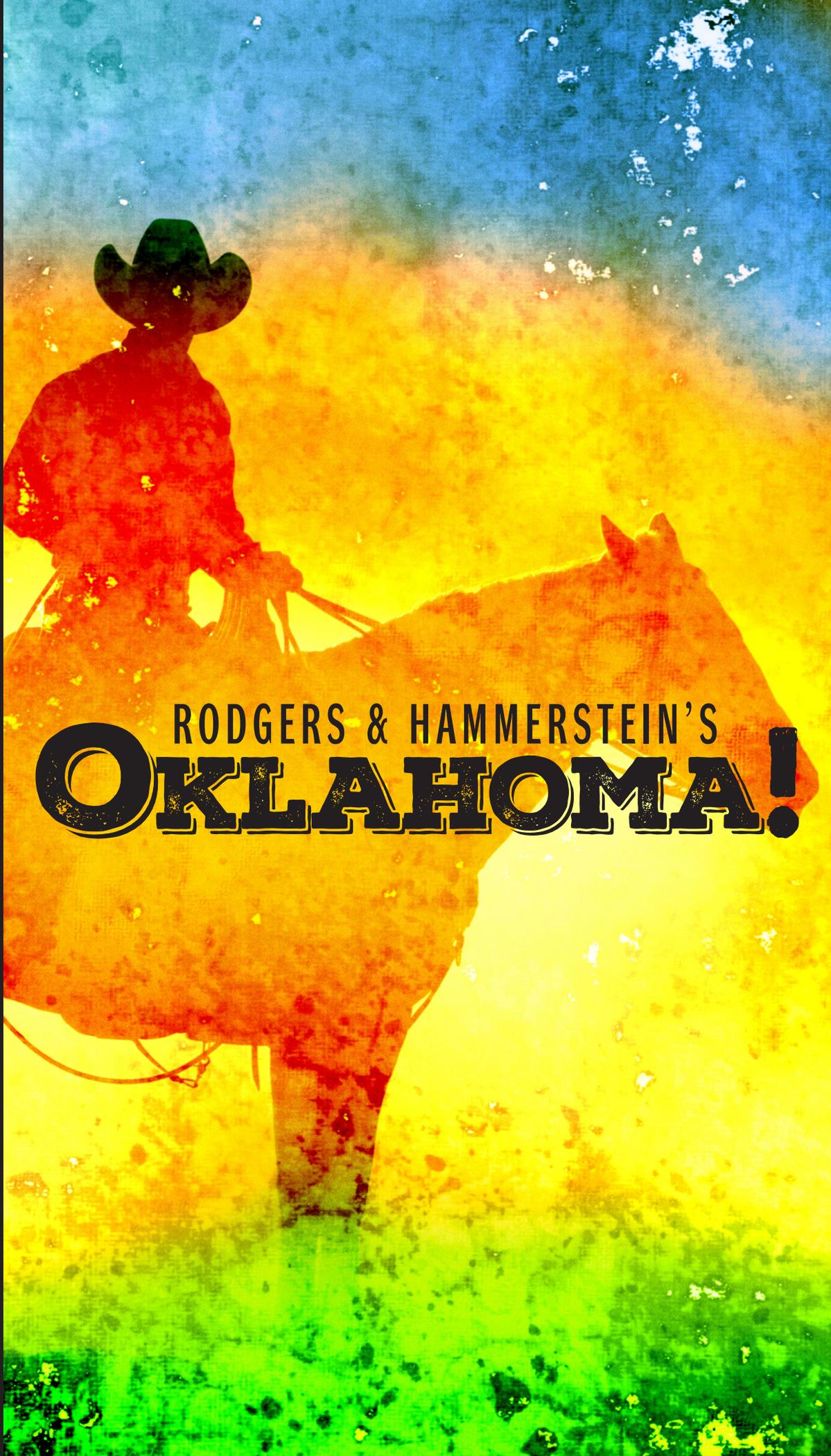


GOODSPEED MUSICALS

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS



RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S
OKLAHOMA!



MICHAEL GENNARO
Executive Director

presents
RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S
OKLAHOMA!

Music by
RICHARD RODGERS

Book and Lyrics by
OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II

Based on the play "Green Grow the Lilacs" by
LYNN RIGGS

Original Dances by
AGNES de MILLE

Scenic Design by
WILSON CHIN

Costume Design by
TRACY CHRISTENSEN

Lighting Design by
PHILIP S. ROSENBERG

Wig & Hair Design by
MARK ADAM RAMPMEYER

Fight Director
UNKLEDAVE'S FIGHT-HOUSE

Orchestrations by
DAN DeLANGE

Additional Dance Arrangements by
DAVID CHASE

Sound Design by
JAY HILTON

Casting by
PAUL HARDT
STEWART/WHITLEY CASTING

Production Manager
R. GLEN GRUSMARK

Production Stage Manager
BRADLEY G. SPACHMAN

Assistant Music Director
F. WADE RUSSO

Associate Producer
BOB ALWINE

Line Producer
DONNA LYNN COOPER HILTON

General Manager
RACHEL TISCHLER

Music Direction by
MICHAEL O'FLAHERTY

Choreographed by
KATIE SPELMAN

Directed by
JENN THOMPSON

JULY 14 - SEPT 23, 2017
THE GOODSPEED

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RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S
OKLAHOMA!

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Goodspeed's Audience Insights can be found on our website:
www.goodspeed.org/guides

Audience Insights for *Oklahoma!* was prepared by:
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MAX
SHOWALTER
CENTER FOR EDUCATION
IN MUSICAL THEATRE

Audience Insights updated 07.03.17

CHARACTER & SHOW SYNOPSIS

THE CHARACTERS

AUNT ELLER MURPHY: Laurey Williams' aunt. She runs the farm and has taken care of Laurey since her parents passed away.

CURLY McLAINE: A cowboy who is in love with Laurey Williams.

LAUREY WILLIAMS: Aunt Eller Murphy's niece who lives on the farm with her. She is also in love with Curly McLaine, though she refuses to admit it.

WILL PARKER: A cattle roper on the rodeo circuit who needs to earn \$50 in order to marry Ado Annie Carnes, per her father's order.

JUD FRY: The hired hand on Aunt Eller's farm who also has eyes for Laurey. Jud is somewhat of a recluse, and many people in the Territory fear him.

ADO ANNIE CARNES: Laurey's friend who must choose between the two men who love her, Will Parker and Ali Hakim.

ALI HAKIM: A Persian peddler who travels the Territory selling household items. In Will's absence, he has been entertaining Ado Annie Carnes.

ANDREW CARNES: Ado Annie's father who insists Will Parker needs to have \$50 in order to marry his daughter.

IKE, SLIM, FRED, CORD ELAM: Citizens of the Territory.

GERTIE, ELLEN, KATE, SYLVIE, ARMINA, AGGIE: Laurey's girl friends who live nearby.

JESS, CHALMERS, MIKE, JOE, SAM: Will Parker's cowboy friends.



Rhett Guter as Curly and Samantha Bruce as Laurey in Goodspeed's Oklahoma! ©Diane Sobolewski.

Aunt Eller Murphy churns butter on the porch of her farmhouse when she hears a voice singing in the distance. The voice belongs to a cowboy named Curly who is looking for Aunt Eller's niece, Laurey Williams, to ask her to the **Box Social**. Laurey comes out of the house onto the porch, pretending not to have heard Curly singing. Curly tries to convince Laurey that attending the Box Social with him would be a grand affair, describing the fancy carriage he hired for the occasion. When Laurey—who relishes getting into spats with Curly—still refuses to go to the social with him, Curly tells her he made up the story about the **surrey**. Laurey marches back into the house, angry with Curly for lying to her; Curly asks Aunt Eller if she will accompany him to the Box Social instead.

Will Parker and a group of farmhands arrive at Claremore Station. Will, a cattle roper, has just returned from a rodeo in Kansas City where he won \$50—a large sum of money for a cowboy in **Indian Territory**. With the money, he hopes to convince Ado Annie's father to let him marry her. Will tells them all how modern Kansas City is; they have **gas buggies**, **Bell Telephones**, and even a 7-story skyscraper!

Ado Annie and Ali Hakim ride up to the farm. Annie confides in Laurey that she is torn between Will Parker, the cattle roper, and Ali Hakim, the **peddler**. Suddenly all the boys are interested in her now that she is older, and she just does not know which to choose. Ado Annie feels sorry for the men who chase her, which is why she "cain't say no" to them. Laurey disagrees; she does not feel sorry for any man, "no matter whut!" She tells Ado Annie to decide which man she loves more: Will Parker or Ali Hakim. Ali Hakim unloads the goods he brought to sell: egg beaters, silk garments, cakes of soap, and the like. When he pulls out smelling salts rumored to help a person make important decisions, Laurey snatches them up.

After Will and the boys leave, Jud—Aunt Eller's hired hand—comes by to tell her that he will stop work early that day to take Laurey to the Box Social. Curly, clearly disappointed, reminds Aunt Eller they have a date that night. When she asks him jokingly if they will ride in the imaginary surrey he described to Laurey earlier, he tells her that the surrey is, in fact, real. He hired it to take them to town.

Ado Annie breaks the news to Ali Hakim that she will marry Will Parker, after all, and he is relieved though he feigns sadness. Annie's father arrives, and when she reveals that Will spent his \$50 rodeo prize on presents, her father resolves that she will not marry him. And when he hears the way Ali Hakim has been talking to Annie, he insists she marry the peddler. This is a shock to Hakim; he never actually intended to marry Ado Annie!

Curly asks Laurey if she really is going to the Box Social with Jud even though everyone expects her to go with him. Laurey says it is just as well she does, since she does not want people gossiping about them anyway. Frustrated,

SHOW SYNOPSIS (CONTINUED)

THINGS TO KNOW

BOX SOCIAL: a community gathering in which women make boxed lunches and men bid money to purchase them, often for charity. The women are also expected to eat lunch with the men who purchase their baskets.

SURREY: a lightweight carriage with four wheels and two forward-facing seats.

INDIAN TERRITORY: prior to the year 1907 when the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma was adopted and Oklahoma was ratified as the 46th state in the union, the area was divided between the Oklahoma Territory in the west and the Indian Territory in the east.

GAS BUGGIES: the early automobiles Will saw in Kansas City predated the Model T Ford of 1908. Often referred to as “gas buggies,” he probably saw primitive gas cars made by companies such as Duryea, Haynes, or Winton.

BELL TELEPHONE: while there were over 2 million phones in Bell’s telephone system by the turn of the 20th century, the system was relatively limited and was still not available to rural areas like the Territory.

PEDDLER: a person who travels from town to town selling small goods.

SHIVOREE: a noisy, discordant mock serenade, often with noisemakers such as pots and pans, planned to disrupt a couple’s wedding night.

Curly storms off to the smoke house where Jud lives on the farm. When Curly leaves, Laurey begs Aunt Eller not to go to the Box Social with Curly, because she is afraid to ride with Jud all by herself. She tells Aunt Eller that she is afraid of him and that he paces under her bedroom window at night.

The smoke house is small, dark, and dirty; the walls are covered in cut-out pictures from magazines and old farm tools. After awkward conversation, the two men talk about Jud’s former employers, who treated him poorly. When Curly asks if he ever got even with them, Jud tells Curly a story about a hired hand who fell in love with the farmer’s daughter, found her with another man, and burned their house down with the family locked inside. Then, he warns Curly to stay away from Laurey and shoots his gun at the ceiling. Curly, remaining calm, draws his own gun and shoots it right through a knot in the wall, demonstrating his impeccable marksmanship.

Aunt Eller—with Ali Hakim close behind—barges into the smoke house after hearing the gun shots. Curly takes the opportunity to leave, while Hakim pulls out items to sell. Jud asks if Ali Hakim has heard of “The Little Wonder,” a small picture viewer with a spring-loaded blade hidden inside. After Hakim remarks that it is too dangerous a toy for him, Jud decides he does not want to buy anything from him at all. What he really wants is a woman. Seizing this opportunity to solve his own problem, Ali Hakim offers him Ado Annie and promptly leaves when Jud says he does not want her. Jud decides he will no longer live as a recluse and resolves to find a bride.

With the help of her smelling salts, Laurey tries to decide between Jud and Curly. She drifts into a dream state and imagines herself happily dancing with and marrying Curly. However, the dream becomes a nightmare when she ends up alone with Jud. Curly finally returns, but the nightmare turns violent as Curly and Jud begin to fight. At the end of Laurey’s dream, Jud kills Curly and carries her away with him. Laurey finally emerges from her slumber as Jud shakes her awake to go to the Box Social. She goes with him dutifully, fearful that her

dream will come true.

Party guests dance and sing at the Box Social, with the farmers and cowhands joking amongst themselves. Ali Hakim convinces Will to sell him all the presents he bought for Ado Annie so that Will can have his \$50 back and Hakim won’t have to marry Annie. The last thing Will sells, however, is to Jud: The Little Wonder. During the Box Social auction, Jud and Curly get into a bidding war over Laurey. Curly sells his saddle, his horse, and his gun in order to outbid Jud, who puts up his life savings of \$42.31. Jud then tries to get Curly to look through The Little Wonder, but Ali Hakim warns Aunt Eller just in time, and she pulls Curly away to the dance floor.

Jud corners Laurey into being alone with him. He gets angry with her for avoiding him and thinking she is better than him. Laurey scolds Jud for threatening her, she fires him, and he leaves the party. Curly finds Laurey, and she tells him about her frightening encounter with Jud. Curly calms Laurey down and asks her to marry him; she accepts gleefully. Elsewhere at the social, Will Parker whisks Ado Annie away to discuss their engagement. He wants her to stop playing around with other men now that they are to be married. The pair says goodbye to the peddler Ali Hakim for good and prepare to be married.

The whole community comes together to celebrate Curly and Laurey’s wedding. While Laurey and Curly prepare to go away for their wedding night, the men of the town plan a **shivoree** for them. Before they can carry out their plan, though, Jud appears and tries to intercept Laurey. Curly pulls him away, they fight, and Jud dies in the struggle. The whole group is shocked at Jud’s sudden death, but nevertheless they hold an impromptu trial for Curly. He pleads self-defense and is found not guilty. With Jud and the trial behind them, Laurey and Curly say goodbye to Aunt Eller and jump into the surrey as the town sees them off.

MEET THE WRITERS

RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S
OKLAHOMA!



Richard Rodgers

RICHARD RODGERS was born on June 28, 1902 in New York, New York. His father was a physician, and while Richard's older brother Mortimer followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a doctor, Richard took after his mother who was an amateur pianist. Both of his parents were avid theatergoers and would bring home sheet music from the popular shows to play on the piano in their living room. With this early exposure to music, Richard learned to play piano by ear. By 1917 at the age of fifteen, Richard had completed his first musical comedy score entitled *One Minute, Please*. He completed his second, called *Up Stage and Down*, two years later. Richard Rodgers' professional career began when he was introduced to Lorenz Hart, a classmate of Mortimer's at Columbia; they were just 16 and 23 years old, respectively. Larry Hart directed a production of Rodgers' *Up Stage and Down*, launching a partnership that would last many years. Together, Rodgers and Hart wrote many musicals for Broadway and film, including *A Connecticut Yankee* (1927, revised 1943), *On Your Toes* (1936, 1939 film), *Babes in Arms* (1937, 1939 film), *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938, 1940 film), *Pal Joey* (1940, 1957 film), and *By Jupiter* (1942). After over twenty years of collaboration, the partnership dissolved as work began on *Oklahoma!*, and Richard teamed up with established lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II. With Hammerstein, Rodgers became one half of the duo that would change forever the landscape of musical theatre. Rodgers and Hammerstein created such Broadway and film classics as *Carousel* (1945, 1956 film), *State Fair* (1945 film, 1996), *South Pacific* (1949, 1958 film), *The King and I* (1951, 1956 film), *Flower Drum Song* (1958, 1961 film), *The Sound of Music* (1959, 1965 film), and, of course, *Oklahoma!* (1943, 1995 film). Richard Rodgers passed away on December 30, 1979 at the age of 77.



Oscar Hammerstein II

OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II was born into a prominent show business family on July 12, 1895 in New York, New York. His grandfather, Oscar Hammerstein I, was a New York theater mogul who built twelve theaters and ran several opera companies throughout his career, all while engaging in well-publicized show business feuds. His father, Willie, was the hugely successful theatre manager of his grandfather's Victoria Theatre, at one point the foremost vaudeville house in the city. Despite Willie's wish that Oscar II stay away from the theater business, he persuaded his uncle Arthur to give him his first job in the industry as an Assistant Stage Manager. Oscar had written the books and lyrics for a number of productions while a student at Columbia, and the actors' strike of 1919 allowed him more time away from the theater to write. Sure enough, his first professional show, *Always You*, opened on Broadway on January 5, 1920. Oscar collaborated with many different writers and composers in the first decades of his career including Otto Harbach, Vincent Youmans, Rudolf Friml, Herbert Stothart, and Jerome Kern. Of these, his professional partnership with Kern endured the longest; after their success with *Show Boat* in 1927, however, Hammerstein and Kern had at least seven flops between 1928 and 1938. Oscar never appreciated the popular notion of the time that musical comedy librettos did not matter and were simply what tied the songs and dances together, and throughout his career he worked to write well crafted musical plays that ultimately revolutionized the genre altogether. This work began particularly with *Show Boat* and continued throughout his partnership with Richard Rodgers, which began with *Oklahoma!* in 1942. After a long and fruitful partnership with Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II died on August 23, 1960 at his home Highland Farm in Doylestown, Pennsylvania at the age of 65. The last song he wrote was "Edelweiss" for *The Sound of Music*.



Director Jenn Thompson

Sometimes musicals come along just when we need them. When *Oklahoma!* burst onto the American stage in March of 1943, a jittery nation faced the uncertainties of WWII. This ground-breaking musical, with its homespun charm and unbridled optimism, deeply touched its anxious audience by offering a unifying glimpse of our shared values and our strong sense of community. That reassuring American spirit—combined with a truly glorious score and the innovative notion of integrating song, dance and story—rocketed *Oklahoma!* to phenomenon status. It ran a previously unprecedented 2,000 performances and marked the beginning of the extraordinary collaboration of Rodgers and Hammerstein. And, like the pioneers it chronicled, it blazed a trail for all new musicals to come.

Rodgers and Hammerstein drew heavily from their source material, the lyrical play *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Oklahoma native son Lynn Riggs, placing story at the fore and tapping into Riggs' authentic, muscular view of the American West at the turn of the century. Riggs endeavored not only to excavate the quirks and customs of his play's inhabitants, but also to touch on the darker more complex aspects of life on the range. Rodgers and Hammerstein followed suit; leaning into the play's natural exuberance, they pushed through barriers of conventional storytelling by using song and dance to propel both the plot and the characters' emotional narrative. In doing so, they captured the heat and violence of the plains and its people. This heady brew of light and dark, set to sweeping, romantic blaze, seized the public's enduring affection, guaranteeing an exalted place not only in the American theatre but as a cultural touchstone as well.

It's been fascinating to reinvest in what many people believe to be the 'quintessential American musical' at a time when the country is struggling to even define what it means to be American. Like all great art, *Oklahoma!* continues to offer fresh insights and pose new questions about our collective past that inform who and where we are today. Not content to stay happily trapped in the amber of its moment, this potent and enterprising show reaches across genera-

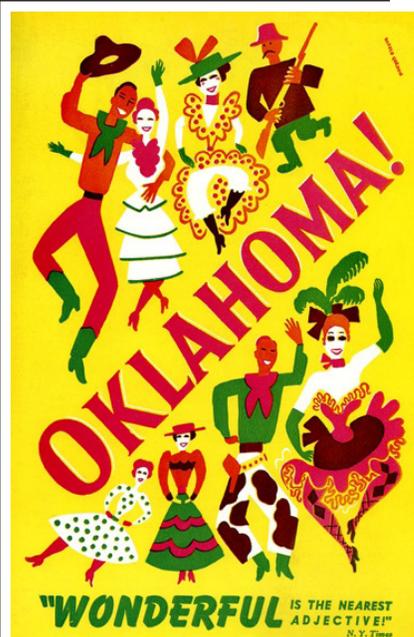
tions, demanding and daring us to look beneath its sunny exterior into the contradictions of our country's history: its promise and pitfalls, its aspirations, divisions, loyalties, and dreams. In an effort to add context and perhaps spark discussion, a piece of neglected history will be on bold display in the image that appears on our show drop—a view of the bountiful Indian Territory, featuring a portrait of a Native American in a ceremonial headdress. The imagery used is taken directly from a poster of the time, advertising the easy procurement of these sacred lands. As neither Native Americans nor their struggle to establish their own state are mentioned or a part of *Oklahoma!* in any way, we've sought to visually represent their presence and sacrifice.

“This ground-breaking musical, with its homespun charm and unbridled optimism, deeply touched its audience.”

Inspired by the show's innovative spirit, and armed with gorgeous, bold dance arrangements by Broadway's David Chase, dynamic, fresh choreography by up-and-comer Katie Spelman, and a youthful, combustible cast, our creative team aims to take full advantage of the intimacy of the Goodspeed stage as we explore, in close-up, the lives and loves of these beloved, iconic characters, offering what we hope will be a most personal, visceral, and illuminating view.

I cannot think of a better place to rediscover and enjoy this thrillingly entertaining and important show than right here at The Goodspeed. Nearly 75 years after its premiere, divided and facing a new set of uncertainties, our view may have shifted, but our need to understand one another and come together is greater than ever. What better place to reach out and find each other than in the dark of the theatre, where even old familiar friends spark new understanding and renew our quest for community and healing? Sometimes revivals come along just when we need them.

HOW THE PIONEERS REVOLUTIONIZED THE AMERICAN THEATRE



A poster from the original 1943 Broadway production of Oklahoma!

When producers Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner of **The Theatre Guild** decided to commission a musical adaptation of Lynn Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs*—a play they had produced ten years prior in 1931—they could think of no better writing team than Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, who had written *The Garrick Gaieties* for the Guild when they first began writing together. The pair had just completed successful Broadway runs of *Pal Joey* and *By Jupiter*, and Rodgers & Hart had distinguished themselves as one of Broadway's most successful teams over their enduring partnership. They had worked together since they were just 16 and 23 years old, respectively, and had numerous artistic and commercial successes. Accordingly, The Theatre Guild invited them to see Westport Country Playhouse's 1940 revival of the play.

Rodgers took to the piece immediately, expressing that he could "see" the musical adaptation as he read Riggs' script. Hart, on the other hand, was entirely unenthusiastic. He agreed to take a meeting with the Guild anyway, but he arrived disheveled,



Alfred Drake as Curly and Betty Garde as Aunt Eller in the original 1943 Broadway production of Oklahoma!

fatigued, and unprepared to work. For years Larry Hart had managed to work in spite of his alcoholism with tremendous support from his partner, but Dick Rodgers could see that Larry's condition was worsening. Despite his best efforts, he had never been able to keep his partner sober, even when they were producing hit after hit. Unfortunately, Larry's health was only part of the problem; he was also adamant that any musical adaptation of *Green Grow the Lilacs* would flop. After they completed work on

By Jupiter, Larry had planned to take an extended holiday in Mexico, and when Dick expressed his desire to begin work on *Green Grow the Lilacs* immediately, Larry refused. Before he left for Mexico, Dick gave Larry an ultimatum: if he admitted himself to a **sanitarium**, Dick would go with him, and they could work there together. Larry

went to Mexico, and Dick Rodgers called a meeting with an old acquaintance and confidant, Oscar Hammerstein II.

Dick Rodgers first met Oscar Hammerstein II when he was 15 years old and Oscar was a fraternity brother of Morty Rodgers, Dick's older brother. Morty brought Dick along to a **Varsity Show** on Columbia's campus for which Oscar had written the lyrics and played one of the roles. Perhaps foreshadowing the trajectory of his career, Lorenz Hart was also a player in the Varsity Show, and while Dick was specifically in awe of Oscar's talents and vividly remembers meeting him that night, he and Larry did not meet, though they established their partnership the following year. Since meeting Oscar as an adolescent, "Hammerstein" had always been in the back of Dick Rodgers' mind, and he had already approached Oscar about the possibility of partnering before his split with Lorenz Hart. (In fact, he had collaborated with Oscar previously, though briefly, as Hammerstein contributed lyrics to Dick's second musical comedy that he wrote when he was 17, *Up Stage and Down*). In the summer of 1941, Dick visited Oscar at **his home in Doylestown, Pennsylvania**, and confided in him that he felt his partnership with Larry Hart was coming to a necessary end. Oscar listened, and when Dick had finished explaining the situation, Oscar replied:

"I think you ought to keep working with Larry just so long as he is able to keep working with you. It would kill him if you walked away while he was still able to function. But if the time ever comes when he cannot function, call me. I'll be there... I'll even go a step further... If you and Larry are in the middle of a job and he can't finish it, I'll finish it for him, and nobody but the two of us ever need know" (Rodgers 209).

When Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II met again in New York and Rodgers pitched the idea for a musical adaptation of *Green Grow the Lilacs*, Oscar agreed to write the book immediately.

Tellingly, Hammerstein also had his eye on the Lynn Riggs property that would eventually become *Oklahoma!* Around the same time The Theatre Guild approached

HOW THE PIONEERS REVOLUTIONIZED... (CONTINUED)

THINGS TO KNOW

THE THEATRE GUILD: at this point in its history, The Theatre Guild was approaching bankruptcy. In fact, Helburn and Langner were transparent about the fact that this new adaptation of *Green Grow the Lilacs* was their last chance at saving the company. Fortunately for the producers, *Oklahoma!* proved to be a hit, and they recouped their investment many times over.

SANITARIUM: an establishment for the treatment of individuals with chronic illnesses.

THE VARSITY SHOW: an annual production mounted by Columbia University students for which the students write, compose, direct, design, produce, and act in an original musical. Even during Oscar and Morty's time there, the production was a huge campus tradition and was even reviewed professionally by New York newspapers.

HIS HOME IN DOYLESTOWN, PA: when Oscar and his second wife Dorothy moved to Doylestown, they bought a property that they named "Highland Farm." Over the years, Highland became home not only to the Hammersteins and their children—and their children from previous marriages—but also to children who were victims of war, abuse, and divorce. One such child was Stephen Sondheim, who, among others, retained a profound, long-lasting relationship with the Hammersteins and their children.

MUSICAL COMEDY CONVENTIONS OF THE DAY: in the first half of the 20th century, musical comedy was still a relatively new and unrefined art form, but its audiences were accustomed to a certain type of bill: a big choral opening with dozens of singers, a chorus of dancing girls in high heels and short skirts, comedic sketches with little or no connection between them, and the occasional vaudeville act.

Rodgers & Hart, Oscar recalled seeing their 1931 production of *Green Grow the Lilacs* and reread the script. Like Dick, he instantly saw its potential and showed it to his partner at the time, Jerome Kern. Kern, like Larry Hart, could not imagine the play as a musical and reminded Oscar that it had been a flop—it only ran for 64 performances. Kern & Hammerstein had always enjoyed a loose association; they wrote together, they wrote with other collaborators, and neither felt snubbed by the other's extraneous partnerships. So, when Jerry Kern recognized that Dick Rodgers' enthusiasm for the project matched Oscar's, he stepped aside.

Finally, the newly-formed team of Rodgers & Hammerstein began work on their first collaboration, initially titled *Away We Go!* Before they wrote a single word or note, however, the two men met often to discuss every aspect of the drama and to determine where in the story songs were needed. Then, they discussed at length each individual song: its emotional content, rhythm, mood, and intention. Initially, Oscar's approach to lyric writing was almost shocking to Dick. In his 23 years collaborating with Larry Hart, he had always completed the music first, and Larry would fit the lyrics accordingly, often quickly and with much coercion from his partner. He and Larry had always worked simultaneously, in the same room. Now he discovered that Oscar preferred to work in the opposite way; in this partnership, Hammerstein almost always provided Rodgers with a completed lyric—by phone or by mail—for which he would write the melody. They agreed that working in this fashion allowed them to write songs that were better integrated into the book and the mood of the show, a novelty of the musical theatre in the 1940s. The two men were so passionate about the material that honoring Riggs' original script took priority over crafting a commercially successful hit, a quality that would become one of the trademarks of their partnership. Thus, they proceeded confidently once they decided to open the musical in the same

fashion as the play—with Aunt Eller quietly churning butter on her front porch, interrupted by the clarion voice of a cowboy singing offstage—even though it defied all **musical comedy conventions of the day**. No dancing girls? No choral opening? No slap-stick comedy? Their goal was honesty, and they cast aside any doubts they may have had about the decision in favor of telling a truly compelling story.

The project that became *Oklahoma!* proved to be the perfect commingling of talent, material, and time. That both Dick Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein saw something in *Green Grow the Lilacs* that neither of their partners did demonstrates that these two extraordinary talents were somehow destined to revolutionize the American theatre together. Neither one had much to lose on the project; Oscar had gone ten years without a hit on Broadway, and Dick had enjoyed an enormously successful career with the same partner over the previous 20 years. It was time for both to forge their paths into a new era. And even though Dick Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein first met when they were young men, their partnership was so successful because they each had full careers prior to working together. Richard Rodgers often carried his partnership with Lorenz Hart, and while it is undeniable that Hart was hugely talented, it is also true that Rodgers was the driving force behind completing projects. As for Oscar Hammerstein II, he had worked with numerous composers throughout his career, making him a mature, seasoned, and disciplined partner. He also had begun the work of writing musical plays with integrated books and scores during his partnership with Jerome Kern, which produced the timeless classic *Show Boat*, among others. His work with Rodgers elaborated on what he and Kern had accomplished back in 1927. Rodgers & Hammerstein continued to perfect their craft show after show—*Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *The Sound of Music*—and *Oklahoma!* was the unlikely blockbuster that started it all.

FROM THE TRAIL OF TEARS TO STATEHOOD

INDIAN LAND FOR SALE

GET A HOME
OF
YOUR OWN
*
EASY PAYMENTS



PERFECT TITLE
*
POSSESSION
WITHIN
THIRTY DAYS

FINE LANDS IN THE WEST

IRRIGATED GRAZING AGRICULTURAL
IRRIGABLE DRY FARMING

IN 1910 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR SOLD UNDER SEALED BIDS ALLOTTED INDIAN LAND AS FOLLOWS:

| Location. | Acres. | Average Price per Acre. | Location. | Acres. | Average Price per Acre. |
|--------------|-----------|-------------------------|--------------|------------|-------------------------|
| Colorado | 5,211.21 | \$7.27 | Oklahoma | 34,664.00 | \$19.14 |
| Idaho | 17,013.00 | 24.85 | Oregon | 1,020.00 | 15.43 |
| Kansas | 1,684.50 | 33.45 | South Dakota | 120,445.00 | 16.53 |
| Montana | 11,034.00 | 9.86 | Washington | 4,879.00 | 41.37 |
| Nebraska | 5,641.00 | 36.65 | Wisconsin | 1,069.00 | 17.00 |
| North Dakota | 22,610.70 | 9.93 | Wyoming | 865.00 | 20.64 |

FOR THE YEAR 1911 IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 350,000 ACRES WILL BE OFFERED FOR SALE

For information as to the character of the land write for booklet, "INDIAN LANDS FOR SALE," to the Superintendent U. S. Indian School at any one of the following places:

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| CALIFORNIA: Hopa, Ignacio. | MINNESOTA: Origin. | NORTH DAKOTA: Fort Totten, Fort Yates. | OKLAHOMA - Con. Sac and Fox Agency, Shawnee. | SOUTH DAKOTA: Cheyenne Agency, Crow Creek, Greenwood, Lower Brule, Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Sisseton. | WASHINGTON: Fort Snoco, Fort Spokane, Toka, Tatalip. |
| IDAHO: Lapwai. | MONTANA: Crow Agency. | OKLAHOMA: Anadarko, Catoomem, Colony, Darrington, Muskogee, Pawnee. | OREGON: Klamath Agency, Pendleton, Roseburg, Siletz. | WISCONSIN: Onota. | |
| KANSAS: Mary, Horton, Hadesa. | NEBRASKA: Mary, Santee, Winnebago. | | | | |

WALTER L. FISHER,
Secretary of the Interior.

ROBERT G. VALENTINE,
Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

A 1911 poster advertising the sale of Indian land.

Oklahoma! takes place in the summer of 1906 in what was once called "Indian Territory." While the musical itself is a healthy dose of Americana, Aunt Eller reminds her fellow territory dwellers in no uncertain terms that they are territory folk, not American citizens, and that their land is not under the jurisdiction of the federal government. While technically true, United States marshals had by this time established authority over US citizens in Indian Territory, and Cherokee law—the law of the Native American tribe whose land they inhabited—had been abolished by the federal government.

Just one year later in 1907, that territory became Oklahoma, the forty-sixth state in the Union. How, then, did this territory once reserved for the Cherokees become populated with pioneers from the east?

When the federal government removed the Cherokee tribe from **southern Appalachia** and, along the Trail of Tears, relocated them to the area that is now Oklahoma,

they did so under the agreement that the new land would belong to the tribe, not to the United States. The Cherokee occupied their land according to the first article of their constitution—written in 1827 in New Echota, Georgia and adopted in 1839 at **Tahlequah**—which stipulated that each member was equally entitled to the land; it was "common property." Practically, this meant that each person's "private"—and untaxed—property was limited to what he or she actually used as well as any improvements made to the land, including clearings, buildings, and farm systems. This land occupation system lent itself well to **subsistence farming** and establishing civilization in an otherwise open frontier, which retained its status as common property until a citizen had a legitimate use for it. Unfortunately, this system reminded many Americans all too much of **Communism**, and it was consistently attacked and misconstrued as such to the general public. The Cherokee endured years of outsiders denouncing them and their system of governance while what their leaders ultimately strived for was equality among their citizen body. By restricting property claims to what one could realistically use at a given time, Cherokee leaders endeavored to eliminate the problems of **wealth disparity**, **land speculation**, and **monopoly**.

The faults in this system emerged when farmers began growing beyond subsistence farming and towards **commercial farming**; there was a shortage of labor. By law an individual could only claim as much land as he or she could properly use, but if that person were to employ laborers, much more land could be cultivated for farming. However, if every citizen is entitled to land equally, there is naturally a scarcity of those willing to work for others. Though there were already constitutional provisions and laws against both selling and leasing land to noncitizens, many Cherokee farmers—particularly in the 1870s—had reason to dodge such restrictions as the postbellum South and other parts of the country struggled economically and many poor citizens began looking for work and a place to sleep. As railroads were built through



An 1884 map of Oklahoma

FROM THE TRAIL OF TEARS... (CONTINUED)

THINGS TO KNOW

SOUTHERN APPALACHIA:

the southern-most area of the Appalachian region that extends across the northern parts of present-day Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia.

TAHLEQUAH: a city established in 1839 as the capital of the Cherokee Nation; currently, it is part of Cherokee County, Oklahoma.

SUBSISTENCE FARMING: self-sufficiency farming in which the farmers focus on growing enough food to feed themselves and their families throughout the year.

COMMUNISM: a political theory derived from the works of Karl Marx that advocates for a society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs.

WEALTH DISPARITY: inequality in the distribution of wealth among a citizen body.

LAND SPECULATION: the act of purchasing large quantities of land for the purpose of withholding it from the market in order to drive the selling price higher.

MONOPOLY: the exclusive possession or control of the supply or trade in a commodity or service.

COMMERCIAL FARMING: farming for a profit where food is produced for sale in the market.

Cherokee land, these American laborers had an opportunity to enter the territory legally and find work to keep them there. The issue of whether or not to permit the employment of noncitizens as laborers drove a political wedge between the Cherokees. Conservatives advocated for the maintenance of the status quo while progressives lobbied for the right to lease their land and hire outside labor.

As the debates between political factions continued, thousands of noncitizen laborers entered Indian Territory and worked the farms. The practice was still unlawful, but it became increasingly clear that enforcing the laws prohibiting noncitizen hiring was nearly impossible. The conservative base tried a number of regulations to maintain their principle of common property: labor permit fees, threats of fines and floggings, and even jail time. Permit fees went largely uncollected, and very few farmers actually faced punishment as a result of their hiring practices. This meant that noncitizen laborers continued to find work in the Cherokee's territory but had very few, if any, rights in negotiating with their citizen patrons. For many years, the United States federal government, and particularly the Office of Indian Affairs, refused to intervene due to the fact that these contracts were unlawful in the first place. In 1889, however, the United States Congress extended the reach of the federal court system to have authority over US citizens in Indian Territory.

This issue was not unique to farmers in Indian Territory, however. Cattle ranchers similarly had been eyeing the land, as it was the untouchable bridge along the cattle drive between Texas—the feeding ground—and Kansas—the breeding ground—and the markets to the north. For them accessing the land was strategic since it had many of the best qualities of southern and northern lands in the same region, but the Department of the Interior refused to grant the ranchers leases that would violate their agreement with tribal governments. Like

the farmhands, ranchers established relationships with individual proprietors and secured unlawful leases to certain lands that allowed them to drive cattle through the territory. The issue of whether or not to grant grazing rights to the cattle industry became as political as hiring noncitizen labor for farmers. In much the same way, enforcing anti-leasing policies—and even more lenient grazing taxes—was extremely difficult and ultimately unsuccessful. Over time, more and more cattle ranchers entered the territory through individual agreements with land-controlling citizens.

While the federal government resisted intervention in Cherokee policy for a few more years, honoring their agreement with the Cherokees that they maintained self-governance, individual citizens implored them on several occasions to intervene in what they deemed unfair taxation on labor and property ownership restrictions. In his 1897 State of the Union address, President William McKinley confirmed his position of intervention in Cherokee lands, and, invoking the power of eminent domain, Congress passed a succession of laws that gradually chipped away at Cherokee self-governance. The Curtis Act of March 1898 essentially dismantled the system established by the Cherokee; it abolished tribal governments, allowed for the incorporation of towns on the land, and established that residents could vote for local government officials (since the area remained a US Territory, residents could not vote in national elections). By 1907, the Constitution of the State of Oklahoma was adopted, and Oklahoma ratified the United States Constitution on November 16th of that year.

AGNES DE MILLE, AMERICA'S CHOREOGRAPHER



Agnes de Mille as the Cowgirl in her ballet *Rodeo*.

Before the premiere of Agnes de Mille's Dream Ballet in *Oklahoma!*, the word "choreographer" was reserved for the dance elite; it was not a household word, and the choreographers of the great ballets of the time were far from household names. In the more accessible musical theatre, dances amounted to little more than spectacle—pretty women kicking their long legs as high as they could and landing in a pose just in time for the comic to take the stage. Agnes

de Mille was the determined, passionate, tiny woman who not only brought the art of dance and choreography to the common person but also redefined the art form's status in the musical theatre.

She was born on September 18, 1905 to William and Anna de Mille. William was a commercially successful playwright, and Anna was the daughter of well-known economist Henry George. In childhood, Agnes and her sister Margaret enjoyed a life of a privilege. The de Mille family spent their summers at Merriewold—an area at the foot of the Catskills developed by followers and family of Henry George—engaging with other intellectuals in the serenity of the forest. It was at Merriewold that Agnes first danced in community with this extended family, and it would remain her spiritual home throughout her life. Though Agnes had danced informally since the age of 3, her father refused to allow her to take formal lessons. He believed that dancing was immoral, particularly for women, and he scoffed at the idea of dance as a serious endeavor. As such, Agnes's tenacity, which would later become infamous, was tested from the time she was a child. While her father forbade her to study dance, her mother was a close friend of **Ruth St. Denis**, and Agnes had been allowed to observe classes and study in the **Denishawn** school's library. Agnes learned by observation and practiced in private at home. When her father moved the family to Los Angeles after his brother Cecil made history with the first feature-length film made in Hollywood, Agnes was finally enrolled in formal lessons; any additional

practice or training beyond two lessons per week, however, was strictly forbidden.

When Agnes prepared to attend college in 1922, dance was not taught in universities, so in an attempt to please her immutable father Agnes studied English at UCLA (then called University of California, Southern Branch). During her college years, de Mille was heavily influenced by the work of Ruth St. Denis—likely because of the years she spent observing with Anna at Denishawn—though she had ceased formal training and only rehearsed on her own. Her lack of formal technique and training did not deter Agnes de Mille from performing, however, and she presented pantomimes and dances for her fellow students regularly. It was also during college that she began studying indigenous folk dances on the recommendation of a favorite English professor, Lily Bess Campbell, which would become not only de Mille's choreographic trademark but also the factor that would later elevate works like *Oklahoma!* to icons of American dance. Through these presentations, she and her audiences recognized her innate ability to move the public, and she determined that her performances would be better suited for the theater than for classical ballet. Agnes graduated from college cum laude, and on the day of her graduation she learned of her parents' divorce.

With Anna and Margaret, Agnes moved to New York where she resumed formal dance training and continued to create her own solo works. What Agnes de Mille devised in these early years was incredibly unique; she created **character studies through movement** derived from classical ballet, rudimentary tap steps, and the folk dances she had studied in college. While folk dancing was not part of the "serious" dance vernacular at the time, Agnes appreciated the rich history and artistic possibilities it afforded her as a choreographer. In many ways, Agnes and her beloved folk dances had much in common: both were uncharacteristic of concert dance at the time, deemed too "common" and "ordinary" for the stage, but Agnes de Mille was certain of both her worth as a dancer and the ability of folk dance to communicate



CLICK HERE to watch an interview with Agnes de Mille about *Oklahoma!*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iW35nQUZdk4>



CLICK HERE to watch the original ballet from *Oklahoma!*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MP7oatLydC0>

AGNES DE MILLE (CONTINUED)

THINGS TO KNOW

RUTH ST. DENIS: an American modern dance pioneer who introduced Eastern ideas and styles of movement into the art form; Denis was the co-founder of the Denishawn School of Dancing and Related Arts.

DENISHAWN SCHOOL OF DANCING AND RELATED ARTS: an arts school, primarily focusing on modern dance, founded in 1915 by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn in Los Angeles, California. The school trained pupils that would later become dance icons, such as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Lillian Powell, Charles Weidman, and Jack Cole.

CHARACTER STUDIES THROUGH MOVEMENT: Agnes de Mille's first pieces she ever performed were more akin to pantomime than they were to classical dance. In these studies, she created characters such as a pioneer girl with the Gold Rush in '49, a frightened ballerina terrified to go on stage and perform in *Stage Fright*, and an Elizabethan woman waiting for her love to return from war in *Jenny Loved a Soldier*.

MARIE RAMBERT: a dancer and pedagogue who greatly influenced the development of British ballet in the 20th century, she formed the first British ballet company, Ballet Club, that subsequently underwent many name changes. Today, it survives as a modern dance company called Rambert Dance Company.

ISADORA DUNCAN: an American pioneer in modern dance, Isadora Duncan broke from traditional ballet and developed her own philosophy of free and natural movements inspired by the classical Greek arts, folk dances, social dances, and nature.

what concert dance could not. De Mille performed study after study as characters ranging from a down-home pioneer girl to an erotic belly dancer. Then, finally, she landed her first job choreographing a musical melodrama, *The Black Crook*.

On this project, de Mille began her partnership with Warren Leonard who helped her learn to construct a complete narrative through dance. While *The Black Crook* was a success, a long string of failures followed it. De Mille and Leonard were hired to create dances for a Broadway revue called *Flying Colors*; they were replaced by Albertina Rasch after the first tryout in Philadelphia. Agnes embarked on a European tour with her work, and she lost money the whole way. She accepted an invitation to study with **Marie Rambert** in London, only to discover that while she was training relentlessly in classical ballet across the pond, **Isadora Duncan's** modern dance had swept the nation at home. Her friend Romney Brent got her a job as choreographer for Cole Porter's new show *Nymph Errant*, and she was replaced at the first opportunity, the producer citing her disorganization in rehearsals. Her Uncle Cecil finally offered her a job (he had previously refused on the grounds that he did not believe in nepotism) creating a dance for his film version of *Antony and Cleopatra*, but when she choreographed a number bigger, longer, and much more involved than he had asked her to—another trend in de Mille's career—she was relieved of her responsibilities. This pattern continued time and time again, proving that while Agnes de Mille was undoubtedly unparalleled in her creativity, tenacity, and vision, these qualities were all double-edged swords, working to her detriment while she tried to establish herself as a serious dancer and choreographer.

She was released from a few more projects—a film of *Romeo and Juliet*, a Broadway production of *Hamlet*, a musical called *Hooray for What!*—until her quintessential ballet, *The Rodeo*, was performed by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo with a score by Aaron Copland. *The Rodeo* was derived from a square dance and included movements evoking horses, cowboys, and the pioneer lifestyle. It

required her dancers to retrain their bodies that had grown so accustomed to the prescriptive movements of ballet, a feat that only a portion of them were willing to endure (8 of 18 dancers quit) and that many found offensive to their art form. The tenacious de Mille persevered, however, and *The Rodeo* proved to be a critical success. Thus, when Agnes approached Lawrence Langner and suggested she choreograph the new Rodgers & Hart (later Rodgers & Hammerstein) musical, *Away We Go*, Langner sent his partner Terry Helburn to see the ballet. She was hired a few days later.

Agnes approached *Away We Go*, later *Oklahoma!*, with the same verve and zeal she did all of her projects, but this one seemed to cater specifically to her strengths. Like her collaborators Rodgers, Hammerstein, and director Mamoulian, she strived for a more complete artistic expression that relied equally on the music, dancing, and expression of the performers to convey a story. She had discussions with her dancers about their characters, their thoughts, their experiences, and she incorporated those revelations into the movement sequences. She worked side by side with orchestrator Robert Russell Bennett to create dance arrangements that lifted up her choreography in a way that had never happened before in the musical theatre. Most importantly, she treated the *Dream Ballet* with a level of care and attention to detail that had never been given to dance in this arena before. While the dream ballet concept was not new to Broadway, a dream ballet that advanced the plot of the show and revealed something profound about one of the characters was certainly a novelty.

Agnes de Mille revolutionized musical theatre choreography by creating movement that was as integral to the show as the lyrics or the score, that expressed elements of the characters that could not be expressed through any other medium. Agnes de Mille's *Oklahoma!* choreography set a new standard for dance in the musical theatre, and it is one that many would argue has still yet to be reached again.



Richard Rodgers, Agnes de Mille, and Oscar Hammerstein II in rehearsal.

- Agnes de Mille was the first woman to have three hit musicals running on Broadway simultaneously, equaling the accomplishments of Berlin, Gershwin, and Porter. (The shows were *Oklahoma!*, *One Touch of Venus*, and *Bloomer Girl*.) She was also the first woman to serve as both director and choreographer for a Broadway musical and the first woman president of a national labor union.
- Oscar Hammerstein II was rejected when he signed up for the draft because he was classified as underweight.
- Both of Oscar Hammerstein's children were delivered by Richard Rodgers' father, who was an obstetrician.
- In 1943, the year that *Oklahoma!* swept the nation, Oscar Hammerstein purchased an ad in *Variety* that listed five of his worst failures with the comment "I've done it before—and I can do it again!"
- The creative team of *Oklahoma!* considered cutting the song "Lonely Room" for fear it would make the audience too uneasy.
- Getting tickets to *Oklahoma!* was notoriously difficult when it premiered. In fact, when Hammerstein's farmer asked for tickets to give to his son and his bride on their wedding night and Oscar asked him when the ceremony was, he replied "The day you can get the tickets."
- When *Oklahoma!* played the Drury Lane Theatre in London, it had the longest run of any production in the theater's 287-year history.
- Richard Rodgers had his first song playing on Broadway at only 17 years old. He also became the youngest professional conductor in New York City in 1919 when he joined the musicians' union in order to conduct his own orchestra for *Fly with Me*.

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