

PROGRAM NOTES

A Fresh Take on Rodgers & Hammerstein

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Isn't it wonderful when you get to see new sides to your favorite people, places, or things? When something you think you know through and through reveals new shadings you didn't previously suspect? Or when a new spin on a classic reveals something unexpected and marvelous you hadn't seen in it before? The greatest art is the art that is complex and shaded enough that you can see something fresh in it every time you look.

The work of Rodgers and Hammerstein certainly qualifies. Their shows are iconic, and they are masters of marrying songwriting with storytelling—each song fits perfectly with the moment it was written for, conveying plot and character and emotion all wrapped in a gorgeous tune. But while there is great joy in seeing those moments play out on a stage, there is also a special pleasure to seeing these exceptional songs stand on their own, and in some cases shift to take on an entirely different spin. Precisely because they were such masters of conveying life on a stage, nothing Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote ever had only one shade. Think of the multifaceted “If I Loved You” from *Carousel*—there's the coyness of an early flirtation between two people who are drawn to each other, the emotional reticence of two people who really would rather not fall in love with each other, and the deep thread of emotion that tells us that something deeper is building between them. There's the darkness of the reality that one of these characters is not a good man, and the lightness of a blooming love that might redeem him. And layered over all of this is a bittersweetness that tells us that this union that we're watching unfold is ultimately doomed. It's brilliantly layered in both the music and the lyrics, and each of these threads, when teased out, could tell a slightly different story. Taking these songs and plac-



ing them in a different light allows us to see facets of them that have always been there, but now get to shine more brightly.

A Grand Night for Singing does exactly that. It takes the songs from a wide range of Rodgers and Hammerstein shows and puts them into a different showcase, allowing them to have an entirely separate life on their own. Combining songs from different shows creates a slightly different narrative, or reveals comedic possibilities in a dramatic song, or vice versa. Threads that run between different shows are teased out, and songs that don't come from the same plots suddenly seem to belong together. And by doing so, it reveals the true brilliance of Rodgers and Hammerstein, and their uncanny ability to create songs as complex and full of different emotions as people themselves are.

It also introduces us to song gems that aren't often heard, but should be. While everyone knows the sweeping heartbreak of “This Nearly Was Mine,” do you know the haunting devastation in “Love, Look Away”? You won't forget it once you do. Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote beautiful love songs, this we know, but both “So Far” and “All at Once You Love Her” capture the blossoming of a potential new romance, but from perspectives we haven't yet seen. And “Don't Marry Me” is the more mature version of conditional love songs in which potential lovers dance around each other, but this song has much funnier punchlines.

This is the true gift of *A Grand Night for Singing*: sixty years after Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein last wrote together, it gives us something new of theirs to discover. And in some cases, that might be the very songs you already love the best.