschner

MUSICAL DIRECTION AND VOCAL ARRANGEMENTS

Wally Harper

LEADING PLAYERS

Richard Ambruster (Barnaby) and an ensemble featuring B. J. Ward, Alfred Dennis, Lynne Osborne, Wayne Tucker, Jack Riley and others

OUTSTANDING SONGS

“Skip to My Lou,” “Go to Sleep, Little Baby,” “Blue Tail Fly,” “Casey Jones,” “I’m Goin’ Away,” “Little Mohee,” “Frankie and Johnny,” “Polly Wolly Doodle,” “Big Rock Candy Mountain,” “Wanderin’,” “While Strolling Through the Park One Day”

SYNOPSIS

A cavalcade of American folk songs stretching from the Puritan era through the present day and held together by a character named Barnaby, who doesn’t age.

ABOUT THE MUSICAL

Walter Kerr, who later distinguished himself as one of America’s finest drama critics, had the idea for *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* during his tenure on the faculty of Catholic University, where the show was first performed. He wrote an Americana musical that very much belongs to the tradition that began in 1943 with *Oklahoma!* and continued through the mid-1950s: a deeply patriotic response to World War II and its aftermath. Kerr subtitled his show a “Musical Biography of American Song,” and indeed, the score comprises about three dozen folk songs plus a handful of 20th-century pop songs.

Kerr saw his show produced on Broadway in late 1944 in a prestigious production mounted by the Theatre Guild and choreographed by Doris Humphrey, with costumes by Lucinda Ballard. The show managed a run of just 102 performances, but it should not be dismissed—for several reasons. The songs were assembled and gorgeously arranged by composer Elie Siegmeister, and performed by an exceptional cast headed by Alfred Drake (not coincidentally, a new star thanks to *Oklahoma!*), folk singer Burl Ives (whose renditions of “Big Rock Candy Mountain” and “Blue Tail Fly” were so indelible that he won stardom himself and sang them for the rest of his life), Bibi Osterwald, Jack McCauley and Juanita Hall (five years before her immortal Bloody Mary in *South Pacific*). Thankfully, Decca recorded a cast album, and when I pull it out all these years later, the LP, now a collector’s item, remains a gem in a decade full of them.

One more thing: As a critic Kerr’s taste in musical theater could be misguided, but he was ahead of his time with this one. His notion was novel, even—according to historian Gerald Bordman—“esoteric.” He sent the central character, Barnaby, wending his way through three centuries of American life without aging a day, supported by a true ensemble of players who took on various roles as the episodic story unfolded. Each scene portrayed a specific historical period, and Kerr’s diction for the characters evolves delightfully, with Barnaby adopting an Irish-American parlance, for example, in the early 20th century. And without getting heavy-handed, Kerr doesn’t shy away from social commentary. Says Barnaby: “Wal, the country’s got kind o’ settled. Tight-like. No more frontier t’head for. Folks turnin’ in on themselves. Gittin’ suspicious. ’Fraid of losin’ their money. ’Tain’t no world for a wanderer.”

It’s such a theatrical notion that these days we have a label for it: concept musical. But trailblazing that territory is usually credited to Rodgers & Hammerstein (*Allegro* in 1947) and Lerner & Weill (*Love Life* a year later). Though *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* presents insoluble problems in its dramaturgy (too few of the songs are integrated with the script), Kerr came awfully close to creating something astonishing: Barnaby singing “Home on the Range” in the 20th-century urban scene is a touching commentary on cultural change; and in the highly satisfying wrap-up, he reunites with Priscilla, his first lady love in the 17th century.

There’s little documentation of *Sing Out, Sweet Land!*; in many volumes surveying the development of the American musical, this rarely performed work doesn’t even get a mention. For poet and critic Louis Untermeyer, however, it was “a kind of pageant which unites the human element with humor.” And Ethan Mordden, in his book on the 1940s, reports: “Some loved it: melodious, inspiring, moving. Others shook their heads: banal, insistent, pretentious.” Count me among the former.

NOTES ON THE MUSICARNIVAL PRODUCTION

In his book on Musicarnival (*The Music Went 'Round and Around*), John Vacha speculates that **Johnny Price** may have chosen *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* as a means of capitalizing on (or at least staying current with) the folk craze then sweeping America. But I'm not sure I agree. The sort of traditional folk music that is the spine of this musical was as far removed from 1965's pop culture as *Carousel*.

Rather, my guess is that the producer—a proud World War II vet who landed on the beach at Normandy on D-Day—found something else in this spirited, patriotic romp through American history. In the second act (and by now, we find ourselves in the 20th century), Barnaby notes: “I'm tryin' to get our country together in one piece. Spent a lotta time gettin' the country built, only to find I still got to pull it together.” The speech draws relieved applause under the tent, and in 1965's tense, divisive era of Vietnam, that must have pleased the producer.

And the production as a whole pleases me. Apparently the repertoire of folk songs in *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* tended to be elastic (there are many differences among the published script, the original-cast recording and the Musicarnival production), but musical director **Wally Harper** keeps the sprawling tale cohesive and even adds his own vocal arrangements—a skill that kept him busy on Broadway for many years. (I suspect, by the way, that the title song that serves as the finale is Harper's own composition.) He also illuminates lyrics that we think we know but don't, and some of them are priceless. We get eight stanzas of “Frankie and Johnny,” including: “Now it wasn't murder in the second degree, and it wasn't murder in the third, / That woman just dropped her man like a hunter drops a bird, / He was her man, but she shot him down.”

Richard Ambruster makes a voluble, downright loveable Barnaby, and in that respect, he strengthens the show in ways that surpass Alfred Drake, who originated the role. Kerr called for an ensemble of great versatility, and Johnny provides: 27 actors are given bios in the program—unprecedented at Musicarnival but entirely deserved. They include Broadway's longtime Daddy Warbucks, **John Schuck**.

One disappointment: In his production notes, Kerr points out that “in the original production, a sequence devoted to Negro music came between Scenes 4 and 5 of Act One. . . . The choice of Negro music is here deliberately left open, to be determined by the director in his individual situation or by the group of singers with which he works.” On Broadway, a stunning “Basement Blues,” for instance, was sung by Juanita Hall. I can't help wondering why, given Johnny's long association with Karamu House, he didn't explore that avenue, casting only one African-

American, **Doris de Mendez**, in the ensemble. In 1965, an integrated company would have given the musical real power.

At any rate, with this production we come to the end of Johnny Price's "production years" (1954–65). There was one more musical that summer—*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*—but apparently it wasn't recorded. There is a certain poetic justice, though, in this collection's beginning with *Oklahoma!* and ending with *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* In the context of the often-formula summer stock that proliferated during these years, here was a particularly *American* theater. That was one of its glories.

CLEVELAND CRITICS' ASSESSMENT

The critics didn't really warm to it. Robert Finn in *The Plain Dealer*, commenting on Johnny's promotion of the show as "family entertainment": "If your family enjoys American folk tunes and doesn't mind generous doses of corn and sentimentality, you will find the show entertaining. But if your brood likes its theater a little more literate ... you will spend some time fidgeting.... [But] it has been attractively costumed and staged with relish." "It's only a mélange of good-natured horseplay, a few puns, parody and slapstick," wrote Dick Shippy in the *Akron Beacon Journal*, "a means of tying together several centuries of American folk song."—**B. R.**

Afterword

By Judith Daykin

Alan Jay Lerner’s phrase in *Camelot*—a show John Price mounted in 1964, near the end of Musicarnival’s so-called “production years”—says it all: “For one brief shining moment...”

Actually the moment lasted 12 seasons, from 1954 to 1965, but it was all too brief, and it was certainly shining. Those of us privileged to earn our stripes in, around and under that tent knew we were doing something remarkable in the history of American theater. For me it was life-altering, and I don’t think that’s an exaggeration.

In 1961, I was a sophomore at the University of Iowa, majoring in theater but with hardly any experience or knowledge of that world. Somehow I was coerced by two fellow students to leave school and accompany them to Palm Beach Musicarnival that winter as a lowly apprentice in the company.

I was thrown into a working relationship with people like Joan Kibrig, Lawrence Brooks, Lucille Benson, Larry Brown, Susan Johnson and a multitude of other talented professionals—that being the operative word. I did all the usual “cheap labor” tasks assigned me as an apprentice, but for some inexplicable reason, I was also *cast* and performed with the aforementioned in several shows that first season.

I was encouraged by John Price, the producer, and by the actors and staff, to feel that I was making an important contribution. Eventually, I joined Musicarnival in Cleveland, and from there became a full-time employee, graduating from apprentice to assistant to the director of publicity (Nancy MacArthur), and during the winter months I traveled around the city and suburbs making speeches about Musicarnival with a handy slide show, promoting group sales and subscriptions for the theater. Periodically, I made return visits to the Palm Beach tent as well.

I also functioned as an assistant stage manager for one season, and was then promoted to production stage manager, and director of the Fellowship School, and finally to assistant to the producer. It was like graduate school for someone without an undergrad degree!

Ultimately, I left Musicarnival to stage-manage for the Paul Taylor Dance Company on world tours and Broadway, did some directing in the Cleveland area, and ended up managing the Taylor company for many years: jobs for which Musicarnival had prepared me by providing me with so many different opportunities—and *trusting* me to deliver. As a mature and experienced arts administrator, I served as the executive vice president of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, as president of Theater Projects Consultants in North America, and finally as president of New York City Center, where, with the creation of the “Encores! Great American Musicals in Concert” series, my Musicarnival experience came full circle. John Price even suggested the title word, “Encores!”

Just as in *Camelot*, there was sadness when the shining moment passed: the time when Musicarnival, like so many of our fellow tent theaters, was forced to move from self-produced musicals to star tours and later attractions featuring well-known performers. Forced, I believe, by television, the mass appeal of stars, and the prohibitive cost of creating full productions from scratch in Cleveland and West Palm Beach.

Something vital in the development of the American musical was lost along the way. Our tents had housed the repertoire from a golden age of musical theater; served and educated a devoted public; and promoted the careers of countless brilliant performers. As this audio archive demonstrates time and again, the work was done with great imagination and impossibly high standards. How wonderful it is to relive this journey.



Judith Daykin in her role as assistant to the producer, conferring with director Otto W. Pirchner

Appendices

APPENDIX A (CD)

Johnny Price in Conversation (Summer 1961)

1. Johnny interviewed by Fred Griffith (WDOK)—The starting point is Musicarnival’s world premiere stage adaptation of Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *Cinderella*, written and directed by Don Driver, but the topics also include Musicarnival’s high standards and attention to detail; the perilous economics of Broadway; the increasing importance of Off Broadway; and the reluctance of American audiences to be challenged by provocative material such as Musicarnival’s stellar but “very unpopular” presentation of *West Side Story*.

2. Johnny interviewed by Howard Wertheimer (WGAR)—The producer recounts the birth of Musicarnival, discusses its innovations, and states his belief that the tent theaters are the best training ground for young talent in all disciplines of the theater.

3. Johnny interviewing Leyna Gabriele (WDJO)—The star of Musicarnival’s *Fledermaus* in an animated conversation with the producer about the virtues of performing opera in English.

4. Johnny interviewing Coley Worth (WDJO)—The featured comic performer of *Fledermaus* talks with Johnny about his signature role of Frosch in the Strauss operetta, which he had already performed for more than a decade with New York City Opera, and the importance of improvising comedy in a war-horse operetta such as *The Red Mill*, also produced at Musicarnival that summer. Johnny describes him accurately as “one of the funniest men in the world today.”

APPENDIX B (CD)

Musicarnival Fellowship School: Session With Don Driver (Summer 1957)

This session for apprentices, moderated by the school’s director, Lawrence Vincent, is a primer on the life of a working New York actor, who tells the students that in the past two years he’s been employed for all but two weeks. Driver began his career as a dancer with Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. He then shifted to performing musical comedy, started writing industrial shows (“You make love to an automobile”) and, thanks to Johnny Price, settled into directing—accompanied by performing, choreographing and/or writing when the opportunities arose. What’s fascinating about this exchange is that we are given such powerful evidence of a director

in the making. That summer, hired as a performer only, he essayed a whopping six roles, playing featured comedy in *South Pacific* (Billis), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Sir Francis Beekman), *Can-Can* (Boris), *Song of Norway* (Count Pepi), *Silk Stockings* (Boris) and *Damn Yankees* (Applegate). But he can't help speaking as both an actor and the director who has the big picture always in mind: "If you approach the musical as you do a play, you have a better musical." Paying homage to George Abbott, "It's about pacing, pacing, pacing—leaving no holes." And: "To treat any musical comedy [script] as inferior is a mistake; you have to superimpose the [storytelling] models of *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific*." Johnny Price saw the potential: Toward the end of the 1957 Cleveland season, he insisted that Driver direct the 1958 winter musicals in West Palm Beach. Driver had never directed before, but he succeeded: the start of something big.

APPENDIX C (CD)

Musicarnival Fellowship School: Session With Boris Kogan (Summer 1957)

In Johnny Price's welcome to the audience each night, he typically ended his spiel with "And now the dean of tent-theater conductors, Bois Kogan." Musicarnival's conductor, whose work ranged from the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo to Broadway, helped open the theater in 1954 and wielded the baton longer (through 1961) than any other musical director. In this session moderated by Lawrence Vincent, the Russian-born Kogan reveals himself to be a no-nonsense master of his craft—and well suited for the demands of "the tents," where "we start from scratch—everything is new to everybody.... Time is our biggest enemy." Once the show opens he clearly relishes controlling "the overall of everything," a predilection that extended to giving any light cue timed with the music. He also declares that Musicarnival has the largest pit orchestra (14 in 1957) of any American tent theater; he was the envy of his colleagues, and he made the orchestra sound even larger through his skillful reductions of the original Broadway orchestrations, usually scored for 24 players. He talks about dancers; during that era "very few of them sing," a state of affairs that was just about to change. He talks about singer/actors and the need for give-and-take between performer and conductor. And he decries stage directors who are trained in drama but who do not have a "full understanding of the [musical theater]; they must be *musical*."

APPENDIX D (CD)

Musicarnival Fellowship School: Session With Lawrence Vincent (Summer 1957)

A bit later in the summer of 1957, Lawrence Vincent—longtime head of Musicarnival's Fellowship School, an admired theater educator on the college level, and a frequent Musicarnival

stage manager and character actor—has his own session with the apprentices, and it's quite revealing. Johnny Price prided himself on opening his tent to graduate students at [Case] Western Reserve University, and this group does not lack for strong opinions. In a debrief on *Can-Can* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, no one is wearing rose-colored glasses: The young people express their disapproval of “the blasé attitude of the ensemble”; and one student reports that “in rehearsal, the principals weren't giving much—the chorus gave less.... What relationship does the chorus have to what's going on?” There is also a lack of attention, they believe, to directing the book scenes. This tendency for performers to “mark”—some of it endemic to summer stock—would be addressed once Don Driver began his tenure as resident director. But we get a glimpse of what the next generation of theater professionals, who transformed the American theater in the 1960s, are made of. They're tough but idealistic, they're politically aware, and they question everything. Johnny must have loved them.

APPENDIX E (CD)

Musicarnival Fellowship School: Session With Irra Petina (Summer 1957)

The hour will make you wish you had known this witty, bright and bubbly singer, then 49, who successfully made the transition from opera (including the Met) to Broadway: most notably the Grieg-Wright-Forrest smash hit *Song of Norway* (1944) and a legendary *succès d'estime*, the Bernstein-Wilbur-Hellman *Candide*, in which she was featured as the Old Lady just a few months before her 1957 Musicarnival reprise of *Norway* with the original star, Lawrence Brooks. The conversation, moderated by Lawrence Vincent, centers on the importance of good acting in opera, with Johnny Price sitting in, adamant as always that opera should be produced in English with true theatrical values. The Russian-born Petina confesses that it is “not always easy to make acting natural in opera,” but that she “always loved to act” and learned early on that she had a flair for comedy: In *The Barber of Seville*, playing the maid, Berta, she “dusted [Ezio] Pinza from head to toe.... He had a tremendous sense of humor and enjoyed it thoroughly.” It's telling that she thrives on the “freedom” of Musicarnival's theater-in-the-round: “I like going in circles all the time. You reach more people.” As for *Candide*: “The piece is very close to opera; in our first rehearsal with the orchestra we went insane for the score.” And this may surprise you: “I feel more challenged as a singer in the opera house, [but more] challenged as an artist on Broadway.”

APPENDIX F (CD)

Musicarnival Fellowship School: Session With Johnny Price and Judith Daykin (Summer 1974)

Although the date of the tape falls outside the bounds of this project (1954–65), it’s valuable for several reasons. It’s a rare chance to hear Johnny Price and one of his most accomplished protégées, Judith Daykin, teach a class together in a room full of college students apprenticing for the summer. By this time Daykin had moved on to New York to manage the Paul Taylor Dance Company, but she was back in Cleveland to spread some wisdom, and in this excerpt from their 90-minute session we receive a classic lesson in tough love in the theater. The theme is “attitude and reliability” and includes a shared reminiscence from Daykin’s Musicarnival tenure during the production years.

APPENDIX G (CD)

Johnny Price in Conversation (Autumn 2006)

The producer was 85 when this interview with Bill Rudman and Evelyn Ward was taped at WCLV in Cleveland, but he had lost none of his passion for and knowledge of the American musical theater in general and Musicarnival in particular. The conversation ranges from memories of launching the tent, to the performances of favorite artists, to auditioning Beverly Sills for the company (and hiring her) when she was virtually unknown, to nurturing Don Driver’s tenure as the theater’s most respected and imaginative director. (Driver went on to an award-winning national career.) One comes away from this interview with a vivid sense of what a producer does, and in the case of Johnny—who for some years also operated a satellite Musicarnival in West Palm Beach—his responsibilities joyfully consumed his life.

APPENDIX H

Productions not taped; productions whose recordings were unusable; or productions whose recordings could not be found

1954: *The New Moon* (with Ridge Bond, Rosemary Kuhlman); *Roberta* (with Jack Cassidy and Patricia Ruhl); *The Student Prince* (with William Boehm and Lillian Murphy); *Finian’s Rainbow* (with Maureen McNalley and Andrew Gainey); *Annie Get Your Gun* (with Susan Johnson and Ridge Bond); *Carousel* (with John Shafer and Arlyne Frank); *The Desert Song* (with John Shafer and Nadja Witkowska)

1958 (Cleveland): *Carousel* (with George Wallace and Helena Scott)

1960 (Cleveland): *Naughty Marietta* (with Robert Rounseville and Laurie Franks);
The Student Prince (with Robert Rounseville and Laurie Franks); *Redhead* (with Mara Lynn)

1963 (West Palm Beach): *Wildcat* (with Joan Kibrig and Joe Lautner)

1963 (Cleveland): *Carnival!* (with Marcia King and Robert Brooks); *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (with Gloria Leroy and Elmarie Wendel)

1965 (Cleveland): *Show Boat* (with Mace Barrett and Judith McCauley); *110 in the Shade* (with Mace Barrett and Leslie Daniel); *South Pacific* (with Joshua Hecht and B. J. Ward); *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (with Alfred Dennis)—**B. R.**

MUSICARNIVAL

By arrangement with Rodgers and Hammerstein

PRESENTS

OKLAHOMA!

Producer
John L. Price Jr.

President
Robert H. Bishop III

Music by Richard Rodgers
Book and Lyrics by
Oscar Hammerstein II
Based on the play "Green Grow The
Lilacs" by Lynn Riggs
Originally Produced by Theatre Guild
Staged by William C. Boehm
Musical and Choral Direction
by Boris Kogan
Choreography and Musical Numbers
Staged by James R. Nygren
Set Designs by Don Ingalls

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Production Stage Manager..... Lee Williams
Stage Manager..... Frank Borgman
Scene Designer..... Don Ingalls
Associate Scene Designer..... Constance M. Price
Technical Director..... Tom Mylett
Master Electrician..... Sam Kleinman
Costume Supervisor..... Rosemary Pechin
Assistant to Mr. Nygren..... Maurice Nystrom
Production Assistants..... Gina Artino, Ed Rueth

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Concert Master..... Ben Silverberg
Assistant to Mr. Kogan..... Harold Fink
Organist..... Miriam Brunner
Gladys Helmund, Drums; George Livoti, Violin;
Harry Levine, Viola; Marvin Cone, Cello; Harold
Garret, Bass; Jack Pollack, Sam Salkin, Violins.

From the program of the inaugural production

