

PROGRAM NOTES

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Development of the musical—A short history

The first theatre piece which conforms to the modern conception of a musical, featuring dance and original music that helped to tell the story, is generally considered to be *The Black Crook*, which premiered in New York on September 12, 1866, the year following the close of the Civil War. The production was an immense five-and-a-half hours long, but in spite of this it ran for 474 performances. Comedians Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart produced and starred in musicals on Broadway between 1878 (*The Mulligan Guard Picnic*) and 1885, with book and lyrics by Harrigan and music by his father-in-law David Braham. These musical comedies featured characters and situations taken from the everyday life of New York's lower classes and represented a significant step forward from vaudeville and burlesque. They starred high quality singers such as Lillian Russell, Vivienne Segal, and Fay Templeton instead of ladies of questionable repute who populated earlier theater. The length of runs in the theatre also changed rapidly around this same time. During World War I musical theatre soon broke the 500 performance mark, most notably in London by the long-running Gilbert and Sullivan hits, such as *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Mikado*.

With *The Merry Widow* in 1907 a period of musical comedy known as operettas began. Victor Herbert was a leading American composer with *Babes in Toyland* (1903), the *Red Mill* (1906), and *Naughty Marietta* (1910). Quincyans received a personal acquaintance with operettas of this period in the elaborate performances by Quincy College, directed by Cloyce Enlow, from 1947 to 1954. These productions in Quincy included: *The Mikado* (1947); *The Red Mill* (1948), *Naughty Marietta* (1949), *The Student Prince* (1950), *The Desert Song* (1951), *The Vagabond King* (1952), *The New Moon* (1953), and *The Chocolate Soldier* (1954). All of these operettas were 35 to 40 years old at the time, dating from the early 20th century operetta repertoire.

The highlight of musical theater production in the 1920's was *Showboat* (1927). Lyrics were based on Edna Ferber's book, adapted by Oscar Hammerstein II, and the gorgeous music was written by Jerome Kern. *Showboat* represented an integration of book and score, with dramatic themes, as told through the music, dialogue, setting and movement, all seamlessly woven together.

The great depression of the 1930's, affected theatre audiences, as people had less money to spend on entertainment. In addition, "talkie" films at low prices presented a strong challenge to all types of theater. Only a few shows exceeded a run on Broadway or in London of 500 performances. Still, for those who could afford it, this was an exciting time in the development of musical theatre. Encouraged by the success of *Show Boat* (1927), creative teams began following the format of that popular hit. *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), a political satire with music by George Gershwin and lyrics by Ira Gershwin and Morrie Ryskind, was the first musical to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize. *The Band Wagon* (1931), starred dancing partners Fred Astaire and his sister Adele. Cole Porter's *Anything Goes* (1934) affirmed Ethel Merman's position as the First Lady of musical theatre--a title she maintained for many years. *As Thousands Cheer* (1933) was an Irving Berlin and Moss Hart success that marked Marilyn Miller's last show and the first Broadway show to star an African-American, Ethel Waters. Gershwin's *Porgy and*

Bess (1935) was a step closer to opera than *Show Boat* and foreshadowed such operatic musicals as *West Side Story*. Despite the economic woes and the competition from film, the musical survived. In fact, the musical theatre in the 1930's was finally evolving beyond the gags-and-showgirls musicals of the Gay Nineties and Roaring Twenties and the sentimental romance of operetta.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* completed the revolution begun by *Show Boat*, by tightly integrating all the aspects of musical theatre with a cohesive plot and songs that furthered the action of the story. It featured dream ballets and other dances that advanced the plot and developed the characters. Rodgers and Hammerstein hired ballet choreographer Agnes de Mille, who used everyday motions to help the characters express their ideas. *Oklahoma!* defied musical conventions by raising its first act curtain on a woman churning butter, with an off-stage voice singing the opening lines of "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'". It was the first blockbuster Broadway show, running a total of 2,212 performances, and was made into a hit film. It remains one of the most frequently produced shows, becoming a milestone used to identify eras according to their relationship to *Oklahoma*. Quincy College's production of *Oklahoma* in 1955 was the first presentation by an amateur company outside Broadway, and represented a break for Quincy from the early 20th century operetta repertoire, as also did *Carousel* in 1956.

After *Oklahoma!*, Rodgers and Hammerstein were the most important contributors to the musical form... The examples they set in creating vital plays, often rich with social thought, provided the necessary encouragement for other gifted writers to create musical plays of their own. The two collaborators created an extraordinary collection of some of musical theatre's best loved and most enduring classics, including *Carousel* (1945), *South Pacific* (1949), *The King and I* (1951), and *The Sound of Music* (1959). Some of these musicals treat more serious subject matter than most earlier shows: the villain in *Oklahoma!* is a suspected murderer and psychopath with a fondness for lewd post cards; *Carousel* deals with spousal abuse, thievery, suicide and the afterlife; *South Pacific* explores miscegenation even more thoroughly than *Show Boat*; and the hero of *The King and I* dies onstage.

Tony Awards

All of the chorus numbers on this program are from shows which have been winners of the Antoinette Perry Awards for Excellence in Theatre, more commonly known as the Tony Awards. Recognizing achievement in live American theatre, the awards are presented by the American Theatre Wing and The Broadway League at an annual ceremony in New York City. The first awards ceremony was held on April 6, 1947, at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York City. Since 1997, the Tony Awards ceremony has been held at Radio City Music Hall in New York City in June and broadcast live on CBS television, except in 1999, when it was held at the Gershwin Theatre. The awards are for Broadway productions and performances, but an award is also given for regional theatre. Further, a discretionary non-competitive Special Tony Award and the Tony Honors for Excellence in Theatre are given. The awards are named after Antoinette Perry, co-founder of the American Theatre Wing. The Tony award is generally regarded as the theater's equivalent to the Oscars. The Tony Award trophy consists of a medallion, a mix of mostly brass and a little bronze, with a nickel-plating on the outside; a black acrylic glass base, and the nickel-plated pewter swivel.