

DRINK TANK

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Editorial by Alissa

When I was four-years-old, my mum took me to audition for my first musical, *The Sound of Music*. I knew the song I was supposed to sing, and we practiced in the restroom beforehand. When it came time to sing in front of people, I really did NOT want to sing “Do-Re-Mi”. I wanted to sing “Twinkle, Twinkle”, and they let me. Needless to say, I didn’t get the part of Gretl von Trapp. My first actual musical was several years later in sixth grade. I played the Cheshire Cat in *The Trial of Alice in Wonderland*. It was GREAT! I had grown up going to musicals with my mum, and I loved movies like *Mary Poppins!* By the time I got to high school, I wanted to do anything and everything to be a part of the theatre department. We put on *Oklahoma!*, *Bye, Bye, Birdie*, and others! I remember being at rehearsals late on weeknights and doing performances on weekends. These friends that performed with me are still people that I keep in touch with, because we just spent so much time together. I love going to see shows live and watching the new ones that come up in the cinema. This is my second year of having season tickets at Gammage, and while I’m here in Phoenix, I will probably continue this tradition. I joined a group of people who love to sing musical music, and these are the people I spend most of my time with outside of work. We all enjoy musicals, and when you find a group of people that can quote musicals like we can, hang onto them!

My favourite musical is *Hamilton* right now. I’ve been fortunate enough to see it twice! But, we’ll talk about that one another time. Before that, it was *Les Mis*. I saw *Les Mis* in Champaign, IL in the nosebleed seats, in the balcony seats on Broadway, and then in London’s West End. I’ve loved the music from *Les Mis* for YEARS! The story that the show tells from beginning to end is epic and beautiful and happy and sad all at the same time. The set and staging are phenomenal. I just am emotionally moved every single time I see this show. That is why we see them.



My Favorite Musicals by Chris Garcia



here are five musicals, as far as I'm concerned. There's one that's the peak of the traditional American Musical Comedy tradition. One's a historical piece. One's an out-there fantasy that drags us kicking and screaming through the American dream. One's a historical piece that is just so damn cool. The final one is just too perfectly strange. I don't really differentiate between movie musicals and stage musicals, so there's that, but the keys to any musical for me are the same – do the songs move me? Does the setting feel alive? Do I lay down my troubles to enjoy 'em?

Let's start with the standard, shall we?

Guys and Dolls is the kind of show that is more about the show than about the story. The opening number, at least in the film, is an incredible piece that is meant to evoke New York City in the late 1940s, and it does such a good job. I've never seen it on Broadway, and that's a shame I'm told because it was supposed to be the finest revival of the 1990s. I have no doubt with Nathan Lane playing Nathan Detroit. It's a great story about gamblers, gangsters, dancers, and reformists. In a way, it's the story of New York in the 1990s, fighting against its traditions to establish a new world. The way that it's about cleaning up the town, getting the gambling out of the town, that's very familiar.

The historical piece I've written about a lot. *1776* is probably the best show of the 1970s. The way that it's composed, and more importantly, how it takes aspects of history and gives it a form of dramatic tension, a serious undertaking because we all know the story and how it ends up, ramps everything up perfectly. The film? I've watched it hundreds of times. Not an exaggeration. HUNDREDS! I've also seen it at the Roundabout Theatre company in New York with my man, with Pat Hingle as Ben Franklin and Brent Spiner as John Adams. The song "Molasses to Rum to Slaves" is easily the most powerful song in a musical ever. It's incredible, and forces us to face our own dark history. A powerful show.

Stephen Sondheim is one of the most incredible writers in American theatre history. He's done at least five shows that are among the most important in history – *Company*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Passion*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Follies*. These are all amazing, and *Company* comes incredibly close to this list, but it's another, more divisive, musical from the master that I love more than anything. *Assassins* is the story of... well, that's hard to figure. It's about what it means to live in these days, it's about the worship of the

worst elements. It's about marking one's mark. It's about America. This is a musical for True Crime aficionados, not only because it features Lee Harvey Oswald, John Wilkes Booth, Squeaky Fromme, and various other assassins, but because it examines not only why they do it, but why we are so obsessed with them. It does just about everything that *Chicago* does on Media Criticism, but with a much deeper dig into the mind of America.

There were two musicals that came out in 2000 with the same title – *The Wild Party*. They were both based on the epic poem *The Wild Party* by Joseph Moncure March (and the subject of [Drink Tank issue 383](#)) and both had a ton of star power. The off-Broadway version featured both Idina Menzel and Taye Diggs, was wonderful, and very different, but the Broadway version is AMAZING!

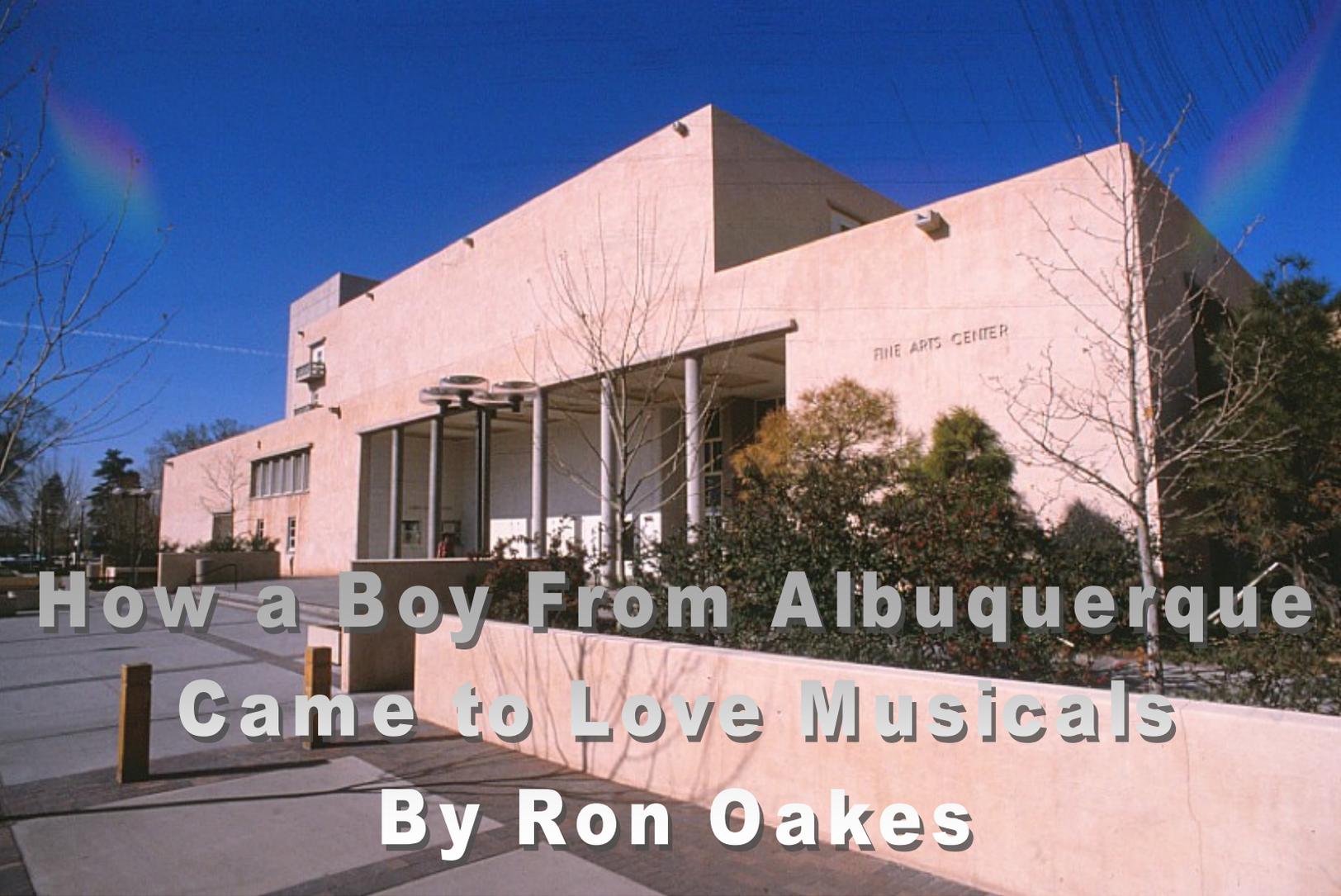
There's the cast – Toni Collette as Queenie, Mandy Patinkin as Burrs, and the final acting role of Miss Eartha Kitt. It's an amazing cast, and it's likely the best performance of Collette on stage. She was electric, and the role was perfect for her dynamic acting range. The music is so smart, with powerful lyrics, but impressive score that feels as if it's both of 1927 and 2000. That's not an easy thing to pull off, but they managed. I love this show, so damn much, and I would love nothing more than to direct a version of it!

And then there's Hedwig.

Hedwig & The Angry Inch is John Cameron Mitchell's masterpiece of rock 'n roll. It's about... well, it's about what the Cold War meant to the path of identity. Watching the film, you come to that by pieces. There's a lot about sexual identity, but also performing identity, as throughout you discover there's a question of what makes an artist's identity, and how sacred is it. The first of those tends to be the most focused on, but that latter is an interesting, and strange one. The role of drag in the show is interesting, but really, compared to something like *Sleeping Beauty or Coma* and *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom*, it's kinda mild, but what it's saying about the state of celebrity and fame is downright transgressive!

What do these have in common? There's the idea of American media, about how we see our heroes and villains. There's the idea of American history – three are distinctly about history, one is a snapshot of a time in the history of the US (albeit a bit sanitized), and the final one explores the history of rock 'n roll in a fascinating way. While there are others that I love and re-watch and listen to (like *Company*, *The Scarlett Pimpernell*, *Ragtime*, *City of Angels*, *Rent*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and on and on) but it's these five that have really hit me like a ton of bricks.

A ton of musically comedic bricks.



How a Boy From Albuquerque Came to Love Musicals By Ron Oakes



really like the American Musical Theater. OK, I should probably say I really like English language musical theater in the traditions that grew up on Broadway and London's West End since I have a soft spot for many shows that started on the West End. In fact, Musicals are probably my favorite form of performing art. Oh, I've spent many more hours in my life watching TV, and by now I've probably spent more time in a movie theater than watching a live musical. And I love most forms of recorded and live music, but the theatrical stage, especially when it's a musical, is magical.

Now, this might not be too odd for someone who grew up with access to Broadway or the West End, but I've never seen a play in either place...I'd love to one day, but I've not had the chance. It is my upbringing that is, to at least a large extent, responsible for my love of musicals.

By all rights, where I grew up probably should not have had the kind of opportunity for a child of my era to see the shows I saw. Albuquerque was, and really still is, a small city in a small state. Even now, the whole metropolitan area population is just under a million, and in the 1970s it was probably half that.

But, in the 1960s University of New Mexico President Thomas Popejoy had a vision that the City of Albuquerque should have a performing arts space. When the plans to co-

develop one with the city fell through (because the city decided to build the sports oriented Civic Auditorium instead) he found a way to build one on campus. Integrated into the university's Fine Arts building, the concert hall, later named Popejoy Hall in his honor, was a state-of-the-art theater and concert hall when it opened in 1966. It was available both to the school and to the community. Two of the early organizations that took advantage of Popejoy Hall were The Albuquerque Children's Theater (ACT) and The Albuquerque Civic Light Opera Association (ACLOA).

I'm only a few months older than Popejoy Hall. But, my family started attending shows by both ACT and ACLOA early on. So, many of my earliest memories are of attending musicals, and ACT original plays, at Popejoy Hall. In fact, I only went to the theater to see one movie before 1974, and that was *Fantasia*. However, during that time I averaged three or more live plays a year. {In 1974 I saw *Seven Alone*, and a few years later I saw some little film called *Star Wars*, starting on the trend of seeing movies in the theater, but that is another story}

The Albuquerque Civic Light Opera Association, at its peak in the 70s and 80s produced a season of 5 or 6 musicals each year, as a strictly amateur company. For financial and rights reasons, they usually or always selected shows that had ended their initial Broadway or off-Broadway run. But, their choice of show wasn't stodgy or unambitious. Two of the plays I saw from ACLOA were *Pippin* and *A Little Night Music*. Other musicals I recall seeing through ACLOA include *My Fair Lady*, *Damn Yankees*, *Paint Your Wagon* (which featured one of our local disk jockeys in a small role), and *Grease* in 1992 after I'd moved to Chicago (my Brother-in-law served as the music director for it).

By the 1980s The Albuquerque Civic Light Opera Association was, as I recall, the largest 100% non-professional theater company in the U.S. dedicated to the production of musicals. This was, in large part, due to the quality of the shows they were able to put on. The non-professional actors and musicians available in that era in Albuquerque were both talented enough and deep enough for them to carry out their ambitious production schedule, and deliver quality shows. And, the facility that the University of New Mexico had built at Popejoy Hall provided the kind of staging and theatrical facilities that they needed to succeed and shine.

Around 1975, I started seeing plays – more often plays than musicals – at Cibola High School. CAST – Cibola Actors, Slaves, and Technicians – under the leadership of drama teacher Joan Kent put on 3 or 4 plays each year, and a musical every other year over the 13 years I had family at Cibola (and the 3 years between my graduating and my younger sister starting) and beyond. While I had family at the school, it wasn't uncommon for me to see one or more of the plays each year.

I also was on the tech crew for one of the non-musical productions, *The Miracle Worker*, during my 10th grade year. I might have become more involved, but between Boy Scouts and academic pursuits, I didn't have the time.

Once my brother started at UNM, he learned about the Cultural Series, a.k.a The Popejoy series, and that students could get discounted series tickets and individual show tickets. So, starting his second year, 1980, he had a subscription. While many of these were events were concerts and tours by groups such as Mummenschanz, any touring play or musical that hit Albuquerque would end up as part of this series since they would be using Popejoy Hall, and it was the Cultural Series that coordinated bringing them in. So, around 1981 I started to see a few of the more current shows on professional (Actor's Equity) tours.

When I started at The University of New Mexico myself in 1984, I got my own subscription to the Cultural Series which I maintained for four years. It was through the Cultural Series that I was able to see *A Chorus Line*, *42nd Street*, *Annie*, *On the Twentieth Century* (with Imogene Coco), and *Cats*. Not bad for a decade, often with only 2-4 tickets available.

One other thing that influenced my love of musicals was the access to the cast recordings. My parent's had recordings of a number of classic shows – a mix of movie and Broadway - including a number of Rodgers and Hammerstein shows, including a somewhat beat up copy of the cast recording for *Carousel* that I took with me when I moved away. And then my brother, who's stereo, and thus musical tastes, tended to dominate the house started buying cast recordings and concept recordings for some of the newer shows. It was from him that I learned of the shows of Andrew Lloyd Webber, and of shows like *Annie*, *42nd Street*, and *A Chorus Line*.

By the time I graduated college in 1989 and moved to the Chicago suburbs, the idea of going to live theater was natural. And Chicago provided a number of opportunities. First, there were the major shows that would set up in Chicago for months at a time. I was able to see *Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Miserables*, and *Miss Saigon* at the Auditorium Theater in Chicago's South Loop all within a few years of moving there. I also saw what was probably one of the few appropriately scaled productions of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Aspects of Love* in a now lost intimate theater that was once part of the Lyric Opera House (and is now been taken over as more backstage space for the opera house).

But, I also ended up with season tickets for several years to the Marriott Lincolnshire Theater, a theater in the round located in a Marriott golf resort in the northern suburbs of Chicago that put on six musicals each season. (For the first 3 or 4 years, I had to remember to sit one seat off of my assigned seat because a glitch caused me to be located in between a couple who had released their third seat after their daughter grew up).

Over time, various factors caused my attendance at live theater to fall off. First, there was my extended business trip to Phoenix. During this trip, I had to give up my subscription to the Marriott Lincolnshire theater, and I never ended up getting another one.

Then, as I got more involved with SF fandom, it started taking both more of my time and resources, leaving me with less of both available for going to shows. And, while I hate to blame her for this, my wife is not nearly as enamored with live theater as I am. So, after I started dating and got married, going to the theater lost its priority for several years.

However, the last few years I've started going back. First, when I lived in San Diego, I decided to take the opportunity to go see two shows when they stopped at the San Diego Civic Theater. The first was *Wicked*, which I'd thought about going to see a few times when we still lived in the Chicago area, but never quite got around to it. The other was the tour of the newest production of *Pippin* (which, amusingly had John Rubinstein – who originated the role of *Pippin* in the original Broadway production – cast as Charlemagne).

Then, shortly after we moved back to Albuquerque (well, I moved back to Albuquerque – my wife had never lived here before), I took the opportunity to see another of my "bucket list" shows, *The Lion King* when it was playing at Popejoy Hall.

Since graduating college and moving away, I'd been in the Fine Arts building a few times. The most recent had been about 10 years before when we'd visited the art museum in

the same building. But since my last visit, the University had performed a major remodeling of the lobby area, including opening up the lobby of Popejoy Hall into the main building lobby, and creating an upstairs entrance to provide elevator access to the balcony and mezzanine. So, while the basic building was still familiar, it had changed a fair amount from the building I'd spent time in since I was a little kid. (Since I was in the marching band and took a couple of other music classes, I also spent a fair amount of time in the Fine Arts Building in college as well, so much of the building was familiar).

But, once they opened the doors and I went inside, the theater was still very much the one I remembered. Coming inside was in its way very much like coming home. I even found myself afraid to touch the metal stair railings for fear of getting a static shock – a common occurrence as a child.

Alas, not all of what I grew up with has survived quite as well as Popejoy itself. The Albuquerque Civic Light Opera company suffered several setbacks over the last twenty-some years. It has since renamed itself Musical Theater Southwest, and after a failed attempt to co-own and manage the historic Highland Theater, and one or more bankruptcies, it now performs fewer shows each season in smaller theater spaces.

I'm less sure what happened to the Albuquerque Children's Theater. I recall that at least for a while after its founder, Bill Hayden passed, it was continued under the auspices of the Albuquerque Little Theater, but there seems to be no evidence of it on its current website.

In the 80s, a major touring show might have one to three performances, and most likely half of the tickets to one of those would be spoken for by the subscribers to the Cultural Series. Now, shows sit down at Popejoy Hall for several weeks, and there are at least as many, if not more, small theater companies scattered around town. In fact, I keep considering getting a series subscription to the current version of the Popejoy Cultural Series – or more likely one that is mostly musicals.

Overall, theatrically speaking, things are probably as good or better in Albuquerque than they were in the '70s and '80s. But, nostalgia being what it is, I do miss the old days when The Albuquerque Civic Light Opera was regularly on the stage at Popejoy, and when I could know that for a student's discount I could see several quality shows each year from the comfort of a theater that felt almost like home.



HMS Pinafore

HMS Pinafore is the most boring show in the world for the female chorus. Three entrances, two of them almost identical, and long stretches of nothing in between. So sometimes I'd hang out backstage and watch the show. One night, during a second act solo number where the principal soprano was singing a debate about whether to go for love or for security, she completely lost her place in the song. After thoroughly messing up the order of the lyrics, I heard the orchestra leader saying, "Orchestra, Measure A." And they started the song over. She did fine the second time, but exited on my side, and I got to see a lady in a beautiful ball-gown screaming very quietly but very emphatically, "Fuck."

Later that same show, she had an entrance past me that she missed while talking to someone offstage. They got to that point and everyone turned towards me, looking expectant while she belatedly dashed on stage.

Ruddigore

If you're unfamiliar with the show, the second act features an entire art gallery which becomes the ghosts of the protagonist's ancestors. I got to "pants" that role, since we lost a guy after the set was built but before we'd made up the portraits. At the final performance, one of the actors didn't make it on stage—we heard the orchestra director (same as above) mutter, "Where's Jerry?" and during our entrance song, one of the other actors verified that I had his line, and we went on without him.

What had happened was that Jerry, an elderly man dressed as a knight, had been on the phone with his wife, planning the cast party. He'd heard the opening chords for our entrance, and dashed backstage in the blackout. He ran up the stairs and fell on the gap created when the stage manager crawled underneath to work the fog machine. His helmet cut into his scalp, and while we were onstage, he was getting treated by our director/Mad Margaret, who happens to be a nurse, for his bleeding scalp wound. He eventually required stitches, and the cast party was moved to the director's house at the last minute.

Iolanthe

Iolanthe was much nicer than usual from the girls' perspective, as we were dressed in light little fairy costumes rather than the typical Victorian layers, while the guys got to wear the Parliamentary robes and overheat. It was also February, which isn't usually too cold. One performance, we had the side door open so that we'd get a cool breeze and a friendly cat wandered on stage. Unfortunately, it was prior to opening, not when the curtains were open. Fairies could have done with a friendly cat.

Into the Woods

Tech Week was unusually fraught for Into the Woods. The curtain got caught; I had to sew up another curtain that got torn while standing on a set piece and sewing over my head. The Witch was late for a rehearsal because she'd been in a car accident while driving up from the Bay Area. And Rapunzel's Prince walked off the stage and onto the keyboardist. ("You're supposed to *pretend* to be blind, not actually be blind!") The actual performances went off pretty well, aside from Jack being entirely on the wrong side of the stage for an entrance. Our Milky White was actually an actor, who had a blast in the role.

Unusually for our company, we had several roles double-cast for the last weekend, since some of our actors were teachers and had a trip coming up. So we had a pick-up rehearsal before the third week. Our director was very clear that we play scenes with those actors like usual, but that left other scenes completely open. Cinderella sang "The Steps of the Palace" in a Brooklyn accent; Rapunzel's Prince and Rapunzel switched places for an early scene. The prize of the night, however, was Jack (who, BTW, happened to be getting his PhD at the time), who improvised his entire song, "There Are Giants When I'm High." Same locations, completely stoned physicality, and the immortal final line, "There are big tall terrible, awful, lovely, wonderful giants... Fuck, I'm high!"

HMS Pinafore (again)

I sent you the video of the power outage. It was a mylar balloon from a party that shorted out half the lines of the community center. Some orchestra members entertained the audience for twenty minutes or so until we could get some basic lighting back up, but we didn't get the rest of the lights on until the second act.

Side note: Most Gilbert & Sullivan songs can be rendered crude by dancing the Macarena to them. Try it. (I discovered that during Yeoman of the Guard, making the entire female chorus to stifle giggles when the hip swing came on "Be thou at hand to take those favors from me...")



Jubilee: Around the World With Cole Porter and Moss Hart Laura Frankos

Cole Porter was an anomaly among Broadway songwriters of the thirties. Most of his contemporaries were Jewish, from poor immigrant backgrounds. Porter was a wealthy WASP from Indiana, a Yale graduate, and married even more money. He was sophisticated, well-traveled, and homosexual. His wife, Linda Lee Thomas, condoned his affairs--within limits. His career began slowly, but by 1934's *Anything Goes*, he ruled Broadway.

Moss Hart's origins were more humble. The son of a Jewish immigrant, he grew up in desperate poverty in the Bronx. Escape came in books and theatre visits with his eccentric aunt. He wrote his first flop at nineteen, collaborated with George S. Kaufman on the smash *Once in a Lifetime* in 1930, and had two hit musicals with Irving Berlin. In 1934, his second work with Kaufman, *Merrily We Roll Along*, was a Pulitzer contender that didn't run long. (In 1981, Sondheim and Furth would have similar trouble with a musical version.)

Porter and Hart decided to collaborate in late 1934--in style. They booked a 144 -day cruise on the RMS *Franconia*, an around-the-world tour organized by Thomas Cook and Son. Rates began at \$1750, roughly \$29,000 in 2018 terms.

Who would produce? Porter usually worked with Max Gordon, Hart with Sam H. Harris. No sweat: they would co-produce. Despite having only a vague concept, Gordon and Harris booked theatres in Boston and New York for the fall and slated Hassard Short to direct.

Following a farewell gala, the entourage boarded ship on January 11, 1935. This included Linda Porter and her maid, Porter's valet, and some pals: his sometime lover Howard Sturges and Monty Woolley (a Yale classmate, now actor-director). Broadway friends saw them off; Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse left a hideous statue in Cole's cabin. He costumed it for every port of call. Hart, who enjoyed indulgence after years of poverty, brought trunks of clothes. Linda Porter later chucked much of his wardrobe overboard, leading to strained relations.

Mostly, Hart worried--a chronic condition. Porter had a reputation for partying.

Would they accomplish anything at all? Hart didn't know Porter had packed "a small metronome, a typewriter, a small piano organ, two dozen black pencils, recordings of Anything Goes, a phonograph, and three cases of Grand Chamberlin '87." Cole was a dilettante, but a "demon for work."

Jubilee's plot wasn't complex, but left opportunity for fun. A king, queen, and their adult son and daughter encounter four commoners (including spoofs of Noël Coward, society hostess Elsa Maxwell, and Olympic swimmer and actor, Johnny Weissmuller). The royals are incognito, hiding from a possible revolution that turns out to be a prank of the younger prince.

The first ten days had Hart hammering out a framework so Porter could start crafting songs. Their workday began early. After breakfast, Porter worked from eight to noon, with an occasional break for a swim. Following lunch and a nap, he composed for another two hours before a workout in the gym and dinner. Hart tried working on deck, but endless suggestions from other passengers drove him to his cabin. They worked while the Franconia was at sea; veteran traveler Porter insisted on seeing sights at every port. As it happened, the destinations provided further inspiration.

The Franconia's first stop was Kingston, Jamaica, where the party visited the Royal Botanical Garden. Porter spotted a bird with shiny plumage, a pointy beak, and a yellow eye, sitting in a tree twisted by the coastal winds. The bird called, ting-ting, waving its boat-shaped tail. The composer asked an attendant what it was, and was told "a kling-kling bird on a divi-divi tree." This chance discovery of a tinkling grackle (or Barbados blackbird) gave Cole the first song of the score, a witty patter number for "Eric Dare," a playwright modeled on Coward. When Eric enters, his adherents ask if he found romance on his travels. He replies whenever he met a likely lass, a certain bird warned him off. "Better follow the advice of the kling-kling bird, on the top of the divi-divi tree. For it may be fun to belong to someone, but it's wonderful to be free." (Coward loved the spoof and the song.)

The ship sailed through the Panama Canal, docking in Los Angeles on January 26. Samuel Goldwyn threw a bash for Porter in Bel-Air, with the Marx Brothers, Charlie Chaplin, Jubilee's producers, and more in attendance. The next stop was Hilo, where Hart told reporters they were making progress, but had no title yet.

The stay in Pago Pago resulted in a prank telegram. Sam Harris' production of *Rain* with Tallulah Bankhead had just opened. Porter cabled: "Rain here in Pago Pago tremendous. How's yours?" Hart sent friends photos of him standing by headhunters in Fiji: "I'm perfectly safe. The natives don't eat white men unless the month has an 'R' in it." While there, the tour director invited the uncrowned king of Fiji (plus his firewalkers) on board for a screening of Disney's *Three Little Pigs*. This was a huge success.

By Papua New Guinea, the first act was done. On March 15, Hart and Porter saw native dancers in Indonesia. One of the rhythms stuck with the composer. He adapted it for the first four bars of "Begin the Beguine," with the rest influenced by a rumba-like Martinique dance (the "bel-air") he had seen in Paris in the twenties.

A Javanese dance in Bali gave Porter the "weird wailing chorus" in the first act finale, and in Zanzibar, he and Hart met the Sultan, who served them pink sherbet in his gleaming white palace and played "Let's Do It" on an elderly gramophone. This meeting prompted some lyrics for the Elsa Maxwell character, planning her social calendar: "Why, Sultan of Zanzibar, it's too, too, divine! I've just got to get that Sultan for that party of mine."

The tour even supplied the show's title. 1935 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of King George V's ascension to the throne. On the Franconia, a British ship, everyone hoisted a

glass for this jubilee on May 5th. Soon after, Hart wired Harris with the title: Jubilee. The royals of the musical were entirely fictional, but the British Foreign Office was concerned about audiences mistaking them for the British royals.. To appease them, Gordon and Harris altered the queen's makeup and removed the king's beard during tryouts. No one wanted to lose potential income from a London run.

In Cape Town in late April, Hart's libretto was nearly done, with Porter finishing the bulk of the score by arrival in Rio. That may have given Porter the title of one of his greatest standards, written for 1936's Red, Hot and Blue. Porter said he and Linda were on deck, watching dawn break over Rio's harbor. "My wife and I had risen specially for the event, but Mr. Woolley had stayed up all night to see it . . . and enjoyed a few whisky-and-sodas. As we stood on the bow, my exclamation was, 'It's delightful!' My wife followed with 'It's delicious!' And Monty, in his happy state, cried, 'It's de-lovely!'" However, Porter also describes eating the tropical fruit, the mangosteen, in Java as the source of the title, with Porter, Hart, and Woolley exclaiming as they sampled it. Whichever story is correct, it's clear the cruise inspired both Jubilee and that Porter classic.

A week after returning, Hart and Porter performed the show for Gordon and Harris to their approval. As Cole had hoped, Monty Woolley was hired to direct the nonmusical scenes, while Hassard Short handling the musical numbers and lighting design. Jo Mielziner, in the midst of a busy season, would continue to change the look of Broadway shows in his scenic design; Albertina Rasch would choreograph; Irene Sharaff and Connie De Pinna would create the costumes.

Hart, Porter, and the producers next flew to Hollywood, where most of the casting took place. They held auditions at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, with composer and librettist in pajamas and dressing gowns. They specifically wanted Mary Boland for the queen, but snagged other film stars, too. Noted British actor Melville Cooper was cast as the king; June Knight, a dancer-singer from MGM, got the role of the nightclub performer (the prince's love interest); character actress and veteran of stage and screen, May Boley, received the Maxwell character.

Given the talent in New York, casting film stars may seem odd, but Jubilee's principal backer (\$125,000) was Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios. The link between Hollywood and Broadway was a major story of the 1935-36 season, with studios backing a third or more of the productions.

The two princes, however, were cast in New York, though both would have cinematic fame later. Charles Walters would choreograph and direct MGM musicals from the 1940s through the 1960s, including Easter Parade, High Society (score by Porter), and Lili (Oscar nomination). In May 1935, he and his partner, Dorothy Fox, were performing in a revue. Jubilee's creators and producers kept turning up to watch him; agents began pestering him to sign.

The theatrical grapevine buzzed that Walters and Paul Draper--an amazing tap dancer whose career was hampered by a stammer--were the top candidates for Prince James. (Given the British concerns for their royals' reputations, they might well have objected to Draper's stammer as mockng the then-Duke of York's speech impediment.) Walters was offered the role at \$350 per week. He declined, citing his obligation to Dorothy Fox. Harris counter-offered: split the salary, and Fox would get a dance solo.

The actor playing impish Prince Peter would also have a distinguished--if too short--career on stage and screen: Montgomery Clift, who turned fifteen the week Jubilee opened. When he was cast in a highly anticipated musical, Sunny Clift, the ultimate stage mother, was thrilled. At first, she instructed her son to emulate Walters in every way. This lasted until

Sunny feared Monty was getting too attached to the handsome Walters.

For one young actress, the auditions did not result in a job. Kitty Carlisle, fresh from a small role in *A Night At The Opera*, read for Princess Diana. She thought Hart was “the best-looking, most arresting man I’d ever seen,” and married him in 1946, later musing, “If they had engaged me, I might have have ten more years with Moss.”

Early rehearsals began in late summer. Things did not go well. Co-directors Short and Woolley were at each other’s throats. Hart, ever anxious, fretted while Cole entertained buddies with cocktails while the actors rehearsed. Why should Cole worry? The score was in great shape. He’d even written another song for the second act, literally overnight: “Just One Of Those Things.” But Hart saw the quarrelsome directors as a bad omen.

Then came the threatening letters. Shortly before the company departed for Boston, Hart, Porter, the producers, and Mary Boland all received letters claiming their lives were in danger if they went to the tryouts. At Grand Central Station, Monty Clift’s mother was called to the phone. Allegedly, a strange woman warned that if Montgomery performed, “he’d have worse than a head cold.” The caller threatened to kidnap the teen--and Moss Hart, too. Sunny Clift and her son stayed with friends during the tryout, not at the hotel.

Then there was a backstage fire at the Shubert during rehearsals. A furious Monty Woolley had just ordered actor Michael Pearman off the stage after botching some lines. Pearman returned a moment later. “I told you to stay backstage!” Woolley bellowed. “I tried, but the theatre’s on fire,” Pearman said. Harris and Gordon hired detectives to protect the cast. More threatening letters came on opening night in Boston. After the show opened in New York, there were three unexplained fires at the Imperial, forcing the cancellation of one performance.

Who was responsible? A Montgomery Clift biographer says the FBI arrested a disgruntled stage mother, angry because her son wasn’t cast. A Moss Hart biographer weirdly blames Hart’s Aunt Kate, who had mental problems and sent disturbing letters, but, at sixty-seven and ill, would have found it hard to set fires in theatres. Neither biographer has references for these theories. The ongoing threats, plus the death of one musician and the mothers of three of the company, led some to feel the show was cursed.

The public, however, geared up for a lavish hit. Jubilee got rave reviews in Boston, selling out its run. Sharaff’s costumes were a highlight, including Boland’s fifteen-yard-long train (needing four page boys to lift it!) and her daring one-piece swim suit for the scenes with the Tarzan character. She commented, “I tried to tell Moss Hart and Cole Porter that it was a trifle décolleté . . . They said, ‘Nothing doing.’”

The New York opening on October 12, 1935, also met with great praise. With so much going for it, why didn’t it take off? There’s no simple answer. The advance buzz was enormous, perhaps too much for the show to match. The critics complained--as they would until *Kiss Me, Kate*--that Porter’s score wasn’t as good as *Anything Goes*. It’s true there weren’t any immediate hit songs; Artie Shaw’s “Begin the Beguine” came in 1938. “Just One of Those Things,” though recorded in 1935, didn’t earn its place in the *Great American Songbook* until repeated use in later films; “Why Shouldn’t I?” and “A Picture of Me Without You” caught on slowly.

Hart and Porter may have been too knowing. The spoofs of Weissmuller, Maxwelll, and Coward were obvious, but the lyrics are crammed with references to celebrities, politicians, events, and products of the mid-thirties. The show’s theme was celebrity, with the royals escaping theirs, but meeting other famous folk, so this makes dramaturgical sense. Their

audience knew Movie Screen, Dorothy Parker, H.G.Wells, and Billy Rose's Jumbo--then rehearsing at the Hippodrome. They knew Averil Harriman, Walter Winchell, O.O. McIntyre, Emily Post, Clarence Darrow, Dizzy Dean, and the difference between industrialist George F. Baker and dancer Josephine Baker. Such topicality had perils: Porter had to change lyrics mentioning Louisiana governor Huey Long after "the Kingfish" was assassinated and a reference to Mussolini following the invasion of Ethiopia.

The period specificity has hurt Jubilee's chances of revival. Companies staging it today are wise to include a 1935 "Who's Who." In a bit of synchronicity, Sondheim used three topics in Porter's lyrics in "I'm Still Here": the Dionne quintuplets, Abie's Irish Rose, and Beebe's bathysphere.

Burns Mantle noted that Jubilee "startled the Broadway natives somewhat. They had been accustomed to musical comedies of the revue order, usually studded with irrelevant interpolations, both musical and textual. 'Jubilee' revealed an intelligent and coherent story." Jubilee was exceptionally well-integrated for the era, and there had been few book-based shows in recent years.

The real blow was the loss of Mary Boland. By January, she was missing performances for illness. This may have been a drinking problem; she was known for delaying film shoots for booze. The producers replaced her in mid-February with Laura Hope Crews (later Aunt Pittypat in *Gone With The Wind*). The public found Crews "more the Queen and less the comedienne" and the box office tanked. Jubilee closed on March 4, 1936, after 169 performances. There would be no tour, no film, no London production. The extravagant show ended deep in the red, most of it MGM's money. Porter never invested in one of his own productions again.

Even before Jubilee closed, there was concern over the increasing financial ties between Hollywood and Broadway. Not because most flopped; Broadway shows ended in the red more often than not. But stagefolk worried about theatre maintaining its integrity as a separate art if bound to the studios.

Another issue was that the current Minimum Basic Agreement with the League of New York Theatres hurt playwrights when it came to film rights. The Dramatists Guild intended to revise it, with much better terms, when it expired on March 1, 1936. The managers--and actors, too--went berserk; the threat of stage warfare loomed over the whole season. When they reached an agreement in spring, it was clear the writers weren't going to get squeezed by the L.A. boys any more.

MGM, Paramount, and Warner Brothers immediately announced they refused to back shows with producers who accepted the new agreement. The withdrawal of California cash, plus the Depression and competition from film and radio, meant the number of new productions fell again in 1936-37. What's more, Hollywood continued luring away stage talent: Bob Hope, Vincent Price, Walter Pidgeon, and the Gershwins all went west to join Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin. Even playwrights like Clifford Odets and Sidney Howard, who fought for the new agreement, wrote for the movies.

Porter and Hart never collaborated again. Cole would work with many librettists over the years; Hart teamed again with Kaufman (*You Can't Take It With You*, *The Man Who Came To Dinner*), Rodgers and Hart, Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin (*Lady in the Dark*), and gained fame as a director. His greatest success was *My Fair Lady* (1956).

On a personal note, I've been obsessed with Jubilee since I was thirteen. I found a demo of Porter singing the score in his reedy tenor. When Musical Theatre Guild--a company that stages readings of obscure shows--announced Jubilee for their 2003 season, I was ecstatic.

We had an extra ticket, so I invited Len Wein. Sure, Len was a comic book legend, but he was my Broadway buddy. We would swap show tunes and theatre trivia for hours. But Len didn't know Jubilee. He studied his program. "The Kling-kling Bird On The Divi-divi Tree'--what kind of a song is that?"

I promptly started singing the opening verses. Len did an exaggerated double take and then dissolved in laughter. Which is how I'll always remember him, enjoying show tunes. And so I have another reason to love this overlooked gem of a musical.





First Broadway: First Date

By Steven H Silver & Melanie Silver

Steven H Silver

In October 2013, my wife and I took our daughters on their first trip to New York City. One of the high points of the trip was taking the girls to their first Broadway show. We had made sure that live theatre was part of our daughters' lives from a young age, taking them to regional theatre and touring productions, but seeing a show on Broadway (or in this case 48th Street) has an excitement all its own.

We wanted to see something new and although we didn't know much about the show, we selected *First Date*, which starred Krysta Rodriguez, who my wife and daughters knew from the television show *Smash* and Zachary Levi, who we had all watched on *Chuck* and had provided the voice for Flynn Rider in the Disney film *Tangled*. We knew that the play was about a first date (the title gave it away, apparently the playwright never heard of spoilers), but didn't know much about it beyond that.

I've written about seeing a play without any knowledge of the content previously for Guy Lillian's fanzine *Challenger*, in which I described taking my wife to see a comedy the night I planned to propose to her. The comedy was a bleak look at dysfunctional marriages and the only humor was that the main characters were named Barbie and Ken. (I proposed anyway, she accepted). Fortunately, *First Date* turned out to be a better play than that long ago experience, although it wasn't without its own hiccoughs.

The musical is set in a bar where two characters, Aaron (Levi) and Casey (Rodriguez), are meeting for a blind date. Each brings their own expectations and anxieties to the date, most

of which are represented by secondary characters who appear on stage as the main characters' subconscious, including Casey's sister, Lauren (Sara Chase), and her best friend, Reggie (Kristoffer Cusick), and Aaron's best friend, Gabe (Bryce Ryness), and his ex-girlfriend, Allison (Kate Loprest), who he is still trying to get over. The only actor to actually interact with the two on their date is their waiter (Blake Hammond).

We generally found the show fun and the songs entertaining, although the waiter is given an hilariously awful song to sing, "I Ordered Love," which if taken on its own is just mind-bogglingly bad, however heard as a satire on bad songs it works well, better if you can see someone performing it rather than just listening to it. The song "The Girl For You," which is performed when Aaron realizes that Casey isn't Jewish and he imagines what his Jewish ancestors and Casey's Christian family would say about their relationship and how it impacts their children, is riotous, but also had us questioning if it might not be offensive.

Earlier, I mentioned that taking our daughters to see their first Broadway play wasn't without its own problems. I'll let my younger daughter, Melanie, who was 12 at the time, explain what those problems were.

Melanie Silver

The show began with "The One." Besides the swear words, which by this point in my theater attending career wasn't uncomfortable to hear next to my parents, nothing seemed too bad. It seemed like the typical love story musical. The first few songs of the show were very enjoyable, one of my favorites being "Bailout Song #1" sung by Casey's best friend.

After that is when I started to question my parents taking me to the show with "The Girl for You." I found this song hilarious, but also implicitly anti-Semitic. This interesting experience of glancing at my parents throughout the song was followed by another song "The Awkward Pause," which, as described by the title, was awkward. This was the first song that blatantly stated inappropriate things. Hearing the words "see your parents having sex" while sitting right next to them, especially when you are 12, is VERY uncomfortable.

The next terrifying song was "That's Why You Love Me," sung by two of Casey's exes who explained how she loved them because they essentially were dirtbags. It basically taught me everything not to look for in a guy when I started dating, something I don't think I needed to hear when I was 12. **(Steven notes—I actually think it is good for her to hear what to avoid when dating at a young age, especially if it comes from someone other than her parents.)**

After all these horrifying experiences the show became tamer in the sexual sense, making it easier for me to enjoy. The second act was more about working through their baggage, something I couldn't relate to, but was much more enjoyable to watch than the first act considering the situation.

During intermission and after the show, my sister and I awkwardly laughed with my parents about the content of the show, while they admitted if they had known what the show was about we would not be seeing it. During the coming months, I listened to soundtrack obsessively as I had gotten over the weirdness of it. It was upsetting because I couldn't brag about and share my first Broadway experience with all my friends because I wasn't allowed to introduce my fellow seventh graders to a show full of inappropriate content.

Steve H Silver

After the play, the girls were excited at the prospect of meeting the cast, so we hung out by the stage door, along with what seemed like half the audience. We waited and eventually managed to get the casts' autographs. When Levi came out near the end, there was still a large crowd and he announced that he would stay as long as it took to sign autographs for everyone there, starting with a tour bus that was on a schedule.

After the tour bus signing, he began signing for other people, jumping us to the front of the line when he saw that we had brought a DVD case of both *Frozen* and the first season of *Chuck*. We chatted and took not only a group photo, but one of Levi and Melanie "for her bat mitzvah montage." Unfortunately, while Levi told us he used to work as a DJ for bar and bat mitzvahs, he wasn't available for us to hire for Melanie's (we wound up with an actor who had a recurring role on *Happy Days* during the 1980-1984 seasons).

After we returned to Chicago, we learned that one of the cast members, Kate Loprest, had attended the same high school my daughters have attended and one of her favorite teachers is a friend of mine who is active in local fandom (and has been teaching a "Literature of Science Fiction" class for seniors at the high school for the past couple of years).

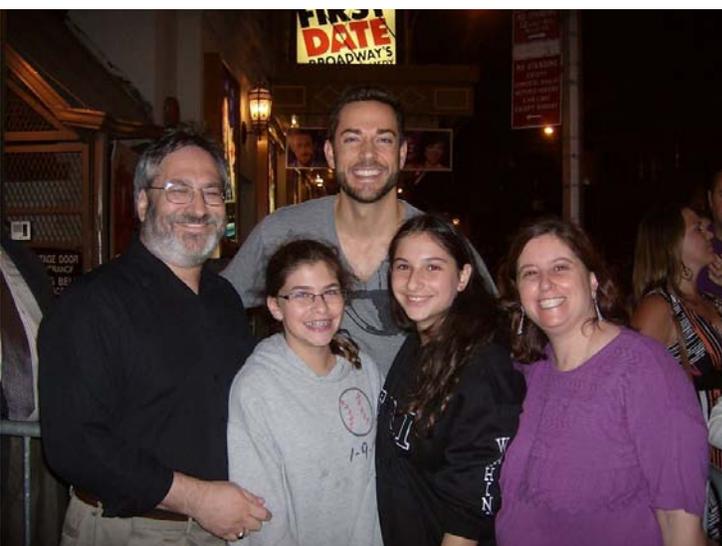
Melanie Silver

The awkward experience I had during my first Broadway show did not deter me from loving Broadway or shying away from inappropriate musicals. It broke a barrier with my parents, as they took me to see the show about a year later when it came to Chicago.

Steven H Silver

Seeing the show with Melanie a second time at the Royal George Theatre in Chicago in February 2015 was a much different experience. Not only was the theatre more intimate with us sitting closer, we knew what to expect before going in. Melanie was a year older and we had already seen the show with her and had discussed the parts that were uncomfortable the first time we saw it together.

As she mentioned, she has continued to push to see shows that we don't think are quite appropriate for someone her age and for shows that we expect will make her uncomfortable to see with her parents. In some cases, we suggest she go to see them with friends,



and in others, we try to get her to hold off on seeing them until we think she's ready, although I'm not sure that is effective since she listens to the soundtracks anyway. On the other hand, I know that one of the shows she's been dying to see, which she has tickets for next month, is much more inappropriate on stage than the soundtrack hints at. But after several years, she and her cousin will finally see *Book of Mormon* when it returns to Chicago's Oriental Theatre in November.



Rocky Horror Picture Show
by Juan Sanmiguel

I first saw *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* after Grad Night (the night high school seniors spent at Disney World). It was at a meeting of TARDIS Repair Incorporated (TRI), the local *Doctor Who* club. A club member had recorded the film from a broadcast on ON TV (a scrambled television service, and alternative to cable in the 80s). Since the meeting was held in a public library, audience participation was very quiet.

I bought into film instantly. It was the opening song “Science Fiction Double Feature” that got me. It told the story of the pulpy fun of the classics of Science Fiction film. *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Invisible Man*, *Day of the Triffids*, *King Kong*, and *Flash Gordon* serials were some of the references in the song. It had a nice tune to sing along with. I had to learn this song, so as soon as I could, I bought the soundtrack and learned the song.

All the songs were good, though the second one to make an impression on me was “Time Warp”. This has been used in every convention dance I have ever been to. No matter what type of con it is, the DJ will play this eventually.

Though “Horror” was in the title, it was clearly a Science Fiction parody. Aliens were messing around with hapless humans, with a little bit of *Frankenstein* mixed in. The creation of a man was funny, though I wish the element that brought him to life was bit more impressive than food coloring.

It would be awhile before I would see *Rocky* again. I never saw it when I lived in Mi-



ami. The theater which hosted it was in an area where parking was too expensive.

I finally saw the film with a shadow cast at Necronomicon, a Science Fiction convention in Tampa, a few years later. I already knew a lot of the responses, and was given a prop bag safe for a convention (it would not make much of a mess).

I did see the play at a Broadway revival. I was hoping to see Joan Jett as the

character Columbia, but that did not happen. Talk show host Dick Cavett played the Criminologist, and acted as MC during the performance. It was fun, and still remains the only Broadway show I have watched.

The film/shadow cast performance came into my life again recently. A few years ago, I had broken my arm and was wearing a cast. At the same time David Bowie and David Hartwell had died in the space of a week. I loved Bowie’s music a lot and I had worked as a volunteer for Hartwell for several years at the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts (ICFA). I had a friend in the local cast in Orlando, named The Rich Weirdoes. I found out through her that they were doing a tribute to Bowie before a performance. The cast, dressed up as versions of Bowie’s film and musical personas, performed a musical tribute to Bowie. I went with the Ziggy Stardust bolt on my face, and it was great way to deal with my grief for both Davids.

The film was shown at MidAmericon, the 1976 Worldcon. This surprised me since this is before the start of *Rocky’s* cult phenomenon. I asked the MidAmericon con chair Ken Kel-

ler at MidAmericon 2 (2016 Worldcon) why he brought the film to the con. Keller saw the film, and thought it was funny, and fit with the con's theme "Science Fiction and the Arts". Since Kansas City, where the con was held, was a hub for film distribution it was cheap to order. Because of this history, when I go to a showing of **Rocky Horror**, I wear a Worldcon T-Shirt.

When I go to see The Rich Weirdoes perform, I also bring a towel. Often the MC asks how many times those in the audience have seen the show, he or she will mention a number, and those in audience that have seen the film with a cast that many times or more will sit down. The MC usually asks the audience if they have seen **Rocky** 42 times, when that happens I proudly wave my towel. It is a Douglas Adams moment.

It is still fun to see the film with a shadow cast. I will still go and watch two clueless Earthlings, Brad and Janet, attempting to see a former teacher and ending up at a castle. I still have not seen it 42 times, but I am working on it.





Regina Snow Victorious by Jay Hartlove

From Idea to Stage

In the fall of 2006, I saw Evanescence perform “Bring Me To Life” at San Jose State University. The song inspired me to think about the untold journey Snow White took in surviving the Sleeping Death spell. Last weekend I premiered my original musical *The Mirror’s Revenge* at WorldCon 76 in San Jose, just a few blocks from SJSU. That twelve-year journey is my testament to the power of tenacity when it is fueled by love and tempered by flexibility.

The Many Forms of Snow

The show is pretty dark. It explores themes that are in the original folk tale like child abuse, and takes them further with PTSD, gaslighting, betrayal, and the nature of evil. Snow White emerges victorious without having to gain agency by picking up a sword. The story is compelling and needed to be told. It really is what Dark Fantasy should be.

The inspiration first took form as a screenplay for the sequel to the Disney classic. A film critic judge at a screenplay contest advised me to take the Disney out and let the story run on its own power. My friend and veteran actor Jeffrey Weissman told me the revised script wasn't a movie but a play, and I need to let actors live the nasty little family revenge drama on stage. My friend Ann Thomas let me conduct a cold table reading with actors from her drama circle, and their feedback was fantastic. Then I realized music had always been part of the genesis, so I approached my friends Kristoph Klover and Margaret Davis to write songs from my lyrics. I parsed out those parts of the script that were better told in song, and over the next two years, they wrote melodies for my lyrics. Next Kristoph and Margaret brought in musician friends and recorded a soundtrack album of the songs. I raised the money to record it with a Kickstarter. We showcased the album with my story narration at BayCon in 2016. "When are we going to see the play on stage?" came the rallying cry.

After ten years of showing the story to critics, actors, and musicians, and after having everyone who ever read it love it and offer to help, I had reason to believe the show deserved the investment of mounting a production. I have had at least one foot on the stage since high school. My competition costuming at science fiction conventions in the 1980s and 90s always felt like theater to me. I have helped several shows to reach their potential, both at conventions and in theaters. So I thought I knew what would be involved. Ah, ignorance is bliss.

A Play Takes Shape

Margaret and Kristoph had explored the possibility of the album being nominated for a Hugo in the Alternate Form category. I thought, why not run the show itself at WorldCon and get it nominated. I wasn't going to get a Tony, so why not try for a Hugo? My friends who were running WorldCon in San Jose were looking for entertainment, so I agreed to move my show to their convention for a day.

This is why ignorance and ambition do not mix.

I saw *Once Upon a Mattress* at the theater run by dear old friends who finally got their own venue after decades of renting out other houses. The show is complicated, with dozens of actors running on and off stage throughout. The show ran flawlessly, even in that tiny space. That kind of precision is not due to a good director, but a good stage manager. I made inquiries, and made her my first hire. Ashira Macy has been my cornerstone anchor though this entire journey. I literally could not have done this without her at my side. I cannot overstate the importance of having a good stage manager.

I networked and placed ads starting in August 2017, one year out, and found a director who had just finished a run of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, which is a challenging play to direct. She was smitten with my story and had big ideas about how to mount it. Unfortunately, her big ideas eventually outstripped my budget (even after an attempted Kickstarter) and we parted ways in March 2018.

Casting A Dream

I found a very talented ingenue lead in a teen theater troupe my daughter belongs to. At fifteen, Kristina Jewett is the right age for Snow White in my story. I attempted to recruit the choreographer from that troupe to direct my show, but there were conflicts of interest that prevented that. I recruited a number of actors I had worked with before. Some dropped out after considering their other commitments, and some stayed on. I networked, placed ads, and held open auditions all through the spring of 2018. Over and over, I would get an actor on board, only to have them change their mind.

I wondered why I was having such a hard time casting a show everyone loved at first sight. Then I took a step back. The theater I rented, the same one where I saw *Mattress*, was in rather remote Vallejo. My rehearsals were going to run through the summer, when folks go on vacation with their families. Several summer stock programs at colleges and other established community theaters had already cast their shows well in advance, thus draining the Bay Area talent pool. And my show was new. Given the choice between playing a known role in a known show and taking a chance on the unknown, many picked the safer choice.

I also asked at local high schools and colleges for interns to help with building sets and running things backstage. Turns out state budget cuts have scrapped drama departments at high schools, and even shut down the summer sessions of the two closest community colleges. So, no interns.

Oh, and there was another wrinkle. This is a recorded show. I had in mind to leverage all the work we had put into the album, and simply have Kristoph strip the voice tracks out, creating a karaoke soundtrack that my actors could sing to. Needless to say, it did not turn out that easy. More on that in a moment. I also thought recorded music would be a whole lot easier to transplant to San Jose for the one convention show. But because recorded shows have notoriously bad orchestrations and sound, several actors who were otherwise interested, walked when they heard I was not going to have live musicians.

Because the show was committed to play during WorldCon, there was no moving the date out if things got difficult. Anyone who has ever run any kind of project knows that having a fixed deadline multiplies stress. As casting difficulties continued, the show's original run before WorldCon (ending on August 16) was moved to after the premier at WorldCon (starting on August 16).

Not being able to wait any longer, I had to have faith that I would finish casting the show once rehearsals started on July 2. On July 5, one of my actors walked in with a buddy on her arm, and he signed on as my last cast member. That night after everyone left rehearsal, I lied down on the stage and laughed out loud. I finally had a show.

Working with Absent People

My younger brother is an electrical engineer and also very good at building things. He helped me hang doors in an insane asylum I once built inside an abandoned mall as part of a charity haunted house. He gutted and remodeled his house working with minimal contracted help. He had said he wanted to help my production, so I counted on him to build my sets. Then he had medical issues that took him away for the entire month of July. I finally secured my cast, just in time to realize I had to build the sets myself while running rehearsals. My brother did become available in August, and he did help me build stuff. So that did work out eventually.

Then the conflict calendars rolled in. Because all these other shows were running, several of my actors were in rehearsals and in performances during my rehearsal period. That meant putting together call schedules around who could be present, when some actors were gone up to a week at a time. We managed to get everyone rehearsed on all their scenes, with the right other actors, over the course of six weeks. Again, Ashira worked magic to pull it off. Our first day with all ten actors on stage at the same time was August 8, the day before we started Tech Week.

The Music

Early on, I had invited an opera singer friend of mine who lives in Rome, Alexandra Montani, to record a demo of our rock solo *Summer Ended Early*. It was to be a promo piece upon which we would build publicity for the larger plan. Alexa visits family each year here in the Bay Area, and being a Snow White fan, agreed to help us. Alexa is a Coloratura Soprano, like Adriana Caselotti in the 1937 Disney film. I wanted to evoke people's memories of the film when considering my sequel. Recall, I wrote the first version of this story as the sequel to the Disney film.

When Kristoph and Margaret invited their musician friends to come record the album, I did not think to insert myself in the process. Kristoph, quite understandably, continued with the notion that we wanted the album to still sound like Disney, so he and Margaret hired singers and arranged the music with lots of soprano music for Snow, and lots of hearty baritones and basses for the men.

This created a couple of problems for turning it into a show. For every male actor who does musical theater, there are ten women. And only a fraction of those men are baritones or basses. So the chances of me casting men to sound like the fellows on the CD were very slim. Even more importantly, I was open to the idea that the Sleeping Death spell had changed Snow White in a variety of ways. Not only was she tired of being a victim and now willing to stand up for herself, but maybe her voice had changed as well. When I found Kristina, I knew I had found my Snow White, even though she is an alto.

My final casting also gender bent two key characters. Brother Daniel became Sister Katherine. And Master Wing went from wizened warrior to kick ass woman warrior. So much for a simple karaoke version of the CD.

Knowing how the musical deck was stacked against me, I hired a Music Director to sort out the music and teach my actors the songs. Jay Krohnengold has been performing, coaching singers, and directing shows for fifty years. He and Kristoph worked together for the entire six-week rehearsal schedule changing keys, adjusting phrasing, and fine-tuning harmonies to turn what was already a great songbook into one that matched my actors on stage. It was a titanic effort for which I will be eternally grateful to both.

On the Nature of Collaboration

I have spent most of my creative life alone, typing away at 2 am in my office. I write and edit iteratively, going back over material many times, adding in things I missed or thought of subsequently. But no matter how many times you revisit something, you can only see what you can see.

I had rewritten this story a dozen times. I thought it captured absolutely everything I ever wanted to say in it's 110 pages. When I handed out the script to my actors, I was confident they were getting a story that worked with characters that audiences would believe and care about. All that was true, but there was so much more to be discovered. Jeffrey Weissman was right. Give it to actors who can occupy the roles, and only then will you see who these characters really are.

The magic started happening with the first rehearsal. Nuances, motivations, personal hopes and fears, layers of humanity I had assumed but not actually written suddenly were up walking and talking and singing. I starting seeing depth in this story I had not seen before. It was as if some other, much more talented playwright had crafted this tale with these fascinating characters.

Directing became the joy of my life. Producing had been so much work under so much pressure. Being able to work with the actors for a few hours a night was pure storytelling bliss. The actors brought so much life to the characters, I wanted to give them something in return. Of course, occupying roles is what actors love to do. But it was time for our big road-show. My hope was it would be a unique experience that would add to their love of their craft.

WorldCon or The Longest Three Days of My Life

Wednesday, August 15, we had our last day of Tech Week. We had met everyday for ten days straight. We had ironed out all the bugs and had the run of the show down to clock-work. But we were tired. After a few hours going over last-minute details, we loaded up a giant rented truck with all the costumes, sets, and props. Everyone went home to sleep, with me taking the truck. I knew I needed a dock-height truck for the Teamsters at the San Jose Convention Center to unload it. The smallest truck I could find with that high a deck was a 26-footer. Driving a moving van sized truck on residential streets in the middle of the night when you're tired is terrifying. I was lucky enough that no one was parked in front of my house, but the lift gate stuck out farther than I thought. I clawed the corner off my neighbor's car fender when I pulled in. Cha-ching!

I needed to be in San Jose before 9 am when the docks opened, so I grabbed four hours of sleep and headed out. The unloading went well. My convention staff liaison Tim Szczesuil and his helper (sorry, no name) were hugely helpful wrangling the Teamsters and getting my sets and costumes into the main hall. Karl, the head union electrical technician took my microphone sound system and set it up with brilliant efficiency. By the time I had my props unpacked, he had the transmitter completely wired at the end of the stage, with all the headsets tested and ready.

My cast arrived for their 10 am call. No one at Registration could find all the badges I had pre-arranged, so an enterprising lady (sorry, no name) produced a dozen unspecified Courtesy Badges. We had the hall from 10 am to 1 pm to do our tech. From 1 pm to 6 pm, the convention was going to rehearse and run their Opening Ceremonies in the same space. We ran a "cue-to-cue" practice run of the scene changes in the new space, and set sound levels for the headsets. Kristin Seibert, our convention lighting designer, was ready to go with the designs I had sent her previously. She worked with Ashira and had the lighting cues set in less than an hour. When we were all set, we pushed all our sets into the side draped "wings."

All seemed to be running smoothly until I realized that at 6 am when I left my house, I had left my computer, with the entire show's music, on my dining room table. So while my cast and crew toured WorldCon from 1 pm to 6 pm, I coordinated with my brother who works in nearby Milpitas to use his car to fetch my computer, from Concord. No rest for the weary.

I got back in time, we took back the stage, and set up to run the show. One of our cast had taken a bad step off our home stage a couple days earlier and was still in a lot of pain. Our Vallejo stage is, shall we say, an intimate theater setting. The stage is four steps from the dressing rooms. The draped off area we had been given as a Green Room was about forty feet from the steps that lead up to the stage. Everything was so spread out, we had to run in the dark carrying furniture and props to get things up onto and off the stage. And our poor wounded comrade did her costume changes on the stairs.



The risers were six feet high, and the hall was a hundred yards deep, set for 1500. Without the headsets, our voices would have dissipated by the fourth row. About 300 folks showed up. A bunch left at the intermission. The convention had booked us against other big events. But over a hundred stayed for the whole show. Even though it was literally a foot race to manage that huge back stage, we pulled it off. The audience laughed and cheered in all the right places. We did not get to mingle with the audience afterwards. It was 10:30, they all left right away, and we were exhausted. I learned from social media later that the show was a big hit.

I dismissed my actors. They had to get home and sleep. We had a show to run in Vallejo the next night. I stayed back and packed up the works. The docks closed at 10 pm and would not

open again until 9 am Friday morning. So I took my time packing and arranging everything for an efficient move the next morning. I considered heading off to parties, but I realized that while the building was locked, there was no security. So I slept back stage. Not terribly restful, it turned out.

The next morning, Tim and his helper met me at the docks and we loaded the truck. I drove to Vallejo. The sets were designed to be moved for this trip. If you've seen the show, you know there are two of them that can only be moved well by two men, a large movable wall, and a folding carriage. I found out they can be moved by one man, with a lift gate. Miraculously, as tired as I was, I did not break anything getting it all loaded back into our theater.

I went home, showered, and gave one of my actors a ride to our 6 pm call. I expected being back in the theater where we had held all our rehearsals would be an easy transition, and it was. We had a small opening night crowd. Friday night Bay Area traffic is not for the faint of heart. The show ran well, and the dozen folks who came were thoroughly entertained. Needless to say, I passed out as soon as I got home.

Yes, Virginia, you can do it all, but why in the world would you want to?

Producing Is Hard Enough By Itself

The story was written as a screenplay with no concern for keeping the stage in the same setting for multiple scenes, which plays try to do as much as possible. No, I have 19 scenes and every damn one of them is in a different locale. We move a lot of furniture and backdrops.

Oh, yes, the backdrops. I hired a spray paint muralist in Oakland to paint a dozen images on both sides of side-by-side pairs of panels made from housing insulation foam core. It took a couple of tries to get the priming right, but they turned out beautiful. Transporting twelve 6 X 4 foot foam core panels between Concord, Oakland, and Vallejo is another tale of perseverance. The panels fit into the moveable wall which doubles as a rack at the back of the stage.

I complain about how much work it is to produce as compared to how much fun it is to direct. To be fair, I complicated the job of producer significantly by also building the sets. And renting the costumes. And building the props.

Backstage as Safe Place

At this writing, we have run the show six times in Vallejo over two weekends. We have one more weekend before we close. We have been working together for two months. A lot can happen in the lives of a dozen people over two months. People get sick, they break up with their significant others, they lose jobs, they have friends pass away. These things have all happened to one or more of us during this time. Coming to the theater and occupying a fictional character can be a good escape from the troubles of real life. But I have found there is something more going on.

Making yourself step outside yourself is an escape, but not really a comfort. Being in a crucible with ten other people you share a stage with creates a fraternity that can be a comfort. Several times, folks have arrived with crushing weights on their shoulders, only to find themselves buoyed and renewed after working hard with their teammates to pull off another show. Maybe this happens all the time backstage. It has not happened with other shows I've been in. Maybe I got lucky with a group of very chill people. Still, it feels pretty good to have

built a team and given them a safe place where they can do good work and heal at the same time.

Challenging Folks to Grow

When the big plans of my first director fizzled, I realized I was going launch my dozen-year dream in a small, out-of-the-way community theater. This was not going to be glamorous. I would not be asked to join a Broadway-bound company due to my efforts to rewrite Snow White head canon. I thought about what lasting good change the play could leave instead. Maybe I could advance some careers.

Another member of the teen troupe, Bailey Barnard, is a triple-threat, she sings, acts, and dances. She has also never been in a three-week, grown-up show. I gave her multiple roles, one where she acts, one where she sings, and one where she dances. A delightful character actor I have worked with before, James Adams, has never landed a singing role. I gave him a solo. He practiced harder and longer than I have ever seen anyone work to rise to the opportunity. His song is every bit as heartfelt as any in the play. Another character actor I know, Remington Stone, typically gets the villain role due to his height and deep voice. Well, I did give him the villain, but I also gave him a tragic romantic singing role. He had never done anything like it, but he too took the challenge. And on and on with the casting. Then of course, there is Kristina Jewett. Kristina is going to be a very big star. I was lucky to get her. Her work with Music Director Jay expanded her singing range, and the demands of this very big role broadened her abilities as an actor. If I can say I had anything to do with advancing her career, I will walk away happy.

What Next for Snow White?

The play answers what comes next for Snow White. What comes next for this play is publication. Publishers want to see that a play has been successfully launched before they will consider it for publication. A favorable professional newspaper review helps a lot too. Once we close, I will go back through the script and the sheet music and capture all the changes we made in rehearsals. This may take a while, but we made a lot of good decisions along the way, and anyone who wants to produce this show should see what we finally created.

So if you missed the show, I'm sorry, you had ten chances to see it. If you were a member of WorldCon76, then please consider nominating the play and the album for a Hugo next year. If your friends told you how great it was and how much you missed, then keep an eye out for the next time a theater company picks it up and produces it. I don't know when that will be, but you have not seen the last of *The Mirror's Revenge*.



Two Shades of Musicals

By Richard von Busack

How many times have you asked yourself, “What am I doing watching this musical? I utterly forgot that I hate showtunes and dancing.” From the *So You Think You Can Sing* efforts in *La La Land*, to *A Star is Born*’s Bradley Cooper drinking himself to death--and, oddly, not having a good time doing it--we see hapless modern efforts to recall something that the movie industry once did very well.

Vincent Minnelli’s *The Band Wagon* (1953) and Menahem Golan’s *The Apple* (1980)—which is *The Room of musicals*—equally deserve study as the heights and depths of the genre. The first has Fred Astaire in a captivating story of a second-act in an American life. Tony Hunter, an Astaire-like figure, is a has-been whose glory days were back in the Art Deco era. He auctions off his cane and top hat as movie memorabilia, and then returns to New York to see what’s happened to Times Square since he’s left.

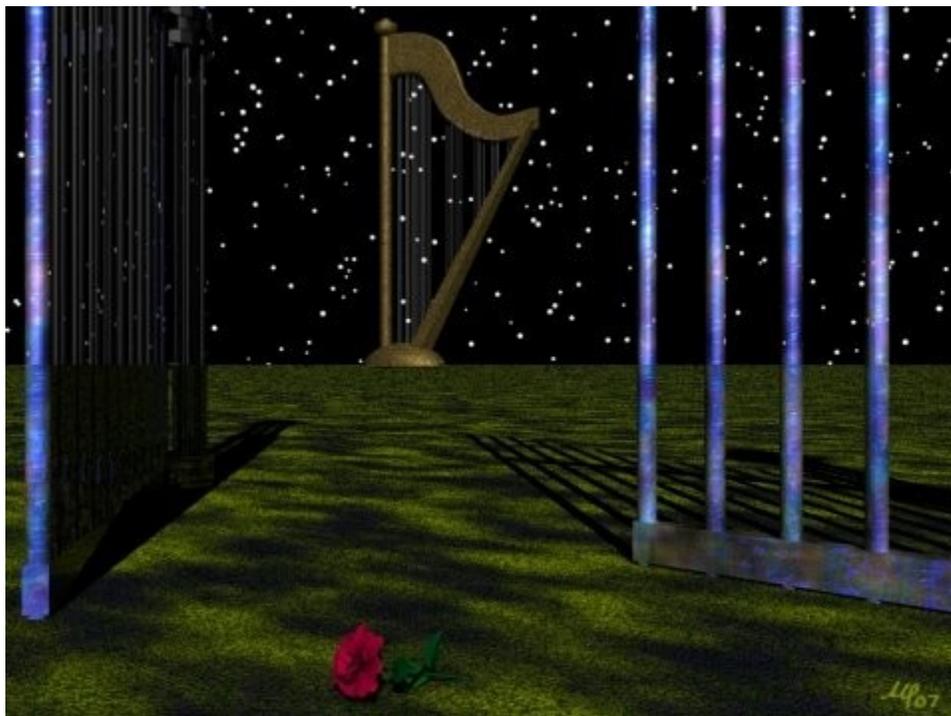
It’s become a sort of monster pinball arcade of neon and hot dog stands and aloha shirts, half-way to becoming the hellmouth Travis Bickle later inhabited. Hunter gets rejuvenated by its hectic, gaudy new post-war vibe. Later he hears that an Orson Welles-like figure Jeffrey Cordova (British song and dance man Jack Buchanan), currently directing and starring in blood-freezingly Expressionist production of *Oedipus Rex*, wants Tony for a musical version of *Faust*.

Cordova explains why in the song “That’s Entertainment,” which was appropriated for several MGM clip-show movies. It’s quite the heartening, generous idea—a unified field theory of entertainment that links Sophocles with pie-fights; Tarkovsky and the Three Stooges woven in one eternal golden braid. Having this excuse for flexibility, *The Band Wagon* stages a series of numbers, from utterly elegant white tie and tails soft shoe (Buchanan and Astaire doing “I Guess I Have to Change My Plans”) to a German dialect song about beer, performed with the

late Nanette Fabray. It's capped with the "Girl Hunt" number with Astaire and the amazing dancer Cyd Charisse, in a parody of Mickey Spillaine's pulp fiction. Whenever someone tells you that the only source of satire in 1950s America was Mad magazine, show them one of these MGM musicals. Sometimes *The Band Wagon* is a little grotesque—the number "Triplets" is tough on people who don't think adults should wear baby bonnets, though it's a great daffy song. ("I wish I had a wittle gun," says one of the three babies, who has had enough of his siblings). Otherwise, the elegance of Astaire mirrors the actors (such as Randolph Scott, Jimmy Stewart, and Joan Crawford) who turned from pre-war charmers to seriously involving presences.

The Apple (1980) also seeks a wide-ranging tone—even a cosmic one. But this berserk hippie movie, melding the Adam and Eve story with a timely arrival from God (Joss Ackland) in his flying Rolls Royce—is just plain all over the map like Texas. Over the years, there have been some damned bad musicals. Take Alan Carr's Village People opus *Can't Stop the Music*, so true to its title—they really won't stop it. But this beats them all. In the magic future of 1994, the Donnie and Marie Osmond style crooners Alphie and Bibi are cheated out of their rightful fame at the 1994 Worldvision Song Festival (it's modeled on the Eurovision song festival, a Niagara of noise, as Anthony Lane has observed: <https://bit.ly/2IKbOCI>)

The couple are turned against each other by the sequin-covered satanic record company owner Mr. Boogalow (Poland's Vladek Sheybal, the plotter Kronsteen in *From Russia With Love*) who somehow takes over the world and forces everyone to wear the holographic mark of the beast. So the *Fall of Man* is staged with some of the stickiest sub John Denver pop ever, and carried out with a vision of the future that's magnificently kitsch, even unto the mini-monorails. Super-cars that resemble Homer Simpson's answer to the Edsel, "The Homer" share space with 1980s crapola, such as acetate clothes that you can practically smell. Finally, a message about the importance of the divine, even as we're gawking at a zodiac-themed orgy. See this, and your antipathy for musicals will go all away around and come out the other side.





Musicals on the Far East End of Broadway

By Kurt Erichsen

The world of musical theater extends far beyond Broadway. European theaters are not just extended Broadway venues, and they are not limited to operas and operettas written 75 years or more ago. European musical theaters also perform original, contemporary musicals. I am touching on a few that are my favorites, and most of which we've seen. It's not an accident that results in my gravitating to the most popular European musicals. The web has many websites that cover these shows. But that's a long way from saying that the information is as complete or as accessible as I could wish. Query #1: which ones are worthwhile? Query #2: You're planning a trip to Europe and a show you'd like to see is playing while you're there. What can you do to prepare to enjoy the performance in a language you don't speak?

The easy answers: Youtube has a plethora of videos of individual songs or even complete shows. On rare occasions you may find a vid with English subtitles. Depending on the show and the theater, the performance may include projected titles. In Budapest for instance *Rebecca* was performed in Hungarian with English supertitles. At the opera house, *Die Fledermaus* was sung in German and spoken in Hungarian. Supertitles for the songs were in Hungarian and dialog supertitles were in German.

In picking musicals to try out, buy a CD. My favorite site is Musical-Shop. It has an extensive catalog of European shows, and European productions of American shows. It also has the best selection of DVDs I've ever found, and even some libretti and sheet music. Before buying a DVD, check the DVD region. Get Region 0 (universal) where you can. The native DVD region is 2, which will not play on American DVD players. Yes, there are region-free players and software hacks. But that's another article. Be forewarned that Musical-Shop is expensive. <http://www.musical-shop.de/index.asp>. Another online source: https://www.soundofmusic-shop.de/Musicals_from_Austria.html?switch_to_desktop=1.

How does one learn a European show in a local language? Ideally, learn the language. I've been working on German for several years, and have a long way to go! But at least I can follow the story if I study the libretto in advance. I did this for *Elisabeth*, for instance. After much web searching I found a (free) libretto from the website of a musical fan. The libretto was in German. Google Translate did a very ham-handed translation, but it was just good enough to follow the plot. The website in question is long gone unfortunately. Libretti from Musical-Shop are in the original language; and some CDs include synopses. To translate: scan and OCR the text – look for language settings in your PDF program, and then run it through Google Translate.

Try networking. Check out groups on Facebook of course, but also register (free) on musicals.net and search for European shows. This website has extensive forums of European musical fans. As a niche genre, it has its own fandom.

Musical Theater Genres

Musical theater is a popular entertainment in many cultures. Today's work of Broadway musicals grew out of operas, and developed into many sub-genres variously called operetta, "ballad operas" (e.g., *Beggar's Opera*), operettas, singspiel, zarzuela, musical comedies, and book musicals. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the major creative teams were Offenbach and his successors in Paris, Gilbert & Sullivan and their successors in Britain – and the whole German/Austrian/Hungarian "Gold and Silver ages" operetta school of composers ranging from Johann Strauss to Robert Stoltz. Germanic shows were translated and adapted for English and toured in Britain and the US.

During and after World War I, American and immigrant composers took the genre in new directions with influence from Jazz and Tinpan Alley. The Germanic musical theater evolved during this period too, with some of the same 20th century influences as American shows. But they evolved differently, and led to a new genre that I would call a cousin of Broadway.

If you tour Europe for musical theater, you will find local language productions of American shows. You will also find European shows, most of which never make it to America – exceptions to that rule include [Claude-Michel Schönberg's](#) *Les Misérables* and *Miss Saigon*. Many other shows form a niche genre we don't hear much about, even as they are performed throughout Europe. I don't know all of these shows, not by a longshot – but America is missing some gems.

Some of these shows attempt American production without success. I find it perplexing that a show could run for several years in multiple European cities and not be a hit in New York. Some shows have subject matter that seems universal. Other shows seem intended for audiences of tourists and Europeans rather than crossing the Atlantic.

Klimt is a classic example of a Tourist Musical. A visitor to Vienna spends the day seeing the Kunsthistorisches and Leopold Museums, and the Succession looking at paintings by Klimt. In the evening he can see a musical about the painter (except this show never made it to Vienna!). The point would be lost to American audiences. Likewise, *Elisabeth*. An American would wonder if this musical is about Elizabeth I or II.

A List of Shows (work in progress)

When I suggested this topic to Chris, I imagined there were a handful of musicals making the rounds of European opera houses. I took the assignment as an opportunity to dig a little deeper. I was surprised at how many European musicals there are. My methodology is limited to meet a deadline – dig through musical shop online catalogues and cross check with Wikipedia or a show-specific webpage. I'm looking for shows that originated in European theaters in the local language. I skipped shows that started off Broadway or the West End. What I found is that European shows are originating from all over the continent: at opera/operetta houses, or arts festivals. Vienna and Berlin, with their pre-eminent opera/operetta/musical houses, seem to have birthed the greatest number of these shows.

Clearly all these musical venues are looking at ways of attracting tourists, and a unique hit musical could serve in their promotion. Some of the shows I found seem to exist only as

concept albums. Many had one production run at their host venue, and were not revived for other cities. Several became European hits in their own right, being performed in several cities. A few were produced off-Broadway. A very few got to Broadway. As an appendix to this article, I offer a list of shows and pertinent details. Take a look at the titles – some intriguing ideas for libretti!

Whether a show has life beyond its initial run depends on more than the quality of the work. As we all know, musical theater is a big-money business. If a show is to have revivals and tours, it needs professional promotion. Yes, there are companies in that business. I chanced upon one, called VBW, or Vereinigte Bühnen Wien. They own and produce shows at four of Vienna's top musical theaters: the Theater an der Wien, the Raimund, the Ronacher, and the Kammeroper. These are major venues, but there are other important theaters: the Volksooper and the Josefstadt come to mind. As part of their promotion, VBW has published an impressive 89 page full color catalogue covering nine of their shows (Vampires, Elisabeth, Rebecca, Schikaneder, Peppone, Austria, Mozart, Rudolf, Visit). It includes background, synopses, lots of photos and extended video clips. I'm not going to try to replicate all that here; check out the link: <https://www.vbw-international.at/home/downloads>

The music of these shows I would describe as contemporary. Most use rock electric guitars / synthesizers and percussion combined with a theater orchestra of anywhere from eight to a hundred pieces. Some are more rock oriented – *Vivaldi Fünfte Jahreszeit* and *Roméo et Juliette* come to mind. *I Am from Austria* is in the Austropop genre with a score by Rainhard Fendrich. Yet even under the electric guitars are show tunes – some even in three-quarter time. I find the music very listenable, and a number of shows have scores as engaging as anything on Broadway.

My List of Favorites

Sylvester Levay and Michael Kunze

The most notable team of European musical writers is Levay and Kunze. They wrote four shows together which were hits in the European circuit, premiering 1992-2006. The first was *Elisabeth* (i.e. Kaiserin von Österreich und Königin von Ungarn – yes *that* Elisabeth, wife of Kaiser Franz Josef), *Mozart!*, *Rebecca*, and *Marie Antoinette*. They also collaborated on two earlier shows. Note – all about European historical figures.



Elisabeth (1992) was a show that really grabbed John and me, and has become a favorite. The premise is that Elisabeth had a life-long romance with Tod (Death). Considering the events of her life – losing a child, Crown Prince Rudolph's scandalous death at Mayerling, Emperor Maximilian of Mexico, and finally her own assassination, Tod plays a major role. He is played as a good looking blond rock star, who spends the show befriending young Rudolf, and tempting Elisabeth onto a boat ramp (on which she was assassinated). The show is narrated by Lucheni, the anarchist who assassinated her.

Mozart! followed from Levay & Kunze in 1999. It tells Mozart's life story, but is not a re-make of *Amadeus*. Mozart is portrayed by two actors – the adult in Vienna who lives Mozart's life, and the ten-year old composer who doesn't speak, and spends much of the show on his hands and knees reliably scribbling out page after page of musical composition. The musical's score includes several quotes of Mozart's work, but by and large the music is by Levay.

Rebecca premiered in 2006. The show is a musical adaptation of the novel by Daphne du Maurier, but I think we all remember it better as the movie by Alfred Hitchcock. It flows the movie closely with engaging songs, and seems a natural to head for Broadway. After two shows successful in Europe that probably would not attract audiences in America, one would think they would be looking for something a little more marketable in their next property. But even a good book and script is not always enough to assure the success of a musical in American theaters. The last I heard, which was several years ago, *Rebecca* was still tied up with legal matters. Which is very unfortunate, so it looks like a Broadway production of *Rebecca* is not going to be in the cards. Well, we all knew that producing a musical show is a risky venture. Still, in terms of accessibility, this is the Levay-Kunze show Americans should start with.

Marie Antoinette was the last collaboration between Levay and Kunze. It premiered in Tokyo in 2006, and had its first European performance in Bremen. I have a CD of the show, but I've never seen it performed, so I'm less familiar with it than the other three. although the subject matter is European history, it is much more familiar to American mass markets than *Elisabeth* or *Mozart*. Spoiler alert: the ending of the story does not turn out too well for the title character.

Tanz der Vampire

Dance of the Vampires is a faithful musical adaptation by Jim Steinman and Michael Kunze of Roman Polanski's film *Fearless Vampire Killers*. The score included Steinman's "Totale Finsternis" ("Total Eclipse of the Heart") which was a Billboard #1 in its own right. This show is one of the best of European musicals, with an entertaining book and many good songs. It's well known enough in Vienna to spawn a parody musical ... not too sorry about missing that. There was a Broadway-bound version of this show. It flopped, but you'll find clips on Youtube. Starring Michael Crawford (who created the title character in *Phantom of the Opera*) as the vampire and Rene Auberjonois as the professor, you'd expect a big hit. How can a show run so successfully in Europe but be panned in America? One explanation is bad reviews: (<https://variety.com/2002/legit/reviews/dance-of-the-vampires-3-1200544450/>, <https://www.talkinbroadway.com/page/world/DanceVampires.html>). Fans of the show point the blame at a re-written book that did not live up to the German version, or to Michael Crawford. Check out the German version and decide for yourself.



Roméo et Juliette

Gérard Presgurvic's musical adaptation of Romeo and Juliet opened in Paris in 2001. Before I saw the show, I wondered how a musical version of this play could avoid seeming like an update of *West Side Story*. It certainly succeeded. The adaptation casts the Montagues and Capulets as modern-day goth street punks. The character and costume design make them more threatening than the Sharks and Jets. The score is very memorable, making the show a must-see.

We saw Roméo, Vampire, and Rebecca in Budapest, all in the same week. Three very dark shows. I found myself counting the characters in each who ended up dead. Roméo won.

Stephen Schwartz

With major Broadway shows like *Godspell* and *Wicked*, Schwartz doesn't really belong on this list. Except that in 2016 he wrote the words and music for *Schikaneder*, which premiered at the Raimund theater in Vienna. Given the subject matter, it seems like an unlikely property for a Broadway hit, though it might do well in Europe. Two years ago there was discussion of a Broadway production. Perhaps it may yet happen. The score is quite good. I wouldn't call it Mozartesque, but it definitely takes a symphonic approach to Broadway songs. It takes on more classical influence than, say, Elisabeth. Schwartz is showing what he can do as a composer by writing a more "serious" score than his big hits, *Godspell* and *Wicked*. After a couple listening, I want to learn this show a bit better. If I get a chance to see it performed, I probably will.

But who was Schikaneder? As Mozart fans know well, Emanuel Schikaneder built the Theater an der Wien opera house (where *Die Zauberflöte* premiered) – he also produced and directed the show, wrote the libretto, and starred as the original Papageno. You'll remember him from the film *Amadeus* – the actor wearing the funny bird costume. Despite the strong score, the subject matter seems a little esoteric for American audiences, but perfect for classic musical tourists in Vienna. News articles hint at a Broadway production – but we'll see!

Claude-Michel Schönberg

Schönberg is best known for *Les Misérables* and *Miss Saigon* (both premiering in London). He also wrote *Martin Guerre*, which opened in London, *Marguerite* opened in London and the Czech Republic, and *The Pirate Queen*, which flopped in America. He also wrote *La Revolution Francaise* – I'm not sure it got beyond a studio cast recording. Based on my criteria for this list, I should exclude Schönberg – but with a show the stature of *Les Misérables*, lesser known works are worth a look.

Frank Wildhorn

Wildhorn also doesn't really belong on the list of European composers either. He's quite prolific, writing about 20 shows since 1990. They include *Jekyll & Hyde* (1990), the *Scarlet Pimpernel* (1997), and the *Civil War* (1998). That seems to be it for his shows that ran on Broadway. Since



then his shows have opened in California or Florida, or Europe, or Korea or Japan. Some intriguing titles: *Dracula the Musical*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Bonnie & Clyde*, *Excalibur*, *Mata Hari*, *Count of Monte Crisco*. I mention him here because he wrote *Rudolf - Affaire Mayerling*. Like its cousin musical *Elisabeth*, the subject matter is esoteric for Americans at home, but just the thing for an American tourist who just spent the day tromping through museums in the Hofburg. This summer Baden bei Wien produced *Bonnie and Clyde* (<https://www.buehnebaden.at/de/spielplan-und-karten/234-bonnie-clyde-musical>). The timing didn't quite work out for us to see it, though we did take in their production of *Der Bettelstudent* (Carl Millöcker 1882). Wildhorn has a long list of musicals to his credit, mostly performed on foreign shores, and a very short list of Tony nominations. The three or four shows of his I've watched are all workman like enough, but they just don't grab me the way that *Elisabeth* or *Tanz der Vampire* did.

Back to the Present

Those are some of my favorites and a few other notables. They were written 15-20 years ago – they seem new to us Americans, but they're old news in Europe. What's going on now, and what about a few shows of note that aren't on my favorite list?

I noted earlier that for a musical to live beyond its premiere production, it must have promotion. I did run across one other promoter – Newplay Entertainment (<https://>

www.newplay-entertainment.com/sitemap/). They not only promote European musicals, but write and produce them as well. Some intriguing titles: *Klimt*, *Tut Ankh Amon*, *Schiele* – music by Gerald Gratzner and books by Sissi Gruber. I bought a DVD of *Klimt* following a trip to Vienna where we'd seen many of Klimt's paintings. No subtitles, but an English synopsis was included. I found the music listenable, but not very memorable. The story is a telling of Gustav Klimt's life and struggles trying to buck the conservative art establishment, but lacks drama. The story includes a character called "Genius," a female dancer in a Klimtesque costume who dances artistically around Klimt but otherwise is not much involved in the plot. The idea was a copy of more successful characters embodying a concept in *Elisabeth* and *Mozart!*. And using a famous painting (The Kiss) as the design motif for costumes and sets was an idea lifted from *Sunday in the Park with George*.

I have not seen or heard the other two shows. *Tut Ankh Amon* sounds interesting, but isn't so little known of his life that the libretto would have to be fictional? The story of Egon Schiele holds a little more promise. He was a painter in the Wiener Succession, he was gay, and had a teenaged lover. Yes, plenty of opportunity for drama.

Vivaldi die Fünfte Jahreszeit

Vivaldi – the Fifth Season is an original production at the Volksoper Wien, and is showing now. The music is by Christian Kolonovits, combining a five piece girl rock group with a full orchestra. Vivaldi lived during the Baroque era, and it's a rock musical, so they devised the term "Barock musical." Das Rock means skirt – so the show is a "Rock" Musical in both senses.

We did not see this show – the Volksoper does not perform during the summer. But we did get a copy of the DVD. I'm still in the process of learning this show sans subtitles. Here's a summary from viennaoperatickets.com: "The premise of *Vivaldi - The Fifth Season* is to recreate the composer's persona as a rock god of the Baroque (or should that be BaRock) era, and the discovery of his diary by a contemporary girl group the device Kolonovits and his librettist, Angelika Messner, use to imagine what a superstar would have looked like in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."

I Am from Austria

The title is in English but the show is in German. VBW describes it as "a sharp-witted love story around the chart-topping hits of Austro-Pop legend Rainhard Fendrich in an affectionate tribute to the culture, countryside and cake that make Austria so special: a foot-tapping, clap-along, laugh-out-loud explosion of fun and colour." I got a copy of the CD, but it's not a show I'd go out of my way to see. The whole premise sounds geared toward Austrians. Even if I spoke fluent German, I wouldn't get the cultural references.

Follow Up

If these shows are new to you, and you want to learn more, here's the short list: a show by Levay and Kunze: *Elisabeth* if you are a history buff, and otherwise *Rebecca*. Plus *Tanz der Vampire* and *Roméo et Juliette*. Note to self: check out more shows by Gérard Presgurvic. If you're still hungry after that, check out the following table.

| Title | Composer | Year | Productions | Lyrics-book | Notes | Link |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------|--|---------------|---|--|
| Abraham | Wolfgang Hofer | 1970 | | | "Das Lied vom Trödler" was a single from this show? | http://deacademic.com/dic.nsf/dewiki/1524510 |
| African Footprint | Dave Pellecut | 2003 | South Africa, France | | | http://www.richardloring.co.za/africanfootprint.html |
| Autant En Emporte Le Vent | Gerard Presgurvic | 2003 | Palais des Sports de Paris | | Gone with the Wind | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autant_en_emporte_le_vent |
| Bed And Sofa | Polly Pen | 1996 | American or English? | | | http://guidetomusicaltheatre.com/shows_b/bed_and_sofa.htm |
| Besuch Der Alten Dame | Moritz Schneider, Michael Reed | 2014 | Vienna Ronacher | | AKA "The Visit" | https://www.vbw-international.at/home/downloads |
| Bonnie & Clyde | Frank Wildhorn | 2012 | Broadway, Baden | | | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonnie_%26_Clyde_(musical) |
| Das Wunder Von Bern | Martin Lingnau | 2015 | Hamburg | | | https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Wunder_von_Bern_(Musical) |
| Die Päpstin | Dennis Martin | 2011 | Fulda | | | |
| Don Camillo & Peppone | Dario Farina | 2007 | Vienna Ronacher | Michael Kunze | | https://www.vbw-international.at/home/downloads |
| Dracula | Frank Wildhorn | 2008 | LaJolla CA | | | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dracula,_the_Musical |
| Drei Von Der Tankstelle | Werner Richard Heymann | 1998 | Vienna | | A musical about a gas station? BP logo on the CD. | |
| Drei Musketiers | Ferdi Bolland, Rob Bolland | 2005 | Berlin | | | |
| Egon Schiele | Gerald Gratzer | 2011 | Vienna | | | https://www.newplay-entertainment.com/musicals/tut-ankh-amon-the-musical/ https://musicalzentrale.de/index.php?service=0&subservice=2&details=3999 |
| Elisabeth | Sylvester Levay | 1992 | Wien; several revivals and tours | Michael Kunze | | https://www.vbw-international.at/home/downloads |
| Elixir | Tobias Künzel | 2008 | Leipzig | | | |
| Emil Und Die Detektive | Marc Schubring | 2001 | Berlin | | | |
| Emilie Jolie | Philippe Chatel | 1995 | France | | | |
| Falco Meets Amadeus | Falco (Hans Hölzel) | 2001 | Berlin | | Falco was a 1980s austropop star | https://muse.jhu.edu/article/35007 |
| Fleisch | Marc Schubring | 2002 | | | | |
| Freudiana | Eric Woolfson | 1990 | Vienna? CD release only? | | Rock opera | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freudiana |
| Friedrich - Mythos Und Tragödie | Dennis Martin | 2012 | Potsdam | | Prussian Emperor Friedrich | |
| Gustav Klimt | Gerald Gratzer | 2009 | Gutenstein | | | https://www.newplay-entertainment.com/musicals/tut-ankh-amon-the-musical/ |

| Title | Composer | Year | Productions | Lyrics-book | Notes | Link |
|---|-------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|---------------|--|---|
| Habsburgischen | Christian Kolonovits | 2007 | Vienna | | Historical satire about the Habsburg family, which reigned over Austria for centuries. | |
| Hinterm Horizont - Musical Über Das Mädchen Aus Ostberlin | Udo Lindenberg | 2011 | Berlin | | | |
| I Am From Vienna | Rainhard Fendrich | 2017 | Vienna Raimund | | | https://www.vbw-international.at/home/downloads |
| Ich War Noch Niemals In New York | Udo Jürgens | 2010 | Wien - Raimund | Michael Kunze | | |
| Jekyll & Hyde | Frank Wildhorn | 1997 | Broadway, Bremen, Felsen | | | |
| Julia & R - Hip-Hop-Musical | Franz Dorfner | 1992 | St. Pölten | | | |
| Kolpings Traum | Dennis Martin | 2013 | | | | |
| Kongress Tanzt | Werner Richard Heymann | 2016 | Vienna - Volksoper | | | |
| La Revolution Francaise | Claude-Michel Schönberg | 1973 | France - studio cast | | | |
| Les Dix Commandements | Pascal Obispo | 2000 | Paris | | | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Dix_Commandements_(musical) |
| Les Mille Et Une Vies D'Alibaba | Fabrice Aboulker, Alain Lanty | 2000 | Studio Cast | | | |
| Linie 1 | Birger Heymann | 1986 | Berlin Grips Theater | | | |
| Ludwig - Sehnsucht Nach Dem Paradies | Franz Hummel | 2000 | Füssen | | | |
| Luna | Rory Six | 2017 | Vienna - studio cast | | | |
| Marie Antoinette | Sylvester Levay | 2006 | Tokyo, Bremen | Michael Kunze | | https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Antoinette_(musical) |
| Matterhorn | Albert Hammond | 2018 | Theatre St.Gallen, Switzerland | Michael Kunze | | https://www.zermatt.ch/en/Media/News/World-Premier-of-the-Matterhorn-Musical |
| Mein Avatar Und Ich | Thomas Zaufke | 2011 | Berlin | | | |
| Mozart! | Sylvester Levay | 1999 | Wien | Michael Kunze | | https://www.vbw-international.at/home/downloads |
| Napoleon | Timothy Williams | 1994 | Toronto | | | |
| Nostradamus | Roger E. Boggasch | 2017 | Vienna | | | |

| Title | Composer | Year | Productions | Lyrics-book | Notes | Link |
|--|---------------------------------|------|---|---------------------|---|--|
| Notre Dame De Paris | Richard Cocciante | 1998 | Concept Album in Paris; opened in London | | | |
| Piaf - De Musical | Leiding Ad van Dijk | 2006 | Holland | | | |
| Rappacinis Tochter - Ein Gothik Musical Von Aeternitas | | 2009 | | | | |
| Rebecca | Sylvester Levay | 2006 | Wien, revival, Stuttgart | Michael Kunze | | https://www.vbw-international.at/home/downloads |
| Rembrandt | Jeroen Englebert, Dirk Bross | 2006 | Holland | | | |
| Romeo Et Juliette | Gérard Presgurvic | 2005 | Wien, several revivals | | | |
| Rudolf - Affaire Mayerling | Frank Wildhorn | 2009 | Wien | | | https://www.vbw-international.at/home/downloads |
| Schikaneder | Stephen Schwartz | 2016 | Wien, Raimund | Stephen Schwartz | | https://www.londontheatre.co.uk/reviews/review-of-schikaneder-by-stephen-schwartz-at-the-ramund-theater-in-vienna |
| Shylock | Stephan Kanyar | 2012 | Innsbruck | | | |
| Snowwhite | Frank Nimsgern | 2012 | Bonn - "reloaded" | | | |
| Star Club - Die Story | Daddis Gaiser | 1998 | Hamburg | | | |
| Stimmen Im Kopf | Wolfgang Böhmer, Peter Lund | 2013 | Berlin | | | |
| Tanz Der Vampire | Jim Steinman | 1998 | Wien, several revivals | Michael Kunze | | https://www.vbw-international.at/home/downloads |
| The Scarlet Pimpernel | Frank Wildhorn | 1998 | Broadway | | | |
| Tut Ankh Amon | Gerald Gratzner | 2008 | Cairo Opera House | | | https://www.newplay-entertainment.com/musicals/tut-ankh-amon-the-musical/ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tutanchamun_(Musical) |
| Vivaldi - Die fünfte Jahreszeit | Christian Kolonovits | 2018 | Vienna Volksoper | | | https://viennaoperatickets.com/opera-all-performances/vivaldi-the-fifth-season/?p=33&l=2&id=1574 |
| Wenig Farbe | Rory Six | 2018 | Vienna | | One-Woman-Musical starring Pia Douwes. | |
| Zum Sterben Schön | Marc Schubrin | 2013 | Hildesheim | | | |





Teaneck Tanzi by Chris Garcia

Some might think that being a massive wrestling fan and a massive fan of musicals is a rare thing. Nope, not at all. In fact, there are a lot of wrestling fans who are also major theatre fans, including several actors, and even writers. There are references to wrestling in some major musicals, including *The Music Man*, but prior to 2010s, there was precious little wrestling on Broadway stages. In 1981, John Sayles brought *Turnbuckle* to New York stages. It was panned, though I've read it and it is mostly the fault of a framing device that was shoehorned in. There was already a successful wrestling-themed musical playing in London called *Trafford Tanzi*. The play was hyper-gimmickry. It was set in a wrestling ring, and divided into ten rounds. This makes sense for the wrestling that had been popular on British TV with stars like Jacky Pallo and Mick McManus featured matches divided into rounds. At the end of each round, a bell would ring. In this way, it's a lot like MMA today.

The play showed Tanzi, a young woman, growing up, being a tomboy, and wanting to be a pro wrestler. She achieves her dream, and there's a lot of actual wrestling in each of the rounds. The wrestling was pretty intense, which actually aided in the thing that made the play so successful: audience heat. It was meant to be booed, cheered, and played as if it were a match, not a regular play. The British audiences ate it up, and it was successful on the West End in a time when we had yet to get the bombastic Cameron Mackintosh-produced Andrew Lloyd Weber beasts of the later 1980s.

And, as happened with those bloated money-harvesting Weber shows, *Trafford Tanzi* came to Broadway.

There is, in fact, a few good reasons to believe it could have worked. New York was, and pretty much still is, the wrestling capital of the USA. Madison Square Garden is considered Mecca to wrestling fans, and many of the legendary shows of the WWF took place there in the 1970s and 80s. These drew a lot of people, including celebrities. Andy Warhol was one, as was Robert Rauschenberg. The Punk/New Wave act Blondie, especially lead singer Debbie Harry, were often seen at the shows. My one show at the Garden featured me sitting two rows down from Larry Toback. If there was a place that could sustain an interest in the kind of show that *Tanzy* was, it was New York.

Broadway was different then. New York itself was different. They hadn't cleaned up Times Square yet, nor had Broadway gone through the changes that would turn it into the megamonster it is today. While *A Chorus Line* and *Cats* were already around, Broadway wasn't drawing huge numbers from around the world, it wasn't quite the tourist business that it is today, so a wrestling-themed musical would work in a city where wrestling was big business.

You'd be wrong.

The show was brought to the US, renamed as *Teaneck Tanzy*, after the city in New Jersey, and they had a cast that so many folks today would love to see. Debbie Harry starred, though only half the time because all the actual wrestling in the show meant they'd be taking a lot of punishment. The other half was Caitlan Clarke, who some may remember from *Dragon-slayer*. It was the Broadway debut of Harry, which is a weird factoid.. The Referee was played by Andy Kaufman.

Yes, THAT Andy Kaufman was in a Broadway show.

Now, Kaufman's work included wrestling, typically women, and of course, Jerry The King Lawler. The show is about Tanzi, but often it is the Referee that is a focus. He was perfect for the role. He was always a song and dance man, but was rarely given the chance to prove it without the surrealistic bent that was his schtick. Then again, can you ever say a musical set in a wrestling ring is truly non-surrealistic?

It opened off-off-Broadway. That's really the place for a show like this. It was changed just a bit to make it more American, though it kept the rounds concept, which is so foreign to Americans, as rounds were only popular through about 1945, and never in the era of Television which led to the sky-rocketing popularity. The show was panned by critics, much like Sayle's *Turnbuckle* had been, but crowds enjoyed it in its limited release. In the UK, it was a hit, and we were just at the start of the UK imports phase that would launch Broadway to more profitable heights. The next obvious step was Broadway for the fine British show, right?

Bad idea.

That's not entirely true. It was a good idea, what with that cast and the stirrings of Pro Wrestling entering into the mainstream of Pop Culture. The one problem was that it wasn't quite there, with Hulk Hogan still working for the AWA, where he was a big deal, but not the international megastar he would become just over a year later. In addition, no matter how big wrestling has been in America, it has never been as big a deal as it was in the UK. American TV was built on the backs of Uncle Miltie, Ed Sullivan, *I Love Lucy*, and slightly earlier and perhaps less driving a force, DuMont network's wrestling superstar, Gorgeous George. Even with that sort of exposure, no one was ever as big culturally in the US as Jackie Pallo and Mick McManus were in the UK. Wrestling was never as profitable as it was in the US, but it had deeply soaked into the zeitgeist.

The show isn't a traditional musical, though there are songs, and it's not quite a fully-realised experimental piece. Instead, it lays in a surrealistic, or perhaps more appropriately, expressionistic, mode that allows it to function as an event rather than a 'show'. That's something that wasn't quite ready for Broadway in the post-Zeigfeld era. In the 1980s, people went for a show, which is what Mackintosh and Weber are so good at providing, but the show aspect required a central post-modernist sensibility that Broadway didn't quite grok yet. This may be why it's done well over the last couple of decades at colleges and fringe festivals. A recent revival at a UK festival was called *Tanzi Libre*, and used the Mexican Lucha Libre iconography of masks as a marker. It's the perfect setting for Tanzi; it's a work of depth, that can easily exist out of time.

CHESSE



GODSPELL



"A MUSICAL
MADE IN HEAVEN"
- TIME MAGAZINE



42ND STREET

DAVID MERRICK'S
SONG & DANCE EXTRAVAGANZA

MAJESTIC THEATRE
44th Street West of Broadway

Some Quick Shots from Ron Oakes

When I saw *42nd Street* on National Tour, I was a bit startled when the character Julian Marsh – the director of the show within the show – suddenly started belting out “Lullaby to Broadway” midway through the second act without having sung a single line prior. Now, knowing more about the show and its original casting, I suspect that people seeing it in its original Broadway run had the opposite reaction, wondering why they cast Jerry Orbach in a non-singing, non-dancing role until that point in the second act.

Chess had a bit of an issue transitioning from concept album to stage. I could not ever figure out what the issue was and why such, at least to me, a wonderful score and libretto couldn't make it on the stage. However, when I saw the 20th (if I recall) anniversary concert, I realized the problem. Current events were moving so fast that it made it so a story, that was supposed to be contemporary, quit working. However, waiting twenty or so years, and telling it as a story set in a specific point in history, suddenly it all works again.

I think I may have seen one of the few early productions of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Aspects of Love* that actually worked. As Lloyd Webber's next show after *Phantom of the Opera* everyone, including Lloyd Webber and his partners, expected another extravaganza. But *Aspects of Love* works much better as an intimate setting. I saw an early post-Broadway production at small theater that used to be located in the Lyric Opera Building in Chicago. In this small setting, the show worked. But, as an extravaganza, I could see how the show failed.

Each time I see it, or even listen to one of the Cast Albums (I have two), I end up seeing *Pippin* very much as a medieval passion play – with The First Player being very much The Devil, and all but three of the players his (or her) demons. I don't know if that is what the writers of the show intended, but it is one of those ideas that once it got into my head, I have never been able to shake.

As a Christian, I really enjoy both *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I have more theological issues with the latter, but I'm always a bit miffed that neither of them cover the resurrection. I understand, at least partially, why. But, the resurrection is an important part of the story – even if you are just telling it as a story.

A political point: though it has been about 50 years since it was written, “Alas for You” from *Godspell* could be about today's leaders of the Evangelical Movement/Religious Right as easily as about first century Pharisees.



A lot of the things I love about musicals are the same things I love about science fiction and fantasy. Wonder, magic, and a glimpse into a world a little different from ours. And maybe that's why musicals are rarely also science fiction or fantasy, with the exception of ones aimed at children, an area where most things are fantastical already anyway.

So it was with happy anticipation that a few years ago I saw ads for a new comedy show that was also secondary world fantasy. Not only are musicals rare on television, but fantasy and science fiction with a lighter tone is also pretty hard to find. With a few exceptions most tv genre at the moment is on the grittier side; angsty, serious superheroes, gritty urban fantasy, and dark science fiction. Lots of it really outstanding stuff, but not exactly what you'd call breezy.

And here was a live action fantasy spoof, with singing!

The story of a brave knight named Galavant, his beautiful kidnapped bride, a beautiful princess in need of help, an a wicked tyrant king. Plus horse riding and swordfights, and well, songs. Of course this being a modern show; lots of pointing out, winking at, and subverting tropes. All that and several full musical numbers per 22 minute episode, quite an ambitious endeavour.

Composers Alan Menken and Glenn Slater were onboard, bringing that Disney action and Broadway cred. Creator Dan Fogleman had some pretty high concept stuff under his belt already, though no big hits. And although most of the cast was not familiar to me, the one face I recognized was none other than Timothy Omundson, best known as Carlton 'Lassie' Lassiter

on the much missed show *Pysch*, which come to think of it had it's own amazing musical episode where he got to show off his talents.

It turned out to be exactly what I wanted, I binged the first half dozen episodes in one sitting (or more precisely in one reclining, if I'm being perfectly honest). A touch of *When Things Were Rotten*, a dash of *Princess Bride*, and a little bit of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, especially in the range of music styles that get spoofed. Very meta, tongue-in-cheek, and just goofily silly, but with good chemistry between the actors and, critically; with really solid musical numbers. It helped that the cast was made up of good comedic actors, and that all of them could also really sing. Joshua Sasse nailed the charming Disney hero thing, Mallory Jansen was just generally fabulous, and Karen David has an actual recording career, Luke Youngblood carries a rousing *Le Mis* style number like a pro, and even Vinnie Jones acquits himself well. Although that last surprising fact led me down a weird YouTube rabbit hole I don't necessarily recommend.

The story has enough twists and turns to keep things interesting, with some fun surprises and unexpected reveals. And by the end of season two you actually care about this gang of idiots and most of their goals, even the villains kinda. But the real fun comes from the rapid fire joke songs (rhyming 'value' and 'disembowel you' has to be a first) and from goofy gags; a bereft character goes to the Island of Spinster, where they hand you a cat and some chocolate on arrival, the first episode of season two is entitled 'A New Season aka Suck it Cancellation Bear'. Toss in the occasional guest star like Hugh Bonneville as Peter the Pillager, or Weird Al as a monk - who quite naturally gets his own song, and a breakneck pace and it all just carries you along with it if you just let it.

Some shows are just bright blasts of silly fun, usually they don't hang around very long, maybe silly fun is hard to maintain in the long run. Of course the elaborate musical numbers, battle scenes, costumes, and location shooting on location all over the castles and villages of Wales probably didn't help. ABC does not have those HBO dollars to throw around, though *Galavant* does sneak in a couple of *GoT* jokes in the background now and then.

But it was nice while it lasted, and it's crazy to think that for a second there we had two musical tv shows on television at the same time. Now its down to *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* to carry the banner alone.



Musicals by Graham Charnock

I am a child of the musical generation. Mostly I grew up on Disney films which always incorporated a strong musical score and lots of chippy happy songs. Heigh Ho Heigh Ho it's off to work we go. One of my earliest lust-objects was Doris Day. So naturally I fell hook line and sinker for Calamity Jane. A beautiful cowboy cross-dresser who proved to be a Disney romantic goddess at heart, especially when the plot dissolved into a predictable boy/girl pair up. What could go wrong?

Of course Rodgers and Hart and Rodgers and Hammerstein also soon bludgeoned their way into my consciousness. Fake cowboys slapping their boots in *Oklahoma* and singing about corn as high as an elephant's eye, regardless of the fact that no elephants had ever been seen in *Oklahoma*. *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*; yes a really credible scenario that for in-breeding if nothing else.

But by then musicals were all becoming a bit inbred. Fake South Sea islanders and Navy sailors serenading each other in *South Pacific*. Bali Hi indeed. My special American Imperialist island And then the crowning glory of *West Side Story*, which gave musicals a credibility by being derived from Shakespeare and at least dealing with ethnic groups in a scenario orchestrated by Jewish writers. It was all part of the American myth that I absorbed in my youth. Needless to say by the time Stephen Sondheim came on the scene I was far more cynical and unreceptive of his *Eine Klien Nachtmusic*, and *Send in the Clowns* always struck me as too contrived. I was beginning to fall out of love with musicals.

Andrew Lloyd Webber contributed substantially to the decline in my interest. Did I

really want to live through the life of Evita Peron even if it had a couple of good tunes. And *Cats* and *Starlight Express*? They weren't musicals as I understood them, just theatrical events for parties coming down for a day-trip from Morecambe.

Now the ultimate extension is Jukebox Musicals, cobbled together from Greatest Hits albums and again appealing to a sixties generation who really should have naturally died out by now. And the insipid and lifeless *La La Land* wins endless awards despite having no real musical heart.

Colour me gone. I'll be at home watching Al Johnson in *The Entertainer*. Everything is better in black and white.

THE ENTERTAINER

Scott Joplin
tubepartitura.com

tubecore.net
tocapartituras.com

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'The Entertainer' by Scott Joplin. It is presented in a 4/4 time signature. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes a standard musical staff for the guitar and a corresponding guitar tab. The second system also includes a standard musical staff with chord markings (C, C7, F, G7, C) and a guitar tab. A vertical blue highlight is present on the right side of the first system's staff and tab, indicating a specific measure.

Gilbert & Sullivan & Murder: 10 Mysteries Set Around G&S Productions

by Petrea Mitchell

My summer reading project this year was to track down and read every murder mystery I could find involving G&S productions. (Well, alleged murder mysteries anyway; the internet turns out to have been a little bit unreliable there.) Here is a look at what they offer to both the murder-mystery connoisseur and the Savoyard, arranged, for defensible reason, in order of publication.

Gladys Mitchell, *Death at the Opera* (1934)

A teacher playing Katisha in a school production of *The Mikado* is drowned during the performance.

Remember the *Mrs. Bradley Mysteries*, starring Diana Rigg? Put those out of your head completely, as the real Mrs. Bradley is nothing like that. She is a fascinating character though, and I'm very disappointed in the BBC now.

This is a murder mystery of the old school, where the author offers you piles of free clues before the murder even happens and invites you to find the one piece that doesn't fit. Multiple plots are uncovered, along with a whole stew of drama going on behind the walls of a quiet boarding school.

The Mikado plus the 1930s is bound to bring a nervous cringe to the modern G&S fan, since this is famously the period which brought in the truly outrageous use of yellowface which would then persist for decades. We are spared any hints of anything but greasepaint being used. The author has no real interest in the show beyond the mechanics of who needed to be on stage when; I think it may have been picked simply for being popular at the time.

Nicholas Meyer, *The West End Horror* (1972)

Subtitled "A Posthumous Memoir of John H. Watson, M.D.", this is framed as a lost manuscript which tells the story of Sherlock Holmes tracking down a gruesome killer in London's theater district.

As a Holmes pastiche, this does an excellent imitation of Arthur Conan Doyle's prose style, but does require a canon-breaking moment or two, particularly the part where Holmes, who does not have many close friends or broad interests, suddenly turns out to be best buds with George Bernard Shaw. The actual mystery sometimes takes a backseat to the author's desire to cram as many theatrical personalities of the time into the story, but the end is rock-solid Doylean.

One of the murder victims is a member of the chorus in *The Grand Duke*. This is another author unconcerned with the G&S plays themselves; the reason for this connection is to get Holmes and Watson hobnobbing with Gilbert, Sullivan, and D'Oyly Carte.

Charlotte MacLeod, *The Plain Old Man* (1985)

An amateur sleuth is dragged into helping with her aunt's production of *The Sorcerer*, which is enlivened with an art theft, a murder, and further mysterious crimes.

All right, you want an author who loves G&S? Here she is. It isn't just the opera, but the constant quotes, the names of half the characters, everything about this book which says it was written just to get it all out of her system. Less fanatical readers will probably still be able to enjoy watching eccentric rich white people being eccentric, but few of them will get what the true Savoyard does out of passages like:

Jack Tippleton had never yet got through a production without making a play for one of the actresses. ... Jack wasn't inclined to bother much with members of the chorus, though he was quite willing to settle for a Pitti Sing or a Fleta, and often had.

Maybe that had been another factor in Emma's apportionment of the roles. If the affair got around to the point of throwing scenes and flouncing off in a huff, Emma wanted to make sure it was not one of her lead singers who flounced. She'd lost her Angelina that way, one time when they were doing *Trial By Jury* with Jack as the Judge. It had happened the night of the dress rehearsal, as Sarah recalled. Aunt Emma, trouser that she was, had taken up another notch in her corsets, crammed herself into the wedding dress, and burlesqued the role to its ultimate limit.

(Being the 1980s, the problematic man is someone to be worked around rather than removed. He's a stock character in the next few books, but more about him later.)

Mollie Hardwick, *Perish in July* (1989)

A production of *Yeomen of the Guard* intended to raise funds for church repairs is halted after the obnoxious leading lady is found dead inside an antique chest hired for the show.

The investigation of the murder follows the philosophy of mostly ignoring it and related developments until the murderer gets around to threatening the heroine. The story is more concerned with her home life. Her husband is an ex-vicar who parted ways with the Anglican church over liturgical reforms, and who is blessed with an author who wants to make his life easy. In the course of the book, another woman falls desperately in love with him, sleeps with him, and then manages to sneak away without his wife ever finding out. The book

also opens with the funeral of his severely disabled daughter who is now conveniently not taking up huge amounts of time and effort.

Not much direct G&S content, although the heroine does get to say over and over and over again that her husband would have made a terrific Jack Point.

Kerry Greenwood, *Ruddy Gore* (1995)

A gala performance of *Ruddigore* in honor of the first solo flight from England to Australia goes awry when someone manages to poison both the actor playing Sir Ruthven and his understudy.

This is from the Phryne Fisher series; I haven't seen any of the TV adaptations. In this book at least, Fisher is a private detective who divides her time equally between detecting and being tragically glamorous. The former at keeps the story moving along well.

The explanation of the murder has links back to the Savoy Theatre and the original G&S performances, and the chapters are all headed with G&S quotes. The author gets the sequence of events in *Ruddigore* wrong twice, though.

Sarah Hoskinson Frommer, *Murder & Sullivan* (1998)

A small town already trying to recover from a tornado suffers another shock when its local *Ruddigore* is halted by Sir Roderic turning up truly dead.

A very nice middle-of-the road cozy that I can't find much to say about as a murder mystery. It does the job. As a relic of a mere twenty years ago, it's notable in that one can see the modern era of rural America forming, with scenes like the community center where the protagonist works hosting a session that takes questions about dealing with Medicare and Medicaid cutbacks.

Of two back-to-back books using *Ruddigore*, this does much better justice to it. This one also uses G&S quotes as chapter headers. It warmed my heart to see even *The Grand Duke* getting a little love.

Karen Sturges, *Death of a Pooh-Bah* (2000)

The truly unpleasant man who plays Pooh-Bah in a community production of *The Mikado* is murdered in his dressing room afterward.

Remember I said we'd get back to the missing stair? Here's the book where people finally turn around and decide he isn't worth tolerating. (Not, however, to the point of murdering him, as it turns out he was a terrible human being in plenty of other ways too.) Women reckoning with mistreatment is an ongoing theme of the book, from the protesters calling for the performance to be shut down for misogyny, to the heroine realizing how much of her life she gave up to support her ex-husband's career, to the long-lost aunt who tells a story of what they did to girls like her in the 1950s when they refused to behave like nice young women.

The Mikado is presented a work that is still worthy and likeable, but with respect for its detractors.

Roberta Morrell, *Vengeance Dire* (2001)

Something happens to Mabel around a production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. I didn't manage to read far enough to find out what.

The author is an experienced G&S director, and so the main character is also a director, of a similar age and gender, only with a totally hot boyfriend and, one suspects, an up-

graded life in general. The mundane details of casting and driving back and forth across England are no doubt based in real life but not made compelling.

This is a self-published book, not in the modern sense of an author seizing power from the gatekeepers of publishing to control the process, but in the old one of never having known the touch of any kind of editor before publication. Editors really do make books better.

Laurie R. King, *Pirate King* (2011)

A silent-film mogul decides that his next masterpiece will be about a people trying to make a film of *Pirates of Penzance*, only to be kidnapped by real pirates. Real life then proceeds to make the entire project even more meta.

This is a good book, just not in any way the book I was looking for. First, it's not a murder mystery, more an adventure comedy. Second, although the main character is introduced as the wife and detecting partner of Sherlock Holmes, very little Holmesian detection goes on. Mostly it is limited to the main characters seeing the disaster that is about to unfold; they then go on to do nothing other than be smug about it. In fact, Holmes is all but superfluous to the story, and it would have been an even better book if the heroine could have stood completely on her own.

The opera is once again merely a convenient plot device; the author is clearly not too familiar with it or any other G&S.

Julianna Deering, *Murder at the Mikado* (2014)

Coming full circle, another 1930s performance of *The Mikado* is disrupted by murder.

It appears to be mere coincidence that we end as we began. There are no other signs of an homage to Mrs. Bradley; this book owes much more to noir than the Detection Club. It also recalls *Ruddy Gore* in that the heroine's social milieu is that of the rich and beautiful people. But it's also a cozy, in that just as much material is provided by the hero's home life. Here they involve obsessive wedding planning which is ultimately derailed by a contrived (in the literary sense) breakup. If that sounds like a lot, yes, this is far and away the longest of the actual murder mysteries.

The Mikado doesn't really show up at all, since the production company immediately moves on to rehearsals for subsequent shows.

After all that, the clear winner for sheer amount of G&S worship is *The Plain Old Man*. But my top recommendation is *Death of a Pooh-Bah* for the total package: the well-constructed mystery, the deep examination of G&S, and a likeable set of heroes that you want to pull for.