

Program Notes
By Joshua S. Ritter



Welcome to *Camelot*!

At Goodspeed, we are proud of our ability to transport our audience into a unique and magical world. With the help of our creative teams and staff, Goodspeed Musicals endeavors to bring you a completely unique show, even when it would be easier to simply mimic what has been done in the past. King Arthur was guided by his principles as well when he envisioned a utopia in which everything happens according to plan:

The rain may never fall 'til after sundown.
By eight the morning fog must disappear.
In short, there's simply not
A more congenial spot
For happ'ly-everaftering than here
In Camelot.

(Lerner, "Camelot")

Alas, but in real life things don't always happen as expected. Unfortunately, there were many obstacles and several tragic circumstances in bringing *Camelot* to Broadway. Adrian Greenburg, the famous motion picture costume designer, died of a heart attack after finishing less than half of his work on the production. Moreover, Alan Jay Lerner (book and lyrics) became ill two months before rehearsal was scheduled to start. Then, when the show opened in Toronto, it lasted more than four hours due to extraneous material. After that opening, Lerner spent ten days in the hospital. Upon Lerner's return to work, Moss Hart (director) promptly suffered a heart attack and was unable to see the show again until it had been running on Broadway for over four months. According to Lerner, "Camelot on Broadway became known as a 'medical' more than a 'musical'."

Another terrible event loomed in *Camelot*'s future and for a number of reasons; it gradually became synonymous with one of the most tragic and shocking stories in American history. On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy's assassination traumatized the nation and cut short the presence of one of our greatest leaders. In recent times, the legacy of *Camelot* and its connection to the Kennedy administration continues to resonate with the American people.

Despite past and future malady, after being rewritten and restaged, *Camelot* opened on Broadway on December 3, 1960. At that point, Alan J. Lerner and Fredrick Loewe (music) were already enjoying great success with their musical *My Fair Lady*. In fact, some would argue that *My Fair Lady* raised the bar too much and negatively impacted *Camelot*'s sales once it opened. Many theatergoers and critics actually projected that it would close before *My Fair Lady*. This was almost the case because *My Fair Lady* closed on September 29, 1962, and *Camelot* ended its run on January 3, 1963.

Despite the mixed reviews and the difficult journey to New York City, the box office was overwhelmed with the largest advance ticket sales in Broadway history. Lerner explains: "The highest expectations of the season, however, were reserved for *Camelot*, the first show by Fritz and me since *My Fair Lady*, with several former associates, namely director Moss Hart, choreographer Hanya Holm, and starring Julie Andrews. Her co-star was Richard Burton. Fritz and I had been away from the theatre for four years, during which time we had written the screenplay, music and lyrics for the film *Gigi*. Because *Gigi* was not only successful, but won more Oscars than any film in history up to that time, and because of *My Fair Lady*, the advance sale for *Camelot* was monumental."

After opening on Broadway however, ticket sales were not impressive and CBS was projecting that the show would close in May of that year. However, the production had its big break when Ed Sullivan invited Lerner and Loewe to be featured for one hour on his television program. The special occasion was the fifth anniversary of *My Fair Lady* and Sullivan permitted Lerner and Loewe to choose the format of the program. Lerner and Loewe used that opportunity to feature all the best songs and scenes from *Camelot*, including much of Moss's vastly improved changes to the show.

Lerner recounts: "The following morning I was awakened by a phone call from an excited manager at the Majestic Theatre. "You better come down here," he said, "and look at this." "Look at what?" I asked. He answered, "Just come and see what's going on at this box office." I got to the theatre as quickly as I could. For the first time there was a line halfway down the block. That night the audience came to the theatre and saw the vastly improved musical that Moss had rehearsed the week before. And at eleven-fifteen the curtain came down! The reaction and the applause were overwhelming. The people came up the aisles raving. *Camelot* was finally a hit."

The legend of Camelot endures in the collective mind of our nation and *Camelot* the musical deals with issues that remain extremely relevant. Together and as individuals, we continue to strive for our own fleeting Camelot. It is our hope that we can provide a glimpse of that magical place on our stage for you to enjoy.