



PROGRAM NOTES

by Joshua S. Ritter
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In the early years of The Great Depression, when Americans desperately needed a laugh, beloved composer Irving Berlin and celebrated playwright Moss Hart collaborated on a hilarious Broadway topical revue entitled *As Thousands Cheer*. Every scene, song, and gag was inspired by a different section of the newspaper. *As Thousands Cheer* opened at the Music Box Theatre on September 30, 1933 to rave reviews. This newspaper-style format was lauded as innovative, and the show ran for more than 400 performances. In one scene, Berlin and Hart placed the cast in an Easter parade as the orchestra played the now-familiar Berlin ballad of the same name. The scene planted an idea in Berlin's mind: why not develop a revue based on American holidays?

Years later, in May of 1940, Berlin approached Paramount Producer-Director Mark Sandrich with the concept. Sandrich had worked with Berlin on three RKO films — *Top Hat* (1935), *Follow the Fleet* (1936), and *Carefree* (1938) — so he was adept at staging Berlin numbers for the camera. Sandrich was intrigued by the idea, and they began working on an outline for a film.

They agreed that it would be an appropriate vehicle for leading Hollywood crooner Bing Crosby. Crosby was contracted to Paramount at the time, so it would be a somewhat cost-effective measure to hire him to play a leading role. However, Sandrich had the extravagant idea of hiring the foremost Hollywood dance man, Fred Astaire, to play Crosby's romantic rival and ex-vaudeville partner. Having directed five Astaire-Rogers films at RKO, Sandrich was comfortable working with Astaire, and he felt he could lure him onboard. Irving Berlin's *Holiday Inn* would mark the first pairing of Crosby and Astaire. Yet Astaire would come at a high financial price. As a concession to satisfy the studio, they agreed to cast lackluster leading women, virtually unknown: Marjorie Reynolds and Virginia Dale.

Despite the light script and unbalanced casting, Berlin composed more than a dozen songs for the film including the timeless classic "White Christmas." The score also featured such gems as "Happy Holiday," "Be Careful, It's My Heart," "You're Easy to Dance With," and "I Can't Tell a Lie." *Holiday Inn* was sure to be a hit, particularly paired with Mark Sandrich's brilliant direction and the boundless talent of the two leading men.

In the winter of 2013, Universal Stage Productions, the live theatre division of the renowned motion picture studio, invited Goodspeed to be the developmental home of the stage adaptation of this wonderfully tuneful film, and we eagerly agreed. Goodspeed has long offered theatre gypsies a bit of respite from their hectic lives trodding the boards in New York City and other bustling cities. Our quaint surroundings share some resemblance to the Connecticut sanctuary sought by Jim Hardy (Bing Crosby) in *Holiday Inn*.

As Director and Book Writer Gordon Greenberg explains, "Before we had even written a word of the adaptation, we identified Goodspeed as the perfect theatre to launch *Holiday Inn*. For starters, there's East Haddam itself; so beautiful it looks like a Hollywood back lot. It's the closest we could possibly come to the setting of the show — the fictional town of Midville, Connecticut. We could have done a site-specific production at the Gelston House, but the main reason we're at Goodspeed is the theatre itself; not just the celebrated Opera House, but the human beings that fill it. The staff at Goodspeed knows musicals better than any other in the world. They live and breathe musicals and have a unique expertise in producing both classics and originals. *Holiday Inn* is simultaneously both. And while the jewel box stage is not the same size or scale of a Broadway house, the talent level certainly is. On top of that, Goodspeed audiences are uniquely smart, seasoned, and supportive. There is nowhere better equipped or more beautiful to develop and stage a brand new musical, especially one with a vintage pedigree."

We couldn't agree more! And we are happy to welcome you to the first-ever performances of the stage adaptation of Irving Berlin's *Holiday Inn*! We're sure glad you're here.

*Happy holiday,
Happy holiday,
May the calendar keep bringing
Happy holidays to you!*



*Bing Crosby, Marjorie Reynolds, Fred Astaire,
and Virginia Dale in the 1942 movie Holiday Inn*