



AUTHOR'S NOTES:

My Dad, Baseball, and *Damn Yankees*

By Joe DiPietro

In the 1940s, my dad played baseball for a Brooklyn Dodgers farm team called the Detroit Clowns. If you want to put fear in your opponent's hearts, you probably shouldn't call your team The Clowns, but this group of Clowns were willing to do anything for a shot at the majors, an eternal yearning they share with the main character of *Damn Yankees*. My dad, alas, never made it anywhere near the big leagues—the army and a young woman who soon became his wife (and my mom) derailed all that. But his love of baseball never abated, while his son's love of baseball never began. Forced to be on the little league team my dad coached, I was pretty hapless. Much to the relief of my teammates, I was properly consigned to the bench, where I would sometimes read a book. That, I thought, was the end of any experience I would ever have with baseball.

But several years ago, Jon Kimball, the Artistic Director of North Shore Music Theatre, got my batter up when he called with a rather cheeky idea: reinventing *Damn Yankees* by substituting the now-defunct Washington Senators with the very much alive Boston Red Sox, thus placing a red-hot sports rivalry in the center of this beloved classic. Suddenly, I had a chance to combine my dad's passion for baseball with my love of musicals. Better yet, I quickly learned the story behind the Red Sox curse: in 1919, the Red Sox team owner traded Babe Ruth to the Yankees to raise funds so he could produce the Broadway musical *No, No, Nanette*. That's right, he didn't trade the greatest player in baseball for a slew of other talented players, he traded him to produce a show that featured "Tea For Two" and "I Want To Be Happy." The legend goes that the baseball gods were so incensed, they damned the Sox to decades and decades of World Series agony. So the world got a delightful musical comedy that has entertained generations since 1925. And Boston got 80 years of hell.

Even if the facts of this legend aren't entirely true (a wise writing teacher once told me, "Never write the facts when you can write the legend"), it provided me with a hell of a good reason to rewrite a classic musical that, quite frankly, doesn't need a whole lot of rewriting. But now the Devil has a clear and delicious motivation, the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry provides an still-pertinent center of conflict, and Babe Ruth gets to drive the plot of a musical.

This is the fifth show that I've had produced at Goodspeed Musicals, and I'm especially thrilled that it'll be directed by Danny Goldstein. Danny was the assistant director of my show *All Shook Up* on Broadway, and he has since stepped up to be a terrific director in his own right, as evidenced by his superb Goodspeed production of *Hello, Dolly!* last season. Danny encouraged me to further tweak the script for Goodspeed—which I have, even though I had to keep reminding him that he used to get me coffee during rehearsal breaks. But he's a true man of the theatre, and he promises a fast, smart and sexy *Damn Yankees*. I have no doubt he'll deliver.

As I wrote this version, I often wondered if my Dad would make the same decision that Joe Hardy makes—to risk giving up those you love in exchange for a guaranteed shot at major league glory. I would like to think my dad would say no. But the devil can make us do all sorts of things, so I've decided never to ask him.