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Ilson, Carol, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1985

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HAROLD PRINCE, PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

by

CAROL ILSON

VOLUME I

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Theatre in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York.

1985

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1985

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

HAROLD PRINCE, PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

by

Carol Ilson

Adviser: Professor Stanley A. Waren

This work is an in-depth study of the theatrical career of Harold Prince, one of the foremost producers and directors of the contemporary Broadway musical. It covers more than thirty productions which Prince produced and/or directed during the years 1954 to 1982. Among the Broadway musicals examined in this study are The Pajama Game, Damn Yankees, West Side Story, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Fiddler on the Roof, She Loves Me, Cabaret, Company, Follies, A Little Night Music, Pacific Overtures, On the Twentieth Century, Evita, and Sweeney Todd.

The history of each of the Prince shows is traced from its inception and pre-production period through rehearsals, out-of-town tryouts, until its Broadway premiere and critical reception. There are many anecdotes as well as inside information on these productions which emerged from intensive research and interviews with more than 25 Prince collaborators and associates.

Among the theatre persons interviewed by the author are Harold Prince, George Abbott, Stephen Sondheim, Lisa

(Mrs. Boris) Aronson, Gwen Verdon, Fred Ebb, Sheldon Harnick, Hugh Wheeler, and John Weidman.

The study reveals original information on how Prince works with his collaborators, the philosophy and style of his work, his influences, and how he, in turn, has influenced and changed the American Musical Theatre.

This work is dedicated with all my love and gratitude to

my husband, Bernie Ilson

for "everything"

our sons, David Ilson and Jimmy Ilson

for their constant support and encouragement

the memory of my beloved parents,

Samuel and Lillian Wilkenfeld Geller

who first introduced me to and inspired my interest in the American Musical Theatre

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME ONE

Chapter		Page
I	INTRODUCTION	2
II	THE MUSICAL THEATRE UNTIL THE '50s (and Prince's Early Life)	24
III	GRIFFITH AND PRINCE: BROADWAY'S NEW PRODUCING TEAM	73
	The Pajama Game	73
	Damn Yankees	88
	New Girl in Town	101
IV	THE DECADE OF THE '50s ENDS	114
	West Side Story	114
	A Swim in the Sea	133
	Fiorello!	138
V	THE '60s BEGIN	159
	Tenderloin	159
	A Call on Kuprin	172
	They Might Be Giants	182
VI	A CHANCE TO DIRECT	193
	Take Her, She's Mine	193
	A Family Affair	202
	A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum	213

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Chapter		Page
	She Loves Me	232
VII	PRINCE MAKES BROADWAY HISTORY WITH FIDDLER	256
	Fiddler on the Roof	256
	Baker Street	279
	Poor Bitos	301
VIII	FLORA, THE RED MENACE (A Last Show with Abbott) AND IT'S A BIRD . . . IT'S A PLANE . . . IT'S SUPERMAN	309
	Flora, the Red Menace	309
	It's a Bird . . . It's a Plane . . . It's Superman	330
IX	CABARET'S A HIT! ZORBA IS NOT	348
	Cabaret	350
	Zorba	385
	VOLUME TWO	
X	PRINCE AND SONDHEIM AND THE MODERN MUSICAL	400
	Company	401
	Follies	441
XI	A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC IN 3/4 TIME AND AN ENVIRONMENTAL CANDIDE	477
	A Little Night Music	478
	Candide	506

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Chapter		Page
XII	A LOW PERIOD AFTER *PACIFIC OVERTURES*	537
	Pacific Overtures	537
	Side by Side by Sondheim	565
	Some of My Best Friends	572
XIII	*EVITA* THE BIGGEST HIT OF ALL	580
	On the Twentieth Century	580
	Evita	599
XIV	*SWEENEY TODD*, A TOUCH OF GRAND GUIGNOL . . .	633
XV	TWO VALIANT ATTEMPTS: *MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG* AND *A DOLL'S LIFE*	665
	Merrily We Roll Along	665
	A Doll's Life	691
XVI	CONCLUSION	714
ADDENDA ON PRINCE		741
BIBLIOGRAPHY		754

VOLUME ONE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> The best reason for all biographies of recent lives is: To record the facts correctly before the peripheral figures forget and distort too much.[1]

> He [speaking of producer/director Harold Prince] is one of the most important creative figures in the modern musical theatre.[2]

> What makes us human? Thinking about ourselves and our world, asking the big questions. We live in the most repressed period of history. The consumer society has repressed thought. Philosophy and literature have become fossils in a museum. People go from bed to office to TV to bed. How dreary! . . . That's why we need the theatre. It requires live brain cells on both sides of the footlights. A good play should shake you up, knock you down, make you think. TV embalms. The theatre calls to life . . ."[3]

Between the years 1954 and 1982--starting with his first production of the hit musical The Pajama Game and

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[1]Stephen Sondheim, Introduction to Getting to Know Him: Biography of Oscar Hammerstein II, by Hugh Fordin (New York: Random House, 1977), p. xiii.

[2]Martin Gottfried, "The Designing Director," Cue, 9 November 1979, p. 32.

[3]Franz Xaver Kroetz, quoted in Arthur Holmberg, "His Plays Seek 'The Reality of the Mind,'" New York Times, 7 October 1984, sec. 2, p. 5.

ending with the failure of A Doll's Life, Harold Prince has had an exceptional thirty-year career in the American Musical Theatre. He has had his share of theatrical failures, but he has also had a hand in some of the biggest successes in musical theatre history. As producer or co-producer he has had a role in the success of such musicals as The Pajama Game, Damn Yankees, West Side Story, Fiorello!, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Fiddler on the Roof, and Side by Side by Sondheim. As producer/director his shows have included She Loves Me, Cabaret, Company, Follies, A Little Night Music, Candide, Pacific Overtures, Merrily We Roll Along, and A Doll's Life. He was the director of Evita, Sweeney Todd, and On the Twentieth Century, and involved creatively with several straight plays--e.g., Poor Bitos by Jean Anouilh, The Great God Brown by Eugene O'Neill, The Visit by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, and the comedy Take Her She's Mine by Phoebe and Henry Ephron. In addition to his involvement in theatre, Prince directed two films: Something for Everyone starring Angela Lansbury and Michael York, and A Little Night Music starring Elizabeth Taylor. He staged several operas, including Ashmedai in 1976 which marked Prince's directorial debut for the New York City Opera then under the direction of Julius Rudel. Later he staged Georg Kaiser's Silverlake, Sweeney Todd and a production of Candide for the company after Beverly Sills became director. Other operas staged by Prince were The Girl of the Golden West for

the Chicago Lyric Opera Company and the San Francisco Opera, and Willie Stark for the Houston Grand Opera.

I shall concentrate on Prince's outstanding contributions to the American Musical Theatre during the period 1954-1982 as a producer, as a director and as producer/director.

The Broadway musical is often regarded as America's major contribution to theatre. It evolved over many decades, landmark shows altering its form. Most musicals are not artistic achievements, having been conceived mainly as entertainments. Some theatre producers and directors, however, do try to make artistic and substantive statements in their musicals. They attempt to create shows which go beyond mere entertainments, but to achieve box-office success, some producers and directors often compromise their artistic aims.

Harold Prince has been one who consistently attempted to create musicals that were more than light and frothy diversions. He has both challenged his audience and raised the level of the American musical. For more than thirty years, Prince has taken chances on shows with unusual themes and ideas, and on new talent and new forms. He has been a major influence in changing the style, shape and spirit of the American Musical Theatre, tackling subjects that are anathema to many producers and directors. His shows often deal with complex subject matter. He evaluates the success of his productions aesthetically and not in box-office terms.

Some of his productions are more attractive and palatable to audiences than others. Money made from such shows as Cabaret and A Little Night Music was used for more experimental projects such as Follies and Pacific Overtures. Stephen Sondheim, one of Prince's major collaborators, explains that "Hal doesn't like failing any more than the rest of us, but that never stops him from taking chances."[1] Howard Kissel agrees that Prince is one of the most influential figures in American Musical Theatre, a fact "all the more remarkable since his career has been built on principles diametrically opposed to the blatant commercialism underlying Hello Dolly!"[2]

Prince has experimented and innovated while doing high-budgeted shows; few others have taken such chances. Collaborators such as Stephen Sondheim and the late Boris Aronson produced songs and set designs aimed at carrying out the producer/director's concept. They were more concerned with that than with critical or audience response.

In his early work as a producer, Prince presented "more popular" musicals such as The Pajama Game and Damn Yankees. In the early '50s when these shows were produced, musicals were much like the '40s musicals (which had been innovative mainly in their integration of songs, dances and

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[1]William B. Collins, "Sondheim's Magic of Night Music," Philadelphia Inquirer, March 1974, p. 1H.

[2]Howard Kissel, "Side by Side by Prince," Horizon, October 1981, p. 60.

book). The Pajama Game and Damn Yankees are excellent examples of the book musical. They are often revived because their scripts are strong and their scores tuneful. Songs and dance extend the story line. George Abbott, who directed these shows, was committed to the integrated form. Martin Gottfried wrote that Abbott, when confronted with the need to rationalize the staging of dances, created artificial devices--e.g., in The Pajama Game (1954), a union meeting entertainment ("Steam Heat") and a visit to a nightclub ("Hernando's Hideaway").[1]

These shows were structured like most other musicals of their period, but had unusual subject matter and themes. The Pajama Game deals with union problems, the conflict between management and labor not a subject that lends itself easily to musical comedy. Glenn Litton recalled how difficult it was for Prince and his partner Robert E. Griffith to find collaborators willing to work on the show: "Not one of the composers and lyricists then writing musicals could see a libretto about a strike in a garment factory and its effects on a romance between the female union representative and her male counterpart in management."[2]

---

[1]Martin Gottfried, Broadway Musicals (New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1979), p. 95.

[2]Cecil Smith and Glenn Litton, Musical Comedy in America (New York: Theatre Art Books, 1981), pp. 235-36.

Damn Yankees (1955) had the unlikely subjects of baseball (long thought to be a theatrical jinx) and the Faust legend, not used in a musical since The Black Crook (1866).

George Abbott became Prince's mentor and has shared an office in Rockefeller Center with Prince for the past thirty years. Martin Gottfried said that "Prince went from being George Abbott's stage manager to being his producer, co-presenting almost every musical Abbott directed between 1954 and 1962."[1] Prince was fortunate during the early years of his career to have learned so much about the art of stage-craft from Abbott, the undisputed dean of musical comedy from the '30s through the '60s. Abbott's career, in Kissel's words, is "based on his infallible knowledge of what makes people laugh, what makes shows tick."[2]

Abbott acted in his early years in the theatre in plays such as Dulcy (1921) and Processional (1925). In the mid-twenties he began writing and directing plays. He collaborated with Phillip Dunning in 1926 on the successful Broadway, followed by collaborations with other writers: Coquette (1927) and Three Men on a Horse (1935). He directed fast-moving melodramas and fast-moving farces.

Abbott's first musical assignment was to assist John Murray Anderson with Jumbo in 1935. Musicals were then

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[1]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 126.

[2]Kissel, "Side by Side by Prince," p. 60.

popular, energetic, colorful and brassy, with the story an excuse to introduce songs, jokes and pretty girls. Abbott introduced discipline into the creation of the musical show, as well as in rehearsals. Prince maintains that he developed his own organized and disciplined way of working from his apprenticeship with Abbott. Prince always plans ahead and is on time for appointments and rehearsals. Prince, like Abbott, is not self-indulgent nor does he engage in histrionics.[1] William Goldman in The Season said of Abbott, "The man is without ego; he doesn't have it and can't take it in others."[2]

From Abbott Prince also learned a great deal about the craft of the theatre. Abbott "knew how to fix things that went wrong."[3] In Gottfried's opinion, "Abbott perfected techniques, set standards, and laid down the pragmatic measure that still governs a musical: Does it work?"[4] Gottfried went on to suggest that Abbott knows

> how to whittle a script down to its basic events and keep the story moving. How to assort, vary and build the musical numbers to first and second act peaks, how to direct book sequences and when to make use of

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[1]Interview with Harold Prince, New York, 14 March 1983.

[2]William Goldman, The Season, A Candid Look at Broadway (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), p. 364.

[3]Ibid., p. 363.

[4]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 87.

> dancing and when not to. He also is willing to drop a number if it isn't working no matter how good it is.[1]

With his own projects, Prince gradually became more innovative than his mentor. In an interview, George Abbott was asked to compare Prince's directing style with his own. He said, "Hal's directing of course is slightly different than mine. Not so strong for form but more for imagination."[2]

There are similarities between Abbott and Prince. Both men try to work with young people. Goldman points out how many Tony Award-winning composers and lyricists had first shows or first hits under Abbott.[3] Prince also liked to hire young, gifted talent for Broadway. Prince cast Liza Minnelli in Flora, the Red Menace, and Patti Lupone--not long out of the Juilliard Drama School--as the star of Evita. One reason Abbott may like to work with young talent is "so he can dominate."[4] Abbott agrees that being strong is important. "I've got to dominate. If I don't, there's not enough time."[5] Ruth Mitchell, Prince's co-producer, said that Prince is also a strong director and renders the final word to his collaborators.[6] Goldman calls the person who

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[1]Ibid., p. 111.

[2]Interview with George Abbott, New York, 4 March 1983.

[3]Goldman, The Season, p. 360.

[4]Ibid., p. 364.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Interview with Ruth Mitchell, New York, 7 March 1983.

shapes a show by having the final say, the clout on a show, "the muscle," and Prince has become the muscle. Goldman says "theatre is a group endeavor, and every member of that group sees something in his head, and he wants that something translated to the stage. But only 'the Muscle' has a chance to be fulfilled; the others may end up rich, but they'll also end up frustrated. Everyone else's vision dies somewhere along the way."[1]

Abbott thinks only about the show, says Goldman. "He never thinks, shall I put in a little something flashy so the critics will know I'm around? It's the show. And you can say anything to him about the show; you can make any suggestion."[2]

Prince also likes to consider suggestions from others.

> I learned from Abbott that you should listen to everybody. Of course you're going to listen to a lot of fools, but listening doesn't mean acting. Turn off the fools. But when the same observation comes up over and over again, doesn't that suggest perhaps you're receiving good advice? Don't be stubborn. Listen. You really aren't threatened. You won't act if it contradicts your better judgment.[3]

Abbott does not appear to do a great deal of homework for a show. He likes to do creative work at rehearsals.[4] Prince, on the other hand, prepares intensively in advance.

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[1]Goldman, The Season, p. 298.

[2]Ibid., p. 364.

[3]Harold Prince, Contradictions: Notes on Twenty-Six Years in the Theatre (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1974), p. 26.

[4]Goldman, The Season, p. 361.

He works with collaborators on some shows for years, readying the project for rehearsals. His shows have few traumatic episodes during rehearsals because of the groundwork accomplished months before rehearsals begin.[1] John Kander, the composer, said,

> One of the best things about Hal as a leader of a collaboration is, you have thousands of meetings, and by the time you get finished with those thousands of meetings you are all doing the same show. It rarely happens with a Hal Prince show that you get out of town and the choreographer is doing one piece and the song writers are doing another and the playwright is doing another.[2]

Prince also finds benefit in the "gypsy run-through" performance done for the chorus members of Broadway shows a few days before his shows leave for their out-of-town tryouts. Prince says this audience is sophisticated and friendly and good for his actors. Abbott, on the other hand, feels that these friends of fellow performers are overly enthusiastic. The run-throughs are on a bare stage and Abbott believes that "they can imagine more than you can possibly give them."[3]

Prince maintains that their "work is very different."[4] He says that the most important thing that Abbott did for

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[1]Ibid.

[2]John Kander in "Landmark Symposium on Cabaret," Dramatist's Guild Quarterly 34 (Summer 1982): 14-15.

[3]Goldman, The Season, p. 363.

[4]"Interview with Dick Cavett and Harold Prince," videotape, 19 February 1980, The Dick Cavett Show, PBS.

him was to encourage him in his desire to become a director. "Besides my family, he's the only person who when I was anxious to direct said, 'You can direct and go ahead and do it.'"[1]

Prince's taste for musicals that were not "run of the mill" became apparent in 1957 when he decided to produce West Side Story. The show was Stephen Sondheim's Broadway debut as a lyricist. It was this show, according to Howard Kissel, that "gave the musical a new urgency."[2] It had a cast of 39 and "every member of it played a part."[3] Dance was also used to further the plot more than had been seen previously.

Besides Abbott, Prince gives credit to Jerome Robbins for influencing his own later directing. Robbins directed both West Side Story and Fiddler on the Roof for Prince the producer. Robbins began as a dancer and choreographer for Ballet Theatre. He launched his theatrical career as a dancer in Great Lady (1938). He also danced in Stars in Your Eyes (1939) and The Straw Hat Revue in 1939. On the Town (1944) was created from an idea of his and originally performed as a ballet. Robbins did the dances for the Broadway version and George Abbott directed. During the next

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Kissel, "Side by Side by Prince," p. 63.

[3]Lehman Engel, The American Musical Theatre, A CBS Legacy Collection Book (New York: Macmillan Co., 1967), p. 164.

thirteen years Robbins choreographed a number of shows that were directed by Abbott, including Billion Dollar Baby (1945), High Button Shoes (1947), Look Ma, I'm Dancin' (1948), and Call Me Madam in 1950. He also co-directed The Pajama Game with Abbott and then made his solo directorial debut with Peter Pan (1954) and Bells Are Ringing (1956).

Like Prince, Robbins spent many years as Abbott's protégé. Gottfried suggests that during these years Abbott gave Robbins all the authority of a director "as if consciously grooming a successor."[1] Abbott's attitude in the theatre influenced Robbins as it did Prince. However, Robbins is not noted as the most "beloved" man in theatre. He is an "uncompromising perfectionist, and has no time for niceties and no inclination for tact in making demands on those with whom he worked. His sharp tongue regularly reduced performers to tears," said Gottfried.[2] Prince describes Robbins' manner as being capable of causing abrasions in his relationship with actors. "This is not uncommon among choreographer/directors. The whole relationship between dancer and choreographer contains powerful elements of sadomasochism."[3]

Prince does not work in this manner. He needs to have fun in rehearsals and needs laughter, no matter how emotional

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[1]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 102.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 34.

things may get. He shies away from contention, feeling that the show is not the most important thing in the world.

Bells Are Ringing in 1956 (which was Robbins' second directorial endeavor) was considered a conventional show. "Robbins was still directing in the manner he'd learned from Abbott, compartmentalizing the play, the songs and the dances."[1] But the following year, when he directed and choreographed West Side Story, the show was not conventional. The idea of a concept was used by Robbins as a unifying motif for the show and he cast unknowns "on whose youth and anonymity he could imprint his production concept."[2] Along with Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim and Arthur Laurents, Robbins proved "that the conventions of musical comedy were much more flexible and expressive than the public, producers and most critics had thought--that a musical tragedy derived from musical comedy was possible."[3] Robbins' view of what was possible in the musical theatre had profound influence on Prince.

After West Side Story, Robbins went on to direct Gypsy and Fiddler on the Roof. He then returned to his work for the New York City Ballet. In Fiddler on the Roof, Robbins extended the "emphasis on music and dance sequences

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[1]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 102.

[2]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 234.

[3]Ibid., p. 235.

that had begun with West Side Story. Without Fiddler, there could have been no Cabaret, Company, Follies, or A Chorus Line, our modern concept musicals.[1] Although with Fiddler the story was told in linear fashion, Robbins drew upon the rituals of "strict Hasidic Jews for his dances, his musical-dramatic sequences, his stage pictures. . . . This concept, or motif, was a theatrical one as well as an intellectual one."[2]

In 1959, Griffith and Prince presented a show about New York politics written by the novelist Jerome Weidman. The show, Fiorello!, won a Pulitzer Prize, one of the few musicals to do so.

After Griffith's death in 1961, Prince began working on his own. One of his first projects was A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, with both music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. That same year Prince took on his first Broadway directorial project in which he was involved from its inception. It was Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick's She Loves Me. With this show, he established himself as a talented director as well as a successful producer. Soon, however, he returned to producing and his next show, Fiddler on the Roof became one of the most successful shows in the history of the Broadway musical.

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[1]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 107.

[2]Ibid., p. 108.

People today don't realize how precarious the whole venture had been. Joseph Stein, the writer of Fiddler on the Roof, remembers a potential investor in the show asking, "And after all the Hadassah ladies have seen it, then what?"[1] Prince took up the challenge, eventually realizing the project's artistic as well as commercial potential.

> Fiddler made an inestimable contribution to Harold Prince's career. For the next dozen years he had a network of "angels" who would back anything he did almost automatically. In effect, his experiments in musical theatre until the mid-seventies were subsidized by the loyal, grateful backers of Fiddler.[2]

There were years, however, which were not financially successful for Prince, although many of his projects were considered significant. He found new talent such as the two songwriters John Kander and Fred Ebb who had never worked as a team before, and Michael Bennett, who got his first chance as co-director with Prince. With It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's SUPERMAN, he was beginning to experiment and made the "whole stage look like a comic strip complete with boxes, a foreshadowing of the kind of stage pictures that would become essential to his 'concept' musicals."[3]

Prince continued to experiment with form in Cabaret (1966). He offered an alternative to the integrated form,

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[1]Kissel, "Side by Side by Prince," p. 63.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid, p. 64.

which eventually led to what has been called the "concept musical," a musical created around a metaphor or theme rather than containing a conventional linear plot. In Cabaret, Prince wished to compare the racial riots that occurred in Chicago streets in the summer of 1961 to the rise of Nazism in Berlin in the '30s. Using unusual stage effects, the Broadhurst Theatre became the seedy Berlin cabaret where the hideousness of Nazism was mirrored.[1]

In 1970, Prince and Sondheim collaborated on Company, hailed by critics as groundbreaking and innovative. Glenn Litton says that Company "gave its creators the freedom to incorporate music, dance, and all the other components of musical theatre in ways dictated only by their imaginations, not by the limits of the integrated book musical."[2] The show was not based on a particular story line but on a theme; an idea. The Sondheim score was not filled with "show tunes." The music was dramatically linked by sound, feeling and texture with episodic scenes. Musical numbers grew out of or commented on a character's situation. Boris Aronson's scenery became part of the musical's theme. The glass and chrome set was linked to the statement of the show.

Prince hired Michael Bennett to choreograph Company. His recognition of Bennett's talents led to the sharing of

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 289.

directing credit with him on his next venture, Follies (1971). Bennett, having been exposed to and influenced by Prince's innovative approach to stagecraft and musical theatre form, later went on to successfully create A Chorus Line and Dreamgirls. In these shows he incorporated many elements that Prince incorporated into his shows. Bennett and his writers created A Chorus Line from taped conversations with dancers rather than working out a linear plot. He, too, gradually favored constructs for his set designs, as exhibited in Dreamgirls. In an interview with George Abbott, Abbott agreed that Bennett's A Chorus Line was influenced by Prince's innovative staging techniques which came earlier. He said, "Speaking of A Chorus Line, it's inspired by Hal's kind of theatre, a new kind of thing . . . something that's never been done before."[1] Gottfried adds that "It may be awhile before the Prince developments that led to Bennett's work take hold."[2]

Follies (1971) was another show that did not have a conventional story line. Follies did not receive good reviews and was also a financial failure. Kissel explains: "The audience for a musical comedy after all, it not an arty crowd. The remarkable thing about musicals is that they have become a subtle, sophisticated art while providing

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[1]Abbott interview.

[2]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 37.

amusement for audiences who have little interest in 'art.'"[1]

Following the failure of Follies, Prince and Sondheim went on to do A Little Night Music, a more popular audience show. The show also received a positive critical response and contains Sondheim's first "hit" song, "Send in the Clowns." The success of this show, however, didn't lull Prince into merely repeating himself in his next venture. Instead, he was soon preparing Pacific Overtures, which has been called his and Sondheim's most ambitious collaboration. The story is about the nineteenth-century Westernization of Japan, and done in Kabuki style and utilizing such oriental elements as a lion dance, haiku-structured verse in some songs, and men playing female roles in true oriental tradition. Again, this production did not appeal to conventional musical theatre audiences. Suddenly, even Prince's reliable group of investors began to rethink their willingness to continue backing the innovative producer/director. Kissel explains Prince's predicament at the time:

> At this moment the way Prince was perceived on Broadway changed importantly. He became an "intellectual," a noun rarely used in a positive sense between Forty-fourth and Fifty-third Streets after about 1960.[2]

Prince then directed a comedy, Some of My Best Friends (1979), about a man who talks to plants and animals. It

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[1]Kissel, "Side by Side by Prince," p. 65.

[2]Ibid.

closed in less than a week and Prince was at the low point in his long career.

Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd-Weber next approached Prince to direct a stage version of their new hit record album, Evita, in London. Evita came to be one of Prince's most successful directorial projects. Martin Gottfried said, "His production concept for Evita is even more critical to the show's success, for the other elements--the libretto and the music--are of little intrinsic worth."[1] By now, there have been sixteen foreign-language productions of Evita as well as productions in every English-speaking country. Despite the fact that some reviewers criticized the glorifying of fascism, Prince was hailed for his brilliant staging and for turning what was essentially a record album into a true theatrical experience.

Prince next staged Sweeney Todd, which deals with a nineteenth-century barber who slits his customers' throats. His neighbor, a lady baker, bakes the people into meat pies. This unusual project became a commercial success. In the spring of 1979, the original cast album was on Billboard's list of ten best-selling albums in the country, not common for Sondheim.

Merrily We Roll Along (1981) was lighter in spirit than most of Prince's productions. The entire cast was

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[1]Gottfried, "The Designing Director," p. 32.

young (under twenty years of age). It tells the story of a composer and his lyricist friend, following their lives from high school graduation through success, and finally to the breakup of their relationship. The show moves backward in time. With the many problems that the show encountered during rehearsals and previews, it was barely in shape for the critics. It ran only two weeks, with the Sondheim score one of the only elements favorably reviewed. The music in Sheldon Harnick's opinion is "The best that Sondheim has ever done."[1]

A Doll's Life (1982), which Prince directed after Merrily, is the story of what happens to Nora of Ibsen's A Doll's House after she leaves her home and family. Written by veteran musical theatre librettists Betty Comden and Adolph Green, it failed dismally.

Prince returned to directing operas around the world and also directed Joanna M. Glass's Play Memory (1983) and Arthur Kopit's End of the World (1984). Glass's play was first presented at the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey in the fall of 1983.

Although he derives much satisfaction from his successful shows, flops do not deter Prince from getting on with the next project. "More than any of his biggest hits--and they have been plenty--it is this resiliency in the face

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[1]Interview with Sheldon Harnick, New York, 4 February 1982.

of failure that symbolizes the monumental achievement of Harold Prince."[1] In 1980, after 28 years in the American Musical Theatre, Prince told Howard Kissel that he feels happiest about the fact that he has "an artistic freedom and an emotional security that he never felt before."[2] Prince went on to explain that, "In other arts, once you've established a reputation you're treated like a hero. In the theatre every time out you're judged as harshly as you were the first time. I kind of like that."[3]

This study should reveal how Harold Prince's productions evolved and were received. We will follow the development of his career and learn in depth about his contributions to the American theatre. I have chosen a chronological approach for my analysis of all his Broadway productions. Books on the musical theatre as well as contemporary reviews and articles will be used as source materials. In addition, I have looked at the Playbills for all of Prince's shows and listened to interviews with him on radio and television. I have also examined original scripts and set designs of his shows as well as original cast recordings.

Fortunately, extensive firsthand personal or telephone interviews from people who have known, worked and

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[1]Peter Buckley, "Prince of the Musical Theater," United Mainliner, February 1982, p. 43.

[2]Kissel, "Side by Side by Prince," p. 67.

[3]Ibid.

created shows with Harold Prince have been available to me, as well as having the good fortune to interview Harold Prince at length.

The American Musical has made an important contribution to theatre. Insight into how a major figure of the American Musical Theatre has created his shows, worked with his collaborators and evolved his production style should prove of value to all. It is important to reiterate that Harold Prince did what few in the musical theatre would be willing to do. Over the years, he took chances with ideas and techniques, introducing innovative elements in a demanding commercial arena.

Before turning to the Prince musicals (1954-1982), it should be beneficial to briefly scan the recent past of the American Musical Theatre to see what Prince found there and why he was probably motivated to seek out change.

CHAPTER II

THE MUSICAL THEATRE UNTIL THE '50s

(and Prince's Early Life)

> The musical, you must remember, is America's most distinctive contribution to the theatre, and though it's the most popular form of theatre in this country, it is a form that has been lacking in content and artistry. Its potential is largely unexplored. There is no reason that the musical must be trivial to be entertaining and successful. So much of the theatre is expectation and it's far worse to get dull disappointment than gallant failure.[1]

> Audiences will not accept serious musicals; they want Dolly - Mame - Fiddler. They enjoy sentimental comedy.[2]

Before the '20s, American musical theatre was inundated with "girlie" shows. In these offerings, the story line was meager and often centered around the frenetic lives of high placed Dukes and Duchesses. Miss Daisy, which opened at the Shubert Theatre in September 1914 and had a short run of less than a month, provides an example of the simplistic plots of the day. The story is based on the fact

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[1]Arthur Laurents, quoted in Craig Zadan, Sondheim & Co. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1974), p. 71.

[2]David Merrick, quoted in Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 39.

that Daisy Hollister takes a job as a housemaid in the Swigget home in order to attract their guest, the Duke of Tormina. Daisy wins the heart of the Duke and her brother wins the hand of Miss Swigget.

Mythical settings abounded and The Dancing Duchess, which opened that same year at the Casino, told of the Duchess of Darmia who runs away to Vienna when the Duke bans all modern dancing. Using the name Celestine, she becomes the rage of Vienna's Trocadero. She enters a tango contest in Budapest and it is there that the repentent Duke finds her for a happy ending. The Trocadero and dance contest scenes provided production numbers for the dancing girls.

A more successful and enduring example of this type of offering, boasting a Victor Herbert score, was The Princess Pat, which was presented on September 29, 1915 by John Cort at his small playhouse on 48th Street. The story takes place on Long Island. An Irish beauty, Patrice O'Connor, is married to Prince Antonio di Montaldo. Although she is in love with her husband, at the same time she flirts with old Anthony Schmalz to save her friend Grace Holbrook from marrying him. All of this makes the Prince jealous. Patrice pretends to elope with Schmalz but they are soon arrested. When the truth is revealed, Pat returns to the Prince and Grace finds that Schmalz's son, Tony, Jr., is a more suitable partner. The critics were generally pleased with the show. Gerald Bordman quotes the reviewer from the Dramatic Mirror

as saying that the Henry Blossom libretto was "a great improvement over the run of recent books," and that "the Blossom characters might really have existed."[1]

The trite librettos continued into the '20s, as exemplified by Tickle Me (8-17-20). The show, which opened at the Selwyn, told of a screenwriter whose scenario (believed to be a masterpiece) is being shot on location in Tibet where "all variety of musical comedy complications await the budding genius."[2] Bordman explains that "when the swirling, kicking chorus of dance specialists such as Olga and Mishka, Frances Grant and Ted Wing were not delaying the plot, Tinney [the star] resorted to his old practice of stopping the action to chat with his audience."[3]

Melodramatic elements--effective with audiences--were commonly incorporated into librettos. Pitter Patter was a musical presented at the Longacre on September 28, 1920. The story tells of a disinherited scion who becomes a "soda jerk." He falls in love, fights off the villain of the show in the pouring rain, and saves his beloved's father from financial ruin. Although most of the action takes place in Colorado, one song is entitled "Baghdad on the Subway" and the finale "moved the action to Cuba, allowing the cast to perform the number "Jazzing Up in Havana."[4]

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[1]Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre, A Chronicle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 309.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid., p. 352. [4]Ibid., p. 353.

It is clear that musicals in this period had simple stories and were without social significance. Pretty girls and hummable tunes sold tickets and most producers and directors were pragmatists, working for commercial success. As Gerald Bordman says, "Mood and logic be hanged. . . . Theatregoers remained the same pleasure seekers they had always been."[1]

The nation was going through a "dancing craze" and most musicals offered continued situations in which the dancers did their production numbers and the specialty acts performed their vaudeville turns. The action of a show was often stopped in order to present these delights.

When Dreams Come True opened at the Lyric Theatre on August 18, 1913. The show told of the dreams of immigrants who saw America as a promised land (and of its leading character, Kean Hedges, whose dream was to marry his sweetheart, Beth). The dancing chorus appeared at the end of the show without any real connection to the plot and danced "The OK Two-Step." The critics ridiculed the number as a "pointless finale with everyone imitating horses and jockeys."[2]

In Hello Broadway, which opened in December 1914 at the Astor Theatre, the star, Ina Claire, gives a big party early in the show. The party was a familiar device allowing the evening to be inundated with specialty dance acts. In Hello Broadway, a pair of high-kicking Russian dancers

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[1]Ibid, p. 309. [2]Ibid., p. 288.

(played by Francis Bryan and Emilie Lea) won the greatest applause.

Because of the emphasis on dance numbers, the stars of musicals were often more gifted as dancers than as singers. No one in the audience, explains Bordman, was surprised when Donald Brian, in The Girl from Utah in 1914, broke out into an energetic polka or a dazzling tap routine. Nor were they amazed when his co-star, Julia Sanderson, joined him. In this show a costume ball finale provided the excuse to interject the dance numbers.[1]

Vernon and Irene Castle, the talented dance team who came to America's attention in 1912 after their success in Paris, helped give birth to this "dance craze" phenomenon. Their lovely ballroom dancing gained such popularity that the action in their musicals, such as The Sunshine Girl (2-3-13) at the Knickerbocker Theatre, was often stopped in order for them to offer a new tango or ragtime dance. Cecil Smith writes, "Castle's turkey-trot with his wife (a new dance, suggesting both wings of a turkey) and his tango with Julia Sanderson presaged a new era in which the waltz would be supplanted by dances from the Western Hemisphere."[2]

Frenetic activity on stage and dance numbers were designed to keep the "tired business man" awake. Gerald

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[1]Ibid., p. 299.

[2]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 94.

Bordman completes his description of Jerome Kern's second show, Love O' Mike in 1917: "As with most Kern scores there was hardly a weak number in the show. Good dancing helped put over the songs."[1]

Although musical comedies continued to be produced in the postwar period, it was the revue that became the major form of entertainment in the '20s, offering some freedom from the mindless plots of the book musicals. "The revue was the archetype of postwar jazz-and-prohibition entertainment."[2]

The American theatre-going audiences were anxious for fun and pleasure after the first World War. Financial backing was readily available and almost any show could be produced. People were making a great deal of money because of low production costs. Broadway was able to produce lavish musicals at prices an audience could afford. The situation enabled the musical theatre "to revel in a decade of luxury and wastefulness and irresponsibility such as it has never known before and will probably never know again in our time."[3]

The revue has no book. It is a fast-paced, lively show with musical numbers, sketches, comedy, and specialty

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[1]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 319.

[2]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 125.

[3]Ibid.

numbers. "A single unifying force organizes the variety of elements into a cumulative sequence of ascending theatrical peaks designed to service the concept of the show."[1] The revue was the perfect format for an evening of gaiety and spectacle and soon it was Broadway's most popular form of entertainment.

A flamboyant impressario, Florenz Ziegfeld, introduced his Ziegfeld Follies in 1907 and George White later followed with his productions of the Scandals in 1919. These revues were lavish and spectacular. Ziegfeld's formula called for pace, glamour (settings of incomparable style and splendor were created to "glorify the American Girl"), and building towards fantastic first-act curtains and finales. Kislan lists decency and spectacle as the other ingredients of the Ziegfeld formula.[2]

For the Follies, Ziegfeld hired outstanding musical theatre writers, composers, designers and performers. He employed composers such as Jerome Kern, Victor Herbert and Irving Berlin, as well as the famed Viennese designer Joseph Urban, who did the lavish sets for most of the Follies. The casts of 23 editions of the revue "paraded the show business celebrities of the age: Nora Bayes, Eva Tanguay, Fannie Brice, Ruth Etting, Marion Davies, Bert

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[1]Richard Kislan, The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theatre (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), p. 79.

[2]Ibid., p. 82.

Williams, W. C. Fields, Ed Wynn, Eddie Cantor, and Will Rogers."[1] The major stars, however, abandoned the revue format after 1925, the form beginning to decline. Ziegfeld, himself, became fascinated with book shows such as Show Boat (1927).

The Shuberts' Passing Show at the Winter Garden provided the Follies with stiff competition. More risqué and daring than the Follies, it "pushed undress constantly nearer to absolute nudity. . . . A ballet in the manner of the Marquis de Sade was presented and a parody of Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape in which 'the chorus girls dressed like stokers and swore without shame.'"[2]

George White, a former hoofer turned producer, presented his Scandals of 1919, a revue modeled after the Ziegfeld Follies. "Having established his claim to a share of the takings from the revue mad public, White continued with annual editions of the Scandals, each more fashionable and lavish than the last."[3] George Gershwin became one of the major composers for the Scandals revues in 1920, continuing through 1924 (although his most memorable songs are not from these shows). Earl Carroll's Vanities and Raymond Hitchcock's Hitchy Koo were also popular annual revues.

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[1]Ibid., p. 83.

[2]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 126.

[3]Ibid., p. 129.

There were also more intimate and modest revues relying less on spectacle and more on witty sketches and lyrics, lively music, and the charm and energy of young performers. They had originality and imagination. These revues included The Grand Street Follies, The Greenwich Village Follies, The Garrick Gaieties, and Charlot's Revue. There was an appreciative audience for both types of revues. "Both personalities thrived in the receptive theatrical climate of the early decades of the 20th Century."[1] The cast of the Garrick Gaieties (1925) included the young members of the popular Theatre Guild: Sterling Holloway, Libby Holman and Lee Strasberg. It was directed by Philip Loeb and had a score by the young Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart.

John Murray Anderson's Greenwich Village Follies was intended for a more sophisticated audience. "The plays, people, and foibles chosen for lampooning were matters of interest primarily to the intelligentsia."[2] The 1923 edition of this revue is the one in which Martha Graham danced, "not in the radically personal style she later evolved, but in her most girlish pretty-pretty classical and interpretive manner."[3]

During the Depression, the expensive spectacular revue began to disappear. The modest, intimate and successful

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[1]Kislan, The Musical, p. 81.

[2]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 130.

[3]Ibid., p. 131.

revue, Pins and Needles (1937), with clever score and sketches by Harold Rome, was unusual in that it dealt with the current labor movement and was "filled with left-wing propaganda and 'shocking' material produced and performed by members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union."[1]

During the years that the revue reigned on Broadway, the use of spectacle was heightened. The musical theatre had more taste and beauty than audiences had experienced before. The more intimate revue, using satirical and subtle humor and more substantial material, was equally successful. Nurtured by the revue were some of the most gifted song-writers of the early twentieth-century musical theatre: Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Rodgers and Hart, and Harold Rome.

Shows created for stars have generally occurred throughout the history of the musical theatre. During the '20s, Kid Boots (12-30-22) at the Earl Carroll Theatre, presented Eddie Cantor. This production was planned as a tribute by Flo Ziegfeld to Cantor, who "dominated the production."[2] The star, in whiteface for most of the show, had to overcome a silly story about a golf caddy who sells stolen golf balls and booze. Although the Harry Akst song, "Dinah,"

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[1]Kislan, The Musical, p. 90.

[2]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 137.

was an appealing element in the show, it was the presence of the star that kept Kid Boots running for months. A few years later (1925), the Shuberts produced a similar vehicle, Big Boy, for Al Jolson.

Sunny (9-22-25) at the New Amsterdam Theatre featured the music of Jerome Kern and a book and lyrics by Otto Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein II. The writers were trying to duplicate the earlier Marilyn Miller success, Sally (1920). "The plot, inevitably complicated in view of all the demands it had to meet--remained essentially a showcase for Marilyn Miller, for her personal glamour, for her remarkable gifts at song and dance," explains David Ewen.[1]

Collaborators and writers of star vehicles had the difficult task of trying to create shows of integrity which at the same time had to accommodate the talents and the demands of both the performers and producers. Oscar Hammerstein II revealed the stipulations set by Charles Dillingham, the producer of Sunny, and Cliff Edwards, a featured performer.

> His [Edwards'] contract required that he do his speciality between ten o'clock and ten fifteen. So we had to construct our story in such a way that Ukulele Ike [as Edwards was known] could come out and perform during that time and still not interfere with the continuity.[2]

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[1]David Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958), p. 515.

[2]Ibid., p. 514.

Cecil Smith cites another musical comedy frankly designed to serve as a vehicle for popular performers:

> The Duncan Sisters, Rosetta and Vivian, enjoyed their moment of glory in Topsy and Eva (1924), a musical version of Uncle Tom's Cabin, including a good many incidents by Catherine Chisholm Cushing that could not be found in Mrs. Stowe's original, and a tearful song by Topsy (Rosetta), "I Never Had a Mammy."[1]

Another type of musical popular in the first quarter of the twentieth century was the sentimental and romantic operetta. "European" examples were more closely related to grand opera--e.g., the works of Johann Strauss, Franz Lehár, and Oskar Straus. Lehár's popular The Merry Widow (1907) ran 416 performances and Straus' The Chocolate Soldier (1911) ran 296 performances.

Leading composers of operetta in America were Victor Herbert, Rudolf Friml and Sigmund Romberg. They were influenced by Strauss and Lehár but succeeded in creating another style of operetta. Lehman Engel writes that it "represented the first significant step away from the European models."[2] There were simpler melodies that were easier to perform. Herbert is remembered for such shows as Babes in Toyland (1903), Mlle. Modiste (1905), and Naughty Marietta (1910)--a small sampling of the 39 operettas he wrote. His last work, The Dream Girl (1924), deals with a fifteenth-century

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[1]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 137.

[2]Engel, The American Musical Theatre, p. 28.

English romance and starred Fay Bainter and Walter Woolf. Friml is known for The Firefly (1912) and his last success, The Three Musketeers in 1928.

Sigmund Romberg, like Friml, had his greatest success in the period between World War I and the end of the '20s. These writers of "American operetta" wrote shows that were, in the words of Stanley Green, "colorful, nostalgic and melodious."[1] Romberg, a prolific composer, wrote Maytime (1917), an adaptation of a Viennese operetta. Green suggests that it was "just the kind of sentimental, bittersweet romance that the composer loved, and for which he would create his most endearing music."[2] Another popular Romberg operetta was The Student Prince in Heidelberg (1924), which told the story of a fleeting love affair between Prince Karl and Kathy, a waitress in the university city of Heidelberg. Songs from this operetta, which ran a record 608 performances, include "The Drinking Song," "Deep In My Heart Dear," and "Serenade."

Cecil Smith, in describing Friml's operetta Rose Marie (1924), sums up the audience's expectations.

> Friml reached the promised land of every sentimental operetta composer, for his tunes--particularly "Indian Love Call" with its wordless mating call--became part of the corpus of enduring light music. The plot, with its manly members of the Canadian

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[1]Stanley Green, The World of Musical Comedy (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1968), p. 37.

[2]Ibid., p. 53.

> Mounted Police, was no more refreshing than those of comparable pieces, but nobody cared, when Dennis King and Mary Ellis were on hand to sing the tunes.[1]

By the end of the 1920s, operetta had virtually disappeared on Broadway. Changes in American life now

> favored confrontation with new realities, not retreat into old-fashioned fantasy. . . . When the public grew indifferent to nostalgia and sentiment, bored with storyland and impatient with obvious love situations, operetta was condemned to memory and occasional patronized revivals.[2]

The librettos of the musical show gradually underwent changes because, as Lehman Engel suggests, "The traditional absurdity of musical books, with their broad comedy, pasteboard characters, and mythical settings, was driving the new, educated generation of Americans out of the musical theatre."[3] A small group of librettists recognized that there was a need for more realistic and logical plots that depicted the settings and characters of real life and not of fantasy.

Jerome Kern, the composer, was in the forefront of the move to revolutionize musicals. Engel says that Kern made "unquestionably the largest contribution to our developing musical at this time."[4] In 1915, Kern, along with the English librettist Guy Bolton, created the show Nobody Home for the Princess Theatre, a tiny house seating only 299

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[1]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 138.

[2]Kislan, The Musical, p. 104.

[3]Engel, The American Musical Theatre, p. 30.

[4]Ibid.

people. This show was not a success, but the two went on to present a group of innovative musicals. Very Good, Eddie (1915) added lyricist P. G. Wodehouse to the team. The show was perfect for the small Princess Theatre. Smith explains, "Scarcely any previous musical comedy had been favored with a plot and dialogue so coherent, so nearly related to those of well-written non musical plays. . . . Dancing was kept to a minimum."[1] Following Very Good, Eddie, Oh, Boy (1917) and Oh, Lady! Lady! (1918) were presented. Kern and his collaborators at the Princess Theatre created simple shows in which the songs and lyrics were integrated into the action. The librettos contained contemporary plots and characters and dialogue which was more like real life. Kislan explains that Kern discovered "a precious, valuable, and entirely new species: the intimate, simple, adult, intelligent, economical, small-cast musical show"[2] which provided another alternative to the revues, operettas, star vehicles and simple-minded plot musicals.

After writing Oh, Lady! Lady! with Bolton and Wodehouse in 1918, Kern returned to the larger commercial theatres.

> He had spent three productive years creating a new form for musicals, pointing a finger straight ahead to the future; but even with success the margin of

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[1]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 122.

[2]Kislan, The Musical, p. 113.

> profit in a theater accommodating an audience of 299 had to have been miniscule. And so when Ziegfeld and Dillingham and the other Broadway "greats" offered him shows, he went along with them, and at least for a time (eight years) he worked more profitably for producers who could not have cared less about his artistic point of view.[1]

In 1927, Kern once again played a major innovative role in the American Musical Theatre. Kern composed Show Boat, which opened on December 27 of that year with book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II. In Ewen's words, "With Show Boat, the musical theatre in America acquired new dimensions."[2] Based on the novel of the same name by Edna Ferber, it was presented by Florenz Ziegfeld at the Ziegfeld Theatre with sets by Joseph Urban and a cast that included Helen Morgan, Howard Marsh, Charles Winninger, Edna May Oliver, and Jules Bledsoe.

The story takes place on a riverboat, the Cotton Blossom. It deals with the romance between Gaylord Ravenal, a dashing riverboat gambler, and Magnolia, the daughter of the show boat's captain. Their marriage is threatened by Ravenal's gambling and eventually he leaves. Magnolia, to support herself and her daughter, becomes a night club singer. Eventually she returns to her father's boat where, years later, the now-reformed Ravenal comes back for a reunion at the final curtain.

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[1]Engel, The American Musical Theatre, p. 31.

[2]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 473.

The secondary plot in the show depicts the disintegration of Julie, a riverboat entertainer and Magnolia's closest friend. The problem of miscegenation is introduced, a subject that Bordman says "had been taboo until then on our lyric stage. Thus Hammerstein added heretofore proscribed topics to venturesome philosophic viewpoints in fabricating his text."[1]

Ferber at first thought the idea of adapting her novel into a musical was preposterous. Her story covers a fifty-year time span and deals with subjects such as a wife's desertion and, as mentioned earlier, miscegenation, hardly source material for musicals. Miles Kreuger suggests that Ferber was doubtful about the potential of the project because the usual 1920s musical "was invariably light-hearted fare about comic events at a college, country club or Long Island estate. The most serious issues generally dealt with how a humble chorus girl might become a star, or how sweethearts from differing social stations could be united without the wealthy one being disinherited."[2]

Show Boat has been hailed for its contribution to the librettos of musicals. Ewen said it was "a musical play with an artistic entity, dramatic truth, authentic

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[1]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 136.

[2]Miles Kreuger, Show Boat: The Story of a Classical American Musical (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 18.

characterizations, effective atmosphere, a logical story line."[1] Kreuger felt that the role of Magnolia was rare (in its time) in depth and complexity. He said, "She [Magnolia] obviously changed and matured as the show progressed."[2]

Engel points out that there are actually five couples written into the story. "Nothing as rich as this had happened before in any other libretto--nothing as courageous in subject matter and nothing in America as opulent musically."[3]

Although Ziegfeld was the producer of the show and known for his parade of beautiful girls, with the exception of the Congress of Beauty in the World's Fair scene, Show Boat did not offer these types of display.

Another uncharacteristic aspect of the show was the dancing. Kreuger points out that

> Instead of a succession of specialties and ensemble routines, choreographer Sammy Lee had staged only the kind of routines that grew naturally out of the plot. During the pseudo-Negro folk tune, "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," Magnolia glides into a langorous shuffle. Frank and Ellie do a vaudeville dance to "I Might Fall Back on You" and a cakewalk to "Good-bye, Ma Lady Love," both of which are relevant to their character and to the era. From the robust Dahomey dancing of the black ensemble to the refined steps allocated the Natchez beaux and belles in the

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 473.

[2]Kreuger, Show Boat, p. 64.

[3]Lehman Engel, Words with Music: The Broadway Musical Libretto (New York: Schirmer Books, 1972), p. 70.

> first act opening and finale, Sammy Lee broke fresh ground in musical comedy dance direction.[1]

Show Boat ran 572 performances and provided audiences with a new view of musical theatre. The characters and dialogue had an unusual honesty and dramatic verisimilitude. Other musicals continued as usual. In the same year that Show Boat was produced, Good News, a musical set at a college, had a simplistic story line in which Tate College became a country club.

In addition to the sporadic progress made in the area of librettos, songs and dances, there was also development in stagecraft.

Max Reinhardt, the stage director, in Smith's opinion, tried "to revolutionize much of the craft of theatrical production on the American stage, as it had already begun in Europe."[2] On January 16, 1912, the Casino Theatre presented the spectacle Sumurun, an oriental fantasy by the Deutsches Theatre Company of Berlin. Not a single word was spoken.

> It was in the practical application of Reinhardt's theories of the unity of all the elements of a lyric-theatre performance that Sumurun stood apart from and well above every contemporaneous production.[3]

Smith believes that only intellectuals were attracted to the show and it closed after 62 performances.

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[1] Kreuger, Show Boat, p. 70.

[2] Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 102.

[3] Ibid., p. 103.

There were a few other examples of musical plays in the '20s which are interesting artistically. John Murray Anderson, who produced the successful Greenwich Village Follies, produced and directed a musical titled What's In a Name? (3-19-20) at the Maxine Elliott Theatre. In this show, designer James Reynolds used the classic device of an inner and an outer stage. He also used screens and draperies like Reinhardt and Gordon Craig. There was extensive experimentation with overhead and side lighting to reduce the reliance on footlights. Bordman quotes Robert Baral as calling this show "a brilliant gem . . . way ahead of its time."[1]

The Shuberts attempted some special techniques in The Rose Girl (1921). Ballet dancers went up and down in elevators. Norman Bel Geddes, director and co-producer of Arabesque (1925), utilized multi-level sets. There were moments in the show when all levels were seen on the stage at the same time.

Attempts to utilize advanced stage techniques in musicals, however, were not too successful. Smith explains,

> Conservative theatregoers by the thousands spurned these empty essays in beauty and contemporary stagecraft, and persisted in preferring the conventional sentimental operettas and musical comedies whose charm, however attenuated, did not require so great an outlay of cultural energy. In the first half of the 1920s, old fashioned operettas and musical

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[1]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 348.

> comedies that were pretty and tuneful and entirely orthodox continued to attract a large following.[1]

Then, as now, theatrical innovations do not necessarily result in audience and critical acceptance. However, innovations are often adopted and developed by future artists.

During the '30s, the modern musical began to evolve. There was a continuing innovative use of production techniques and the content of shows, affected by the Depression in the United States as well as other world events, focused less on romantic intrigue and more on topical satire. Compared to contemporary musicals, the shows of the '30s might appear trite and nonsensical, but the musical was undergoing change.

Throughout the decade, most shows were still mainly concerned with entertaining audiences with bright tunes and production numbers. But there was opulence, fantasy and nonsensical plotting. There was also a growing awareness of real-life problems. By the end of 1931, political themes, too, were more apparent in musicals.

Of Thee I Sing (12-26-31), with score by George and Ira Gershwin and a book by Morrie Ryskind and George S. Kaufman, satirized Washington, D.C. political circles. It was an effective (as well as entertaining) way of criticizing the government. "In the throes of the Depression, the play had more than timely appeal," said Abe Laufe, "as it lampooned

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[1]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 137.

hush-hush deals, political campaigns and ridiculous bids for votes."[1] Vice President Throttlebottom in one scene is refused admission to the White House and made to show references for the library.

The plot deals with Wintergreen's campaign to become president, presidential election practices, Throttlebottom's selection as vice president, the romance between Wintergreen and a French girl whom he is supposed to marry for political reasons, and his eventual marriage to all-American girl Mary Turner.

"Love" as a campaign issue in the piece allows the authors to develop the personal and romantic elements of the story. The show was a huge success and ran 441 performances (which was exceptional during the Depression). It was the first musical comedy text to be published in book form, as well as the first to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama. Ewen excerpted a portion of the Pulitzer Prize citation: "Its effect on the stage promised to be considerable, because musical plays are always popular and by injecting satire and point into them a very large public is reached."[2]

Although this show, like others of its kind which followed, avoided the stilted plot that was common musical theatre fare and utilized wit and biting satire, it still

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[1]Abe Laufe, Broadway's Greatest Musicals (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969), p. 32.

[2]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 373.

contained romantic elements. Cecil Smith wrote that Of Thee I Sing "festooned a profusion of colorful jests about national affairs and the behavior of politicians. By the end of the evening neither party was left with a leg to stand on. But at least LOVE still reigned."[1] Smith went on: "In order to make a musical work that had political overtones--a lot of humour, wit as well as a secondary love interest had to prevail."[2] Shows containing political themes continued to serve up laughs, comediennes and production numbers.

The Band Wagon, also presented in 1931, was hailed as one of the most exciting revues--technically--in Broadway history. "This was the first time in any musical that a revolving stage (let alone two of them) was used for anything except to change the scenery."[3] The song "Dancing in the Dark" by Dietz and Schwartz (considered their masterpiece) occurs in a ballet sequence performed by Tilly Losch and her dancers. Constantly changing lights are reflected in mirrors attached to the stage floor. Richard Lockridge suggested that the show had begun a new era for the musical comedy and added that "it is large and beautiful."[4]

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[1]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 161.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 33.

[4]Richard Lockridge, "The Band Wagon," New York Sun, 4 June 1931, collection of newspaper clippings of dramatic criticisms 1930-1931, A-C, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.

George Gershwin's "American folk opera" Porgy and Bess was presented at the Alvin Theatre on October 10, 1935. Inspired by DuBose Heyward's novel, Porgy, which had been dramatized in 1927 by the author and his wife, the production dealt with the wretched poverty-ridden existence of the Blacks of Charleston, South Carolina, or more specifically, Catfish Row.

"Porgy and Bess," says Stanley Green, "made a conscientious effort to depict Negro life as realistically as possible. Gone was the energetic hoofing, the self-parodying that had long characterized the Negro musical."[1] Ewen describes it as a folk opera, an epic of the Negro people "told with humanity and compassion. . . ."[2]

The mixture of opera and musical theatre resulted in mixed notices. Green suggests that "Porgy and Bess would have had difficulties even had it won unanimous raves; with a divided press despite its being both a musical and a theatrical event, it could last only four months on Broadway before embarking on a brief tour."[3]

It was not until the show was revived in New York--with a score that was revised to resemble a musical more than

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[1]Stanley Green, Ring Bells! Sing Songs!: Broadway Musicals of the 1930's (New York: Galahad Books, 1971), p. 116.

[2]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 428.

[3]Green, Ring Bells! Sing Songs!, p. 118.

an opera--on January 22, 1942 (almost five years after Gershwin's death) that it became a success. Ewen quotes Virgil Thomson who called it "a beautiful piece of music and a deeply moving play for the lyric theatre."[1]

Smith, however, had reservations about the work. "It lurches abruptly into vaudevillian clichés of the popular stage and deserts them with equal suddenness when the time to be serious seems to have arrived."[2] Smith also faults the show in that

> the most expressive sections of the score are those allotted to the chorus, and the felicitous instances of musical characterization are attached not to the central characters, but to Sportin' Life and Serena. Such pieces as "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," "Bess," "Summertime," and Porgy's "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'" are decorative operetta divertissements pure and simple, and serve little or no valuable end in advancing the plot or clarifying the characters.[3]

On Your Toes (4-11-36) at the Imperial Theatre was another significant production of the '30s, with score by Rodgers and Hart and book by the songwriting team along with George Abbott (the latter also serving as director). This production offered ballet sequences choreographed by George Balanchine. For the first time in a musical, dance numbers such as the classical "Scheherazade" and the jazzy "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" were perceived seriously. Since the show

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 427.

[2]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 163.

[3]Ibid.

dealt with a ballet company, there was a framework for the dances. Green suggests that the chief reason On Your Toes has been hailed as a landmark musical was because of its final scene. "Here at last a dance sequence, 'Slaughter on Tenth Avenue,' was actually conceived both as a separate dance and as an integral part of the story line itself."[1]

On Your Toes was successfully revived in New York in March 1983 at the Virginia Theatre. Jack Kroll, reviewing it for Newsweek Magazine 47 years after its original presentation, reminded his readers of how it originally had moved musical theatre forward:

> Some scholars have sniffed at the book for On Your Toes. Well, 1936 was a pivitol year for the American musical, and with On Your Toes Rodgers and Hart were helping to pivot the form into a more organic fusion of story, song and dance. The details of the show's plot are far less important than its engaging mixture of elements--the world of ballet, an America in which the New Deal was arm-wrestling the Depression, and the gangster who had become a scary and stylish antihero.[2]

The '40s for the American Musical Theatre was a time of true innovation. The "integrated" musical was developed and successful examples of this musical comedy genre would be with us for many years. The integrated musical is defined in Martin Mann's unpublished dissertation on "The Musicals of Frank Loesser" as the fusing of the elements of

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[1]Green, Ring Bells! Sing Songs!, p. 126.

[2]Jack Kroll, "Gotta Have Rodgers and Hart," Newsweek, 21 March 1983, p. 67.

a composition so that

> the contributions of any one of the collaborators cannot be separated from its content without doing harm to the whole. In this way the transitions between the dialogue, the score, and the dances are so smooth that the musical numbers are not intrusions into the narrative but function as an extension of plot, character and mood.[1]

Oklahoma! (1943) provided the big breakthrough for the integrated musical and was a real departure from the many rather shallow musicals of previous decades. It followed such innovative musicals as Show Boat, Pal Joey (1940), and Lady in the Dark (1940). In Pal Joey, the male lead is a "heel," and not the usual romantic hero. "The odiousness of its leading character," said Lehman Engel of Pal Joey, "repelled critics and audience alike."[2] A successful revival was mounted in 1952, however, and by then the public was ready to accept a musical with an anti-hero.

Lady in the Dark, which opened at the Alvin Theatre on January 23, 1940, used dream sequences for its song presentations. Although dreams had long been used in shows, "their psychoanalytic implications had been largely ignored,"[3] explains Bordman, who goes on to say that Moss Hart's libretto was "far more literate than that of the run-of-the-mill Broadway musical book. His characters not only spoke grammatically correct and complete sentences, they

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[1]Martin Mann, "The Musicals of Frank Loesser" (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York Graduate School, 1974), p. 1.

[2]Engel, Words with Music, p. 77.

[3]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 524.

often spoke complete paragraphs. Yet his touch was so light, stylish and sure that he dispelled the artificiality and turgidness of the old comic-opera librettos."[1]

The influence of Lady in the Dark and Pal Joey on the American Musical Theatre was not immediately apparent. "It would be years later, looking back, that they would be recognized as isolated beacons in an otherwise dark period illuminating ways to the future. Broadway quickly returned to the easier Panama Hattie type of musical."[2]

It was with Oklahoma! (arriving two years later) that the songs and dances were perceived as being more integrated into the book than with previous shows. Oklahoma! ushered in a period, as Bordman suggests, in which "the American Musical Theatre witnessed a sustained seriousness of approach unknown before on the lyric stage."[3] Ewen agrees about the Rodgers and Hammerstein show: "A great deal in their play defied tradition . . . music and comedy had to be germane to the plot."[4]

Oklahoma! opened at the St. James Theatre on March 31, 1943. Based on Lynn Riggs' 1931 play Green Grow the Lilacs, it "embraced a sentimental look at bygone Americana."[5]

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 525. [3]Ibid., p. 530.

[4]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 380.

[5]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 534.

Bordman suggests that it was a comic opera and therefore not dependent on sophistication and wit.[1] Agnes DeMille created choreography to combine "dancing with pantomime in a way that related the dances clearly to the story."[2]

Set in Indian territory--later the state of Oklahoma--the plot involves Laurey, who pretends that she is not romantically interested in Curly. She decides to go to the local box social with Jud Fry, a disreputable farmhand who works on the farm, but she soon regrets her decision. There is a secondary romantic pair in the show, Ado Annie and Will Parker, who marry by the end of the second act. Ali Hakim, a Persian peddler, sells Laurey a bottle of "Egyptian Elixir," a "potion that he assures her will conjure up dreams about the future."[3] Curly and Jud fight over Laurey and the struggle is dramatized in a ballet sequence. Curly protects Laurey from Jud. Three weeks after the social, Curly and Laurey are married, Oklahoma becomes a state, and the entire ensemble sing the show's rousing song, "Oklahoma." In the midst of this celebration, Jud appears, drunk and wielding a long knife. He rushes at Curly but during the fight that ensues Jud falls on the knife and dies. A trial is held quickly and Curly is acquitted. The happy newlyweds enter

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 198.

[3]Laufe, Broadway's Greatest Musicals, p. 70.

the surrey "with the fringe on top" for the final reprise of "Oklahoma."

Before arriving on Broadway, the show was not given much hope for success. Abe Laufe says that one producer told the Theatre Guild that "the show had little chance to succeed on Broadway because it was too clean, had no bawdy jokes or striptease girls."[1]

Oklahoma! was acclaimed as an innovative show. It opened with a slow song, "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'," without musical accompaniment, "when musicals were expected to begin with rousing production numbers."[2] Martin Gottfried lists other unusual elements of the show, such as "a ballet dealing with the heroine's dreams, it even had a villain."[3] Laufe also discusses how the show defied tradition. A man is killed on stage (a most unusual action for a musical) and the chorus girls do not appear in the first act for almost 45 minutes.[4]

If Porgy and Bess, Show Boat, and Of Thee I Sing had not settled the issue, says Gottfried, "Oklahoma! finally established the musical theatre as a stage form to be reckoned with. . . . It is music fitted to a story, music for the stage, all of a piece."[5] Kislan sums up the tremendous

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[1]Ibid., p. 59.

[2]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 186.

[3]Ibid., p. 186.

[4]Laufe, Broadway's Greatest Musicals, p. 59.

[5]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 186.

influence that Oklahoma! had on the future of musicals: "Oklahoma! was a revolutionary manifesto that banished 'June-moon' musicomedy as it raised the 'integrated' musical to the seat of power and influence."[1]

Following the artistic and commercial success of Oklahoma!, Broadway produced many serious, exciting and "integrated" musicals. The American Musical Theatre was recognized and respected throughout the world. The '40s saw such outstanding integrated musicals as Guys and Dolls (1950), Carousel (1945), South Pacific (1949), and The King and I (1951).

The '40s musicals, however (as did those that came before them), contained much sentimentality, perhaps as a way of escaping the realities of World War II. These musical shows reflected an optimistic vision of America even during the dark moments in our history such as the Depression, World War II and the cold war. "One reason for the success of Oklahoma!," says Stanley Green, was that "it gave wartime audiences a chance to feel pride in an important page of our country's history. It implied a hopefulness about the future, while still letting people enjoy the pleasures of a simpler, sunnier period of the past."[2]

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[1]Kislan, The Musical, p. 142.

[2]Stanley Green, The Rodgers and Hammerstein Story (New York: J. Day Co., 1963; reprint ed., New York: DaCapo Paperback, 1980), p. 109.

Hubert Saal, in Newsweek Magazine, discussed how life is depicted in Broadway musicals: "Americans are generously sentimental, attractively brash, innocent and they live in a country where love conquers all and people live happily ever after."[1]

The '40s musical's heroes were Rodgers and Hammerstein and they wrote with "a basic feeling of optimism for the world."[2] Gottfried agrees that the books for their shows dealt with safe, sentimental material.[3]

Stephen Sondheim has said that the thing that makes a musical a smash hit is giving audiences the stories that they want to hear. "And it's always the same story," said Sondheim. "How everything turns out terrific in the end and the audience goes out thinking, that's what life is all about . . . but those are fairy stories and they are what makes smash hits."[4]

Although Rodgers and Hammerstein were sometimes criticized because their universe was depicted as all sweetness and light, Kislan defends their approach because "they believed sincerely in what they wrote."[5] Joseph Fields, who

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[1]Hubert Saal, "How to Play at Hal Prince," Newsweek, 26 July 1971, p. 70.

[2]Green, The Rodgers and Hammerstein Story, p. 13.

[3]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 13.

[4]"Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim," videotape, 2 June 1975, Theatre on Film and Tape Project of Lincoln Center Library, New York. Hereafter referred to as Tape Project, LCL.

[5]Kislan, The Musical, p. 136.

collaborated with Rodgers and Hammerstein on the book for Flower Drum Song (1958), said: "Oscar really believed that love conquers all, that virtue triumphs, that dreams do come true."[1]

Rodgers' response to those who complained about their sentimental shows was, "What's wrong with 'sweetness and light?' It's been around quite a while."[2]

In South Pacific (1949), adapted from James Michener's Tales of the South Pacific, Rodgers and Hammerstein presented "an attractive and believable romance between an island planter and a fresh and spirited nurse from Little Rock."[3] The secondary love story told of the love of a young officer and a Polynesian girl. The pairing of couples from such different backgrounds enabled the creators to express "their hopeful outlook on life which stemmed directly from their belief in the basic goodness of man."[4]

According to Stanley Green, in Carousel (1945), Rodgers and Hammerstein tried to present their philosophy of the importance of having faith in oneself as well as in others. "The young girl in the play can only find happiness by becoming friendly toward others."[5]

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 137.

[3]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 200.

[4]Green, The Rodgers and Hammerstein Story, p. 34.

[5]Ibid., p. 119.

A favorite theme for the successful collaborators was brotherhood . . . the idea that people of different nationalities could get to like each other by knowing each other. This is effectively presented in both South Pacific and The King and I. Anna sings "Getting to Know You" in The King and I to her royal pupils. This show gave the song writing team the opportunity, in Stanley Green's opinion, to "continue writing about a theme that concerned them deeply--the necessity for people of one group to get along with people of another."[1]

Gottfried summed up both negative and positive values in Hammerstein's scripts: "His [Hammerstein's] technique of setting up songs makes them too episodic. They are also too earnest; they are preachy. But, in their time, they were better crafted and more professional than other books."[2] Sondheim, who claims Hammerstein as his mentor, points out in a Brendan Gill interview a negative feature of his work in most of the Rodgers and Hammerstein shows. Sondheim feels that the song writers took imagination away from the audience: "The only poetic aspect of their shows was that people sang instead of speaking."[3]

The sentimental view found in most Broadway musicals through the '40s did not truly reflect life, but this is the

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[1]Ibid., p. 138.

[2]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 13.

[3]"Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim."

world of musicals into which Prince was born. He felt that they did not deal with important issues. He would eventually become known not only as an important innovator in the American Musical Theatre but also as the champion of the musical which sought to depict a more truthful and meaningful view of life. "The image of America in Prince's musicals," said Saal of Newsweek, "begins after the living-happily-ever-after runs into trouble."[1] Prince truly believes that audiences will be entertained more by the challenge of insightful subject matter than by the spoon-feeding of sentiment or nostalgia. He thinks that it is more stimulating to be upset than to be titillated. "I try to be part of what I would want to see," says Prince, "And I go to the theatre to see a little blood drawn."[2]

In an interview with Allan Wallach of Newsday, Prince explained that he likes serious theatre, theatre with ideas. He likes things that are controversial, when "there's some heat going. . . . I love the theatre when it's at its hottest, when it's at its most lurid. There's a lot of room for Night Music [Prince was referring to the show A Little Night Music, which he directed in 1973] but that's not the most exciting thing in theatre for me."[3]

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[1]Saal, "How to Play at Hal Prince," p. 70.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Alan Wallach, "Harold Prince," Newsday (Long Island), 3 February 1980, p. 23.

Ironically, Prince as a child did not go to see musicals very often. "All that good natured, happy celebration stuff--never," said Prince in a PBS television interview with Dick Cavett. He added that he still doesn't tend to enjoy "mindless musicals."[1] However, he is not closed minded on the subject. We know that he did attend musical theatre during the '40s and admits that there is room for all types of musical entertainment. Prince can enjoy funny, messageless, entertaining musicals. "One of the best musicals ever written is Guys and Dolls," says Prince. "It certainly doesn't have an important message but that doesn't diminish it in the least. It would be among my five favorite all-time musicals. That's artistic work!"[2] However, he doesn't choose to do such musicals himself.

During the '40s, Prince was at the opening night of South Pacific. He called it "an extraordinary show in the growth of the theatre."[3] At the opening he met Stephen Sondheim, who would become his most important collaborator. As Prince recalls, "He [Sondheim] was there with his mentor, Oscar Hammerstein II and Mary Rodgers introduced us."[4]

Stephen Sondheim, in a People Magazine interview with Guy Flatley, talks of the influence of the '40s musical

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[1]"Interview with Dick Cavett and Harold Prince."

[2]Ibid.

[3]"London Weekend with Harold Prince," videotape, 23 June 1978, The South Bank Show.

[4]Prince, Contradictions, p. 29.

on his work:

> Integrated was the vogue theatrical word of the '40s referring to an approach in which a story is told and characters are advanced through song. The watershed, the landmark musical was indisputably Oklahoma! Everything that follows can be seen as a development of it--either a rejection or a carrying on. Me, I'm carrying it on, making variations.[1]

If Prince had developed an antipathy for the sentimentality and the mindlessness of many integrated musicals of the '40s, he was impressed by other attempts at innovation. In an interview with Alan Wallach, Prince admits that he is the beneficiary of much of the innovative work that he saw. Most artists' output, he feels, stems from earlier work of others. He cites Rodgers and Hammerstein's Allegro as an example of a musical that influenced him.[2] Prince believes that Allegro was a courageous and audacious step forward.[3]

Allegro opened on October 10,1947 at the Majestic Theatre. The show was Rodgers and Hammerstein's third collaboration. This time it was not adapted from other materials. "Instead of revising an existing tightly knit plot, Hammerstein composed a loose, rambling chronicle recounting the life of an ordinary upper-middle-class professional."[4] Bordman explains how a Greek-like chorus was set at the side

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[1]Guy Flatley, "A Bio of Stephen Sondheim," People, 5 April 1976, p. 66.

[2]Wallach, "Harold Prince," p. 23. [3]Ibid.

[4]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 559.

of the stage to introduce scenes and comment on the action.[1] The story is of the first 35 years in the life of a young doctor attempting to maintain his integrity in the face of difficulties. The show was presented without conventional scenery. Agnes DeMille was the director and Jo Mielziner, the designer. "He [Mielziner] took care of the problem of swiftly moving scenes by using different stage levels and backdrops, and by his imaginative use of lighting."[2] Stanley Green explains that Rodgers and Hammerstein wished Allegro to be "a special kind of musical, one that was almost epic in concept."[3]

The show failed. For Prince, it was "abominably cast . . . all was wrong about that show except what was on paper."[4] However, Prince admires the fact that Rodgers and Hammerstein tried such new things in a musical as operatic moments and a non-linear structure. Prince remembers that it was an abstract show and that it needed re-writing: "It was larger than life. . . . This was unfamiliar then, but is familiar today."[5]

In this same interview with Gill, both Prince and Sondheim recall that they were college students at the time

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Green, The Rodgers and Hammerstein Story, p. 127.

[3]Ibid., p. 125.

[4]"Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim."

[5]Ibid.

Allegro opened (Sondheim was also an assistant to Hammerstein on the show). Sondheim says, "Allegro proved one didn't need a linear form anymore. . . . However, because of the show's failure, Rodgers and Hammerstein went back to the linear form."[1]

This then was the American Musical Theatre world throughout the '40s. Harold Prince would soon graduate from college and embark on his own theatrical career. It should prove beneficial to examine Prince's early life and background for possible influences.

Harold Smith Prince was born in New York City on January 30, 1928, the only child of Milton Prince and Blanche Stern Smith. In an autobiographical work Prince summed up his family background. "We were privileged upper-middle lower-rich class, Jewish, both parents of German families which settled here soon after the Civil War."[2]

From his father, a Wall Street stockbroker with Stanley Heller and Company, Prince may have developed his business acumen, from his mother, who was an avid theatregoer, his enthusiasm for the stage. His parents did not attempt to persuade Prince to embark on a career either in finance or in theatre. Prince, however, admits he fantasized about a life in theatre. He wanted to be a playwright.

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 1.

He explains: "I'm a real snob. I think writing is the highest of the arts, but I don't cut it well enough. So I've taken second best."[1] In an interview with Newsweek Magazine in 1971, Prince recalled, "When I was thirteen I daydreamed that one day I'd have an office in Rockefeller Center in which I wrote and directed plays."[2] Except for his desire to become a playwright, Prince has realized his ambitions. As for becoming a producer first, he claims he did that to get into directing. "I didn't enjoy producing much; it's frustrating."[3]

Exposed to theatregoing as a young boy, Prince looked forward to attending Saturday matinees and sitting in the top balcony of the Empire Theatre where he watched the great actors and actresses of the day. The first play he saw was a Mercury Theatre production of Julius Caesar starring the 21-year-old Orson Welles. Other memorable productions included Tallulah Bankhead in The Little Foxes, Burgess Meredith in Winterset, and Eva LeGallienne and Joseph Schildkraut in Uncle Harry. Prince was not particularly interested in musicals as a child, a lack of interest that prevailed until later in his life.

In 1944 Prince graduated from Franklin School, a private preparatory school on Manhattan's West Side, where a

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[1]Wallach, "Harold Prince," p. 26.

[2]Saal, "How to Play Hal Prince," p. 69.

[3]Wallach, "Harold Prince," p. 26.

grandfather had been educated. He attended the University of Pennsylvania and became an active member of the Penn Players. He wrote, acted and directed. In addition, he founded and managed the campus radio station, writing and directing and sometimes acting in weekly play adaptations.

At college he enrolled in a liberal arts program concentrating on English, psychology, philosophy and history. The latter subject is still his favorite subject. He enjoyed reading plays. "I went to college when I was barely sixteen and finished when I was still nineteen. Too fast, I think, but to compensate I came to appreciate that I had gotten the beat on my peers. I was working for George Abbott when I was twenty."[1] The University of Pennsylvania has named a theatre The Harold Prince.

After graduating in 1948, he tried to write plays, sending them to producers in New York. "I was shy and as silent as I am presently loquacious, so I fooled myself into thinking I was 'making the rounds' by writing plays and having them make the rounds instead."[2]

The head of the script department at ABC-TV read one of his plays and sent Prince for an interview to the George Abbott office where Abbott was planning a small experimental TV unit.

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 3.

[2]Ibid.

Prince, at the Abbott office, offered to work for nothing (on "spec"). Within two weeks he was earning $25 a week, remaining at that salary for six months. He did odd jobs as well as writing several television scripts for the company that had been formed by Mary, Abbott's wife at that time. Abbott had backed the project financially and lent the organization his name. The company had an early success, particularly with game shows.

Prince remembers doing a little of everything for the three shows the company produced for television. One was an original musical called The Hugh Martin Show, written by Abbott and featuring Hugh Martin, Joan McCracken and Kaye Ballard. It was a modest show, supposedly set in Martin's living room. It appeared on NBC at 7 o'clock on Sunday nights.

> Abbott wrote the first one and directed it, and then he let me write the second and direct it. He simply approved what I was doing and went away and let me do it. Soon I got into a battle with Kaye Ballard, the comedienne on the show. I was a nervous kid in those days, nervous, ambitious, apprehensive. It was irritating to observe how quickly I moved, how intensely I worked. After all, you never know when someone's watching. We clashed, and Hugh Martin, who had brought Kaye into the show and was a great friend of hers, went to Abbott and insisted I be taken off the show . . . and Abbott refused. Martin put it to Abbott: Prince or the show. Abbott chose Prince; the show went off the air.[1]

Abbott soon disbanded the television operation. The projects, which did not make money, had caused too much

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[1]Ibid., p. 4.

anxiety and hysteria in the office. Prince was certain, upon hearing the news, that he had lost his job. Robert E. Griffith, however, who was Abbott's production stage manager, had requested Prince as his assistant. Abbott was impressed with Prince's willingness to work and thought that Prince was somebody who would develop. "You couldn't help but notice his enthusiasm, his tremendous vitality," Abbott recalled. "Then I discovered how bright he was. That's a pretty good combination, enthusiasm and intelligence, so I brought him in to work with Bobby [Robert Griffith]."[1] Abbott, in a recent interview, summed up Prince's ability as the fledgling assistant to Griffith. "Oh, he was a smart fellow--you could tell that!"[2]

Robert E. Griffith, Abbott's stage manager, was born in Methuen, Massachusetts in 1907 and like Abbott began his theatrical career as an actor. He appeared in the original Broadway productions of Once In a Lifetime, Dinner at Eight, and Merrily We Roll Along, the latter a stage play which would eventually become a musical twenty years after Griffith's death, and which would be directed by Prince. Griffith became chief stage manager for Abbott in 1935. He was associated with more than fifty productions, including Room Service, Three Men On a Horse, Best Foot Forward, Call Me

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[1]Gary Paul Gates, "Broadway's Prince Charming," Holiday, April 1966, p. 102.

[2]Abbott interview.

Madam, and Where's Charley?. He assisted Abbott in staging High Button Shoes and also worked with Joshua Logan on Wish You Were Here. In addition to his busy theatrical career, he headed Boothbay Boats, Inc., a boat-building firm in Boothbay, Maine. Prince, working as Griffith's assistant stage manager, had found a highly qualified teacher to further his training and experience.

Griffith was a shy, easygoing, introverted man, 22 years older than Prince. Despite differences in age and temperament (Prince had a more dynamic, volatile personality), the two men, working out of a small office in Rockefeller Center and backstage, became close collaborators and friends.[1]

When Griffith and Prince eventually formed their producing partnership in 1953, Griffith was called paternal and sagacious, Prince, youthful and irrepressible. Abbott explains about Griffith that "everyone liked Bobby and everyone wished him well for he had qualities of simple goodness that could be appreciated by all."[2] The fact that Griffith was a hands-on worker in the theatre won him the respect of his associates. He encouraged Prince to understand the technical areas of the theatre as well as the economics.

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[1]"Robert E. Griffith Obituary," New York Herald Tribune, 8 June 1961, The Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center. Hereafter referred to as NYPL Clipping Folder. Every reference to this source is found in the folder of the show or person under discussion.

[2]George Abbott, Mr. Abbott (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 207.

Gwen Verdon developed a great deal of respect for Griffith after working with him on two shows (Damn Yankees and New Girl in Town). She thought he was a "terrific" person and very calm. Verdon remembered that Griffith was

> the oil on troubled water. He could take care of what Mr. Abbott wanted plus keep all the actors, the choreographer and the composers content saying "We'll handle it, we'll take care of it." He could run the show at the same time--change all the cues (and every time you change a show--all the cues change), handle all the electricians, the whole crew, change certain cues, all the lights, and deal with the actors, deal with Mr. Abbott and in addition make sure all the changes in the script were typewritten. . . . I'm sure Hal Prince observed and learned so much from him.[1]

Prince's salary was $85 a week when he began assisting Griffith. He worked nights on the first show, a revue, Touch and Go, by Jean and Walter Kerr, which opened on October 13, 1949 at the Broadhurst Theatre. During the day, Prince ran the switchboard, helped with casting, delivered messages. He was the all around helper at the Abbott office.

A new revue, Tickets, Please, with Paul and Grace Hartman, was having trouble in Boston, and the director was fired. Abbott was called in. He needed a stage manager to go with him to Boston. Since Griffith was in Europe at the time, Abbott asked Prince to become his first assistant stage manager. The show opened in New York on April 27, 1950 at the Coronet Theatre and ran until November of that

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[1]Interview with Gwen Verdon, New York, 24 May 1983.

year. During the show's run, Prince worked the show at night. During the day he wrote a play with Ted Luce who had written most of the material for Tickets, Please.

Prince's dream of becoming a playwright seemed about to come true. By Thanksgiving, when Tickets, Please ended its run, Ted Luce and Prince had completed the comedy-murder mystery, A Perfect Scream. The Hartmans optioned the play and Prince joined the Dramatists Guild. However, the Hartmans soon separated, and the script was never produced.

Prince was next loaned by Abbott to Leland Hayward to cast the Irving Berlin musical Call Me Madam. It was understood that he would be Griffith's first assistant on the show. Now Prince began to meet more of the people who would later become important in his future endeavors. Ruth Mitchell, Hayward's stage manager for Mr. Roberts, would one day become one of Prince's important associates. He also met Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse who later became friends and devoted supporters and investors.

Prince never got to work on Call Me Madam as he had hoped to. He was inducted into the army at 10 Church Street at 5:30 on the morning after the opening of the show, the reviews under his arm.

Stationed near Stuttgart, Germany with an anti-aircraft artillery battalion, Prince spent many evenings visiting a sleazy nightclub called Maxims. It was 1951, and Prince was unaware that in 1966 he would rely on images of

that place for Cabaret, a musical that he would both produce and direct.

Prince came home in October 1952. George Abbott was producing In Any Language with Uta Hagen and Walter Matthau, and Prince went to the opening night at the Cort Theatre where he found Abbott and Griffith a few minutes before curtain time. Abbott asked Prince, "Are you back already?" Prince said, "It's been two years." Abbott then asked him, "And when do you get out?" Prince answered, "Next week." "Well," said Abbott, "If you want to go to work come in next week. We're doing a show with Rosalind Russell based on My Sister Eileen," and the following week Prince was working.[1] (My Sister Eileen became the very successful musical, Wonderful Town.)

Wonderful Town resulted in Prince meeting Betty Comden and Adolph Green. The successful book and lyric writing team would one day write the musicals On the Twentieth Century and A Doll's Life, with Prince as director. Leonard Bernstein, the composer of Wonderful Town, would eventually write the musical, West Side Story, which Prince would produce. Prince also met Jerome Robbins, who came to help with Wonderful Town while it was on the road.[2] Even more important, Prince was now busily learning the craft of

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[1]Abbott interview.

[2]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 93.

creating a musical and he was learning it from a master director, George Abbott.

Wonderful Town opened on February 15, 1953 at the Winter Garden Theatre and ran more than 500 performances. During the first half of the run, Robert E. Griffith and Harold Prince began seriously discussing the possibility of their becoming a producing team. They decided to give the idea a try and this new producing team would eventually become one of the most successful on Broadway.

Reflecting on the circumstances of Prince's early life, one would have to agree with his own assessment: that he was blessed with good fortune. He grew up in a home that encouraged his enthusiasm for the stage. He had the opportunity to attend the theatre on a regular basis and was eventually allowed to choose a life in theatre.

Prince was fortunate to have gone to work for the George Abbott office soon after his college graduation. There, as assistant stage manager to Robert E. Griffith, he learned a great deal about theatre from an important "behind-the-scenes" perspective. And Griffith was "a thorough and patient teacher," said Abbott,"as well as a very good stage manager."[1]

George Abbott, as discussed earlier in Chapter I, was a level-headed, knowledgeable and successful theatre man.

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[1]Abbott interview.

He proved to be a supportive mentor and role model for his young assistant. And, when Griffith and Prince decided to join forces as a producing team, no one gave them more help and encouragement than Abbott. Indeed, Prince correctly assesses that luck and timing in his early life were important factors that led to his later successes.

CHAPTER III

GRIFFITH AND PRINCE: BROADWAY'S NEW PRODUCING TEAM

> Although the blame for most of Broadway's disastrous musicals usually falls on poor direction, choreography, libretti, music, lyrics, and performances, invariably it is the producer who is at fault. If the producer does his job, which goes far beyond the raising of production capital, he will see to it that the correct people are hired and every aspect of the show is well conceived and absolutely ready to go into production. If not, he will postpone or even cancel his project. Not that certain producers actually plan to do less than their best, but in many cases their best isn't good enough.[1]

The Pajama Game

Griffith had read the review of a book called 7½ Cents by Richard Bissell in the New York Times. He was busy producing a Ford Motor Company television show so he called Prince and asked him to read the book quickly. Prince liked what he read.

> By two o'clock we had made an offer to Harold Matson, the author's agent, for the musical rights. Subsequently Leland Hayward tried to obtain them, and there were other similarly prestigious offers, but Harold Matson displaying intuition for which he was highly respected, chose the fellows with the enthusiasm, if little else.[2]

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[1] Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 37.

[2] Prince, Contradictions, p. 8.

When Griffith and Prince told George Abbott about the project, he was not very enthusiastic. "I didn't like the idea at first . . . they had to sell it to me. It had a certain novelty in that there had never been a kind of romantic show about a labor union [the story told of a love affair in a factory amidst the problems between capital and labor], the least romantic thing I can think of. We just made a good story out of it."[1] This was the first sign of Prince's unorthodox taste in his choice of subject matter. Abbott agreed to direct with the proviso that the novel be adapted by a talented playwright. Prince believes that Abbott agreed to direct the show because of his fondness for Griffith.

Every major writer, composer and lyricist turned down the offer to adapt the show. Abbott, in his autobiography, Mister Abbott, recalls:

> I did wish to help, and I began to have interviews with several authors in the hope that some good writers would accept the assignment. Others seemed to be even more shy of the material than I was. They felt that a garment factory and a strike was too serious and controversial a subject for a jolly musical. It was after a luncheon with Abe Burrows at the Harvard Club, where I had again failed to enlist an author, that as a result of an argument with Abe I began to see a new plot development.[2]

Abbott believes that plot construction or story line is more important than the words. The big hits have unity,

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[1]Abbott interview.

[2]Abbott, Mister Abbott, p. 248.

one scene leading to the next with ever-increasing audience interest.

While walking on Fifth Avenue, Abbott conceived of the title, The Pajama Game, and simultaneously thought about a subplot. He hurried back to his office and told Griffith and Prince that if they could get Bissell, he would collaborate with him on the book. Bissell quickly made the decision to come East with his family.

Prince has always expressed his gratitude for the support that Abbott gave the new producing team. Prince and Griffith were low on funds and Abbott allowed them to work out of his office without rent. After The Pajama Game opened, the producers contributed their full share.

Abbott's contract for The Pajama Game as well as subsequent Griffith and Prince shows was more than fair. He worked for a smaller percentage of the profits and a lower royalty than younger successful directors. There was never any squabbling over billing size or position. Abbott had become a model for Prince not only as an ethical businessman but as a disciplined theatre craftsman. Abbott set the example and Prince learned and matured, gaining needed experience with each of his productions. Eventually he would become the steadying influence with collaborators.

The Pajama Game now needed a composer and lyricist. Several experienced newcomers were approached but they, too, felt that the pajama factory strike idea was a poor one.

Frank Loesser turned them down but he liked the idea of the show and suggested two of his protégés, Richard Adler and Jerry Ross. The young writing team was virtually new to Broadway. They had had a few pop song hits including "Rags to Riches," which they wrote in 1953, and had worked on several radio shows and motion pictures. The Pajama Game would be their first complete Broadway score, although they had contributed most of the pieces to the 1953 edition of John Murray Anderson's Almanac, a revue starring Hermione Gingold, Billy DeWolfe and Harry Belafonte. Richard Adler talked about the way he and Jerry Ross were hired for the show:

> We did four numbers on "spec"--within two days I think. We came back with the four numbers and they loved them all. All of those songs remained in the show and we went on to write the rest of the score in five weeks. Among the songs that were auditioned were "Steam Heat" and "Racing with the Clock," the latter song being chosen to open the show.[1]

Jerome Robbins was the producers' first choice to do the choreography. Robbins had choreographed other Abbott shows and Abbott was anxious to work with him again. Robbins was unable to take the job but recommended Bob Fosse, another newcomer. Fosse had been a dancer in shows and in films and was trying to launch a career as a Broadway choreographer. Ronna Sloan, in her unpublished dissertation on the career of Bob Fosse, explains how he was hired for The Pajama Game:

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[1]Interview with Richard Adler, New York, 30 June 1983.

> Fosse's wife at that time, Joan McCracken, had worked with George Abbott on Broadway in Me and Juliet and on television on the Hugh Martin Show. One of McCracken's best friends was Buzz Miller who had also danced with her in Me and Juliet. Miller, at Carol Haney's insistence, took Jerome Robbins to see Fosse's choreography in his brief segment in Kiss Me Kate. Robbins was making the step from choreographer to co-director. Since he could be around to back up Fosse, if necessary, Robbins recommended Fosse to Abbott for The Pajama Game.[1]

For Robbins this arrangement marked the beginning of his move from his usual role of choreographer into the directing arena and ultimately to the status of choreographer/director. Eventually he would direct two famous landmark musicals, West Side Story and Fiddler on the Roof, both produced by Harold Prince.

With The Pajama Game, Fosse proved himself a gifted and imaginative choreographer, utilizing the Jack Cole jazz technique that would become a major form of theatre dance for decades. There were times, however, during rehearsals when Fosse needed help and the more experienced Robbins was called in to lend a hand. During the staging of the song "7½ Cents," Fosse had problems and Robbins completed the number. After the show opened, Robbins graciously refuted any reports that he had assisted in the choreography of the show, insisting that he was used only as an adviser and editor.[2]

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[1]Ronna Elaine Sloan, "Bob Fosse: An Analytic-Critical Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York Graduate School, 1983), pp. 81-82.

[2]Ibid., p. 82.

Veteran showman Frederick Brisson became the third co-producer of The Pajama Game. The show was capitalized at $250,000, and the producers had a terrible time trying to raise money. There were no big stars in the cast and most of the people with the show (with the exception of Abbott) were unknown to potential backers. Prince remembers an early audition to raise money:

> George Abbott told the story exactly as it was; in other words, strikes and more strikes. In that one night we eliminated every major theatrical investor in the country and were forced to canvass people who didn't normally invest in shows. All told there were eleven auditions which is not really that many. I would tell of Romeo and Juliet in Iowa, eliminating the strike, eliminating the pajama factory. Adler and Ross would play the score and sing, augmented by four singers from Wonderful Town, and Bobby and Freddie would "sell."[1]

Finally the producers managed to raise money (in small amounts) from 164 backers including members of the chorus, backstage employees, family and friends. Griffith and Prince graciously permitted the original investors to invest in later productions. Finally, it was Abbott who advanced the final $28,000 required for the show.

Rehearsals began at the Winter Garden Theatre for an anticipated opening date just one year from the time the producers had obtained the rights to Bissell's novel. Because money was tight, both Harold Prince and Robert E. Griffith worked as their own stage managers.

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 10.

The show is set in the Sleep-Time Pajama factory in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The factory manager and efficiency expert Hines (Eddie Foy, Jr.) is trying to speed up the plant's operation. The song "Racing with the Clock" encourages the girls who work the machines to increase their productivity.

The factory's new superintendent, Sid Sorokin (John Raitt), also wants to maintain production at peak level. He sings "A New Town is a Blue Town," expressing his loneliness as a newcomer to Cedar Rapids. He falls in love with Babe Williams (Janis Paige) who heads the union's grievance committee. Babe denies any romantic feelings in the song "I'm Not at All in Love." Sid sings the song "Hey There," expressing his feelings of love for Babe, while he dictates into his dictaphone machine. "It then becomes a delightful one-man duet when the dictaphone plays the song back to him while he makes pointed comments."[1] By the finale of Act I, which takes place at the workers' annual picnic, the romance between Sid and Babe is making fast progress. The act ends with the rousing production number, "Once-a-Year Day."

In the second act, a conflict builds as Babe refuses to allow her feelings for Sid to stand in the way of the union gaining a seven-and-a-half-cent raise for the workers from the boss, Mr. Husler (Ralph Dunn). Babe sings the song "7½ Cents" and, when Husler refuses to grant the raise,

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the Musical Theatre, p. 400.

the workers decide to sabotage production by means of a slow-down. Sid and Babe are drawn apart. The secondary love interest concerns Hines and Gladys (Carol Haney), the president's secretary, who dances the jazzy "Steam Heat" number at a union meeting. Eddie Foy, Jr. added the comedic touch to the show as well as dancing a soft-shoe with Reta Shaw (cast as another factory secretary). He also did a few farcical scenes, one of which had him modeling pajamas while the trousers kept falling down.

Sid manages to get the key to the president's secret ledgers from Gladys while they are at a disreputable night spot, Hernando's Hideaway. The boss has been adding the anticipated seven-and-a-half-cents an hour wage increase to the cost of his product for some time, making an unfair profit. When confronted with the facts, the boss gives in. Sid wins Babe back and the company celebrates at the Hideaway singing the final number, "The Pajama Game."

Richard Adler remembers that there were very few changes made during the rehearsal period.

> We did write "Hey There" in rehearsal and that was about it. We tried other numbers also. I frankly was so convinced that "Hey There" wouldn't be a hit that I kept writing other songs with which to replace "Hey There" . . . because I didn't think it was commercial. That shows what an absolute moron I was. . . . I thought it was "too classy" a song to make it. It turned out to be one of the biggest hits of all times. It was recorded over 500 different times and sold countless millions of records.[1]

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[1]Adler interview.

The other hit number in the show, "Hernando's Hideaway," Ewen calls "a takeoff on traditional tangos."[1] The show-stopping dance number, "Steam Heat," was performed by the late Carol Haney. Ewen describes her "dressed as a gamin, but in derby and black tightfitting suit--and flanked by two men [Buzz Miller and Peter Gennaro] similarly dressed. She performs a routine accompanied by hissing and other sounds."[2] The show changed her status on Broadway from novice to rising star. A former Jack Cole dancer as well as assistant to Gene Kelly in Hollywood, Haney was brought to Broadway for The Pajama Game on the insistence of Bob Fosse who had performed a brief dance number with her in the screen version of Kiss Me Kate. Ronna Sloan quotes George Abbott: "Originally, Fosse envisioned her [Haney] as ideal for the small role of a character named Poopsie, and planned to throw all the important dancing to this part."[3] Fosse realized, however, that she was a wonderful comedienne as well as a jazz dancer. The role of Poopsie was merged with the role of the boss's secretary to make Haney's part larger.[4]

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 400.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Sloan, "Bob Fosse," p. 86.

[4]Ibid.

Robbins had always wanted "7½ Cents" to open the show, but Abbott continually refused. However, during a New York preview, he decided to test the idea. The number, humorous at the close of the show, appeared too serious up front. Prince said, "It scared the hell out of Abbott, and he refused to try it for a second performance."[1]

Richard Adler was asked what he thought of Prince as a novice producer. He told of the wonderful suggestion Prince gave him for creating the lyrics in the chorus section of the song "7½ Cents":

> He was very young--but when he came up to me (at rehearsal or somewhere) with that suggestion, I thought - that was pretty sharp. I sensed something there might go beyond just being another silly producer (if you'll excuse my expression) because most of them are.[2]

The show tried out in New Haven and Boston, receiving wonderful reviews. In New Haven during Holy Week--one of the traditionally bad weeks for show business--it played to full houses. Tickets were at a premium. Bissell had already made his story credible, drawing on his own work experiences in the Dubuque pajama factory owned by his family.

The Pajama Game opened in New York on May 13, 1954 at the St. James Theatre with an advance sale of only $40,000. In 1954 that amount was sufficient to run about one week. The glowing notices, however, drew a line of 400 people to

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 136.

[2]Adler interview.

the box-office the next morning. Walter Kerr pointed out the wonderful "newcomers" Adler and Ross, Bob Fosse and Carol Haney. "It's a show that takes a whole barrelful of gleaming new talents, and a handful of stimulating ideas as well, and sends them tumbling in happy profusion over the footlights."[1] Brooks Atkinson felt that the tale of factory and labor problems provided an original setting for the show. He called it the "best musical of the season."[2] Variety's Hobe Morrison also cited it as the best musical of the year and praised Abbott and Robbins for the show's pace and style.[3] Richard Watts, Jr., writing for the New York Post, suggested that, although the labor/management fight was a strange concept for a musical, "it isn't serious about economic affairs and they are merely the springboard for the songs and dances."[4]

The producers inaugurated a policy the day after opening which they continued with subsequent hits. They distributed a check for 20% of their investment to their backers along with the reviews. Prince explains this custom:

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[1]Walter Kerr, "Theatre," New York Herald Tribune, 14 May 1954, New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, vol. 15, p. 324. Every reference to this source will hereafter be cited as NYPL Critics' Reviews, and will refer to the show under discussion.

[2]Brooks Atkinson, "Theatre in Review," New York Times, 14 May 1954, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 15, p. 325.

[3]Hobe Morrison, Variety,

[4]Richard Watts, Jr., "Review," New York Post, 14 May 1954, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 15, p. 326.

> It was simply a trick. We deliberately over-capitalized our shows so that if we had a success we could mail a check the following morning. It seemed to our investors a profit distribution, and though they knew the difference they went along happily with the feel of it. Our first shows were capitalized at $250,000, and cost under $170,000. Today, I think what we would have to raise to insure an overage. In fact, costs have so spiraled that I occasionally under-capitalize (the figures appall me) running a personal risk every time I do a new show.[1]

In the '50s producers did not usually distribute profits until a show had recouped its investment. With this production, that happened fourteen weeks later. Griffith and Prince continued their stage managing duties and saw their first production from the wings. Their weekly salaries at the beginning of the show's run were $250 for Griffith and $125 for Prince.

Prince has vivid backstage memories of the opening night of The Pajama Game but because he and Griffith were stage managing, they hardly had a chance to observe the audience's reaction:

> We heard the applause. We shared the show-stoppers over the intercom system, "That went well, God, didn't that go well." And soon, when the curtain came down, we crossed the stage and embraced each other.[2]

Within a month, Griffith left stage managing forever and saw his first producing effort from a seat in the theatre.

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 12.

[2]Ibid., p. 11.

Prince continued to stage manage for another six and a half months.

The Pajama Game launched many careers. Not only did it become a stunning debut for producers Griffith and Prince but it started Fosse as a choreographer. It established Adler and Ross in Stanley Green's opinion as "the brightest new song-writing team to emerge during the decade."[1] It gave Robbins his first chance to move toward directing, and Carol Haney was the "new face" on Broadway. Shirley MacLaine, who understudied Haney, went on in her place one night when the Hollywood producer Hal Wallis happened to be in the audience, which eventually led her to movie stardom. Lehman Engel, in his autobiography, spoke of how his not having enough faith in the show affected his future:

> Bobby and Hal asked me to conduct the show. I read the script and became extremely jittery at the thought of leaving a hit (Wonderful Town) for anything as flimsy as this: There was no second act at all. I declined. . . . Pajama Game was a hit . . . Hal Hastings, who conducted it, went along with Griffith and Prince to Damn Yankees, New Girl in Town, Fiorello!, Tenderloin, Cabaret, and Zorba. No one was more surprised by Pajama Game's reception than I. When I finally saw it, it still had no book, a usual cause for failure. It certainly had no second act. But Abbott moved it so swiftly that it bothered nobody.[2]

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[1]Green, The World of Musical Comedy, p. 341.

[2]Lehman Engel, This Bright Day; An Autobiography (New York: Macmillan Co., 1974), p. 202.

Another Broadway ritual was broken because The Pajama Game opened in May, just before summer, generally considered precarious. It was clear that the young Prince and his producing partner were not going to do things routinely. They would take chances on new talent, new opening dates, and most important, on subject matter that many producers rejected out of hand. As Abe Laufe said, "The idea of setting a musical comedy in a factory and developing a story that concerns a feud between labor and management seemed unusual to a great many theatregoers. Pins and Needles had dealt with labor problems, but it was primarily a revue emphasizing social consciousness."[1]

The Pajama Game was both risky and unique in the early '50s. It did not contain a libretto made up of the usual conventional musical comedy frippery. A sampling of musicals of the period include Wish You Were Here, which pictured life at a Catskills summer camp with a real swimming pool on stage; Top Banana with Phil Silvers, which told the story of a TV comic, settling for many old burlesque and vaudeville routines; and Can-Can, which concerned the legalization of can-can dancing.

Griffith and Prince in their first producing effort had chosen a show with an unusual story line and it had become a hit. Instead of becoming alienated, audiences and

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[1]Laufe, Broadway's Greatest Musicals, p. 181.

critics enjoyed the fine tuneful score, bright talent, exciting jazz dance numbers and Abbott's staging and dazzling pace.

Prince became the Broadway "Wunderkind" who at the age of 26 had hit the jackpot with his first project. He was at the time the youngest producer on Broadway.

Richard Bissell later wrote a novel, Say Darling, based on his experiences with the show. Since Bissell had worked closely with the producers, Prince was one of the characters in the book and was portrayed as a nervous dilettante. Eventually Bissell, his wife Marian, and Abe Burrows dramatized the book with Bobby Morse playing the Prince character on stage. In an interview with Gwen Verdon, she said, "The way Bobby Morse acted in that show was exactly the way Hal Prince was."[1] Prince was angered at the time. "When I saw it I was furious. But I was like that. I see that now. I was so nervous, so desperate for success. Time was always running out."[2]

The Pajama Game became the eighth musical in Broadway history to run over one thousand performances (1,063 performances). It won the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson Awards as the best musical of the season. Warner Brothers produced a successful movie of the show in 1957 starring

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[1]Verdon interview.

[2]New York Times, 24 November 1968, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Doris Day and, in an unusual move, hired most of the cast of the stage production. The show was revived at the New York City Center on May 15, 1957, less than six months after its long Broadway run.

Damn Yankees

A couple of weeks after The Pajama Game had begun its run, Griffith and Prince became involved in their second project. Abbott had agreed to direct a musical based on Douglas Wallop's novel, The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant, which had been brought to his attention by a William Morris agent, Albert Taylor. Abbott would direct the show provided that Brisson, Griffith and Prince produced it. Taylor became an associate producer and Abbott co-authored with Wallop. As they had done in The Pajama Game, Adler and Ross wrote the score and Bob Fosse did the choreography.

The subject, baseball, did not easily lend itself to the making of a Broadway musical comedy. George Abbott explained why baseball musicals were considered a jinx: "It's pretty hard to show a baseball game on the stage. You can't show the diamond."[1] Ethan Mordden had the same idea. "Baseball is a definitely unconventional (read suicidal) subject for musical theatre."[2] In the past, producers had had bad

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[1]Abbott interview.

[2]Ethan Mordden, Better Foot Forward, The History of American Musical Theatre (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), p. 242.

experiences doing shows dealing with baseball. Most had been failures. An exception was a 1928 play by Ring Lardner called Elmer, the Great, which concerned a baseball pitcher who wins the World Series and the girl of his dreams. The "jinx" didn't affect this play. Brooks Atkinson wrote, "The strong baseball flavor keeps Elmer, the Great generally interesting."[1]

Despite the poor record of baseball plays, Griffith and Prince moved ahead enthusiastically with their project, titled Damn Yankees. Gwen Verdon was cast in the leading role of Lola, a part turned down by Mitzi Gaynor and Zizi Jeanmaire. Verdon had been acclaimed in 1953 for her featured dancing role in Can-Can, but she was not considered a star.

With no stars in the cast and two precarious themes (baseball and the Faust legend), there was still no problem in raising money. No backers' auditions were needed after the producing team's success with their first show. As with The Pajama Game, 155 people invested in Damn Yankees and many of the backers remained loyal to Prince productions for years to come. In 1974, Prince commented:

> Even today a letter announcing a play, its author, the name of the composer, choreographer (often they are all new names) accomplishes the job. But it is not as easy as it was the first seventeen years.[2]

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[1]Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, 25 September 1928, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 16.

Things did not go smoothly in rehearsal or on the road prior to the Broadway opening. Much of the score was discarded and much of the book had to be rewritten. With Abbott as director and co-writer, however, there was no need to panic. He worked steadily and assuredly, as was his habit, and Prince remembers that everything improved except the ending. Richard Adler discussed some of the difficulties:

> There was an awful lot to do in that show--a lot to do! We worked our tails off on that one. It was a very different experience than The Pajama Game. We thought we had an immediate smash hit when we were in rehearsal. When we were in New Haven to our great surprise--after "You've Got to Have Heart"--which stopped the show cold from its first performance on--the show went right out the window because the audience was interested in the ballplayers, not in the love story. And that was the problem. And Lola, they were interested in how to bring her in and not detract from the central story of the two middle aged people [Joe Hardy, who gets turned into a young athlete and his middle aged wife] and how he misses her and loves her. Ultimately we got there.[1]

Gwen Verdon did very little when the show first opened out of town. She talked of some of the changes that took place:

> I didn't do "Little Brains." "Lola" was the first thing that I did. And then there was a baseball ballet which I was part of. I did a pas de deux with a gorilla who was supposed to be the New York Yankees. George Marcy was the gorilla wearing the Yankee uniform. Then that was cut out and they wanted another number. Out of the trunk of Adler and Ross came "Whose Got the Pain?". Bob and I put the number together in about two hours. After

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[1]Adler interview.

> the show at night they did a kind of "fako" arrangement for it. The next day, we still did the other ballet. Then they got it all together to see if it would work. We did this version of the mambo which worked immediately (even though it was not the mambo that Bob finally worked on). He extended it . . . a real orchestration was done and he put his own style into it because it was really a conglomeration of me and Jack Cole and Bob. He put all that stuff in where I would crawl up on Eddie's back singing.[1]

Verdon is sorry the original number was cut because it was, in her opinion, "a fabulous ballet."[2] Everyone was in the number and they were dressed as different baseball teams--e.g., the Orioles dressed as birds. Originally, the ballet was placed at the end of Act I. Verdon was not sure who made the decision to alter the placement or cut numbers out of the show:

> You never really knew who wore the hat or who was the ax man. I have a hunch it was George Abbott. But Griffith and Prince did all the work saying, "that's cut--this is what we're going to do." But I'm pretty sure decisions to cut things came from Abbott. He was the boss.[3]

One of Verdon's favorite numbers in the show was "Two Lost Souls." The original music for the song was one of the first pieces of rock music; very early rock. Abbott was against it. Verdon talked about that song:

> Adler and Ross were kids, and they knew everything that was going on in the music scene. And rock was just beginning (Chubby Checker, the slop and stuff like that). However, when Abbott heard it he said,

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[1]Verdon interview.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

> "What's that?" and they said, "that's the new music." And Abbott answered, "I hate it, change it." And they changed it almost to a cowboy sound similar to "There Once Was a Man" from Pajama Game where they sort of yodel while singing it. They changed the orchestration and it was less rock and roll and more swing. I thought the original version was fun and when we did a revival of the show in Chicago and Westbury (almost 10 years later) we got the notation of the original orchestration, had it redone, and although it sounds old-fashioned now--it went back to rock and roll.[1]

Another number Verdon was fond of was "Lola." It was the first time she had done anything quite like it. The song, dance and scene were all blended "like a mini little show right in the middle of everything."[2]

Damn Yankees tells the story of Joe Boyd (Robert Shafer) a balding middle-aged real estate salesman from Washington, D.C. who is an avid Washington Senators baseball fan. Desperate to have his favorite team win the pennant, he makes an offhand remark about selling his soul to see his team win against those "damn Yankees." Suddenly, a personable fellow named Applegate (Ray Walston) appears as the Devil in disguise. Applegate offers Joe a deal. In return for his soul, he will transform him into a young, virile and unbeatable ballplayer who not only helps the Senators win the pennant but the World Series too. Joe goes along with the arrangement but insists on an "escape clause." At a certain time, if he chooses, he will be restored to his

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

former self, rejoin his wife and live out his years normally. The Devil agrees.[1]

Plump Joe Boyd becomes strapping Joe Hardy (Stephen Douglass), "endowed with supernatural abilities at playing baseball."[2] He joins the Senators team. Manager Van Buren (Russ Brown) tries to build confidence in the discouraged ballplayers with the hit song, "You've Got to Have Heart." The team soon moves up to second place in the American League. Joe, however, misses his wife, Meg (Shannon Bolin). He rents a room in his own home, Meg not realizing who he is. Applegate becomes nervous; he fears that Joe's longing for his old life will ruin their deal. He employs the services of Lola (Gwen Verdon), a "hag who has sold her soul to become a beautiful woman,"[3] to entice Joe into staying on the side of the Devil. Lola does her best to seduce Joe, but he is still determined to go home to his wife. Suddenly it occurs to him that if he refuses to play with the team it cannot possibly win the pennant; and if the Senators do not win the pennant, his bargain with the Devil is negated. Thus he is able to save his soul, forget all about Lola, revert to his former status as a middle-aged baseball fan rooting

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[1] Damn Yankees, Record Liner Notes, RCA Victor, LOC-1021.

[2] Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 104.

[3] Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 595.

for a losing team, and return to his wife.[1]

The score, in Bordman's opinion, is inventive and clever, but uncomfortably close to Adler and Ross' material for The Pajama Game. However, "You've Got to Have Heart" became a popular hit as did "Whatever Lola Wants," a mock tango, which Bordman suggests is similar to The Pajama Game's "Hernando's Hideaway."[2] "Whatever Lola Wants" is a seductive number in which Verdon suggests to Joe that she can get anything she wants.

The show opens with "Six Months out of Every Year," giving baseball wives a chance to complain humorously about the way their husbands ignore them. "Who's Got the Pain?", in a mambo rhythm, is the number mentioned earlier that was co-choreographed by Fosse and Verdon and danced by Verdon and Eddie Phillips. Other numbers, such as "Near to You" and Joe and Lola's farewell, "Two Lost Souls," displayed "promising originality."[3] "Shoeless Joe, from Hannibal, Mo." was a rousing number featuring Gloria, a reporter (Rae Allen) and the baseball players. Applegate's show-stopping number was a vaudeville style soft-shoe coupled with a wry delivery of "Those Were the Good Old Days."

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 104.

[2]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 595.

[3]Ibid.

Damn Yankees opened in New York on May 5, 1955 at the 46th Street Theatre. Walter Kerr, in the New York Herald Tribune, wrote that "one of the neatest tricks of anybody's season would be to bring off a fantasy about Hell and baseball. . . . the funny thing about this show is that it does the toughest things best."[1] John Chapman loved the show, saying, "It breaks the jinx, for there has been a legend that the topic of baseball is murder in the theatre, on account of some mysterious whammy."[2] Although Lewis Funke had nice things to say about it and was enchanted by Verdon and Fosse, he felt that there was a tendency for the show to "settle down a bit flatly on the ground."[3] Although the reviews were generally favorable, the show had two problems. First, it was too long, and second, the audience, having become enamored of Gwen Verdon as Lola during the show, resented her turning into an ugly old crone at the end.

The day after opening, Griffith, Prince and Abbott, along with Adler and Ross, called a rehearsal. A major number was deleted from the show and a second act number was moved into the first act. Richard Adler discussed what happened:

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[1]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, 6 May 1955, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]John Chapman, New York News, 6 May 1955, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Lewis Funke, New York Times, 6 May 1955, NYPL Clipping Folder.

> "Not Meg" was the last number in the show and came right before the finale. That was the number deleted by Abbott after opening night. It broke my heart because I loved the song but Abbott of course was right. He was able to keep things in absolute perfect order. He didn't "kill with improvement." Abbott felt that "Not Meg" was gratuitous and he was right. And the show had opened the night before with across the board rave notices. It took a lot of guts to do that. But of course Abbott is a very special man.[1]

With the changes Abbott made, Damn Yankees played better and ran twenty minutes less at its second performance. In an unusual move, the producers asked Walter Kerr to return and rereview the show. He did, and he liked it more than he had on first viewing.

In spite of the changes and the good reviews, the audiences resisted coming. During the first four weeks, not more than $250 worth of tickets were sold daily. The producers decided to remove the picture of Gwen Verdon in a baseball uniform from the ads and to replace it with a picture of her in a more revealing costume. They deleted references to the baseball theme of the show. Gwen Verdon recalls that "People didn't originally know what the show was about. They either thought it had something to do with the South or only baseball, because on the posters everyone including me was in a baseball uniform. So they changed the record album cover, all the photographs out front, the Playbill. Everything was changed."[2] Within a month there were long

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[1] Adler interview.

[2] Verdon interview.

lines at the box-office. Abe Laufe said, "Damn Yankees might have been unsuccessful if the producers had emphasized the sport angle. Instead of concentrating on baseball, however, they capitalized on two popular themes: regained youth, as symbolized by Faust, and Sex."[1]

Although Prince believes that a show doesn't require a star to be successful, he did hire Bobby Clark to play the Devil in the Damn Yankees national company. He played the role that had been played so successfully by Ray Walston on Broadway. For the touring company, Prince believed that he needed a star as a box-office attraction. He had worshipped Bobby Clark from childhood and the idea of using the renowned comic in one of his productions was irresistible. Prince feels, however, that Clark did not work out. With Clark in the role, the show became a vehicle for the comic. In New York, the show had won many awards with Ray Walston, a fine actor rather than a star personality. Abbott commented, "The show always was a star vehicle . . . Mr. Applegate is the star."[2]

An interview with Clark by Herbert Whittaker in a Toronto newspaper corroborates Prince's perception. Clark had promised Abbott that he would stay within the bounds of the story. When asked about a wildly funny moment in which

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[1]Laufe, Broadway's Greatest Musicals, p. 191.

[2]Abbott interview.

he went into a burlesque of the actress singing "Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets," Clark admitted that his predesessor, Ray Walston, had not done that. Clark said, "It would be very wrong for Mr. Walston to do that kind of burlesque, it wouldn't suit him at all."[1]

Richard Adler agreed with Prince about Clark, and felt that he didn't really fit into the "tapestry" of the show:

> He [Clark] was a different kind of an Applegate. He was hamming it up all over the place, as I recall. The audience loved it and it didn't matter much as far as the box office went. But artistically--he wasn't near the performer Ray Walston was.[2]

Prince learned his lesson well. He would remain firm in his philosophy of doing shows with virtual unknowns in leading roles if he thought they were best for the show.

Later, working as a director, Prince said that good actors can add greatly to a production, and are indeed collaborators. Prince felt that the actors in Sweeney Todd (1979), for example, including the ensemble, were very creative and helped him with some imaginative ideas. "It is not unusual for material to get short shrift, for otherwise good material to seem inferior, in the hands of a dazzling personality. Stars have a way of saving themselves at the cost of the material."[3] On the other hand, if a star is the

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[1]Herbert Whittaker, "Show Business," Toronto Globe and Mail, 11 May 1957, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Adler interview.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 19.

best person around for a particular role, Prince won't hesitate to hire him.

Damn Yankees played over a thousand performances (1,012) and won the Antoinette Perry Award for best musical. The collaborators of the show had triumphed for a second time, but Prince was uncertain about a third project. "Damn Yankees wasn't as good as The Pajama Game, probably the next wouldn't have been any good."[1] The decision of whether to continue with the same team for the next show was resolved in a tragic way. Jerry Ross died suddenly in 1955 from a chronic respiratory ailment.

Damn Yankees was bought for the movies and produced in 1958 by Warner Brothers. Gwen Verdon again played Lola, and Tab Hunter played Joe.

The "Wunderkind" Harold Prince, with his second big Broadway musical hit, was establishing himself in the commercial theatre. Prince, at this time, was assertive, impatient and outspoken. Mike Stewart, the writer, once compared the partners as Griffith, "the nice one," and Prince, "the loud one."[2] Prince, however, was not considered abusive or caustic. He was an extrovert whose emotions surfaced easily. He would erupt in anger, but then quickly revert to his usual happy, pleasant self. He was known for

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[1]Ibid., p. 20.

[2]Ibid., p. 82.

his nervous energy and vitality, his activities continuing from early morning until late at night. Adler remembers the youthful Prince as being much like a "hyper-active child, in his kinetic energy. He was jumping up all over the place. It was definitely nervous energy. He's still very energetic, but it's more tempered now . . . well he's much older."[1] When conversing on the telephone he would pace anxiously, neither sitting nor stopping for a moment. His speech was rapid as was his walk and many could not keep up with him. He walked quickly to appointments and to rehearsals, arriving faster than by taxi. To some he appeared to be a restless listener.

As a producer, Prince involved himself in nearly every creative phase of the work--from the writing to the selection of the props:

> He generally chooses all the scenery for his shows and he has been known to make vital last minute cast changes, to recommend specific revisions in a script, to suggest a way of disentangling a ponderous muddle in a second act, and to advise a composer and lyricist that a certain kind of number is needed to fill a hole in a third act--all matters that normally fall to the director.[2]

Such total involvement might have posed a problem for others. The producer is the "boss" and everyone must pay attention to his opinions. If his ideas are poor (or good, for that matter), the cast and crew might resent him.

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[1]Adler interview.

[2]Gates, "Broadway's Prince Charming," p. 101.

Prince, however, was not only a creative man, but a man of taste and was most often perceived as an asset to his productions.

New Girl in Town

In 1956, a conversation in Hollywood between Doris Day and George Abbott set an idea in motion for a third Griffith/Prince/Abbott musical. Day liked some Bob Merrill songs written for a new screen version of Eugene O'Neill's Pulitzer Prize-winning play Anna Christie (1921). The MGM movie studio had planned to do the film, but later decided against it. Abbott called Griffith and Prince in New York, asking them to get in touch with Merrill (who was in Manhattan at the time) about the songs. The producing team met with Merrill, a composer of popular song hits including "How Much is that Doggie in the Window?" and "If I Knew You Were Coming, I'd Have Baked a Cake." They liked the score and Abbott later agreed with them. Griffith and Prince decided to produce a musical stage version of Anna Christie called New Girl in Town and asked Merrill to write additional material. Abbott would write the book and direct, and Fosse choreograph.

They made a deal with MGM for the release of the score and the screen rights to Anna Christie. Abbott also called on Mrs. Carlotta Monterey O'Neill, the playwright's widow, to explain his conception of a musical of the play and secured the stage rights from her at a reasonable fee.

As a producer, Prince felt that a play must be able to exist at 60% of capacity. Negotiations with MGM were prolonged until, in the final settlement, the 2% originally required by MGM was split between the O'Neill estate and the movie studio.

George Abbott told Don Ross of the New York Herald Tribune that he thought New Girl in Town was the first O'Neill play to be set to music. He said, "There have been plans to make musicals of Desire Under the Elms and Ah Wilderness but nothing much seems to have come of them."[1] Abbott did think that the idea of making a musical of the O'Neill play was a good one:

> Why not? There's lots of serious material on the musical stage today. Pal Joey is serious material. Carousel is. American musicals have progressed far beyond the musical comedy stage; a musical comedy implies a kind of Follies atmosphere. The trend of our musicals is to try to give honest characters and an honest story and have the musical development come out of that story. There can be added pleasure at a musical from the feeling that the people are real and their situations are those which you have empathy for. New Girl in Town is a love story between a woman who seemed to have a shattered life and a man whose whole life was bare. It's the story of courage, of the triumph over environment and I think courage is always interesting, whether in life or on the stage, whether in a drama or a musical.[2]

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[1]Don Ross, "O'Neill Set to Music in Abbott's 'New Girl,'" New York Herald Tribune, 12 May 1957, sec. 4., p. 1.

[2]Seymour Peck, "Anna Christie Sings," NYPL Clipping Folder.

New York had rediscovered O'Neill at that time. When New Girl in Town opened in 1957, three of the playwright's works were on the New York stage. There were revivals of A Moon for the Misbegotten which had started its run in May at the Bijou Theatre, and the 1957 Pulitzer Prize-winning Long Day's Journey Into Night playing on Broadway. The Iceman Cometh was an off-Broadway revival which had started two years earlier at Circle-in-the-Square. Perhaps this revived interest in O'Neill gave Griffith and Prince additional motivation to proceed with the musical adaptation of Anna Christie.

The story tells of how Anna (Gwen Verdon), a prostitute, is recovering from tuberculosis. She seeks refuge with her seafaring father, Chris (Cameron Prud'homme), who is unaware of her past and whom Anna has not seen in years. She falls in love with seaman Matt (George Wallace), who deserts her after he learns of her former profession. Later he returns convinced that Anna has converted to a new way of life.

Abbott took six weeks to write the book, which he kept as close as possible to the original play. He did, however, move Anna's story to the turn of the century instead of the '20s. He explained: "The clothes were prettier in 1900 . . . They had the ugliest clothes in the world in 1921. In 1900, too, woman's place was a more inferior one, making her problem greater. Women could vote by 1921,

there was considerable emancipation by then."[1] Merrill's songs, which had inspired the project, seemed too contemporary (MGM had planned to do the movie in a modern setting), and he was asked to do "a new score suitable to the rhythms and language of 1900."[2] Merrill wrote sixteen new songs for New Girl in Town before it went into rehearsal and three more during rehearsals. Only two of the original songs written for the shelved movie version were used. One of them is "Good to Be Alive."

The search for an actress to play Anna was extensive and many actresses were auditioned. Gwen Verdon was eager to play the part in order to demonstrate her ability as an actress, since her previous shows had been vehicles for her singing and dancing talents. Verdon recalls:

> I did an audition with Mr. Abbott--he read with me--and afterwards he said, "Well, that's in miniature but that's right." Then, I did a musical audition. I sang "Good to Be Alive" and broke right in the middle of it. I just couldn't sing it. It looked bad but there's something about defeat that does something to me. "Give me three weeks," I said, "and let me audition again."[3]

After three weeks of daily singing lessons, Verdon won the role. Prince was happy with the choice but Abbott was uncertain. He had planned a show without dance and was concerned about audience reaction to a non-dancing Verdon. The collaborators had agreed previously that Anna shouldn't and wouldn't be choreographed. However, once the show was

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

in rehearsal, Verdon was given dancing moments. Dialogue was cut as dancing chores increased. Prince admits this hurt the show. "New Girl in Town was far better when we stuck with a concept conscious of risking the wrath of our audience."[1] Prince had come to believe that it was better to stick with an idea, a concept, approach to a show, no matter the audience risk, than to try to please everybody by making modifications.

Verdon went to Sanford Meisner for acting lessons and private coaching. She felt Anna should be played in a funny-pathetic manner (like Charlie Chaplin).[2] Meisner also helped Verdon by getting some actors together to work with her. Abbott, Verdon remembers, has a marvelous way of directing because it's so quick.

> He doesn't bother getting to the in-depth study of the character through you or your own stuff. Which is OK with me. However, half the time I didn't know what he was talking about. . . . Fosse was like an interpreter. Fosse told me to ask Abbott to say more than just one line to explain what he wants you to do. By asking for four or five lines of explanation, I'd realize what he wanted of me.[3]

Both Prince and Verdon feel that the highlight of the show is the scene at the bar with Anna and the sharp-tongued, bedraggled Marthy (Thelma Ritter), the barge captain's woman. Verdon feels it was successful dramatically because "it was

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 23.

[2]Verdon interview.

[3]Ibid.

pure O'Neill."[1] Prince liked it because "it contained no music, which was symptomatic of what was to be wrong throughout the musical."[2] Verdon also liked a "fabulous song, 'On the Farm,' which replaced some of O'Neill's dialogue."[3] The bitter ballad about Anna's childhood in Minnesota offered exposition and character delineation. "And then the scene where Anna tells Matt what she's been--that was O'Neill's also," said Verdon. "I didn't like the way we had to do it--in one--and in the spotlight--as if we were about to do a tap dance, but I still think the scenes that worked best were the O'Neill scenes."[4]

Verdon claims she fought with Abbott throughout, feeling that he was commercializing it too much. She agrees with Prince that they should have stayed with the original concept. Brooks Atkinson noted the problem: "Mr. Abbott's effort to make a bigtime festival out of a somber theme is not altogether successful. The two substances do not blend easily."[5] Walter Kerr, however, had the opposite opinion: "Mr. Abbott, in reworking the tooth-and-nail love story, has minded his business and played the whole thing straight

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 23.

[3]Verdon interview.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Brooks Atkinson, "The Theatre: Singing Anna Christie," New York Times, 15 May 1957, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 269.

(perhaps too straight--there was some sound robust comedy in the original that is missing here)."[1] Richard Watts, Jr. lauded Abbott for giving the show "the sort of expert staging for which he is famous."[2]

One of the outstanding numbers in the show is the rousing opener, "Roll Yer Socks Up," performed by the sailors and waterfront "floosies" in a rousing fandango with a backdrop of the New York City waterfront at the turn of the century. Another show-stopping number is "Flings," in which the relationship of Marthy to Chris is humorously detailed. The vicissitudes of young romantic love are compared to the more stable and comfortable relationship of two older people who understand each others' needs.[3] Henry Hewes wrote that the barroom parody, "Oh, the Sunshine Girl Had Raindrops in Her Eyes," "allows dancer Eddie Phillips to break up the joint with a jazzy backroom romp."[4] Walter Kerr liked "an ingratiating snake dance which sends an impudent chorus on its way to "The Check Apron Ball."[5] Verdon remembers that

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[1]Walter Kerr, "Theatre," New York Herald Tribune, 15 May 1957, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 269.

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "'Two on the Aisle': Another Triumph for Gwen Verdon," New York Post, 15 May 1957, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 268.

[3]Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, June 1957, p. 22, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Kerr, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 270.

Fosse added a "little soft shoe" for her in this number which they always called the "Pony Dance."[1]

Bob Fosse's choreography was applauded by most critics. John Chapman said it "gave the production the life it needs."[2] A novel staging device used the first act curtain to cut off the ensemble in the midst of an energetic dance number, "There Ain't No Flies on Me," while Act II "commences amusingly by picking up the dancers in mid-kick right where they left off."[2]

Thelma Ritter as Marthy sang "Yer My Friend Aintcha" with Chris. "Ven I Valse" is a number very similar to The King and I's "Shall We Dance." It was sung by Chris and the girls of the waterfront to Anna and then, said Verdon, "Chris and I did a waltz together."[3] Verdon's big number was "It's Great to Be Alive" and the big romantic ballad, sung by Matt Burke (George Wallace), was "Look at Er." Marthy gave sobriety a "hearty plug in a Settlement House trio called 'Chess and Checkers,'" said Walter Kerr in his review.[4]

Elliot Norton of the Boston Record cited the new song added in Boston, "I'd Like a Tattoo" ("The Tattoo Song")

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[1]Verdon interview.

[2]John Chapman, "New Girl in Town," New York Daily News, 15 May 1957, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 268.

[3]Verdon interview.

[4]Kerr, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 270.

sung by George Wallace. He called it "agreeable, but by no means distinguished."[1]

There was a major conflict out of town between Fosse and Verdon on the one hand and the director and producers on the other hand over a dream ballet which Fosse had created for the second act. "The Red Light "Ballet" offered Matt's nightmare fantasy of what Anna's past had been like in a house of prostitution. George Abbott in his autobiography, Mister Abbott, explained that the "cold, shocked reaction of the viewers made us realize that the sequence was just plain dirty."[2] Abbott and the producers cut out the number after the New Haven tryout and destroyed the $40,000 staircase used in the scene. They objected to the ballet as "pornographic, an artistic miss."[3]

Prince said, "The movement possibly, was lovely (Gwen and Fosse thought so). Erotic, yes. But it had been imposed on the play. We had entered a musical brothel, our prostitutes became dancers, our Anna Christie, Gwen Verdon."[4]

> I didn't know that the number was out until we went into Boston. When I asked to talk to Abbott about it Hal Prince told me, "He's too busy to talk to you." I said, "I'm too busy to go on" and I left. But I did the show because Bob Fosse said you'll be blackballed forever if you don't and he convinced me to go on. . . . Fosse tried several versions of

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[1]Elliot Norton, "'Girl' Leaves Town, Pruned, Polished," Boston Record, 2 May 1957, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Abbott, Mister Abbott, p. 254.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 26.

[4]Ibid., p. 27.

> the ballet and George Abbott hated them all. It was his decision and he was the boss so you go along with it.[1]

Although Fosse and Verdon were adamant about the original choreography being a work of art, they went about trying to change the number for the Boston performances. Abbott says that he and the producers were "not able to pierce the emotional armor with which they [Fosse and Verdon] had invested their creation."[2] The restaged and laundered version in Boston was described by Norton: "It was now Anna who dreams of her past. To garish music in flashing lights, men and women of the ballet dance a brief history of her fall from innocence, and her acceptance in a house of evil, in moments that are wild and little restrained, yet hardly offensive in a show of this kind."[3]

Abbott didn't like the new version any better than he had the original. For the opening in New York, the ballet was struck entirely. Verdon said: "They finally did put the number back into the show a few months later (June 23rd . . . I remember because it was Bob's birthday). They didn't therefore have the staircase and they weren't going to build another one. And there was much more musical accompaniment now. Originally it was done in silence, which made people

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[1]Verdon interview.

[2]Abbott, Mister Abbott, p. 354.

[3]Norton, "'Girl' Leaves Town Pruned, Polished."

very nervous. About 80% of the choreography was the same as the original. They put it back in because I wanted it. If I decide I want something, I'll go off a cliff to get it. I knew it was good."[1]

George Abbott called the ballet "a very depressing experience, both in its effect on us and its effect on the audience."[2] As a result of the situation, neither Fosse nor Verdon ever worked for Prince again and Verdon never again spoke to George Abbott.

Another "problem" that Verdon encountered during the run of New Girl in Town was the "realistic" leading man, George Wallace, whom she said was "terrific." However, she thinks that he felt inadequate as an actor around the rest of the cast and he would make the "scenes real--beyond theatrical real."[3] Verdon said:

> Thelma Ritter was totally covered with bruises where he would grab her. In one scene he threw me so hard that my shoes flew off. We all knew what he was like and tried to talk to him. When that did no good, we tried to avoid him. Thelma and I wore pads on our knees and elbows. It was a mess. . . . But I wasn't going to get smashed around. . . . I rarely get angry but when I do--I'm deranged. Bobby Griffith finally told him he was not allowed to touch us. He should do the scene but not touch us.[4]

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[1] Verdon interview.

[2] Abbott, Mister Abbott, p. 254.

[3] Verdon interview.

[4] Ibid.

Verdon, who during their two shows together, perceived producer Prince as "very young," said that she spent a day with Prince and his family in Majorca in 1972 (fifteen years after New Girl in Town) and that he amazed her. "I guess I never expected Hal to grow up but he really grew up a lot. He'd become quite a figure in the theatre and in humanitarian things. And thank goodness, I matured enough to recognize that he, too, had really evolved as a human being."[1]

New Girl in Town, which was capitalized at $300,000, opened on Broadway on May 14, 1957 at the 46th Street Theatre and ran almost thirteen months (439 performances), generally playing below capacity. It not only returned the investors' money but even realized a substantial profit. On November 11, 1957, a letter was sent to investors with the final 10% of their investment. The letter stated they were in the black and doing capacity business.[2] The show set a new high for Broadway tickets with the top price at $9.20 for an orchestra divan seat and $8.60 for the regular orchestra seats (on weekends). The cast album was recorded by RCA Victor.

Variety's Hobe Morrison said that

> Abbott's adaptation of the O'Neill classic can't entirely remove the bitter quality of the story . . . so it lacks much of the romantic aura likely to bring mass popularity but it's solid and

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Variety, 13 February 1974, p. 70. NYPL Clipping Folder.

> propulsive. . . . Verdon easily surpasses her previous performances. . . . It's vigorous and graphic, if possibly limited in range.[1]

John McClain in the New York Journal American said,

> Devout O'Neill fans will not find much of the atmosphere of the original in this book by George Abbott, but they will be treated to a thoroughly zestful and engaging musical period piece, a show with style, humor and a rollicking score.[2]

Prince later came to believe that the subject of prostitution is "not romantic and rarely comical and our material was too conventional, our vision superficial."[3] For him, the main reason for doing the show was his need to get back to work. The producing team had had over a year's layoff since Damn Yankees had opened, and they were anxious to start a new project. Prince now says that Anna Christie should have been done as an American opera. He admits it might have had a shorter life span but it would have remained faithful to the original concept, which was serious and not comedic.

Although New Girl in Town was profitable, Prince still considers it an aesthetic failure. Soon after, Frederick Brisson moved back to California, breaking up the producing trio of Griffith, Prince and Brisson, which had been responsible for the successful three-hit streak.

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[1]Hobe Morrison, Variety, 22 May 1957, p. 56, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]John McClain, "New Girl in Town," New York Journal American, 15 May 1957, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 21.

CHAPTER IV

THE DECADE OF THE '50s ENDS

> I get bored with the same thing . . . I like theatre when it's not like what you get in other media.[1]

West Side Story

Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim became good friends in the early '50s. They first met at the opening of South Pacific in April 1949. Prince recalls hearing about Sondheim that

> Steve was a composer whose reputation had reached me all the way from Williams College where he had written book, music and lyrics for a show called Climb High (which was the story of a young man with aspirations to produce on Broadway).[2]

Prince and Sondheim discussed the future of the American theatre over a sandwich in Walgreen's drugstore, a theatre hangout at the time. They discussed the American musical theatre and their rightful place in its future. Their first project became West Side Story, a groundbreaker in musical theatre.

West Side Story is a contemporary treatment of the Romeo and Juliet theme. Set on New York's West Side, it contains violence, poverty and ethnic hostility. It is a

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[1] Prince interview, The Dick Cavett Show.

[2] Prince, Contradictions, p. 29.

musical tragedy and expresses itself poetically and through the use of dance. The show is an innovative departure from the integrated musicals of the period. Other musicals repeated the successful formulas of the past, but West Side Story was hailed as a new kind of musical theatre.

The idea for the show began to evolve with Jerome Robbins in 1949. Arthur Laurents, who had never written the book for a musical before, but whose produced plays included Home of the Brave, The Time of the Cuckoo, and A Clearing in the Woods, developed Robbins' idea into a story of a Jewish girl and a gentile boy on the East Side of New York. Various changing titles for the project were East Side Story and Gang Way. Leonard Bernstein, represented on Broadway by On the Town, Wonderful Town and Candide, soon joined the show as composer. Betty Comden and Adolph Green, originally set to write the lyrics, were not released from a Hollywood film contract. The remaining collaborators could not decide on what the piece should become and soon the project was abandoned. It remained in limbo but over the years, Laurents altered the libretto to relate to the demographic changes that had occurred in the city. The show now dealt with the conflict of Puerto Ricans and "whites" who lived on the West Side of Manhattan, and Robbins eagerly accepted this concept.

In 1954, Bernstein, dissatisfied with his own lyrics, asked Stephen Sondheim to help him. Sondheim

complained to his mentor, Oscar Hammerstein II, that he didn't want to accept the job because he wanted to compose. Hammerstein convinced him to do it. He said, "To work with men of the professional caliber of Bernstein and Laurents and Robbins is invaluable experience. And I think also it'll be a foot in the theatre for you. You can always do music on your next show."[1] Sondheim agreed to do the show.

Bernstein felt that Sondheim's contribution was enormous. He said, "It far exceeded even my expectations. What made him so valuable was that he was also a composer and I could explain musical problems to him and he'd understand immediately, which made the collaboration a joy."[2] The manner in which they collaborated varied. Sometimes they worked together, sometimes apart. With "Cool" and "Officer Krupke," the tune came first, and with "A Boy Like That," the lyrics were first.[3] When the show opened in New York, Bernstein, in a gracious gesture, removed his name as co-lyricist, thus giving newcomer Sondheim deserved recognition.

George Abbott had decided not to produce the original musical and Griffith and Prince also declined the early script. The show was then owned by Cheryl Crawford, in

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[1]Fordin, Getting to Know Him, p. 330.

[2]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 16.

[3]Ibid., p. 22.

association with Roger Stevens, who had financed the project since its inception. Eventually, Crawford dropped out, and the creators of the show learned that Stevens was not happy either.

The collaborators were desperate. Every major New York producer had turned the show down, and they now feared that the project would again fall apart. Bernstein remembers,

> We thought at that point that it would not get on. Everybody told us to stop. They all said it was suicidal. I don't know how many people begged me not to waste my time on something that could not possibly succeed. After all, how could we do a musical where there are two bodies lying on the stage at the end of the first act and everybody eventually dies? . . . a show that's so filled with hatefulness and ugliness?[1]

Prince was in Boston with his production of New Girl in Town. In those days, he remained on the road while the production was trying out. His New York office was run by Carl Fisher, his general manager at the time, a very capable assistant. One day, Prince and Sondheim compared notes on how badly things were going for each of them. Sondheim's bad news about West Side Story affected Prince. He talked to Griffith and called Sondheim back. Prince said:

> I knew the show backwards and forwards, though Bobby had not heard it, for Steve had played all the music for me unbeknownst to Lenny, since he didn't want anybody to hear it. So when I called Steve back I told him that Bobby and I could come to New York on Sunday to hear the score while

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[1]Ibid., p. 16.

> George Abbott rehearsed New Girl, but if they wanted us and if we wanted to do it, we would go right back to Boston because we had a show in trouble and we would not talk about their show, would do nothing about getting a theatre, would do nothing about raising money, and they would have to just leave us alone.[1]

Griffith and Prince came to New York, heard the material and decided they would present West Side Story. Then they went back to Boston to get their own show ready for its New York opening. West Side Story was to become the first of many times that Prince and Sondheim would come to each other's rescue professionally.

The day after New Girl in Town opened on Broadway, Griffith and Prince began work on West Side Story. Within a week they had raised the $300,000 needed for the show and it soon went into rehearsal. Prince was again tackling a show whose subject matter was perceived as controversial. In fact, the show was considered by those close to it as revolutionary. It did not compromise with a happy ending. In fact, the ending was tragic. With the exception of two songs, "America" and "Officer Krupke," it was humorless. Richard Watts, Jr. would write later, "To start with a sweeping understatement, West Side Story is far from being a regulation Broadway musical play."[2]

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[1]Ibid, p. 17.

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "Two on the Aisle: Romeo and Juliet in a Gang War," New York Post, 27 September 1957, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 252.

The producers were determined to search out new, young talent. They needed performers who could dance, move well, act and who could also sing the Bernstein score. The arduous job of casting took six months; it was the show that was to be the star. Larry Kert, who was hired to play the role of Tony, said, "They didn't want anybody to overshadow their precious West Side Story."[1]

In addition to Kert as Tony, leading roles were assigned to Carol Lawrence as Maria and Chita Rivera as Anita. Others in the company were amateurs or professionals who had never played roles before; mainly, they were young dancers who had done some chorus work.

Prince claims that watching Jerome Robbins at work during the creation of West Side Story helped shape his theatrical vision. Although it would be some years before Prince would begin directing (and although he has said that Robbins' method of putting a show together is quite different from his own) he credits Robbins for much of the directorial know-how which he absorbed during the rehearsals of the show. Prince said, "I learned from Robbins how to prepare a concept musical--although I hate the term--but Jerry had an aesthetic view--a vision of the visual elements of production."[2]

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 19.

[2]The South Bank Show: London Weekend, 23 June 1978, interview with Harold Prince.

Kert claimed that rehearsals were painful because Robbins is a perfectionist who "sees himself in every role, and if you come on stage and don't give him exactly what he's pictured the night before, his tolerance level is low, so in his own kind of way he destroys you. . . . We resented it."[1]

West Side Story was the first musical not directed by Abbott that Prince produced. "At the time, Hal was completely under Abbott's wing,"[2] recalled Sondheim. Sondheim believes that Prince's career was reshaped when he and Griffith rejected the counsel of their collaborator and mentor, George Abbott, and took over the production of West Side Story. Sondheim maintains that, if Prince hadn't had the confidence to reject Abbott's advice, he would have continued to produce George Abbott musicals. "Instead," says Sondheim, "he trusted his own instincts and became very much his own man. After West Side Story he never stood quite as much in awe of Abbott. Not that there was ever any trouble. But now they're colleagues, associates. Up until West Side Story, the relationship was definitely that of teacher and pupil."[3]

Prince recalls that time. "It was difficult to come out from under Abbott's protective arm. On the other hand,

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 19.

[2]Gates, "Broadway's Prince Charming," p. 100.

[3]Ibid.

he gave us his blessing easily. George Abbott is a secure man."[1]

Robbins has been called a "method director." He used this systematic approach on West Side Story, and later, Fiddler on the Roof. West Side Story has no chorus and each gang member was given a name and a fleshed-out history and background. The cast cut out items about gang wars from the papers and covered the theatre's walls with them. After the show's first run-through, the consensus was that the show was too slow and a bit self-conscious. Robbins was persuaded to modify his "method" technique and to stress "line readings" and the show began to come together in less than a week's time. The hours that Robbins spent early on probing in method style Prince credited as having given the show its "legs."[2] Prince did not emulate Robbins' "method" technique when he began directing. Prince works quickly and doesn't spend much time working out inner motivations in rehearsal. As Lonny Price, who starred in a recent Prince musical, Merrily We Roll Along, said, "Prince expects the actor to do all that as part of his homework."[3]

The plot of West Side Story concerns the Jets (the American gang) and the Sharks (the Puerto Rican gang), who

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 32.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Interview with Lonny Price, New York, 18 February 1982.

are at war with each other. The production opens with a danced "prologue" indicating the bitter tensions between them. The Jets wish to halt further growth of Puerto Rican influence in their neighborhood. Riff (Mickey Calin), the Jet's leader, sings about this in "Jet Song." Tony, the former leader of the Jets, goes along with the Jets' plans although he has been "growing away from the gang and feels the stirrings of other emotions."[1] He expresses these feelings in "Something's Coming," telling how every morning he would awaken and reach out to something "around the corner or down the beach."

The gangs meet at a dance at the local gym where the song "Dance at the Gym" and the choreography reflect their hostility to each other. Tony meets Bernardo's sister, Maria, and they fall in love. Bernardo is the leader of the Sharks. Dance is used to express mood and plot details in a way not seen before in a musical. Tony and Maria pledge their love on Maria's fire escape in the famous love song, "Tonight."

The gang plans to fight ("The Rumble"). Riff is killed and Tony, in a blind rage, kills Bernardo. This tragic chain of events culminates in Tony's death at the final curtain.

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[1]George Dale, West Side Story Record Liner Notes, Columbia OL5230.

Bernstein's score was well received. Richard Watts, Jr. said that the mood of the music

> lies somewhere between the sardonic bite of his score for Candide and his considerably more popular songs for Wonderful Town. If it leans more in the direction of the former, it is because of what seemed to me a certain chilliness that didn't altogether capture the hot-bloodedness of grimly embattled youth in West Side Story. But the vitality and the harshness of the musical tragedy's mood are there, and there can be little dispute about the vigor of the music.[1]

Other musical highlights were "Maria," in which Tony sings about his new-found love, and "I Feel Pretty," which reflects Maria's joy and new-found happiness with Tony. "Somewhere," a lyrical dream ballet, accompanied by off-stage voices singing lyrics, expressed the young people's wish for a better life. Again, dance was being used to both explain and, even more important, to help set mood.

The comedy numbers are "America," in which the Puerto Rican girls sing of their "happy" life in this country, and "Gee, Officer Krupke," a satire on the "problem of juvenile delinquency."[2] Anita scolds Maria for loving Tony in the song "A Boy Like That" and Maria answers in "I Have a Love."

Sondheim has reservations about some of the numbers in the show. He dislikes "I Feel Pretty" and "One Hand, One Heart," although Bernstein loved them. Bernstein had

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[1]Watts, "Romeo and Juliet in a Gang War."

[2]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 560.

originally written the latter for Candide and revised it for West Side Story. "I Feel Pretty," Sondheim believes, goes against character. He had wanted to show that he could do inner rhymes. "So I had this uneducated Puerto Rican girl singing 'It's alarming how charming I feel' . . . so there it is to this day embarrassing me every time it's sung, because it's full of mistakes like that."[1]

Before the show went into rehearsal, Sondheim played seven songs for Dorothy and Oscar Hammerstein. Although they liked "Maria," Sondheim had a mixed reaction. He didn't like the style of the lyric. He knew that it was like a "Hammerstein lyric in that it had the one quality Oscar valued above all others," said Sondheim. "Absolute honesty about a character and what he is saying."[2] Sondheim says he still tries for this quality in his lyrics, regardless of style.

A special run-through was staged for Hammerstein prior to West Side Story's Philadelphia tryout. Hammerstein was thrilled, but had several major criticisms, the principal one being that "Tonight" was not a sufficiently "soaring" song for the balcony scene. Hammerstein said, "It's a nice song, but it doesn't seem to me to take off enough."[3]

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 23.

[2]Fordin, Getting to Know Him, p. 330.

[3]Ibid.

"His instinct was unerring," said Sondheim, "because the truth was that the song had not been written for that scene but was used there as a last resort."[1] Even though Sondheim and the other collaborators knew he was right, the song remained in.

There were not many changes made during the out-of-town tryouts (exceptional for a musical). Sondheim said "the show was changed least of any musical he has heard of."[2] Robbins had prepared thoroughly and attempted to fix things at an early stage. The show rehearsed an unprecedented eight weeks, with Robbins doing much work both before and during rehearsals. These traits Prince would later emulate.

Minor revisions made out of town included the rewriting of the release for "Jet Song" and the adding of a few notes to "One Hand, One Heart." Robbins also made some changes in the second-act ballet. In Washington, a new number for the characters Anybodys, Arab and Baby John called "Kinds Ain't" was written and then rejected. Laurents and Sondheim feared that the audiences would love this typical musical number for its commercial elements and it would detract from the show as a whole.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 25.

[3] Ibid.

They also thought of changing the opening to "This Turf is Ours," thinking that heightening the violence would improve the number. It proved to be "too" violent and they went back to "Jet Song."

The collaborators got along very well, although Laurents said that, because of Robbins' behavior, "nobody spoke to him on the opening night in New York."[1]

Robbins had worked a great deal with dance projects and dance theatre which depend more on lighting than scenery. West Side Story, therefore, became the first show for which Prince hired a lighting designer. In earlier shows, the company electrician, George Gebhardt, and Griffith had done the lighting. Prince recalls, "It was a matter of lights up for the scene, and lights down for the song. Lights up again after the song with George Abbott shouting from the orchestra, 'more light on those faces--this is a funny scene.'"[2] Jean Rosenthal did the lighting for West Side Story. As a result, she would do many future shows with Prince.

The reviews in Washington were raves. In Philadelphia, the reception was not nearly as good, but the collaborators remained calm, since, in Sondheim's words, "Philly is an antitheatrical town."[3] West Side Story

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[1]Ibid., p. 27.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 37.

[3]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 27.

opened at the Winter Garden Theatre in New York on September 16, 1957. The show received favorable reviews from all the critics, but no so-called raves. John Chapman wrote,

> The American theatre took a venturesome forward step when the firm of Griffith and Prince presented West Side Story at the Winter Garden last evening. This is a bold new kind of musical theatre--a juke-box Manhattan opera. It is, to me, extraordinarily exciting. In it, the various fine skills of show business are put to new tests, and as a result a different kind of musical has emerged.[1]

Walter Kerr had reservations about the show. He liked the dancing, but wrote:

> The show is, in general, not well sung. It is rushingly acted. (The dramatic postures are rarely varied.) And it is, apart from the spine-tingling velocity of the dances, almost never emotionally affecting. Perhaps the echoes of another "Romeo and Juliet" are too firm; the people often seem to be behaving as they do because of arbitrary commands from a borrowed plot. Perhaps the near-absence of comedy whittles away the substance of ordinary humanity. Perhaps these teenage gangsters are too ferocious, too tawdry, too intent upon grinding their teeth to interest us compassionately for two and one-half hours. They terrify us in their drive; they do not touch us in their bewilderment. The evening hurtles headlong past whatever endearing simplicities may be hidden in Arthur Laurents' text for Stephen Sondheim's lyrics.[2]

Brooks Atkinson said:

> Everything in West Side Story is of a piece. Everything contributes to the total impression of

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[1]John Chapman, "'West Side Story': A Splendid and Super-modern Musical Drama," New York Daily News, 27 September 1957, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 252.

[2]Walter Kerr, "West Side Story," New York Herald Tribune, 17 September 1957, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 253.

> wildness, ecstasy and anguish. The astringent score has moments of tranquility and rapture, and occasionally a touch of sardonic humor. And the ballets convey the things that Mr. Laurents is inhibited from saying because the characters are so inarticulate. The hostility and suspicion between the gangs, the glory of the nuptials, the terror of the rumble, the devastating climax--Mr. Robbins has found the patterns of movement that express these parts of the story.[1]

John McClain was most impressed with Robbins' work. "This should be his monument, for there has never been a happier integration, a more sensitive blending of story, song and movement. Many of the most exciting moments of the evening are told in dance, and they are superb."[2]

Robert Coleman said, "Robert E. Griffith and Harold S. Prince, the hit boys, have another sensational smash on their hands. They've come to bat four times--with Pajama Game, Damn Yankees, New Girl in Town and West Side Story--and whacked out grand slammers for a perfect record."[3]

Although the first weeks of the run sold out, people didn't flock to the box-office for tickets. Many people think that West Side Story was an enormous commercial success but it wasn't. It became the success it is now considered only after the movie version was released.

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[1]Brooks Atkinson, "Theatre: The Jungles of the City," New York Times, 27 September 1957, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 253.

[2]John McClain, "Music Magnificent in Overwhelming Hit," New York Journal American, 27 September 1957, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 254.

[3]Robert Coleman, "'West Side Story': A Sensational Hit!", New York Daily Mirror, 27 September 1957, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 18, p. 254.

The show played a year and a half on Broadway (734 performances). Prince admits making a poor decision. The producers had finally lowered the ticket prices and initiated a two-for-the-price-of-one policy. Audiences flocked to the theatre, but Griffith and Prince had already booked the show for a national tour. Craig Zadan writes:

> It was one of the few business mistakes of Hal's career. Hal didn't realize what a large audience there would be once ticket prices were reduced, so he made the mistake of booking a tour too early and the last couple of months you couldn't get into the theatre. To make up for that he brought it back to New York after the tour for a run of about six months--also on reduced prices--and it did quite well.[1]

Prince agrees that West Side Story left New York about six months too soon. "It takes a peculiar talent to know when to close a show and this office is short on that talent."[2] He agrees that the show is an important one but also that important shows are not always smash hits. All the awards that year were won by The Music Man, which ran years longer than West Side Story. However, Jerome Robbins won a Tony as best choreographer.

Money in large sums resulted from the movie and record sales of West Side Story. United Artists paid $315,000 for the film rights plus a piece of the profits, which in those days was not considered much. Eventually,

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 33.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 40.

however, the sale did result in much money for the original investors and producers. Prince remarked:

> Profit participation in films has always been a chancy business: don't count on any. West Side Story was the exception. Though the Broadway production recouped its costs, increments from the tour, stock and amateur rights, and the cast album provided some profit, the film as of today has been worth over three million dollars to the production and there will be more.[1]

The road tour of West Side Story finished before the year was up. The show did well on the West Coast but not in Chicago. The show reopened in New York and Bernstein agreed to conduct the overture on the first night. The critics rereviewed the show and, as Prince says, "This time around the book was special, Sondheim was credited, and the show had a place in history."[2] From the time of the re-opening in New York, the show played six months. It could have run longer had it not been for a dispute that Prince had with the musicians' union.

Because another musical was booked into the Alvin Theatre at this time, Prince wanted to move West Side Story into the Broadway Theatre, which was a bigger house. He hoped by doing this he could drop ticket prices and enlarge his audience. He thought this might give the show another six months to run, since it was no longer making money.

> We went to the musicians' union and explained that if we closed at the Alvin Theatre on Saturday, we

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[1]Ibid, p. 42. [2]Ibid., p. 40.

> would be able to open again on Wednesday or Thursday of the following week at the Broadway. We could not afford to pay the actors, musicians, or anybody else for the intervening days, and I asked for a concession. They turned me down.[1]

Why is West Side Story considered a landmark musical? Arthur Laurents explains:

> We all knew what we did not want--neither formal poetry nor flat reportage; neither opera nor split-level musical comedy; neither zippered-in ballets nor characterless dance routines. We didn't want newsreel acting, blue-jean costumes, or garbage-can scenery any more than we wanted soap-box pounding for our theme of young love destroyed by a violent world. What we did was to aim at a lyrically and theatrically sharpened illusion of reality.[2]

Bernstein described the show as "breaking new ground":

> So much was conveyed in music, including the enormous reliance upon dance to tell plot--not just songs stuck into a book. . . . I thought, Oh well, now I've really done my bit for the Broadway theatre and I can become a conductor and seriously think about Beethoven and Wagner [Bernstein was so sure that the show was a unique contribution to the American musical that he accepted the directorship of the New York Philharmonic the same month as West Side Story opened]. . . . I was perfectly confident that there would be dozens of kids who would take the next step and pick up on the hints of West Side Story that I was convinced would lead to some form of American opera.[3]

Bernstein did not know that two of the collaborators on the show, Prince and Sondheim, would continue, with their work, to move the American musical forward. Prince,

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[1] Ibid., p. 41.

[2] Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 28

[3] Ibid., p. 31.

having learned his trade well through his working experiences with Abbott, Robbins, Bernstein, Laurents and Sondheim, would emerge with a unique vision of his own for the American Musical Theatre. Although Prince had been raised with an American Musical Theatre that might be labeled conventional, it had moved through various steps. Shows such as Lady in the Dark, Pal Joey, Oklahoma! and Allegro were all landmark musicals. Now, West Side Story was hailed as a breakthrough but, in Prince's opinion, the show was a product of what had come before.

> West Side Story which had the audacity to contain that much dance and to move that much ahead with each dance, without words explosive as the whole concept was, was not something new. It was the pinnacle of a tradition.[1]

After West Side Story, Prince became more and more concerned with the possibilities of musical theatre as a serious medium. He said, "How can you live today and not recognize the awful disillusionment of people?"[2] But it would take time for him to find a way to express these feelings in the theatre.

West Side Story was Griffith and Prince's fourth successful production and it appeared as if the producing team couldn't fail. However, it wasn't long before Prince did have his first major flop.

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 128.

[2]Newsweek, 26 July 1971, p. 68. NYPL Clipping Folder.

A Swim in the Sea

In 1957, the producers decided to present a straight play, A Swim in the Sea, by Jess Gregg, which had originally been titled The Sea Shell. The play dealt with incest in a Southern family and featured a sixty-year-old woman as its central character. It had previously been the property of the Theatre Guild. When Joshua Logan was unable to stage the drama, the Guild dropped the option and it was picked up by Griffith and Prince.

This was Gregg's first play. He had worked five years on the script, polishing it for production. Some years later (1964), his play Shout from the Rooftops would receive positive reviews when it opened at the Renata Theatre. He also published two novels, The Other Elizabeth (1952) and The Glory Circuit.

Both Shirley Booth and Helen Hayes had turned down the opportunity to play the central role and Elia Kazan and Harold Clurman, as well as Joshua Logan, had turned down the job of directing it. The producers, however, were determined to get the play into production and would not allow themselves to be discouraged by the rejections. Prince said, "We had entered a companionship with self-deception not unique in the theatre but unprofessional and lazy."[1]

They arranged for a two-week winter stock production to open at the Royal Poinciana Playhouse in Palm Beach,

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 45.

Florida on April 28, 1958, following six days of previews at the Annie Russell Theatre in Winter Park, Florida. Palm Beach, they believed, would prove a good place for a tryout.

Peggy Wood, who had played the role of Mama for eight years in a television series, I Remember Mama, was persuaded to appear in the Florida production, even though Prince felt she was miscast. Others in the play were Inga Swenson and George Peppard, playing an incestuous pair. The Royal Poinciana Playhouse paid rehearsal costs, cast salaries, provided sets and costumes, and would arrange for audiences, and the producers felt they couldn't lose financially.

Elliot Silverstein was chosen to direct on the recommendation of literary agent Audrey Wood. Silverstein had done graduate work at the Yale Drama School (as had Gregg) and had been a stage director for television's Omnibus. He had directed some operas and had been responsible for Sideshow at the Phoenix Theatre. The producers had never seen his work before and were not very happy with the results. Silverstein did go on after this experience to successfully direct the film Cat Ballou.

The story of the three-act play A Swim in the Sea deals with an all-possessing mother, Mrs. Kittridge, who has two daughters, Swart Petry and Derst Petry, by her first marriage, and a daughter and son, Amy and Frank, by her second. Her last husband has long since deserted her, taking the son with him. She has been living with her

three daughters, making them largely dependent upon her. Her stifling affection has made them distrust outsiders and her feigned illnesses have turned the two oldest girls into spinsters.

The conflict occurs with the return of the son, a self-reliant young man who, as a child, was torn from this environment and raised by his father. He finds the household unbearable and is determined that his kid sister be brought back into the mainstream of life. He inspires her to take a figurative swim in the sea and then to strike out on her own.

Amy, who hadn't seen Frank since childhood, has fallen passionately in love with him. Ann M. Davidson, in Florida's Winter Park Herald, said, "Amy's turbulent declaration of love for her shocked and bewildered brother is the tainted, though innocent harvest of this poignantly twisted yet oddly heroic household."[1] Terrified when he learns of the depth of his sister's affections for him, Frank avoids an incestuous relationship by developing a normal relationship with a friend of one of the older sisters. Amy leaves home and eventually joins them. In the final scene, the mother tells her oldest daughter that Amy will return, but it is apparent that this is not so.

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[1]Ann M. Davidson, "A Swim in the Sea," Winter Park Herald, 8 May 1958, p. 2, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Gregg recognized that the relationship between the brother and his youngest sister insinuated more than he had intended. In his rewrites, Gregg placed the relationship in better balance, eliminating the emphasis on the "unnatural" attachment.

Shirley Ayers, a former Broadway actress and the widow of the late and noted scenic designer Lemuel Ayers, was associated with Griffith and Prince in the production of A Swim in the Sea. Originally, she had owned the script but had turned it over to the producers in return for associate producer billing.

After ten days of rehearsals, they opened in Florida to fairly good reviews. Although the producers realized that local papers often encourage local theatrical offerings and may not give a true reflection, they decided to bring the show to New York. At this time, New Girl in Town was in its 48th week and West Side Story was in its 29th week. They planned an opening at the Lyceum Theatre on September 30, 1958, with a capitalization of about $100,000. There would be a pre-Broadway tryout in Philadelphia.

Peggy Wood and George Peppard dropped out of the show, Inga Swenson and Silverstein staying with it. A young, inexperienced actor replaced Peppard and Fay Bainter replaced Wood.

An item in Variety summed up the matter:

> The Royal Poinciana Playhouse in Palm Beach, Florida is in for 2½% of the potential net profits

> of the Broadway production of A Swim in the Sea. That's the theatre's payoff for trying out the comedy-drama last April 28-May 3. The deal was worked out by the producers. . . . The percentage cut is in consideration of the stock operation having footed the tryout cost . . . The agreement also called for the Playhouse to retain all income received from that presentation. . . . For staging the Broadway production Silverstein received $2,500 plus 1½% of the weekly gross until production costs have been recouped and 2% thereafter. . . . The producers announced theatre party sales of $75,000-$100,000.[1]

The show opened in Philadelphia. It didn't work and the reviews were terrible. Waters, reviewing for Variety, said:

> It has the benefit of an impressive cast and numerous impressive scenes, some excellent characterizations and considerable effective dialogue, although some of the last-named is on the declamatory side . . . Elliot Silverstein's direction seems sometimes a trifle vague and obtuse. . . . The actors are good . . . It has some soap opera overtones . . . but it has considerable to recommend it too, and the good may eventually outbalance the flaws. But it's still not too promising a Broadway entry.[2]

Prince was so upset by the reviews that he and Griffith went back to New York, leaving the show and the cast and crew to finish the second week without them. They had decided to close the show in Philadelphia. They would then be able to return 52% of their investors' money. The management returned $40,000 to its backers and anticipated

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[1] "A Swim in the Sea," Variety, 30 July 1958, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2] J. Waters, "Shows Out of Town," Variety, 17 September 1958, NYPL Clipping Folder.

that around $10,000 more would probably be forthcoming after all closing expenses were covered.

> In an unusual move, the management of the show distributed the $40,000 to the investors two days before the show's closing. The producers had notified the backers of their decision to wrap up the presentation in Philly rather than sink additional coin into the venture to bring it to New York where they felt its prospects were dim.[1]

Prince tried to be philosophical about his first major failure. He said:

> The minute we knew we were closing the show, it was easy to leave the hotel, indeed, a relief to have had a flop. Moreover, we deserved it. And it was painless. Pain is a play you love that closed, but pain is not a failure. Curiously, we felt baptized. A failure lent credence to the events of the past three years, gave us a feeling of continuity.[2]

And continue they did. Before long, Griffith and Prince were busy preparing their next venture, which would be the award-winning Fiorello!.

Fiorello!

The idea of doing a musical based on the former New York City mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, originated over lunch at the Coffee House Club. Arthur Penn suggested the project to Prince. Penn had already researched the former mayor's public and private life. Small in height, LaGuardia was a bundle of dramatic paradoxes. He had a volatile

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[1]"A Swim in the Sea," Variety, 2 October 1958, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 47.

personality but was warmhearted. He was ruthless but also sentimental. At times he was petty but he was also generous. Prince had always had an interest in historical subjects, especially the private lives of historical figures; and so he was taken with the idea.

> I had always been fascinated by the personal lives of Churchill and Roosevelt. And it was some surprise to find that Fiorello shared their paradoxical inability to cope with their private responsibilities while solving the problems of the masses by using precisely the same human criteria they should have been bringing home.[1]

Griffith also loved the idea for the show and suggested Jerome Weidman, an old friend and neighbor in Connecticut, and the author of I Can Get It For You Wholesale, as a possible choice for librettist. Weidman agreed to write the book. Penn wanted to guide the writing and to direct. The producers met with LaGuardia's widow, Marie, at the LaGuardia home in Riverdale, New York, and promised to give her an outline of the show as soon as possible.

Penn suggested that the leading lady might double playing (in Act I) the mayor's first wife, who died while giving birth in the 1920s. In the second act, years later, the same actress would play Marie, LaGuardia's secretary and assistant. At the final curtain, Marie and LaGuardia would be married.

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 49.

The producers called Mrs. LaGuardia when the outline was ready and the next day she phoned her agreement for them to do the show.

Arthur Penn was disappointed with Weidman's script. He wanted more of the internal conflict and psychological foundations of his The Miracle Worker and Two for the Seesaw. However, Weidman's version was highly nostalgic and that pleased Griffith and Prince. Prince described Weidman's book as a "lament for a bygone manageable New York, for the loss of heroes, of the innocence of speakeasys, and payoffs and gang wars."[1] Prince had a clear vision of the future show. He felt that Penn's vision wouldn't leave room for music and dance and that Fiorello LaGuardia wasn't the right subject for an intense treatment. Prince explained:

> It's not that there exist rules about such things, just a feel of what identifies a project of when the surprise is a surprise and not a violation. Since that time I believe I have proven a predilection for what Walter Kerr calls the "dark musical." So it was in particular that we disagreed, not in principle.[2]

Penn left the show, retaining an author's interest. Griffith and Prince then asked George Abbott to direct. Abbott hated the idea of Fiorello LaGuardia as a subject for a musical. Abbott disliked most of the ideas the producing team had had for musicals and didn't hesitate to tell them so, but he also had no difficulty changing his mind.

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[1]Ibid., p. 52. [2]Ibid.

Abbott became co-author with Weidman as well as the director of the show. He and Weidman worked well together. Abbott would outline a scene and Weidman would write fifty pages overnight. Then Abbott would edit, rewrite and structure the total. Abbott had reservations about the Fiorello! plot and felt that the idea of the one woman playing both wives wouldn't work. Instead, he suggested that they introduce the Marie character in 1914 as LaGuardia's secretary and tell the story of both women concurrently. In this way, the show could trace the city's history from before World War I to World War II. This idea was incorporated into the show.

Weidman talked about the difference between creating a musical and writing novels in an article in Theatre Arts.

> Instead of working in isolation as I had on former writing projects, I had five collaborators to face each day: the producers Griffith and Prince, the lyricist, composer, and George Abbott, who is both director and co-author of the book. I found they were articulate, personable, witty, strong-minded people . . . There were no fights. . . . I attribute this to the dignity, warmth and courtliness of George Abbott.[1]

Now the collaborators began looking for a composer-lyricist for the show. Director Abbott favored a team who could write satire but who could also give the score a period flavor. A new song-writing team, Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, was eventually contracted to do the show.

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[1]Jerome Weidman, "Joining the Team," Theatre Arts, December 1959, p. 12.

Bock had written Mr. Wonderful for Sammy Davis, Jr. the previous year and Sheldon Harnick was a composer and lyricist known for his special material and for some fine numbers he had contributed to small revues. Griffith and Prince had recently attended the opening of the song-writing team's The Body Beautiful. The show was not a success, but the producers were impressed by the gifted music writers.

Harnick recalls his first meeting with Prince on the opening night of The Body Beautiful at Sardi's. When the reviews came out (the show was a flop), most everyone at the table deserted them. One of the lighting designers on the show (either Jean or Bill Eckert) came over to the table and explained that Griffith and Prince wanted to meet them. Harnick recalls that the producers were honest in their appraisal of the show. They hadn't liked it but they said they had enjoyed the score very much and found a lot of it very fresh.

Within a year Bock was hired by Griffith and Prince to do the music for Fiorello!. Although Bock and Harnick were anxious to work together, they were not hired as a team at first. Harnick was told that the book writer, Jerome Weidman, wanted to do his own lyrics. Weidman did write some songs but the producers were not happy with them. Stephen Sondheim was then asked to do the lyrics but he did not want to. Harnick said:

> I'll be forever grateful to Stephen Sondheim because they asked Steve to do the show and Steve

> had just decided that he wouldn't do a show in which he could only do lyrics. He wanted to do both his own music and lyrics.[1]

Other lyricists were considered but Griffith and Prince decided not to use them for various reasons. The producers believed that Harnick's songs were clever and sophisticated but they weren't certain that he could write songs that were earthy and warm. Finally, however, they asked him to write some songs on speculation. They outlined the show and suggested spots where they wanted him to write some songs. Harnick remembers what happened when he and Bock came in with the numbers:

> One of the songs we played was "Till Tomorrow" which stayed in the show. There was a song about service rivalry (the military vs. the air force and so forth). The music to that song stayed in the show and later became "Little Tin Box." Then there was another song that stayed in the show . . . it was called "Unfair," it was the girls' striking song. The fourth song, I don't recall. It was kind of touch and go . . . the first song we did was the strikers' song and they liked that. Then we played "Till Tomorrow." Bobby loved it. For me it was an unusual song because it was a highly sentimental song that was meant to reflect what I figured was the tone of an Irving Berlin waltz from about 1917 . . . so one of the lyrics in it was "parting is such sweet sorrow" (the quote from Shakespeare) . . . I happened to be looking right at Hal Prince when I sang that and because it was uncharacteristic of me I couldn't help but grin as I sang that line. At the end of the song Hal said, "That song is a put-on . . . you're mocking it, nobody will take you seriously" . . . and the grin disappeared from my face. I said, no, no, no . . . I really believe this is what that song should sound like, and Bobby Griffith, bless him, said, "No, Hal, I'm older than you and this is what those songs

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[1]Harnick interview.

> sounded like." Hal said, "Nobody will take that seriously . . . I don't think Sheldon can write that kind of song." They were arguing and my heart was sinking. The doorbell rang. It was our choreographer, Peter Gennaro. Before Pete came in, Hal said, "Everybody shut up--don't say anything--just play it." So we played and sang "Till Tomorrow." Peter grinned and said, "Oh! That's 1917--it's perfect!" And Hal grinned and he looked at me and said, "You've got the job." And that's the way it started.[1]

It is ironic that Stanley Green called "Till Tomorrow" one of the most memorable moments in the score.[2]

Bock and Harnick began working as a team on the show, musicalizing most of Weidman's clubhouse scene and producing the satirical and critically acclaimed number, "Politics and Poker." Harnick is quoted in an article for Playwrights, Lyricists, Composers on Theatre, edited by Otis L. Guernsey, that the latter song exhibited Weidman's generosity. It is difficult for librettists to have their ideas, jokes, lines of dialogue (perhaps even whole scenes) appropriated by the composer and lyricist (a common occurrence in the creation of a musical), but Weidman was most gracious:

> One of Jerome Weidman's early drafts of Fiorello! contained a scene in which a number of ward-heelers were playing poker when they should have been attending to the business of choosing a candidate to run for Congress from their district. As written, it was an amusing scene which seemed certain to play well. Now, I had long had a desire to write a lyric involving poker terms which had struck me as especially colorful and tangy ever since I had played a lot of it in the army. When I read Mr. Weidman's scene, I

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Green, The World of Musical Comedy, p. 363.

> had an instant vision of an effective song which could incorporate much of the scene and to which I felt I could contribute a great deal. I asked him if he would mind if Jerry and I tried to "musicalize" his scene. Generously, he told us to go ahead and to feel free to use anything in the scene which we felt would be valuable. I then proceeded to construct the lyric for "Politics and Poker," rephrasing what I felt were the most valuable aspects of the scene, and adding to them my own notions. When we played the song for Mr. Weidman, he was genuinely delighted, which must have taken great generosity of spirit indeed, for he must have seen that he would get no credit for a number of funny notions in the song, including the notion for the punch line ("You idiot, that's me!").[1]

Bock and Harnick soon wrote "On the Side of the Angels" as the opening number. Prince says that it is the major songs in a score that are usually the first to be written.

> This was true of "Wilkommen" in Cabaret, of "Company," of "Racing with the Clock" in The Pajama Game. Probably it's a very good idea, as they establish (or should) the ground rules for what is to follow . . . the tone, style, concept, and often the point of the evening. Oscar Hammerstein said most musicals are made in the first five minutes.[2]

Fiorello! opens with a prologue based on an actual moment in history. LaGuardia, now mayor, is reading the Sunday "funnies" over the radio to the children of New York City during a newspaper strike. "In this one instant, Bosley establishes himself in his role; it's as though we

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[1]Sheldon Harnick, "What Comes First in a Musical? The Libretto," in Playwrights, Lyricists, Composers on Theatre, ed. Otis L. Guernsey, Jr. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1964), p. 40.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 52.

are all listening again to the meanest, cussedest and sweetest chief executive this town ever had."[1] Then the show cuts back to 1914 and LaGuardia's introduction into politics. Banking on his popularity as an honest, poor people's lawyer in Greenwich Village, he decides to try for the nomination on the Republican ticket for a seat in Congress.

His staff feel they are indeed fortunate to be working for a man who is so clearly "On the Side of the Angels." Marie, LaGuardia's secretary (Patricia Wilson), obviously in love with him, goes along with her boss to the political clubroom, a hangout of the 14th Congressional District's Republican leader, Ben Marino (Howard da Silva). In this scene, the number "Politics and Poker" is sung, comparing the many ways in which the two are similar. Since Ben has been trying to select a victim to lose (as usual) to the Tammany candidate, and is impressed with LaGuardia's cocky attitude, he agrees to put him on the ticket.

Next, LaGuardia joins a strike for better working conditions at the Nifty Shirt Waist factory. The strike leader, Thea (Ellen Hanley), is arrested but later becomes LaGuardia's wife. The other girls in the scene are shown being heckled by a burly police officer (Mark Dawson) and

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[1]John Chapman, "Fiorello," New York Daily News, 24 November 1959, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 20, p. 220.

a group of Tammany men. Later, one of the girls falls in love with the policeman. LaGuardia's advice to the girls is to shout that management is "Unfair." Soon he convinces the strikers to join him at his headquarters to discuss tactics.

LaGuardia becomes the first Republican from the district to win a Congressional seat. He goes to the people whom he has always befriended with his campaign song, "The Name's LaGuardia." After winning the election, Marino and his boys sing "The Bum Won."

Soon Fiorello enlists in the army and a going away party at the clubroom introduces the aforementioned sentimental waltz, "Till Tomorrow," sung by Thea and the chorus.

Marie, who realizes that she doesn't have a chance romantically with LaGuardia after he breaks a date with her, sings "Marie's Law." Unaware of Marie's love for him, LaGuardia proposes to Thea, who accepts.

LaGuardia is gone, but a Pathe-type newsreel shows him winning the war singlehandedly. The war is over, and as Act I closes, the troops descend the gangplank into the arms of their girls. Fiorello, now a major, embraces Thea, as Marie and the others look on and sing "Home Again."

Act II begins ten years later and Thea and LaGuardia are happily married, and Thea sings the ballad "When Did I Fall in Love?" LaGuardia soon runs for mayor against the incumbent, Jimmy Walker. The star of a hit musical, Mitzi

(Eileen Rodgers), leads the company in a rousing campaign song and tap dance to "Gentleman Jimmy." LaGuardia is warned not to expose the corruption of the Walker administration, since Walker is so well liked. While he is running for office, Thea dies. As Ben predicts, Walker wins by a landslide.

Fiorello does not give up his dreams to reform the city and become mayor. "He becomes a prime mover in having Tammany Hall investigated by Judge Seabury and his committee."[1] In their clubroom, Ben and his political friends perform a hilarious travesty on the investigation in the song, "Little Tin Box," which became a great favorite of audiences and critics alike. LaGuardia wins the mayor's office on a fusion ticket, determined to destroy graft and chicanery wherever he finds them. At the end of the show, he marries Marie.

Prince had no trouble raising the $300,000 for Fiorello!. Most of the investors had been the same ones since The Pajama Game. Prince wrote them all once a month. He claims that he doesn't understand the workings of his car, and never asks the mechanic to show him the engine. Using similar reasoning, he sees no need to show investors how a show looks or sounds.[2]

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 141.

[2]"Say, Darling, Look at Hal Prince Now," New York Times, 24 November 1968, sec. 2, p. D13.

Prince continued to learn from Abbott about how to structure a book for a musical and how to make a show "work." Sheldon Harnick recalls Prince's attitude towards his mentor:

> As a producer, Prince had great respect for Abbott as the director and left most decisions up to him. Abbott was still at the peak of his powers although he was in his seventies.[1]

Harnick and Bock often took suggestions from Abbott about song numbers because they were generally worthwhile. Abbott thought it would be wonderful if Marie, after being stood up by Fiorello, could have a song stating that there ought to be a law that you can't do that to a woman. The suggestion resulted in the song, "Marie's Law." Prince continued to pick up many things from Abbott. Harnick said:

> Abbott was very impatient in the theatre. He didn't like to feel that any point was being labored. Get it done--do it--get on with the show. That was his style. So that there was always a great deal of editing in the shows. I think Hal carried on in that tradition--find out what the show is about and say it as succinctly and as entertainingly as you can and get on with it! Just make it move--make it move along. That's my recollection of the similarity between them.[2]

Although Harnick had little contact with Prince during the making of the show, he remembers that Prince was very encouraging. "One felt his buoyance, ebullience, his confidence and energy."[3] He gave young talent opportunities in his shows and he was very supportive of them. Harnick recalls one incident while rehearsing Fiorello!:

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[1]Harnick interview. [2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

> Hal did something that was wonderfully reassuring. One night on the way home from someplace in a taxi he said to me, "You're going to be one of the great lyricists." I felt so far from that because although I'd had a couple of songs in revues, I'd never had a hit song (I still don't have many hit songs). But I'd never had hit songs then and I'd written one Broadway show that was a flop. So I had very little to base feelings of confidence on and Hal was just very quiet and said you're going to be one of the great lyricists. And that was a wonderfully reassuring thing to hear.[1]

As he had done before and would again in the future, Prince gave the leading role in Fiorello! to an unknown--a 32-year-old Off-Broadway actor, Tom Bosley. The more experienced Eli Wallach was the one that they all had wanted for the leading role. Wallach was anxious to do it, but he lacked the vocal range required by the score. No other actor impressed them and so they went with the unknown Bosley, who had the look of LaGuardia.

Judy Abbott (George Abbott's daughter) was doing Griffith and Prince's casting at that time and she had seen Tom Bosley in an Off-Broadway play. Prince remembers auditioning Bosley:

> He did not look like the young Fiorello, but he was familiar to us. He was a young man, a little heavy, round and jowly--not really Fiorello--better than that; a caricature of Fiorello.[2]

After several readings, they gave him the role. Abbott's method of direction had occasionally led to problems with actors and with Bosley, things did not always work too smoothly.

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[1]Ibid. [2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 54.

> Tom, during rehearsals, worked to arrive at internal feelings, or internal reasons. He found it very difficult to work with Abbott. Abbott loved to cut the direction method by giving line readings. But there are actors such as Bosley who can't work that way. At one point Abbott was thinking about firing him. But, he kept him on because he saw Tom was wonderful in his songs and he thought, "Well, if you guys can teach him to do the songs, then I can certainly get an acting performance out of him." Little by little, Tom realized what to do. He would listen to Abbott and what Abbott was trying to convey to him with line readings. Then Tom would go home and struggle with a solution for a reading. He would arrive at his own version of what Abbott had wanted.[1]

Many changes were made during the out-of-town tryout of Fiorello! Numbers were taken out of the show and new ones added. Abbott said, "But all of them were accomplished without friction among us. The actors turned out to be a troupe of very skillful and flexible people. Fiorello! came close to my picture of what it should be, and when it won all the awards in sight, I felt that it deserved them."[2] "Little Tin Box," which was written on the road two weeks before the Broadway opening, became the much needed "eleven o'clock" show-stopper. It picked up the show just after the death of LaGuardia's wife and baby in childbirth, his political reversals and the Depression. Prince commented:

> I remember hearing about eleven o'clock numbers all my life. Though I don't care much for formulas, I would settle for an eleven-o'clock show-stopper every time. Those don't even hurt operas.[3]

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[1]Harnick interview.

[2]Abbott, Mister Abbott, p. 263.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 58.

Prince may have accepted the idea of an eleven o'clock show-stopper but he was not as positive about the inclusion of the subordinate story of the flapper and the policeman. The use of secondary characters was a common device in musicals of the '40s and '50s. It enabled the writer to move away from the major story line and add diversion and supply comic relief. Subplots and secondary characters often provided the opportunity to use dance in the show. This was true of the Eddie Foy, Jr.-Carol Haney duo in The Pajama Game. Prince felt that the use of secondary characters was a major flaw in Fiorello!. He was beginning to think that the American Musical Theatre needed restructuring to move it away from tried and tested formulas.

> The character of the policeman represented Tammany Hall, synthesized corruption in the city, spanning along with Fiorello the entire period of the play. Life rarely provides similarly convenient relationships and he was an amusing villain, leavening a heavy second act. How to achieve this without him? I have yet to figure that out, but if we were doing Fiorello! again today, we would have to.[1]

The out-of-town tryouts took place in New Haven and Philadelphia. Prince felt that the critics in Philadelphia were dangerous, "that audiences there were encouraged by criticism to go to the wrong shows, not to be discerning. . . . When Fiorello! was there Saratoga was doing the business."[2] In later years, Prince changed his mind. "Now, I think it's worth the try. We need the cities."[3]

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[1]Ibid., p. 59. [2]Prince interview. [3]Ibid.

The New Haven reviews were quite good. In his review, Bone of Variety said, "There are weak spots but Abbott's staging has caught the spirit of the era and in a tuneful score, smart lyrics, and capable cast and worthy physical production blend for okay entertainment."[1]

Newsfilm was used to depict the years of World War I when LaGuardia went off to war. Aram Boyajian, who is now a TV film producer, was at the time a film editor working on 20th Century, a CBS program hosted by Walter Cronkite. The producers of Fiorello! asked Mel Stewart, a researcher at CBS, to put together some footage. Stewart found the film (the raw material) and asked Boyajian to edit the section and put it together for the show. Boyajian remembers the experience:

> We had a few shots of LaGuardia in uniform and then I had some shots of ships going across the ocean. I had some air battles and war scenes and I put the whole thing together. When it was ready, Hal Prince, Abbott and Bosley came over to the cutting room to look at the film. Abbott said that I should take out the battle scenes. . . . There was no question about who had the final say--Abbott had the absolute say. The screening was done for him. And his one comment was that I should take the fighting scenes out. Everything else was fine. Prince was genial and it was a very relaxed, nice way of working. After cutting it according to those instructions Prince called me to the theatre for a rehearsal of the film. He and Griffith were there and Prince said, "You know, it cost me $100 just to pull down that screen." Then we looked at the film. It was a very simple matter to fill in that time. It wasn't really integrated into the show as such. . . . The show just came to a stop, the screen came

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[1] Harold Bone, "Shows Out of Town," Variety, 21 October 1959, NYPL Clipping Folder.

> down; this sequence took in the period of LaGuardia being overseas. Then the lights came back on--and they just picked up the show. The war was over . . . It was like a one-minute war. . . . From the time they had come to the cutting room, they never looked at the footage again until we had the rehearsal. That was a set piece. I had already cut the negative and matched it. It was already a print. A thing like that would be unheard of today. There would be twenty men and women fiddling with it. Working with them everyone was allowed freedom to do what they wanted to do. It was very nice. After many years in the business I realize how rare that quality is of allowing creative people to do their bit. And I had a feeling that this must work all along the line with these people. They allow people to do their best. They commented on it and added to it, but they gave you that freedom. I've worked on networks, cable, etc. and this is practically impossible to find.[1]

Fiorello! opened on November 23, 1959 at the Broadhurst Theatre in New York. The reviews were very good. Brooks Atkinson in the New York Times said:

> Years ago the Little Flower took a frowzy, depressed city of political hacks and brought it to life by the fire of his own personality. New York was interesting because he stood at the head of it. Bringing musical comedy to life on Broadway is an achievement of a lesser order. But the Little Flower is the most dynamic figure in the musical arcades this season. Again, everyone feels happier because his enkindling spirit is with us again.[2]

Walter Kerr loved choreographer Peter Gennaro's staging of "I Love a Cop." He continued, "Mr. Gennaro does other stirring things, some of them tub-thumpers; a

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[1]Interview with Aram Boyajian, New York, 30 May, 1983.

[2]Brooks Atkinson, "Fiorello," New York Times, 24 November 1959, NYPL Critics Reviews, vol. 20, p. 219.

political rally to a syncopated Yiddish beat, a stomping Charleston with chaos in its limbs."[1]

Robert Coleman in the Daily Mirror said:

> Jerry Bock has supplied a score that is bouncy and nostalgic, and Sheldon Harnick has captured the flavor of a hectic period with his lyrics. . . . Robert Griffith and Harold Prince are still batting 1,000. They put their hit streak on the line last night with Fiorello! and whacked out another four-bagger. As usual, they are managing a team of talented newcomers, with old pro George Abbott in the clean-up spot.[2]

Richard Watts, Jr., in the New York Post, liked the fact that the title role was a well-rounded character and not a cartoon character.

> Although there is no doubt about the authors' enthusiasm for the temperamental Little Flower, they are also candid in their portrait. They show his capacity for violent rages, his stubbornness, his frequent unreasonableness and his tendency to be a martinet, but they likewise depict his courage, his integrity, his sympathy for the poor and oppressed and his hatred of corruption and skulduggery. They are aware that the game little fellow was a man of size and quality, and, admirably played by Tom Bosley, he is an immensely likable human being.[3]

The show won awards, including the New York Drama Critics Award and a Pulitzer Prize, the third musical comedy to win that honor. The first musical awarded a

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[1]Walter Kerr, "Fiorello," New York Herald Tribune, 24 November 1959, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 20, p. 221.

[2]Robert Coleman, "'Fiorello': A Smashing Winner," New York Daily Mirror, 24 November 1959, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 20, p. 222.

[3]Richard Watts, Jr., "A Salute to the Little Flower," New York Post, 24 November 1959, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 20, p. 221.

Pulitzer Prize was Of Thee I Sing in 1932, and Gerald Bordman compares the two shows. Bordman admits that "George Abbott and Jerome Weidman's book, Jerry Bock's score and Sheldon Harnick's lyrics were no mean achievement," but he goes on to say that "the deliciously preposterous fictions of the earlier work were absent as was the consistent tone that the fictions allowed and that its authors successfully maintained."[1] (The second musical to win the Pulitzer Prize was South Pacific in 1949.) Abbott was asked why he thought Fiorello! became such a critical success. He said, "It happened to be about a political matter . . . an honest mayor. But basically it was just a good show and the lyrics worked and everything worked."[2]

Fiorello! ran 795 performances, not a great run after such a wonderful reception. Prince claims that he may have been responsible for the disappointing run. After a year at the Broadhurst, the show was moved to the larger 1800-seat Broadway Theatre. The producers then lowered the prices to $5, $4, and $3 (from the $7 top ticket price). They advertised the new price range but unfortunately the number of tickets sold did not increase. They were filling the same number of seats at a lower price. Prince says, "I simply assume the price of tickets wasn't the problem in 1960 after all."[3]

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[1]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 615.

[2]Abbott interview. [3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 59.

Prince gives another reason for the foreshortened run of Fiorello!. In the spring of 1960, a strike ensued after weeks of negotiations between Actor's Equity and the League of New York Theatres, the latter representing producers and theatre owners. This was the first strike since 1919 (right after Actor's Equity was formed). The producers, rather than allowing a strike of a different show at each performance as Equity had planned (sensing that this method would confuse the public and keep them away), decided to black out all the shows. The strike lasted eight days. Due to the extended media coverage about "A Blacked-Out Broadway," audiences continued to stay away, destroying Broadway's momentum. "I believe," says Prince, "that the 1960 strike cost Fiorello! six months on Broadway."[1]

Fiorello!'s run and critical success insured Griffith and Prince's place at the forefront of Broadway musical producers. The decade of the fifties was over and the producing team had had five major hits and only one failure. It was a fantastic six-year record and one that seemed destined to continue in much the same vein in the decade to come.

After Fiorello!, Prince evinced an interest in becoming a director. In 1960, Roger Stevens offered him the opportunity to direct a musical version of Juno and the Paycock on the condition that the authors, Joe Stein and

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[1]Ibid., pp. 62.

Marc Blitzstein, approve. Prince asked Griffith how he felt about the idea of his partner becoming a director. Griffith suggested they co-direct their own shows. Prince felt that this is the one area in which Griffith treated him unfairly.

> It was the one thing in the world he didn't want me to be, and he didn't face it. . . . He had always said he was going to direct, even before I knew him. But he hadn't. I do not believe he would have been a particularly good director. It had become his curious, quiet failure, something which really didn't bother him--not until I became interested. . . . He had a true and unerring sense of what was honest acting. I had a stronger sense of what was good material. He had a better facility for working, dealing with people. I had the edge on him with respect to text and the physical aspects of a production, the scenery, costumes. We collaborated well, but when it came to direction, we could hardly have been co-directors.[1]

Abbott realized that Prince had a strong urge to direct and that Griffith did not wish to go along with it. Abbott said,

> I used to send the boys on the road to fix up shows and performances that were getting a bit shoddy--from being played too long. I always found that Prince could get good results. But Bobby didn't want to let go of him. He wanted to share in the thing. Once I said, "I'll send you separately!" But Bobby said, "No, we want to be together." Bobby wanted to direct also, but he didn't have the ability."[2]

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[1]Ibid., pp. 82-83.

[2]Abbott interview.

CHAPTER V

THE '60s BEGIN

Tenderloin

The creators of Fiorello! enjoyed their experience working together. Even before Fiorello! had opened, Abbott, Weidman, Bock, Harnick, Griffith and Prince began talking about their next show. Prince had been sent the galleys of the novel Tenderloin by a friend at Random House. The book was written by Samuel Hopkins Adams who died in 1958 at the age of 87 just as his book was going to press. Prince felt that the Gay Nineties period and the source material would lend themselves to becoming a popular musical. They decided to adapt the work into a new musical entitled Tenderloin. They obtained the rights and proceeded at full speed. The subject of the novel was based on the attempts of the Reverend Charles H. Parkhurst to clean up the Tenderloin district of New York around West 23rd Street. Parkhurst was pastor for 38 years of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church. He died at the age of 91 in 1933. He actually accompanied his investigators into the Tenderloin fleshpots and opium dens and other places of questionable character, all of which operated openly in the late '90s with police and Tammany protection. In 1891, the minister was elected

president of the Society for the Prevention of Crime. His labors resulted in a Tammany rout in 1894.

Abbott and Weidman as co-librettists hoped to give a feeling that debauchery was fun during the Gay Nineties in one of New York's most popular red-light districts. Griffith and Prince's backers invested in the show, and the new show, capitalized at $350,000, went into action.

Abbott seemed unable to come to grips with Tenderloin's problem-ridden book. Richard Altman, who would eventually become Jerome Robbins' assistant director on Fiddler on the Roof, had received a Ford Foundation grant to observe the creation of Tenderloin. He was to report on the way George Abbott built and shaped a Broadway show, based on his attendance at meetings and rehearsals. Altman observed: "Abbott blindly followed his own rule of changing little or nothing until a show went out of town."[1]

Sheldon Harnick discussed what he felt were the problems. He thought they organized Tenderloin too quickly, and that they didn't follow the original source material closely enough.[2] He suggested where things may have gone awry:

> We made a conceptual mistake that was everybody's mistake. If you read the novel you find out that the minister is a vital role but a relatively small role. The main character is the boy. We made the

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[1]Richard Altman, with Mervyn Kaufman, The Making of a Musical: "Fiddler on the Roof" (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971), p. 26.

[2]Harnick interview.

> conceptual mistake of making the roles equal in importance and then casting a star. And what we discovered was that the minister is essentially a kill-joy. The reality of the Tenderloin situation was that it was an ugly place with disease and corruption. But in musical comedy you don't talk about disease and in a musical comedy corruption is a subject for comedy, not for social cure. So the minister who wanted to close the Tenderloin was a bore because the Tenderloin was what provided the excitement of the show. That's where the fun was. And when we realized that, we said, "Oh, God! But we can't shorten the role of the minister because he's the star." It just threw the show all out of kilter.[1]

Walter Kerr humorously commented: "Evans [he was referring to Maurice Evans, who was cast in the leading role] plays a crusading minister who wants to eliminate the production numbers."[2]

Prince agrees that the book of Tenderloin had many problems, but feels the major trouble with the show was that it did not establish a particular tone. When the creators became aware that they were unable to solve the problems with the libretto, they secretly asked help from two brothers, James and William Goldman, who would go on to write, respectively, The Lion in Winter and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Richard Altman learned that the Goldman brothers were doctoring the book but most people connected with the show were uncertain as to how and by whom it was

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Walter Kerr, "Tenderloin," New York Herald Tribune, 18 October 1960, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 21, p. 206.

being done. Altman said, "I learned that quietly and quite unofficially they were working on the book, and no one was supposed to know about it."[1] Unfortunately, their help came too late. Prince now concludes that it was a mistake from the beginning to adapt that particular novel as a musical.

Prince also believes that they erred in casting Maurice Evans in the role of Rev. Brock. Abbott had favored Hugh Griffith for the part, who would have given the character an eccentric, even lunatic, sensibility. Prince explains, "Bobby and I insisted on the Shakespearean star because it was offbeat casting."[2] Evans expressed delight with his role. Talking about Brock, the man he would portray, Evans said, "Vice crusaders always look a little ridiculous, but there is no doubt in my mind that he was sincere. I do have a sneaking hunch that he enjoyed his red-light expeditions, though, and that's the way he'll be played."[3] Howard Taubman in the New York Times said that the honorable Shakespearean and Shavian star "sings quite well and struts a little."[4] Evans had never sung on the American stage prior to this engagement, but did sing on the British stage early in his career.

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[1]Altman, The Making of a Musical, p. 27.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 68.

[3]"Tenderloin," New York Daily News, 1 September 1960, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[4]Howard Taubman, "The Theatre: Virtue vs. Vice to Music," New York Times, 18 October 1960, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 21, p. 205.

Altman claims to have quickly become disenchanted with Abbott's directorial style, which he refers to as "hopelessly mechanical."[1] Altman recalls Abbott giving line readings with actors parroting him without knowing what they were saying, thinking or feeling. In one scene, Abbott told an actor to hang his head, pause, smile and turn, without telling him what he should be feeling. In Altman's opinion, neither Abbott nor Evans had ever been clear as to who or what Brock was. Evans, however, was very pleased with his association with Abbott. An item in the New York Daily News said that he was awed at the Abbott pace, and at the speed with which the show was being whipped together.[2] Altman also commended Abbott on his staging ability and the way he blocked a huge crowd scene, juggling groups of 25 people extemporaneously. "After twenty minutes," said Altman, "everything was working, with much detail. Incredible!"[3]

As for Altman's impressions of Prince, he felt he was the epitome of the buoyant, effusive, always enthusiastic producer in action and was very much like the Robert Morse character in Say Darling.

The story of the musical Tenderloin is loosely based on the Adams book and, in Bordman's words, is "far more

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[1]Altman, The Making of a Musical, p. 26.

[2]"Tenderloin," New York Daily News.

[3]Altman, The Making of a Musical, p. 26.

fiction than fact."[1] It deals with the Reverend Brock (Maurice Evans), who wishes to eliminate the vice and investigate corruption in his district. He enlists the aid of a young, handsome scandal-sheet reporter who works on a paper called The Tattler. Tommy (Ron Husmann) also sings part-time at one of the neighborhood's rough saloons. He deceives Brock and, together with a corrupt policeman, Lieutenant Schmidt (Ralph Dunn), they frame Brock with doctored photos.

Tommy admits the truth in court, clearing the Reverend. His change of heart is brought on by his love for Laura (Wynne Miller), a pretty society girl who also sings in the church choir. The area is eventually cleaned up, and Brock leaves to continue his crusade in Detroit.

Bock and Harnick wrote about 35 numbers for the show; only 12 or 13 were needed.[2] Creating the score did not prove as easy for them as it had been for Fiorello!. Jerry Bock explained, "Fiorello! was easier in the sense that LaGuardia's life provided a more rigid historical framework to work within. With Tenderloin, one had to be more inventive. We wrote about three times more music than the show required."[3]

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[1]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 618.

[2]Stuart W. Little, "Theatre News," New York Herald Tribune, 16 August 1960, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Ibid.

The number that received the unanimous appreciation of the critics was "Artificial Flowers," sung by Ron Husmann. There were various descriptions of the song--e.g., "a ballad with fraudulent tears."[1] Chapman called it a "triumph of sentimentality."[2] Walter Kerr called the song an attractive pastiche of late nineteenth-century song styles. He said, "'Artificial Flowers' has to do with one of those poor little match girls in a snowy attic working her fingers to the bone on wax flowers and 'waxing and wiring till she waned.'"[3]

Another tune (also sung by Tommy) with a cynical approach is "The Picture of Happiness." In this song, "there is a tinkling bit of rhythm which tells of a lass who was innocent 'until a bounder got around her,' after which she was the happiest woman in town."[4]

The show opened with a hymn sung in a Park Avenue church, followed by the rousing "Little Old New York," a production number sung by the lowlifes who inhabited the Tenderloin. Prince says it is one of the best opening numbers he has ever seen. He also felt that the Bock and Harnick score for the show was a very good one. Ethan

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[1]Taubman, "The Theatre: Virtue v. Vice to Music."

[2]John Chapman, "Tenderloin," New York Daily News, 18 October 1960, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 21, p. 208.

[3]Kerr, "Tenderloin."

[4]Ibid.

Mordden, in his book Better Foot Forward, agrees with Prince about the score, claiming that the songwriting team was "summa cum laude in the writing of integrated theatre scores" and that the "opening number was especially effective, an exponential proof positive that musicals weren't going to limit themselves to 'fourth-wall' literalism any more."[1]

Two other musical numbers, "My Miss Mary," which is sung beside a bridle path with "make believe horses" bearing "real" show girls, and "My Gentle Young Johnny," a torch song sung by Eileen Rodgers, were commented on by Ed Wilson in the Brooklyn Eagle:

> Abbott's apparent belief that his musical need not make sense pervades the entire production. Typical is a song called "My Miss Mary, Shy Miss Mary," a perfect example of a love ballad for the reporter. Only there is no one in the show named Mary, shy or otherwise." . . . And if you think this is just an exception there is another song called "My Gentle Young Johnny" with no Johnny in sight.[2]

Tenderloin opened in New Haven to a mild reaction. Altman's notes at the time stated that the book didn't work and was hokey and melodramatic. Everyone was buoyed, however, by the fact that Stephen Sondheim saw the show and was positive and enthusiastic. At a meeting held after the New Haven opening, Prince was the only one of the collaborators disturbed by the show. No one else seemed concerned.

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[1]Mordden, Better Foot Forward, p. 289.

[2]Ed Wilson, "Frustration on Two Stages," Brooklyn Eagle, 30 September 1960, NYPL Clipping Folder.

"All were pussyfooting and discussing details until Abbott finally said, 'Gentlemen, I had a concept for this show and it doesn't work. Any suggestions?'"[1] Variety's review was not a good one. The critic Harold Bone said:

> Although he [Abbott] found a better-than-average portion of promising ingredients in this new musical, it needs to go back in the broiler. . . . Griffith and Prince who are making something of a career out of staging musicals located in Gotham, have given Tenderloin a sumptuous production. . . . Score at present is not strong enough in toto, to generate consistent audience response despite standouts "Flower" and "Good Clean Fun" (which rate more treatment).[2]

They opened in Boston with the same basic problems, except for the fine new opening number. The reviews in Boston were mixed. Three were favorable and three were not. Elinor Hughes in the Boston Herald called the production "handsome, colorful, stylish, and introduces several exciting newcomers. . . . George Abbott sees to it that something is going on on the stage virtually every minute. . . . The capacity audience enjoyed the show and gave it a real ovation at the end. . . . It looks as though it were headed for solid success."[3]

Altman offers a possible reason for Abbott's reluctance to make any changes out of town. Evans couldn't (or

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[1]Altman, The Making of a Musical, p. 28.

[2]Harold Bone, "Shows Out of Town: 'Tenderloin,'" Variety, 14 September 1960, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Elinor Hughes, "The Theatre: 'Tenderloin,'" Boston Herald, 21 September 1960, NYPL Clipping Folder.

wouldn't) learn his lyrics and Abbott in desperation told him to carry the lyrics, pretending that they were letters from his parishioners. An entry in Altman's diary says, "Prince says Abbott is afraid to make changes now because Evans is such a slow study."[1] However, a fine new song, "Dear Friend," was added to the show and helped a great deal.

Joe Layton, the choreographer on Tenderloin, was a former Broadway dancer and had choreographed On the Town Off-Broadway the season before. He had created the dances for three Broadway shows, The Sound of Music, Greenwillow, and Once Upon a Mattress, before joining Tenderloin. Walter Kerr liked his work, saying that "Lee Becker and Eddie Phillips do an airy skipping and skittering first-act dance by Layton."[2] Taubman said that "a dance by the outrageously accoutred girls and their boy friends in the bordello has a neat, stylized quality that catches the atmosphere of the period and at the same time comments on it."[3] Variety, in New Haven, was not as flattering to the dance numbers. "Layton's choreography is on the frantic side . . . lively if not especially distinguished."[4] Perhaps Layton cleared up the frantic quality by the time the show reached Broadway.

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[1]Altman, The Making of a Musical, p. 28.

[2]Kerr, "Tenderloin."

[3]Taubman, "The Theatre: Virtue vs. Vice to Music."

[4]Bone, "Shows Out of Town: 'Tenderloin.'"

Cecil Beaton did both sets and costumes. His work, Prince felt, was tasteful and chic when it should have been vulgar. He did the right job for the wrong show.

> Beaton had the idea that we should make up the girls in the brothel stylistically, with masses of black grotesque makeup. So we took some of the prettiest girls you ever saw in your life and made them ugly.[1]

Walter Kerr wrote of Beaton's work:

> Why aren't they at the very least prettily made-up and prettily bedecked? Cecil Beaton had done the costumes, but he has spent all the attractive flourishes of his designer's crayon on the settings. Those poor inmates haven't an indecent thing to wear. The frills are there, of course, but they're fussy and they clash and they don't add up to anything appetizing.[2]

Howard Taubman seemed to like Beaton's creations. He said, "When Tenderloin moves into the gaudy brothel and introduces the girls in their luridly old-fashioned costumes, it takes on a sense of style and its spirits lift."[3]

Tenderloin opened in New York on October 17, 1960 at the 46th Street Theatre with an enormous advance sale of more than $750,000. It seemed that the public wanted to see the show. Prince does not agree. "The public rarely knows in advance what it wants to see. Eventually it rejects what it anticipates and embraces what comes as a

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 69.

[2]Kerr, "Tenderloin."

[3]Taubman, "The Theatre: Virtue vs. Vice to Music."

surprise."[1] The opening night audience applauded almost all the musical numbers but was quiet during the book scenes. There were four curtain calls. After the final curtain, the actor Ron Husmann, who had played Tommy, fainted. There were five negative reviews (Times, Tribune, Post, Mirror, Journal) and two affirmative (News, Telegram). The Saturday Review said, "The show seems to pull in a variety of directions. About halfway through the second act, someone realizes that the audience hasn't become more than superficially interested in either Tommy, the colorless heel, or Brock, the merry minister, and we are treated to a stock sentiment about the prostitute with a heart of gold."[2] Walter Kerr said, "Mastermind Goerge Abbott, working in tandem with librettist Jerome Weidman, has let some one talk him into applying his magic to an unaccountably dour documentary. Hurrah and everything for good, clean fun, but where is it?"[3] And John McClain in the Journal American said, "Sad to say, I believe Tenderloin is a clinker."[4] On the positive side, John Chapman in the News said:

> If I stopped to analyze the libretto of Tenderloin I could find some flaws, but last evening I didn't

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 68.

[2]"Tenderloin," Saturday Review, 5 November 1960, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Kerr, "Tenderloin."

[4]John McClain, "Musical Just Doesn't Sing," New York Journal American, 18 September 1960, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 21, p. 206.

> want to stop. I was having too good a time listening to the Bock-Harnick songs, including many fetching choral numbers . . . and watching Joe Layton's frisky dancers doing modern tricks with old-fashioned dances like the schottische. It's a grand show, and I don't think my morals have been damaged much.[1]

An item in Variety noted that George Abbott was to get 2% of the gross of Tenderloin as director plus 20% of any net profits--to be computed prior to the distribution of net profits to anyone else. One percent of the weekly gross went to the Hopkins estate and 6-3/4% aggregate total of the weekly gross went to the writers of the show.[2]

Capital Records recorded the musical.

Although the creators of Tenderloin were the same as those who had successfully shaped Fiorello!, and although many of the elements in this show were excellent and were admired by critics, the show failed. It was a definite disappointment. Prince said, "We never again did a show because it would be popular."[3]

Tenderloin closed in New York after 214 performances. After the closing, Prince and Griffith were anxious to get back to work immediately. Harold Prince is a self-confessed workaholic. Throughout the years he has admitted that he is most happy when he is involved in a production.

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[1]Chapman, "Tenderloin."

[2]"Tenderloin," Variety, 20 April 1960, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 68.

While rehearsing one show, he is usually busy planning his next. He schedules a meeting of his entire office on the morning after one of his productions opens. This meeting is meant to demonstrate that the office will actively start work on his next project (plans of which have usually been in the works for some time). This need to have a project in the works all the time has led Prince on occasion to do pieces that might better have been left undone. Prince has admitted to this. He suggests that, because of their need to start something new after Tenderloin closed, they rushed into their next project, A Call on Kuprin, their second attempt at producing a straight play.

A Call on Kuprin

A Call on Kuprin is an adaptation of a science-fiction novel published in 1959 and written by a British writer, Maurice Edelman, a member of Britain's Parliament. Edelman had written five novels and a half-dozen television plays for the British Broadcasting Company. The story is based on Russia's efforts to put a man in space. Prince believed that because most of the book was written in dialogue form, there would be little difficulty in preparing the script.

Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, who had written Inherit the Wind and Auntie Mame, were chosen to do the adaptation. The playwrights discussed their ideas about the script:

> We are less concerned with the adventuring of Cosmonauts than with the adventuring of the scientific mind. There is one thing more dramatic than a daring exploit: that is the daring of the mind which imagines it. . . . The most volatile propellant in our society is not chemical fuel liquid or solid: it is gray matter. But we are not going to keep ourselves alive on this planet solely by the exercise of intellectual razzle-dazzle. We must demonstrate, as Kuprin does, our "potential for compassion."[1]

Griffith and Prince had wanted to call the play An Adventure and hoped, along with the writers, that it would not be a cartoon-like view of Moscow filled with gloomy Czarists or comic Communists. They attempted to make A Call on Kuprin a view of "an authentic Moscow which is trying so desperately to leap from the twelfth century to the twenty-first."[2] When they began shaping the play, the event which provides the thrust of the story (the sending of a Cosmonaut into space) had not as yet taken place.

The finished script was approved by George Abbott who was set to direct Kuprin, his 77th show on Broadway. He sent the script to Griffith and Prince, who were then opening a company of West Side Story in Israel, and suggested they could cast it when they returned to New York and to plan for a May opening. Stuart W. Little, writing in the New York Herald Tribune, called this a "hurry up decision by Robert E. Griffith and Harold Prince. . . .

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[1]Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, "A Call on Kuprin," NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ibid.

These producers have just decided to risk a late season opening. Instead of waiting until fall they will go into production immediately with A Call on Kuprin and open the play May 25, a week before the season expires. . . . They decided they had too good a play to wait."[1] Prince said he has since learned from experience some facts about opening dates.

> Spring openings for serious plays are notoriously dangerous. You can't gain momentum enough, opening in April or May, to get you through the summer. It's a good idea to open a straight play in the fall so that it can run the full season, in which time it ought to have paid off. Serious plays traditionally don't play as many continuous performances as comedies and musicals.[2]

A Call on Kuprin deals with the efforts of an American science writer, Jonathan Smith (Jeffrey Lynn), to find his old friend and astronomy teacher of prewar Ohio days, and who is now Russia's most brilliant space scientist (at the opening of the play he has placed a man in orbit). Smith hopes to persuade his friend, Professor V. V. Kuprin, to desert Russia and return to the West. He has been given the job by the American ambassador to Russia. Smith meets the scientist's "dotty" mother (Eugenie Leontovich), who won't come to grips with the fact that the Czar has been gone for decades. He falls in love with the scientist's cousin, Vera (Lydia Bruce). He is completely fooled by the

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[1]Stuart W. Little, "Theatre News," New York Herald Tribune, 10 March 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 70.

Russian counter-intelligence, which Theatre Arts called a "welcome touch of realism."[1] Smith eventually escapes with the girl, but not before some intense discussions with Kuprin at the denouement. As Variety explained, "Since this is no ordinary black is black and white is white sort of melodrama, the arguments fly swiftly and intelligently, with the Russian remaining adamant against defecting, and arguing that if scientists have war potentialities, they also have them for peace."[2]

The casting was in Variety's words "adroit."[3] Jeffrey Lynn was hired by the producers to play Smith after their first choice, Henry Fonda, proved unavailable. One critic called Lynn "ideal" for the part.[4] George Voskovec was set for the title role and received fine reviews for his work. Edward Hipp said that "easily the best acting at the Broadhurst is turned in by George Voskovec."[5] Variety's reviewer called Voskovec's work forceful and eloquent.[6] Leon Janney played a Soviet professor and Lydia Bruce was cast as the romantic interest. Eugenie Leontovich, who played

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[1]"A Call on Kuprin," Theatre Arts, July 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Blake Murdoch, "A Call on Kuprin," Variety, 10 May 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Ibid. [4]Ibid.

[5]Edward Sothern Hipp, "Grim Message Smothered in 'A Call on Kuprin,'" NYPL Clipping Folder.

[6]Murdoch, "A Call on Kuprin."

Kuprin's mother, was a Russian expatriate actress and a former member of the Moscow Art Theatre prior to the Russian Revolution. She was first seen on the New York stage in 1922. In a cast of over thirty, there were nineteen speaking parts, of which thirteen or fourteen were played by Russian-speaking actors. Authenticity was pursued relentlessly and, as reported in Little's column in the New York Herald Tribune, one of the characters in a crowd scene was heard repeating almost word for word "snatches of an overheard conversation Mr. Lawrence remembered from a visit he made to Russia a year ago to gather material for the play."[1] For the crowd scene, each person had been given a complete dossier by the playwrights. The dossier gave each anonymous extra or bit player the outlines of a personality, motivation and some genuine dialogue that would probably never be heard by the audience and would certainly be lost in the hum of voices. However, by giving the company things to say in Russian, the playwrights believed, the acting would be more convincing.

One of the things that resulted in varied comments by the reviewers was Donald Oenslager's sets. He designed sets for eight locales that shifted, in Howard Taubman's opinion, "ingeniously and that summon up the very air of

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[1]Stuart W. Little, "Theatre News: Russian-speaking Extras Join 'Kuprin' Rehearsals," New York Herald Tribune, 25 April 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

'places in Moscow and Yalta.'"[1] Walter Kerr made these negative remarks:

> A Call on Kuprin is a great deal of scenery in three acts. As Jeffrey Lynn goes to Moscow to look up a friendly scientist he hasn't seen in twenty years, he seems unable to turn a corner until the carpenters have gone out and built him a corner, and by the time he has turned all the corners the melodramatic evening confronts him with, he has shouldered his way through a crowded tourists' bureau, ducked down an alley-way behind a vast stone wall, climbed to the roof of the American Embassy, joined the throng watching an enormous chess-game at Gorky Park, slipped in and out of a nice girl's apartment, slipped in and out of the nice girl's beachrobe on a misty river-bank, been shuttled in and out of three seperate cubicles at police headquarters, and crawled on his belly over the Yalta waterfront. The authors describe Mr. Lynn as a tourist, and they're not kidding. . . . It is difficult to see what more director George Abbott could have done with the scenes or the scenic devices, except perhaps that some of them be left in the storehouse.[2]

Abbott had been overheard saying at an out-of-town run-through, "Oh! For one of those one-set plays!"[3] Jack Gaver tended to agree with Abbott's sentiments, and said in his UPI column:

> Griffith and Prince specialized in musicals and one of their claims to fame was that, in these days of astronomical costs, they were able to bring in such productions for astonishingly moderate sums and make them pay off. Yet all of a sudden they brought in a basically simple melodrama--at the wrong time of the season--and

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[1]Howard Taubman, "A Call on Kuprin," New York Times, 26 May 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Walter Kerr, "A Call on Kuprin," New York Herald Tribune, 26 May 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]George Abbott, "A Call on Kuprin," NYPL Clipping Folder.

> spent enough money on an unnecessarily heavy physical production to finance at least two non-musical shows. You got the impression that they thought they were presenting a combination of Ben-Hur and Gone With the Wind.[1]

Griffith and Prince chose source material to adapt that added up to more than a suspenseful melodrama. This piece presents a warning, said Edward Hipp. "The time limit on unbridled chauvinism is upon us they tell us in A Call on Kuprin. Man has scored great achievements and more are imminent, but they must be employed for the glory of man not for the selfish advantage of nations. It is an argument to cheer."[2]

A strength of the play is that the Russian characters are treated intelligently and sympathetically. Vera, the girl that Smith falls in love with, and Kuprin are two examples.

> The dramatic function of Vera as far as the necessities of plot is concerned is not lofty. She is the girl whom the hero, an American, falls in love with. She is also the person for whom Kuprin makes a sacrifice. But it would have been easy to treat her as a fictional convenience, investing her with the casual attributes needed for a romantic ingenue. Instead, A Call on Kuprin gives her the warmth and dignity of a personality. . . . In the final act Kuprin has a long speech in which he speaks of knowledge as the common aim and boon of all mankind and excoriates the childishness of

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[1]Jack Gaver, UPI "Newsfeature," NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Hipp, "Grim Message Smothered in 'A Call on Kuprin.'"

> equating it in nationalistic terms. . . . Would the Soviet theatres give Americans the humanity and depth that A Call on Kuprin confers on Vera and Kuprin? It is a sign of our maturity that we tolerate a play, basically a spy thriller, that tempers plot with a touch of honest perception of how the other side feels.[1]

Rehearsals for Kuprin began in New York on April 10, 1961 and the show opened a two-week pre-Broadway engagement at the Forrest Theatre in Philadelphia on May 8. The budget of $150,000 was high for a straight play. The cast was huge and the backstage crew equaled that of a musical comedy. Henry T. Murdock of the Philadelphia Inquirer liked the timeliness of the show as well as its melodramatic elements. He concluded: "If the theatre is ripe for melodrama, particularly a timely melodrama about space exploration and the U.S.-Soviet rivalry therein, then the prospects look bright for A Call on Kuprin.[2]

Around the time the show was rehearsing and previewing in Philadelphia, first the Russians and then the Americans sent men into space. Now the play, more than any of the collaborators had imagined, truly paralleled the current news. Prince believes that timing is very important in doing a project. Sometimes what starts as a unique

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[1]Howard Taubman, "People in Russia," New York Times, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Henry T. Murdock, "DeLuxe Melodrama Opens," Philadelphia Inquirer, 9 May 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

idea loses its uniqueness in the time it takes to develop the idea into a play. Prince feels that this is what happened with Kuprin. The sense of awe and mystery disappeared when the real life event took place.

> As for racing with the headlines, there is a good reason why topical theatre is rare today. The speed of communications is primarily responsible, and you are safer dealing with abstractions in metaphors. Once again, the theatre needs language, imagery, imagination, to separate itself from the realism of the six-o'clock news.[1]

Gaver reiterated the problem of dealing with shows based on current events. "Theatre through the ages has never been noted for successes about things of the moment, except possibly, in the case of topical revues."[2]

A Call on Kuprin opened on May 25, 1961 at the Broadhurst Theatre in New York. Taubman in the New York Times said that the play "is not only contemporary and tautly suspenseful but also says something of vast importance. . . . After a slow start, it holds and then grips the attention. But there need be no secret about the underlying truth it affirms that knowledge has no national borders."[3]

Richard Watts, Jr. felt that, although there was no doubt of the play's sympathies and its hatred of police-state

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[1]Price, Contradictions, p. 71.

[2]Gaver, UPI "Newsfeature."

[3]Howard Taubman, "'Call on Kuprin' Aims High, Hits Target," New York Times, 26 May 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

tyranny, it

> doesn't lose its measure of objectivity. The American is its hero, the Russian scientist is a victim of his masters, and the Soviet secret police are its villains. It concedes, however, that its hero is engaged in conspiratorial activities, that the rescue plan had the backing of the American ambassador, and that the scientist felt a sense of patriotic obligation to his country. And the chief Russian agent, while ruthless, is by no means a man utterly without decency.[1]

John McClain in the Journal American called it a production of vast dimension, "and it seems at times that the writing lacks the tautness and excitement to equal the global problems posed; scenes of size and importance sometimes faded into listless conclusions, and the love story emerged as more than a happy convenience."[2]

Prince had chosen to present a theatre piece that would challenge the audience. Although the Times review was excellent, the public didn't come to see the play. Prince remembers, "We sold one ticket (not even a pair) between 10 A.M., when the box-office opened, and noon."[3] He kept the show open for a second week, thereby losing another $20,000. A Call on Kuprin closed June 3, 1961 after

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[1]Richard Watts, Jr., "An Effective Cold War Melodrama," New York Post, 26 May 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]John McClain, "Suspenseful Melodrama," New York Journal American, 26 May 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 72.

fourteen performances. It was the second non-musical that Griffith and Prince had produced and both had been failures. Prince was not deterred, however, from doing another straight play. Shortly he was involved with the comedy, Take Her, She's Mine, and this play would be successful.

They Might Be Giants

It was around this time that Prince became excited about the work of an English director, Joan Littlewood. He had seen her production of The Hostage and was fascinated with her fresh approach and innovative staging.

> The sure, yet impulsive way she maneuvered currents of reality and fantasy compatibly in one play was something. And I admired how she cued in fragments of songs--the show had many--and how they erupted from rather than grew out of moments. They had the abrasive effect of attacking when you least expected, creating such life.[1]

Littlewood influenced Prince after he began to direct. He claims that, after seeing The Hostage and for a decade afterwards, he and Sondheim discussed her technique. The manner in which songs were introduced in Prince's 1970 production Company owed a conscious debt to the work done by Littlewood in The Hostage.[2]

Littlewood also directed Fings Ain't What They Used to Be (the first Lionel Bart musical) and A Taste of Honey, both of which Prince liked. However, when he first saw her

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[1]Ibid., p. 73. [2]Ibid., p. 74.

work he was unaware of her working methods. She usually depends more on improvisation then on the existing script. The Hostage had less than one act on paper when she started work on it. A Taste of Honey had no real structure and was merely a collection of scenes. Littlewood also improvised Fings Ain't What They Used To Be with Lionel Bart in a free style that Prince suggests may have been the precursor of Tom O'Horgan's Hair. What Prince enjoyed was "the curious irreverence, a sloppy excitement--nothing constipated there."[1]

Littlewood's 1964 production of Oh, What a Lovely War was created at her Stratford's Theatre Workshop in England from improvisations and ideas and bits of dialogue from a group of writers. It deviated even further than her earlier pieces from what American audiences expected in a musical. It was abrasive and different at each performance.[2] The eighteen members of the cast maintained anonymity, with each one playing multiple roles. Scenes were unrelated to plot but held together by time (1914-1918) and by theme (the folly of war). Bare, unlocalized sets stressed the universality of the show's theme and its disturbing ironies. An electrical sign, hung upstage, periodically spelled out statistics about World War I. In addition, giant projections of battlefield photos made bitterly ironic comments

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 77.

about the patriotic songs and slogans and comic routines.[1] In the years that followed, as Harold Prince began to direct his own musicals, his theatrical vision paralleled that of Joan Littlewood's. Glenn Litton noted:

> One of the greatest admirers of Oh, What a Lovely War was Harold Prince, who believed it had "fractured the musical (comedy) form into something resembling a revue, discarding central characters, a story line." Here was a form that freed the musical from the rigid prescriptions of the integrated book, particularly the rule that all songs in a musical must grow out of its dialogue, that they must help tell its story. The countless alternatives suggested by Oh, What a Lovely War were especially inspiring to a producer/director who, since West Side Story, had been trying to renovate rather than replace the book musical but who had become increasingly frustrated by his efforts.[2]

In the fall of 1960, while the out-of-town tryouts of Tenderloin were in progress, Prince acquired the rights to the play They Might Be Giants, written by James Goldman, one of the two Goldman brothers who had come to Boston to help the troubled musical. Goldman, a native of Chicago, had spent two years writing They Might Be Giants, his first play. The script was "about a wealthy American with a Sherlock Holmes fixation, about his family who sent him to a psychoanalyst to have him declared insane so they could get their hands on his money."[3] The locale of the play is present-day New York and, according to the playwright, it

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[1]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 281.

[2]Ibid., p. 282.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 73.

is a romantic comedy; a love story that takes a satirical look at contemporary New York through the eyes of the central character who imagines that he is Sherlock Holmes.[1] Prince felt it was a highly theatrical and imaginative script.

Prince was most anxious to collaborate with Joan Littlewood on some project, and sent a note to her in England introducing himself and sending her a copy of the Goldman play. She replied quickly that she would like to do it. Rehearsals were scheduled for June with a projected opening on June 28 at the Theatre Royale, Stratford (Littlewood's theatre workshop), which was in the East End of London. This was to be the first time in its fifteen-year history that another theatrical management would be associated with a Theatre Workshop production at the Theatre Royale, Stratford. It was even more unusual in that it was to be an American management (Griffith and Prince). Littlewood would direct the play and the plan was to move it to the West End and then Broadway the following season. In New York in early 1961 the run of Tenderloin ended in April. A Call on Kuprin had had a quick opening and closing. Prince, therefore, did not get to London to meet with Littlewood until three days before the scheduled opening of Giants.

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[1]"They Might Be Giants," NYPL Clipping Folder.

When he arrived, Prince was startled to see that the actors were still improvising and doing exercises to better inform themselves about their roles. Since it was so close to opening, he decided not to try to improve the situation. On the advice of Bunnage and Corbett, the lead actors, he insisted that they open on schedule. Littlewood wanted an additional week to rehearse, but Prince ruled against it firmly. Littlewood was known to do her best work after a show had opened.

The show, which featured Harry H. Corbett as Holmes and Avis Bunnage as an American spinster (both of whom had also been in The Hostage), opened on schedule and was a failure. One report of the production in the English press said:

> This is a fantasy that pokes etiolated fun at the American way of life. The hero is a putative paranoiac who dresses like Sherlock Holmes and believes himself to be threatened by a monster of evil called Moriarty; together with a lady psychiatrist, Watson by name, he pursues his enemy through a slimming parlour, a television studio, a cinema, a deserted theatre and several other Manhattan boltholes. The fact that he is actually being hunted by real hoodlums lends substance to the author's unsurprising conclusion which is that the mad are sometimes saner than the sane. The script is often funny . . . ("God bless you, Barbara Stanwyck!" cries a movie patron at the end of a Western), but the casting is drably inept. Neither Harry H. Corbett nor Avis Bunnage comes within miles of the Robert Morley-Katherine Hepburn partnership that the author seems to have envisaged; and Joan Littlewood is the last director I would choose to send the more whimsical nuances of New York wit winging across to a paying audience. The end product is a chaos of English accents, rustic in its timing and enlivened mainly

> by the brilliance of John Bury's decor--four faceted panels, which need only a gentle whirl to present a total change of scene.[1]

Another critique of the show likened the technique used to a strip-cartoon. It was a wonderful jcke to turn Dr. Watson into a woman trailing after Holmes throughout the show:

> One ends up having quite an affection for James Goldman's play, and those bursts of American sentimentality, which usually so offend English audiences, turn out to be particularly endearing. The scene in which Avis Bunnage tries ham-fistedly to prepare dinner for Holmes is comic and pathetic, and it conquered, at any rate, me. The robot, too, is more amusing than a lot of human beings we have been seeing on the stage lately. Altogether this is an evening which in its oddity, I would not like to have missed; and Harry H. Corbett is always fascinating.[2]

A third review said that the play has been "written through too many drafts--or not enough. They Might Be Giants has a clever central idea, a strong, ingenious skeleton which could be loaded with every kind of satire and parody like an intellectual Christmas tree."[3]

Milton Shulman suggested that Goldman's theme may have been the wickedness of materialism, the need of togetherness and the sanity of the insane. Goldman's "philosophical approach to life is about as significant as

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[1]"They Might Be Giants, England," NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]"They Might Be Giants, B," NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]"They Might Be Giants, C," NYPL Clipping Folder.

the cards collected in your nearest weighing machine."[1] Shulman went on: "Even more disturbing than the juvenilia of the symbolism is the gauche and awkward manner in which Joan Littlewood had directed this odd offering."[2]

Littlewood took full responsibility for the chaos. It was clear that her previous experiences had not been with scripts like Goldman's which had tightly structured scenes and dialogue that was carefully thought out, even providing stage directions. With the wisdom of hindsight, Prince realized that Littlewood's lack of a disciplined style of rehearsing made the carefully structured Goldman play the wrong vehicle for her. Littlewood, upset at the play's failure, closed her theatre and went to Nigeria. It was the last production of the Theatre Royale for many years.

Prince returned to New York and Goldman suggested that Prince direct the play on Broadway himself. Prince, anxious for a directing career, agreed. Knowing there was something wrong with the script, however, and anxious to discover what it was, he arranged a reading of the piece with George C. Scott and Colleen Dewhurst. Prince says that as good as the reading was, the play didn't work and he couldn't zero in on the flaw.

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[1]Milton Shulman, "At the Theatre: An Attack Completely Out of Range," NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ibid.

> The reason was I couldn't hear them [Scott and Dewhurst]. Instead, I kept hearing the performance I had seen in England. Those actors, their voices--I kept seeing their moves. I hadn't liked that production, still I couldn't shake it off. It was indelibly in my head.[1]

At this time, Prince did not have the facility to reinterpret a play without being influenced by the original staging.

Prince was reluctant to give up on They Might Be Giants but eventually he did. The play never reached Broadway. However, the motion picture rights to the piece were retained and in 1968 Universal made a film of it starring George C. Scott and Joanne Woodward and directed by Anthony Harvey. With a percentage arranged for the producers, they eventually and most unusually got back all the money they had lost in 1961.

With the closing of Kuprin on June 3, 1961 and the Littlewood production of They Might Be Giants being readied in London, Griffith and Prince had no show on Broadway for the first time in seven years. Griffith felt badly about the failures of Kuprin and Tenderloin and decided to slow down. He suggested that Prince produce some shows without him. He did not want to discontinue their partnership, but wished to function only as an adviser, retaining minimal interest in Prince's solo projects. He seemed anxious to devote more time to his private life.

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 78.

Prince didn't feel that their partnership would end. The partners had been together for eight years, working closely from 9 in the morning until 11 at night, six days a week. He did feel, however, the conflict involving his own desire to direct and Griffith's inability to support that desire. Then, early in June 1961, Griffith, while playing golf with Abbott at the Westchester Country Club, collapsed. He died early the next morning, June 7, in Parkchester Hospital.

Abbott recalls the unique partnership of Griffith and Prince.

> It was a very strong emotional relationship. Obviously, as time progressed, Hal must have felt held back by Bobby who was not as smart as he and who objected to his wish to direct. Bobby was a good enough theatre man but he wasn't in Hal's class as far as theatre knowledge went. However, I think had he lived, Hal would never have deserted him. They were very strong friends.[1]

Prince found it difficult to analyze the relationship he had had with Griffith.

> A brother, maybe, and certainly, in the area of stage managing, a teacher, a patient one, for I was emotionally ill suited to that job. But he covered for me during those years, and I got out and into producing before anybody caught on. A friend. We loved each other. Ironically, he helped me in very real ways to calm down, to enjoy life, more, in fact, than he was able to enjoy his own. He was generous, the delight of the panhandlers in front of the Lambs Club.[2]

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[1]Abbott interview.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 82.

Sheldon Harnick also discussed the relationship between the two partners:

> Bobby and Hal complimented each other wonderfully. Hal was ebullient and outgoing. Bobby was quiet, thoughtful. What their method of working together was like, I don't know. I only saw the public side of it and from the public side of it it always looked like Hal was the moving force, because he seemed to dominate the conversations, take the lead. In private it may not have been like that at all. But that was the impression one had.[1]

After Griffith's death, which Prince has called the loneliest period of his life, he found himself having to make independent decisions and to reassess many things. He decided to produce himself and mainly without partners, except in very special cases. Some people questioned Prince's ability to manage successfully on his own. He had depended on Griffith's considerable knowledge and experience in the theatre. During his years with Griffith, Prince the mercurial and nervous one, gave the impression that he would be lost without his steady balance wheel. Ironically, as the years progressed, and as Prince matured both personally and professionally, he became the balance wheel to many of the people working with him.[2]

He restructured his production company, making Ruth Mitchell an associate and Carl Fisher, who had been general manager, a partner, taking on the many business chores that

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[1]Harnick interview.

[2]Mitchell interview.

Griffith had attended to and which Prince disliked doing. Prince was capable of delegating responsibilities to staff members without feeling threatened. This allowed him to turn his energies towards his major ambition at the time: becoming a director.

This period also saw changes in Prince's private life. On a trip to Europe he met Judy Chaplin, whom he married the following year (eventually having two children, Charley and Daisey with her). He also went into psychoanalysis for a few years.

The next three shows that Prince would present were Take Her, She's Mine, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, and Fiddler on the Roof, proving spectacularly that he could produce successfully on his own.

CHAPTER VI

A CHANCE TO DIRECT

> People in general become closed to life, and that's very bad for people in the arts, particularly successful people. You find most successful people repeating themselves; because it's safe. To do anything, particularly in the theatre, is really walking out on a gangplank and diving out into a sea of shark.[1]

Take Her, She's Mine

Judy Abbott had given Prince a script to read of a light comedy, Age of Consent, by screenwriters Phoebe and Henry Ephron, later retitled Take Her, She's Mine. Based on the Ephrons' family life and two daughters, the play focused on Nora Ephron, the eldest child (called Mollie Michaelson in the play) and "the inevitable pain a father feels handing his daughter over to another man."[2] Prince liked the play and decided to produce it.

Abbott agreed to direct, his 80th directorial assignment on Broadway. Art Carney, a television star on the Jackie Gleason Show and familiar to audiences for his portrayal of Gleason's sidekick Ed Norton, and Phyllis Thaxter,

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[1]Arthur Laurents, quoted by Leslie Bennett, "Here Comes the Musical 'La Cage,'" New York Times, 21 August 1983, sec. 2, p. 4.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 81.

a motion picture actress, were cast as the parents. Elizabeth Ashley, a 21-year-old Baton Rouge, Louisiana ingenue, who had been understudy to Barbara Bel Geddes in Mary, Mary, was set for the role of the older daughter. Prince described the unique casting experience he encountered with Ashley:

> We auditioned dozens of ingenues without success. Rehearsals were scheduled in a few weeks, and desperately Phoebe and Henry Ephron, the authors, and I examined the same worn audition lists in search of a surprise. One girl's name kept appearing and next to it the words No Show. Apparently because of illness, she'd had to cancel repeatedly. She became our "idee fixe." We persuaded her agent to coax her out of her sickbed and up to our office. Reluctantly, Elizabeth Ashley appeared, beautiful and pale, too ill to audition, and she left. Abbott turned to us and said, "What do you think of that girl? Don't we want her?"[1]

They hired her out of desperation, although Ashley had done little on the Broadway stage. Prince predicted "the 21-year-old actress is headed for stardom in the very near future."[2] Richard Watts, Jr. called her performance "skillful and charming"[3] and Walter Kerr said in the New York Herald Tribune that "Miss Ashley is obviously a

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[1]Ibid., p. 56.

[2]Jim O'Connor, New York Journal American, 12 December 1961, quoted by Prince, ibid.

[3]Richard Watts, Jr., "Comedy of the College Generation," New York Post, 22 December 1961, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 22, p. 148.

talented girl."[1] In May 1962, Ashley was elevated to co-starring status.

Casting June Harding to play Mollie's 15-year-old younger sister Liz, a high school student, brought forth comments from director Abbott. The show was a challenge because so many of the characters were of college age (there were some twenty actors and only four adult roles in the play). Abbott said:

> The actors had to be "discovered" and I like the satisfaction of not knowing a single thing about the performer except what I see up there on the stage where he is auditioning. . . . In this particular production June Harding came to audition for Molly, the lead; she wasn't right, but there was a quality there which I didn't want to lose. I asked her to read for the younger sister. My associates were worried about my sanity, for she was dressed for the older part, but my instinct--my hunch if you will, but really my judgment based on experience--was justified by her performance.[2]

The show was capitalized at $150,000 and, in a most unusual arrangement, Prince sold the rights to 20th Century-Fox shortly before the production opened its pre-Broadway tryout tour in New Haven. The picture deal, said Variety, "is understood to involve a down payment of $150,000 plus a percentage of the gross on profitable weeks up to an undisclosed ceiling."[3]

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[1]Walter Kerr, "Take Her, She's Mine," New York Herald Tribune, 22 December 1961, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 22, p. 149.

[2]Abbott, Mister Abbott, p. 267.

[3]"Take Her, She's Mine," Variety, 6 December 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Take Her, She's Mine is set in Beverly Hills, California at the Michaelson home and at the eastern girls' college where the eldest daughter, Mollie, goes to school. "Father's difficulty in adjusting to the fact that his girls are no longer children is the central comic business," said Taubman in the New York Times.[1] Mollie at first tries to be very sophisticated about sex. She "endeavors to look and seem mature, and is a little embarrassed by her virtue. Next, she goes through a liberal period, interesting herself in causes, longing to go abroad in government service, and in this case, dreaming of being a folk musician in a beatnik coffee house for young intellectuals. Finally, she starts thinking seriously of marriage."[2]

Mollie falls in love with a young man she had despised. There are scenes of holidays back in California where Michaelson, to distract himself from his daughter's activities at college, goes off to take rhumba lessons. "Only the mother, most understandingly played by Miss Thaxter, seems to be getting any amusement out of events."[3]

William and Jean Eckert, who designed Damn Yankees and Fiorello!, were hired to design the multiple settings

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[1]Howard Taubman, "Theatre: Young in Heart," New York Times, 22 December 1961, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 22, p. 150.

[2]Watts, "Comedy of the College Generation."

[3]John Chapman, "'Take Her, She's Mine' Presents Art Carney as a Typical Father," New York Daily News, 22 December 1961, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 22, p. 149.

that are required for the Michaelsons' California home, the college, and surrounding spots in New England. John McClain in the Journal American said they "responded to the challenge of double and multiple sets by rolling rooms and players on and off-stage without slowing the continuity."[1] This was done on "wedge shaped platforms," says Taubman. "There is an airiness in the devices that makes one overlook the patchiness of the narrative technique, which resembles that of films."[2]

Prince said that nothing especially interesting happened during the producing of Take Her, She's Mine.[3] The relaxed atmosphere is reflected in Art Carney's comments on Abbott's directing. Carney said, "Abbott was a revelation. His rehearsals are long but not severe and he's absolutely just in the way he praises or criticizes. He never plays favorites and no one is offended."[4]

The Ephrons gave a witty interview to Stuart W. Little in the Herald Tribune, saying more humorously than bitingly that they were disturbed about New Haven, where the play opened on November 25. They said they pleaded with Prince

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[1]John McClain, "Art Carney Dominates in an Ingratiating Play," New York Journal American, 22 December 1961, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 22, p. 150.

[2]Taubman: "Theatre: Young in Heart."

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 85.

[4]Elinor Hughes, "'Take Her, She's Mine' Winner with Carney," Boston Herald, 6 December 1961, p. 28, NYPL Clipping Folder.

not to send the play to either New Haven or Boston since those were two places written about in the play. Ephron said, "We talk about Harvard and Yale and all the women's colleges around them, the so-called 'Heavenly Seven.' So naturally he's sending us right to New Haven and then to Boston."[1] However, the reviews in both cities were very good.

In New Haven, Variety said that the show had "virtually all the elements required for click acceptance. A 'human' story is told interestingly and entertainingly, and there are knowing chuckles and substantial guffaws which pepper the dialogue."[2] The review also commended "the excellent acting" and the "skilled" direction. They said Abbott "again exhibits his skill at working with personable youngsters. His overall staging adds force to the general picture."[3]

In Boston, Elinor Hughes of the Boston Herald said that the huge audience that filled the Shubert Theatre initially came prepared to enjoy Carney. They remained to enjoy not only Carney but also the play. "They enjoyed it so much they are probably still laughing." She goes on to say that the play has no great depth. However, "It is a

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[1]Stuart W. Little, "Take Her, She's Mine," New York Herald Tribune, 31 October 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Harold Bone, "Take Her, She's Mine," Variety, 29 November 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Ibid.

clean, funny and attractively presented comedy about the difficulties parents have in understanding their growing children."[1] Hughes concludes that "Harold S. Prince in his first solo venture as a producer has come up with a winner."[2]

Melvin Maddocks in the Christian Science Monitor said the light comedy "makes for utterly inconsequential, utterly undemanding and--to judge from first-night responses--popular entertainment."[3]

Kevin Kelly, another Boston reviewer, felt that the major drawback was the "lack of craftsmanship in the writing."[4] He said:

> It has been constructed in a series of sketch-like episodes by Phoebe and Henry Ephron, who are content, for example, to allow the main character--a badly harassed father, well-played by Art Carney--to deliver the basic information of the plot by standing down by the footlights and confiding it directly to the audience. The father talks out his problems as though they were really his alone and not the creative problems of the playwrights.[5]

Take Her, She's Mine was ready for its December 21 opening on Broadway. The comedy was the first legitimate show to play the completely redecorated Biltmore Theatre in ten years. Not since the fall of 1951 and The Number had the

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[1]Hughes, "'Take Her, She's Mine' Winner with Carney."

[2]Ibid.

[3]Melvin Maddocks, "Take Her, She's Mine," Christian Science Monitor, 6 December 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[4]Kevin Kelly, "'Take Her, She's Mine' Opens at Shubert Theatre, Boston Globe, 6 December 1961, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[5]Ibid.

Biltmore housed legitimate shows. It had been host to television, originating shows for CBS for eight years. The new owner, David I. Cogen, put in new seats, wall decorations, new chandeliers and new carpet. He had the stage entirely reconstructed. The new seating capacity was 948. Ironically, George Abbott had been part owner of the Biltmore Theatre with Warner Brothers when the theatre was built in 1925 and was involved in some of its hits, including Kiss and Tell and Brother Rat. Abbott had also directed the last play to go into the house ten years prior to the run of Take Her, She's Mine.

The comedy opened on December 21, 1961 and in Prince's opinion the only good reviews were those from out of town.

> Take Her, She's Mine played the Shubert in Boston, with a seating capacity of 1700. The size of the theatre made for a bigger, broader performance. That, plus the greater decibels of laughter, created a perfect relationship between the stage and the audience for the easy, good-natured superficiality of the material. In New York we played the Biltmore, seating 948. The actors were forced to modulate their performances. Laughter was cut by half, and the play begged for more serious scrutiny.[1]

Walter Kerr said of the show:

> Authors Phoebe and Henry Ephron would seem to have a built-in preference for the limp laugh. A glancing side-swipe in the direction of a gag is nearly always enough for them, with very little damage done to the funnybones out front.[2]

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 85

[2]Kerr, "Take Her, She's Mine."

John Chapman in the Daily News said,

> As a piece for the theatre, it lacks pace, but it almost makes up for this shortcoming with charm. . . . it was not designed to kill you with laughter; all it wants to do is warm your heart. Maybe it will, if your heart is warmer than mine to begin with.[1]

Howard Taubman in the New York Times said:

> It would not do to place Take Her, She's Mine under exacting scrutiny. In structure it is a rambling affair, full of vignettes, some quite sharp and others rather blurred. It lacks the strong underpinning of a solid conflict and, as a result, the characters, though agreeable, are not searchingly realized.[2]

The show played for a little less than a year and then toured an additional season. It made a decent profit and was a "sure fire" commercial venture. This made it unnecessary for Prince to accept Abbott's gracious offer, for the second time in his producing career, of free office space until his new producing set-up became secure. Producing "solo" had started off for Prince quite successfully.

Up until now, Prince had not lacked the courage to present shows containing subject matter that his fellow producers often avoided. However, at the same time, he got involved in projects that would have to be described as "run-of-the-mill" commercial ventures. Perhaps he had not yet formulated a clear picture of what he wished to accomplish or change in the musical theatre. That part of his career

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[1]Chapman, "'Take Her She's Mine' Presents Art Carney as a Typical Father."

[2]Taubman, "Theatre: Young in Heart."

was still ahead of him. He said:

> Take Her, She's Mine could have been produced by anyone. A number of the shows that preceded it fit that category. Others, the best of them, the Abbott shows had a texture which was his, but even he wasn't so much concerned with content as I was going to be.[1]

However, a new phase in Prince's career was about to begin.

A Family Affair

Prince began his long sought-after directing career on Broadway by attempting to rescue the musical A Family Affair early in 1962. He had not been involved with the project since its inception, but replaced the original director, Word Baker, near the completion of the show's out-of-town tryout. As Gary Paul Gates said in his Holiday magazine article, "The show, a mindless trifle, was being quietly put to sleep in Philadelphia, when Prince was called in for last minute resuscitation and he managed to breathe enough life into it to give it at least a brief Broadway run."[2]

Prince had been made aware of the property about the time he was working on Tenderloin. Sondheim had suggested that he look into A Family Affair, an original musical. The book by James and William Goldman was "humorous."[3] The

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 86.

[2]Gates, "Broadway's Prince Charming," p. 102.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 87.

score was by John Kander, who had started his theatrical career as a conductor for stock company orchestras and then arranged the dance music for Gypsy and Irma La Douce. A Family Affair was his first musical as a collaborator. Prince thought the score was "superior."[1] The story dealt with the actions of a young Jewish couple planning their wedding from the time of their engagement to the ceremony itself. The only thing standing in their way is the cold war that develops between the girl's guardian and the boy's parents as they make their plans for the big event. Variety in Philadelphia called it a "kosher version of Father of the Bride.[2]

Prince had originally decided against doing the show after he read it. He was not happy with the conflicts in the story. He felt "there was a certain predictability about them, and never a doubt where the show was going."[3]

In early 1961, Leland Hayward bought the rights to do the show and planned to present it in association with Jerome Robbins, who was expected to supervise the staging and choreograph. Eventually they decided against doing it. The property was next optioned by a lawyer, Andrew Siff. It was his first show. Siff hired Word Baker, a director

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Jerry Gaghan, "Out of Town Review [Philadelphia]," Variety, 17 January 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 87.

of two prominent Off-Broadway productions, The Fantasticks and The Crucible.

Baker cast Shelley Berman, who had made a name for himself as a nightclub stand-up comedian, as Alfie Nathan, the bride's guardian and bachelor uncle. Berman had a brittle, desperate style of delivery. He had appeared briefly several seasons earlier in The Girls Against the Boys, a Broadway revue. Morris Carnovsky, known for his Shakespearean work and seen on Broadway in Rhinoceros, was cast as Morris Siegal, the boy's father in what John Chapman in the Daily News called "a most satisfactory stroke of off-beat casting."[1] Eileen Heckart was set to play the boy's mother, Tilly Siegal, an aggressive arranger of marital details. Rita Gardner, also a veteran of The Fantasticks company, was given the role of the bride-to-be, Sally Nathan, and Larry Kert, the young groom, Gerry Siegal. Lulu Bates, who had performed in New Girl in Town, played the groom's grandmother. A favorite Broadway character actress of the day, Bibi Osterwald, was cast as a determined wedding consultant. Cathryn Damon also joined the company.

Much of the action of the show deals with the squabbling and confusion of the embattled factions, led by Berman and Heckart as they fight about the plans for the wedding of their children. Alfie (Berman) innocently proposes to

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[1]John Chapman, "'Family Affair' Bright and Funny," New York Daily News, 29 January 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

have a family affair in his living room, with only forty guests present. Tilly wants the Old Oaks Country Club ("Problem Weddings our Specialty") and 400 guests. Alfie is defeated with as much humor as it is possible to manage. A "clamourous difference over the guest list is turned to amusing account when the abundant Siegal clan, deployed in satiric football formation, is countered by Alfie's numerous flames in suggestive gridiron costumes."[1] There is a scene with Sally doing her trousseau shopping and one in which Alfie's past failures to find the right girl are analyzed. All this, said Howard Taubman in the New York Times, is based "on a notion so thin that it might be good for one fast joke. They stretch it with slight variations of the essential jest and with noisy repetitions of the basic bickering until it all but snaps."[2]

With John Butler as choreographer, sets and lights by David Hays, and costumes by Robert Fletcher, the show went to Philadelphia for its pre-Broadway run scheduled from December 23, 1961 until January 1, 1962 at the Erlanger Theatre. It was due to return to New York for a week of previews and an opening on January 27, 1962. The show was capitalized at $350,000 and United Artists Records was a

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[1]Howard Taubman, "Theatre: 'Family Affair,'" New York Times, 29 January 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ibid.

substantial investor. They also put out the cast album. Eventually, backers were asked for 20% more as an "overcall."

The reviews were not good in Philadelphia. Variety said that the show needed momentum and wrote, "The production was rough . . . and in the second act virtually all the ensembles failed to jell."[1] Backstage staffer Margery Nelson, on hand to cover it, reported that:

> The first act lags badly and needs a great deal of tightening. The staging by Word Baker was rather sloppy on opening night, especially in the crowd scenes. Some of the voices were inaudible at times too. All in all, the old familiar phrase, "It needs a lot of work," is applicable but when the show is cut and tightened, it should provide a charming evening's entertainment.[2]

The producer, Siff, was about the close the show and cancel the New York opening, but first he sent out a call to Robbins, Abbott and Gower Champion to see if they were interested and/or available to come to Philadelphia to help the show. None of them were. It was at this point that the collaborators, who all knew Prince, turned to him although they knew he had never directed a musical before. Prince said, "Failing with every musical director in New York, they invited me."[3] Prince remembers what happened:

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[1]Gaghan, "Out of Town Review [Philadelphia]."

[2]Margery Nelson, "Family Affair," Backstage, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 88.

> I visited the show in Philadelphia. It was a mess. The material that I liked so much on paper was impossible to see for the production that was imposed on it, a unit set that looked like a tiered wedding cake, with doughnut turntables that moved at a snail's pace, and a cyclorama of wedding lace in front of which they played the entire show. . . . Instead of a realistic old-fashioned musical with walls, and doors, and corners, they had gone chic with yards and yards of China silk and surrealistic costumes. It had a big chorus it didn't need. It was a disaster. . . . Still, I remembered the material and if you could simply put back on the stage what I'd read, in focus so we could <u>see</u> it, that alone would have to make an enormous difference.[1]

Prince sized up the situation quickly. He believed that he could fix the show or "at least make something respectable out of it."[2] He was given the assurance of full authority. However, there was no audience for the show in Philadelphia and they were not able to meet expenses. They were still scheduled to open in New York in a little over two weeks.

Prince didn't think the show would be a hit, even if he fixed everything that was wrong with it. When he called Abbott for advice, after agreeing to stay with the show, Abbott told him to keep that in mind so that he would not be disappointed if it failed. Abbott encouraged and supported his desire to work on it.

Prince replaced Baker on January 5 in Philadelphia. Baker was said to have resigned because of artistic differences with the management but would receive program credit.

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 89.

Bob Herget was also called in to help John Butler with the choreography. Knowing they would need extra time to get the show in shape, the New York opening was changed from January 23 to January 27. Prince made it clear to everyone involved in the show that there was no time left for "collaboration." They would have to do exactly what he said if he were to whip the show into shape in time for its opening in New York. This was a big demand from a novice director. Yet, everyone agreed.

Prince worked closely with the authors. In order to establish the confidence of the company he worked on the least successful scene of the play first. The sequence entailed a passage of time going by, a type of scene common in musicals of the day used to dramatize via mime, music or people rushing around on the stage, that it was "later." The Goldmans wrote out Prince's idea for the scene involving new dialogue for Berman who became incensed and refused to play. Prince remained tough, offering to return to New York and leave them with their troubled play. Berman relented. When the scene was played it worked and the cast congratulated their new director. Berman apologized. After that, said Prince, "we were in business."[1]

They then left for New York. On January 18, Prince added three new scenes and one whole restaged number. A Family Affair continued with a long string of paid previews

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[1]Ibid.

before its January 27 premiere. Berman, who eventually was most enthusiastic about Prince's work on the show, said about his new director in an interview with Joseph Morgenstern of the Herald Tribune a week before the show opened:

> He's a murderer, a marvelous murderer . . . A benevolent killer. Anything cute goes out. Is he ruthless? Of course he's ruthless. Of course you've gotta be a murderer with your own stuff. That's why Prince is so marvelous for us. Otherwise, everything is a jewel. Everything is gospel.[1]

Prince told a newspaperman in relation to Berman's labeling him as ruthless, that he didn't think he was so at all. "I want to be liked too much. But coming from Berman, who can be pretty ruthless himself, it's my favorite compliment."[2] Prince handed the principals as many as five new pages of script to learn at each preview performance. However, not all the material was new. A good deal of the earlier work done by Baker had been retained but changed. Prince said,

> I know now we could not have accomplished what we had in ten days were it not for Baker's initial direction. The performers knew who they were. There has to be that solid a foundation for you to be able to tumult it to the degree I did in such a short time without destroying it.[3]

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[1]Joseph Morgenstern, "Interview with Berman," New York Herald Tribune, 21 January 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Thomas Buckley, "Prince vs. Prince," New York Times, 21 April 1963, p. 1.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 90.

Prince ordered new lyrics, and the set simplified. Carpenters were ordered to obliterate as much as they could of the many elements in the set with black paint. Finally, Prince was billed as director on the show. Although he wasn't going to do so at first, he changed his mind. He said, "it seemed to me sheer cowardice to hide behind someone else's credit."[1]

A Family Affair opened on January 27, 1962 at the Billy Rose Theatre. Although the show wasn't a success, it did receive some good notices. Richard Watts, Jr. liked two songs, "Harmony" and a lament called "I'm Worse Than Anybody," which he called "bright, tuneful and amusing."[2] However, he felt much of the book elements were "fatiguing."[3] Taubman felt that

> The writing of A Family Affair is not strong on taste; it resorts to the cliches of Jewish domestic attitudes. Nor is it fresh in style; it often has the air of a busy, good-humored borrower from various musical-comedy sources. Since some of these sources are first-rate, some numbers are lively.[4]

Taubman described some of these numbers. One depicts the two families battling over their respective guest lists in football costumes. Taubman liked Prince's staging of a

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "Musical Comedy About a Wedding," New York Post, 29 January 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Taubman, "Theatre: 'Family Affair.'"

"hilarious" scene involving trousseau shopping. And Alfie's past failure to find the right girl is "analyzed in diverting stylized movement in the country club gym.[1] Finally, Berman, in a wild number called "Revenge," plots "gruesome reprisals, calculating their effect on Tilly with fiendish glee as he writhes on a sofa, telephones demented instructions to an inhuman answering service at 4 A.M., and dances ghoulishly to a Spanish rhythm."[2]

John Chapman in the Daily News liked the first-act finale quartet sung by Miss Osterwald, Jack De Leon, Gino Conforti and Linda Lavin. He also felt that "Harold Prince has directed the show with an eye to humorous effect."[3]

Norman Nadel felt that the only expendable scene was Eileen Heckart's solo, "Summer Is Over." He didn't mind the tune but felt she was not a soloist. However, he felt her trio with Berman and Carnovsky, "I'm Worse Than Anybody," was "one of the evening's real show-stoppers."[4]

Kerr liked much of the show. This was due to "what composer-librettists James Goldman, John Kander and William Goldman have decided to do with the shape of musical comedy. They have decided to housebreak it, for one thing, closing

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Chapman, "'Family Affair' Bright and Funny."

[4]Norman Nadel, "'Family Affair' at Billy Rose," New York World-Telegram, 29 January 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

the outside door that leads to all those big production numbers and insisting that the folk settle down by a reasonably cozy hearth and fight there."[1] Kerr also liked several of the tunes in the show, such as "Harmony," which he called a "sassy, old-fashioned, ragtime tune." He defied audiences not to whistle the tune at intermission. He also enjoyed Carnovsky singing "Now, Morris" in the second act. But Kerr also pointed out where the show fails. He said:

> It falls off in the vacuousness of some of its blackouts, falls off in the repetitiousness of quarrels that don't progress, falls off most notoriously in its second-act reaching for incidental numbers (such as a bachelor party) that are far enough afield to be arrested for vagrancy. . . . A most appealing "almost."[2]

Richard Adler, who did the lyrics for The Pajama Game and Damn Yankees, felt it was a "dreadful play."[3] He said:

> Hal and I were friendly in those days. He was given an opportunity to direct his first show. I didn't think he did much of a job on it. I thought--just like all orchestrators want to be composers, all producers want to be directors. I thought he'd never succeed after seeing A Family Affair. But, I was being intolerant and not remembering that it was a first effort. And look what he's gone and done! I think that the staging in later years of Candide and Evita are two of the most brilliant pieces of musical stagecraft I've ever seen.[4]

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[1]Walter Kerr, "'A Family Affair,'" New York Herald Tribune, 29 January 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Adler interview.

[4]Ibid.

Although A Family Affair lasted only 65 performances, Prince felt that it "gave me a chance to feel my own strength, my influence over people."[1] His lifelong dream of becoming a Broadway director had finally been realized.

A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Forum

Prior to Griffith's death, Prince had read a script of A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum written by Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart. The piece had had a long history before it was a project of the American Musical Theatre. Earlier, before World War II, while he was in his freshman year in the Department of Drama at Yale University, Shevelove had written the lyrics for a musical version of Plautus' Mostellaria. Richard O'Connell (who would later become the authorized translator of Lorca's plays) directed a production of the play as a partial requirement for his master's degree. O'Connell had "conceived it as a Broadway musical comedy," wrote Shevelove many years later.[2] "I remember one of the songs was called 'A Couple of Greeks on a Roman Holiday.' It was that sort of show. The faculty and students adored it."[3]

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[1]Buckley, "Prince vs. Prince."

[2]Burt Shevelove, "All About 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum,'" Performing Arts: The Music Center Monthly 5, no. 10 (October 1971): 31.

[3]Ibid.

Later, when Shevelove was the resident director of the Yale Dramat, the club did a musical called When in Rome, loosely based on Plautus' Miles Gloriosus and Pseudolus. After the war, Shevelove became a successful television writer and director. One evening he and a group of friends were sitting around complaining about the lack of low comedy on Broadway. Shevelove recalls the sentiments that they all shared: "There were plenty of touching, even tragic, lovers, plenty of dream ballets, and plenty of important truths, stated and restated, but no fun."[1] Sondheim was excited by Shevelove's idea to do something farcical on Broadway using Plautus' plays. He encouraged Shevelove and Larry Gelbart, another witty television writer, to do a book based on the plays, for which he would do the music and lyrics. It was about the time that West Side Story had begun its initial Broadway run, and Sondheim was undoubtedly anxious to write both music and lyrics for a show.

Shevelove explained the restrictions that he and Gelbart had imposed on themselves.

> We would preserve the classic unities of time, place, and action. We would use the classic characters of Plautus. We would have no anachronisms or sly references to today. But we realized we would have to invent a plot (the original plots are negligible) to accommodate all the characters we wanted to use.[2]

By early 1958, the first draft of Forum was nearing completion. It would go through fifteen rewrites, three producers

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

and three directors before opening on Broadway.

Sondheim called Jerome Robbins, who was looking for a farce. Robbins was excited by the project and a tentative agreement was reached to do what Shevelove referred to as A Scenario for Vaudevillians.[1] The authors referred to their show as a "play for vaudevillians."[2]

Leland Hayward evinced interest in the project but soon dropped out. There was a delay while Sondheim worked on the lyrics of Gypsy with Robbins directing. By then, David Merrick had optioned it. Robbins dropped out because "Robbins and Merrick didn't get along well."[3] Joshua Logan agreed to take Robbins' place as director but withdrew when the writers wouldn't revise the book. Eventually, the creators returned Merrick's $4,000 option and Robbins, who had now renewed his involvement with the project, suggested that Prince present Forum. Prince remembers that his partner was not anxious to do the project. "Bobby wasn't enthused. I was. They went about arranging a release from Merrick, and I sent the script to Phil Silvers, for whom it had been written."[4] Silvers turned down the project because it was "old schtick, not realizing that that was precisely the

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 41.

[2]"A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," New York Herald Tribune, 10 May 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 73.

[4]Prince, Contradictions, p. 81.

show's intention," Zadan wrote.[1] Others also turned down the project because they weren't excited by the script. It was offered to the American Theatre Society, a board of producers and theatre owners in Washington, D.C. They wouldn't even consider it for a Theatre Guild subscription. They didn't think it was funny and in addition said it was confusing. Prince said, "Somehow at the piano and on paper it was a show that to put it mildly, was attractive to a minimal number of people."[2] Shevelove said,

> People are oriented by the shows they've seen before. They said, "There's only room for one or two dances in it and you don't care anything about the kids." And we said, "You're not supposed to care anything about the kids." Also, one set of costumes didn't strike them as a musical. Our reason for putting it on was an affectionate one. Low comedy and farce in America are rarely done and are rarely successful.[3]

Prince, however, was eager to do Forum, having the same kind of conviction and excitement about it as he had with West Side Story. Griffith finally but unenthusiastically agreed to co-produce it. However, his sudden death left Prince as its lone producer.

Take Her, She's Mine went into production, and Prince shelved Forum, deciding to wait until the spring of 1962 to go into rehearsals with it.

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 73.

[2]Prince, quoted in ibid., p. 75.

[3]Shevelove, quoted in ibid.

When Prince returned to Forum, he released the news that Milton Berle would be playing the role written for Silvers. Zadan said that "Berle, afraid that many of his best lines might be cut during the numerous revisions of the libretto, insisted that script approval be included in his contract. He also wanted a say on casting, choice of choreographer, scene and costume designers, as well as the theatre to be rented. Prince refused and Berle withdrew.[1]

Zero Mostel finally signed to play the role of Pseudolus, the slave who wanted to be free, in a show that Martin Gottfried called in his book, Broadway Musicals, "the most intellectual of our musical books . . . the least likely book of musicals to date. . . . its brains are applied to showmanship."[2] Gottfried noted that the show had been written for Silvers, announced with Berle and opened with Mostel which "as its title suggests, was a tribute to comics."[3] Prince wanted Zero Mostel because he loved his work in clubs and his performance in Rhinoceros, which had earned him a Tony Award for the best acting of the 1960-61 season. Mostel had become known in theatre circles for his work on that show as well as for Ulysses in Nighttown. He had also appeared in Beggar's Holiday in 1946 under George Abbott's direction. Initially, Mostel refused the

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 29.

[3]Ibid.

part but he later noted that it was his wife who convinced him to accept the role.

The authors of the show were very unhappy with Prince's decision to cast Mostel. The atmosphere became unpleasant. It was now December of 1961 and the aim had been for a February rehearsal period and a spring opening. While Prince was negotiating with Mostel, the authors, on their own, had been busily auditioning other actor/comics such as Red Buttons. Prince remained firm, and the deal with Mostel was made.[1]

The Dramatists Guild contract gives authors approval of casting and the Forum writers threatened to withdraw the play. Abbott, who after Robbins left the production had been asked to direct, supported Prince, saying that if Mostel wasn't accepted he would withdraw from the show. Within two days, the authors' representatives called Prince with the news that, unhappy as they were, they would go ahead with Mostel.[2]

Shevelove and Gelbart were never completely satisfied with Mostel. They recognized his talent, but felt that he lacked stage discipline. He would improvise lines and business rather than do what had been set in rehearsals. The authors felt that he detracted from the material and the smooth running of the production. Prince contends that

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 93. [2]Ibid.

Mostel was brilliant in the role, but some of the collaborators on the show still have unpleasant memories of his work.[1]

Abbott came in to direct Forum. In a recent interview, Abbott said,

> I never had anything to do with the show until it was in its last stages. Hal came to me and said, "We want you to take it over." I said I would cut it so drastically that the writers would hate me. Hal said, "No, they won't. . . . they now need a strong hand to go to work on it." So I took it to my country home, and I cut it a lot. And they said, "Dandy!" The script, you see, had been very verbose.[2]

To summarize the plot of Forum, which is a collage of at least six of Plautus' plays, is not a simple task. There is Senex (David Burns), an old man caught between his disaffection with his wife Domina (Ruth Kobart) and his interest in the beautiful slave girl next door named Philia, played "with delicacy and charm"[3] by Preshy Marker. Hero, their son, is played by Brian Davies, "an extremely winning juvenile."[4] There is the braggart soldier (Ronald Holgate), who has bought the virgin slave for himself and Lycus (John Carradine), a dealer in courtesans. Jack Gilford "scurries

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 84.

[2]Abbott interview.

[3]John Simon, "Theatre," Theatre Arts, July 1962, p. 66.

[4]Ibid.

magisterially across the stage like the Ghost of Burlesque Past"[1] as the eunuch Hysterium. As Pseudolus, the wily slave, who tries to buy his freedom from his master, Hero, by securing Philia for him, Zero Mostel received the following review from John Simon in Theatre Arts:

> He manipulates the outraged pawns of the outrageous plot with the "savoir faire" of a cloudful of "dei ex machina." When Mostel dances, he trips up the light fantastic; when he sings, it is like a choir of angels weeping; and when he mugs, we recognize the face that launched a thousand hardships on spectators averse to cluttering up the aisles with their rolling bodies. And his lines? If it is a line that has to be hit, he smacks it smartly with the back of his hand in the solar plexus, so that it never recovers. And if it is a line to be thrown away, he tosses it off with princely casualness, only to pull it short in mid-flight by an invisible rubber band. If ballet has its prima ballerina assoluta, Latin its ablative absolute, science its absolute zero, the theatre can proudly point to its Zero Mostel.[2]

The show was a mixture of vaudeville, musical comedy, farce, and burlesque. "Not all the gags that turn up at the Alvin appear in the Roman originals,"[3] explained Walter Kerr. There were all kinds of crossed eyes, dropped pants and mangled lines, crossed spears and curtains that fall down when they're supposed to go up, and unexpectedly opened doors. The cast included an array of clowns such as Mostel, Gilford and David Burns. Sondheim, in an interview with

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 67.

[3]Walter Kerr, "Friends, Romans, Vaudevillians," New York Herald Tribune, p. 1, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Brendan Gill, said, "Forum tells a story, but not in terms of characters. It's a show without characters. It basically uses vaudeville techniques. And Shevelove originally wanted it in front of an olio."[1]

Sondheim is a great fan of the libretto of Forum. He thinks that people don't give sufficient credit to it.

> We worked on the show over a period of four years. It took Larry and Burt eleven complete and distinct separate drafts, and everybody thinks that it was whipped up over a weekend because it plays so easily. The plotting is intricate, the dialogue is never anachronistic, and there are only two or three jokes--the rest is comic situation.[2]

The action takes place in a single setting of a street in ancient Rome, containing the houses of two patricians and a brothel. There is a small cast of stock comic characters out of Roman farces. They are the cunning slave, the painfully honest young virgin, the lovesick young man, the lecherous old man, the domineering wife, the hysterical slave, the befuddled old man, the avaricious pimp, and the braggart warrior.

Sondheim's first complete score for a Broadway show won approval. He claims that, while writing the score, he was rebelling against the kind of writing he had learned from Oscar Hammerstein II. "There were other ways to write shows outside the Rodgers and Hammerstein tradition."[3] He

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[1]"Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim," videotape, 2 June 1975.

[2]Quoted in Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 79.

[3]Ibid.

found it most difficult since he had been trained to use songs solely for dramatic purposes, unlike other songwriters who received their training in revue or nightclub work in which a song must be its own entity without having to relate to anything around it.[1] Forum, said Sondheim, "is about 'let's sing about this moment'--an old fashioned concept but a highly sophisticated form."[2] Sondheim feels that the show is experimental. Shevelove, however, convinced Sondheim that the show would become tedious without the songs. He said,

> Without the songs, the show would become relentless. It would exhaust you and you wouldn't get any breathers, any savoring of certain moments. . . . When Steve first started, he only wanted to write songs integrated into the show that would advance the plot and increase your knowledge of the characters. I tried to tell him that the songs don't have to do that. Plays have breathers, too, and in Forum the songs can be respites.[3]

The show is not really a musical-comedy version of the Plautine comedies as is generally believed. In Plautus there was about twice as much music as dialogue; here the ratio is reversed.[4]

Variety said that Sondheim's score contained overly clever words and "music, which seems not so melodic as

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Sondheim interview, "Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim."

[3]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 77.

[4]Simon, "Theatre."

serviceable in terms of comic situation."[1] Leonard Hoffman in The Hollywood Reporter felt that Sondheim's score was "not of top calibre."[2] However, he said the standout numbers were "Everybody Ought to Have a Maid," a comedy quartet number "which rings the bell; 'Impossible,' and a diverting song done by Ruth Kobart, 'That Dirty Old Man.'"[3]

John Simon in Theatre Arts said Sondheim "has written his customary dapper and pointed lyrics."[4] He continued to discuss Sondheim's debut as a composer:

> Mr. Sondheim strives too hard for unconventional melodic lines which end up not as lines at all but as tonal pointillism. Still, there is much to be said for seeking the new, and at least three songs, "Comedy Tonight," "Love, I Hear," and "Lovely," seemed to me altogether pleasing.[5]

Walter Kerr summed up the composer's work:

> Composer Stephen Sondheim begins by giving his lightfooted fools some rather odd recitative as substitute for melody and some vaguely Oriental wood-block effects as substitute for lively accompaniment. You wonder. Then, with a foursome in which Mr. Mostel, Mr. Burns, Mr. Gilford and a borrowed scarecrow named John Carradine, take off to a tune called "Everybody Ought to Have a Maid," the odd figurations Mr. Sondheim is attracted to begin to pay off. There's a faint edge of musical sarcasm to be dealt with here, and it crops up again--most effectively--in "I'm Calm," "Impossible," "That Dirty Old Man,"

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[1]Hobe Morrison, "A Funny Thing," Variety, 10 May 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Leonard Hoffman, "New York Play," Hollywood Reporter, 9 May 1962, p. 3.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Simon, "Theatre," p. 67. [5]Ibid.

> and in Mr. Mostel's swooning reprise of a number that was mocking in the first place, "Lovely." The score is in and out, but wins out. The lyrics are fine.[1]

The reaction of the critics to Sondheim's score was good, with some dissent. His music was not as highly praised as his lyrics, the notices suggesting that he doesn't write "hummable" tunes. George Oppenheimer in Newsday praised him highly.

> Mr. Sondheim's debut is a happy one. He has entered into the spirit of the occasion by writing, for the most part, songs that match the humor and lyrics that heighten it. He has contrived, while the comedians weren't looking, to insert a charming love song, "Lovely," although Mr. Mostel promptly appropriates it from the lovers and sings it to the reluctantly feminized Mr. Gilford in one of the more uninhibitedly hilarious moments of the play. He has also succeeded in making his comedy numbers not only comic, a feat in itself, but pleasantly tuneful. "Comedy Tonight," "Pretty as a Picture," "Everybody Ought to Have a Maid," "Impossible" and others, on first hearing, both impressed and amused me. Musically Mr. Sondheim's score is better than promising; lyrically it is witty and satiric and every bit as helpful as the book in characterizing the people and progressing the plot.[2]

Of the songs, the most difficult for Sondheim to write was "Pretty as a Picture." He referred to it as "an intricate, tricky lyric that I worked on for over a year."[3]

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[1]Walter Kerr, "A Funny Thing . . .," New York Herald Tribune, 9 May 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]George Oppenheimer, "I Come to Praise," Newsday, 6 May 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Quoted by Bruce Bahrenburg, "The Sound of Sondheim," Performing Arts: The Music Center Monthly 5, no. 10 (October 1971): 33.

His personal favorites from the show were "Free" and "Impossible."[1] Another lyric that he likes was cut out in New Haven. It is "The Echo Song," which was put back into the show during the 1972 revival. It uses a specific technique, Sondheim says, that "isn't often taken advantage of on the stage." Philia is asking her gods whether she should go off with Hero, or keep her promise to marry someone else. She believes she is hearing the genuine reply of the gods only when it comes back in the form of an echo. Hero rigs it so that he himself, concealed, is providing the echoing answers (which appear below in parentheses) to Philia's questions as she sings:

> Tell me. (Tell me.)
> Dare I ask it? (Ask it.)
>
> Should I love him? (Love him.)
>
> Shall I leave with him? (Leave with him, leave with him.)
>
> Tell me. (Tell me.)
>
> Should I leave right now? (Right now.)
>
> I hear my heart say, "Let him live with me. (Live with me, live with me.)
>
> Should I hear my heart and go? (Go! Go! Go!)
>
> O should I, worthy, wait here
>
> Till I meet my fate here?
>
> Tell me, tell me, I must know. (No! No! No!)
>
> Tell me. (Tell me.)
>
> Should I hold him (Hold him.)

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[1] Ibid.

Or forget him (Get him.)

And forego my love? (Go, my love, go, my love!)

Thank you, (Thank you.)

I believe now! (Leave now!)

I must hurry (Hurry!)

So I'll say goodbye. (Say goodbye! Say goodbye!)

Only one more question please. (Please, please, please!)

Does he want me? (Does he!)

Would he miss me? (Would he!)

Must I pay the debt I owe? (Oh...oh...oh)

Or may I go with Hero,

My beloved Hero,

Tell me yes so I may know.

(No-Ye-N-Yes!)[1]

Forum opened at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven on March 31, 1962 to unenthusiastic reviews. Variety was not completely negative but questioned whether audiences would "find it to their liking."[2] Much of the material that Abbott had cut out was put back into the show because the writers felt that a good deal of the fun had been lost.

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[1]Stephen Sondheim, "Theatre Lyrics," in Playwrights, Lyricists, Composers on Theatre, ed. Otis L. Guernsey, Jr. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1964), pp. 81-82. Stephen Sondheim, "The Echo Song," copyright 1971 by Stephen Sondheim, Burthen Music Co.

[2]Harold Bone, "Shows Out of Town," Variety, 3 April 1962, p. 86.

The complications of all the various plots and subplots were reinstated.

Finally, the ingenue and juvenile were recast. Preshy Marker and Brian Davies replaced Karen Black and Pat Fox. Prince was not happy with the casting:

> Somewhere earlier I had brought in a girl and boy, namely Barbara Harris and Joel Grey, and I was laughed out of that audition. The point that I was trying to make was that the two young people should have been terribly comic. I still think I was right and if I was doing the show today, that's the way I'd do it. They would probably still fight me, but I'd win. Let's put it this way, in those days they were happy with me just as a producer. And I think I was a good one.[1]

In Washington, D.C., the show opened at the National Theatre with a benefit performance for government officials, which Prince believes was not a good idea.

> They began to walk out on us soon after the curtain went up. By the bows we'd lost over 50% of them. The reviews reflected it. Richard Coe, of the Washington Post, perhaps the most influential and respected of the critics, suggested closing it.[2]

Coe wrote, "It's not a bad idea to have an intimate little musical from an old Roman farce, but a good deal more steam will be needed to reassure you that you haven't wandered into amateur night."[3]

The collaborators thought that the audience did not know how to react to the show, but they did not know the

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 80.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 94.

[3]Richard L. Coe., "A Thin Night in Old Rome," Washington Post, 11 April 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

remedy. Although audiences remained small and the press had advised them to close the show, Prince remained firm in his determination.

> I think my biggest contribution to the show was that I was very sure about it. When the whole world's falling apart, you should have somebody who's sure. I never doubted for one minute that the show would be a smash in New York. The problems were all with the authors--they weren't getting along very well at that point. Steve needed somebody else to tell him what to do. Namely, Jerry Robbins.[1]

Prince believes that in a situation like this one he has to move decisively and without fear. He felt he knew what to do and he didn't waver. Many of his collaborators agree, saying that Prince, once he decides what must be done, has the courage of his convictions. Robbins, who had been scheduled to direct the show, now came down to Washington as "play doctor." The problem for him was the opening number. "Love Is in the Air" did not tell the audiences what the show would be about. "Up until now, we'd thought A Funny Thing was about love being in the air, but of course it wasn't," said Prince.[2] Robbins felt that the audiences did not realize that they were about to see a low comedy and were not prepared to laugh. At Robbins' suggestion, Sondheim was asked to write another opening number. "So one weekend in Washington I wrote 'Comedy Tonight.' Jerry staged it over the next week (along with restaging several

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 81.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 94.

other musical numbers in the show and reblocking the end chase scene)," said Sondheim.[1] On the night of the first preview in New York with the new opening, the audience reaction changed. Robbins was not credited in the program as is customary with play doctors. It is common knowledge, however, that his ideas had a most important impact on the production. Furthermore, he and Abbott got along together compatibly.

Jack Cole created the few dances in Forum. There was no dance chorus. As Taubman said in the New York Times, "There is choreography by Jack Cole--it says here--but not much."[2] One of the scenes that he staged was an amusing funeral sequence and dance.

The settings and costumes were designed by Tony Walton. Sondheim pointed out that abstract slide projections were used in Forum but that nobody really noticed them. They were utilized as mood pieces.[3] Walton and Richard Pilbrow worked out a lighting design that made the set look larger than it was.

> They built two towers on either side of the stage from which they projected on a cyclorama upstage dozens of changing abstract images, one enhancing

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 81.

[2]Howard Taubman, "Theatre: A Funny Thing Happened . . . ," New York Times, 9 May 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]"Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim," videotape.

> a love song, another emphasizing the midday madness of scenes, tranquilizing, exhilarating, keeping pace with the busy moods of the show. Walton had to handpaint on glass slides, which were then distorted by Pilbrow in London so that as they were cast at an angle of forty-five degrees; the distortion compensated for the distance they covered. It was involved and expensive, and worth it.[1]

Forum was capitalized at $300,000 and opened at a cost of $240,000. It opened at the Alvin Theatre in New York on May 8, 1962 after eight previews. According to an article in the New York Herald Tribune, director Abbott "called a rehearsal hours after the opening night cast party ended. He made one change in the second act and that was all. The show is now set."[2]

The reviews in New York were mostly good except for John Chapman of the New York Daily News, who in Prince's words "loathed" the show.[3] It was a late season opening and there was an advance of only $40,000. However, within two months it began selling out.

Richard Watts, Jr. in the New York Post said:

> The new musical comedy which opened last night at the Alvin Theatre makes no pretenses of subtlety, delicacy or lavishness, and it can lay no claim to distinction of story, song or choreography. It is simply a burlesque show with a pseudoclassic Roman setting and a firm conviction that pace and simple basic humor are important to farce. But

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 95.

[2]"A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," New York Herald Tribune, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 95.

> the fact remains that, in its shameless fashion, it is downright hilarious.[1]

Jerry Tallmer in the Village Voice liked the show and thought Abbott deserved special notice for his work as director. He praised "his talent for timing, and his talent for talent."[2]

Walter Kerr in the New York Herald Tribune summed up the sentiments of most critics:

> There aren't many girls and there isn't much scenery and you've got to like the permutations and combinations of what may be described as classical corn in order to relish the simple nonsense to the full. But the nonsense is true nonsense as the zanies are true zanies, and I find it kindly of director George Abbott to have given us an admittedly lowbrow and unpretentiously merry good time once again.[3]

Forum won the Tony Award as best musical of 1962, and it was recorded by Capitol Records. A revival of the show was presented in 1972 with Phil Silvers playing the role that had been written for him, with Burt Shevelove directing. Although the reviews were even better the second time around, Prince believes that the production "wasn't nearly as good."[4] However, Sondheim's music was better received. As Shevelove explained:

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[1]Richard Watts, Jr., "Riotous Life of the Old Romans," New York Post, 9 May 1962, p. 76.

[2]Jerry Tallmer, "Comedy Tonight," Village Voice, 17 May 1962, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Kerr, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum."

[4]Prince, Contradictions, p. 96.

> Steve is a child of his times, and in expressing himself, he is not being derivative, as most composers are. You see, the critics and audiences were startled originally that a play following Rodgers and Hammerstein and all their descendants could be written so abstractly as Forum. But when they came to see it again, they didn't mind the abstraction because they knew what to expect. Audiences go to the theater preconditioned. They didn't laugh at the lyrics originally, mainly because of the music. Most of the time when you write a comic song you put it to a very simple melody so that the lyrics shine out. Well, Steve's music is a little tricky. Today, we hear the music more easily because our ears have changed and the lyrics seem much funnier when the music is easier to comprehend.[1]

The film version of Forum had Silvers in the role of Lycus and it was directed by Richard Lester. The writers of the Broadway show disliked it because it contained new story lines and many of the original musical numbers were deleted. They felt that the continuity of style had been lost. The film lacked the simplicity that the stage production had achieved with its one set and sixteen characters.

Forum is played all over the world and is constantly revived by stock and amateur groups in the U.S. Prince had contributed a great deal towards making the show a success in the guise of producer. But he was now more interested than ever in directing.

She Loves Me

Prince received an assignment to direct a New York State touring production of The Matchmaker in the fall of

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 87.

1962 for the Phoenix Repertory. The project helped to hone his directing skills and to develop further his credibility as a director. When Abbott saw it, he said, "It's time you directed for Broadway. Your apprentice days are over.[1]

David Merrick agreed and asked Prince to direct the musical which would later become known as Hello, Dolly! (at first called Dolly! A Damned Exasperating Woman), which was based on the Thornton Wilder play. Prince decided against doing the show. "I didn't care for the score, particularly the song 'Hello, Dolly!'. I couldn't for the life of me see why those waiters were singing how glad they were to have her back where she belonged, when she'd never been there in the first place."[2] Instead of directing Hello, Dolly!, a big, lavish-style musical, Prince chose to direct and co-produce (in association with Laurence N. Kasha and silent partner Philip C. McKenna) She Loves Me, a charming, romantic show which songwriter Jerry Bock called "one of the smallest musical shows on Broadway . . . featuring a small cast of actor/singers [7 principal characters, 20 lesser roles, and 12 other persons], an orchestra consisting mainly of strings as opposed to brass. There would be no lavish production numbers and only a small smattering of dance."[3]

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[1]Buckley, "Prince vs. Prince," p. 3.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 99.

[3]Milt Freudenheim, "'She Loves Me' Has Pair Excited," Miami Herald-Chicago Newswire, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Kasha had initiated the idea of adapting this Broadway musical from Ernst Lubitsch's film, The Shop Around the Corner, which had starred Margaret Sullavan and James Stewart and had been based on the Hungarian play, Parfumerie by Miklos Laszlo. In 1949, MGM had also made The Shop Around the Corner into a screen musical, In the Good Old Summertime, starring Judy Garland and Van Johnson. Kasha thought he had obtained the rights from MGM and brought Bock, Harnick and the writer Joe Masteroff together. As the project got underway, MGM reneged. Masteroff believes that the movie company thought the score and book writers weren't important enough to do the adaptation and they asked Prince to help. Prince was able to get MGM to release the rights.

The songwriting team, Bock and Harnick, attempted with the score to keep the intimacy of the original '40s Lubitsch movie. A "terrible semi-musical version made later by MGM with Judy Garland and Van Johnson has been avoided," said Harnick.[1] They wrote fewer songs but more music than is contained in the usual 12- to 15-song musical. Harnick felt that this was part of a trend.[2] Bock explained, "It's a way of getting more closely involved in the show's book . . . taking up the briefest possible moment if there's a part of a song idea in it . . . instead of just looking for the rounded song."[3] Harnick summed up their intent to keep the show small by comparing it (without directly saying so)

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

to the score for Hello Dolly!. "We have ignored any temptation to take it out of the store and go to downtown Budapest where a parade might be passing by."[1] In their contemporary treatment of this period piece, they wrote 30 or 35 songs, of which 24 remained in the show. Many numbers were written on the road.

Masteroff wrote the libretto or script as a straight play. Then he, Bock and Harnick worked out the spots for the songs. They never had a battle. Masteroff said, "I happen to feel the music is more important than the book. If you don't feel that way you can't possibly work on a musical. . . . The songs came so naturally, there was only a little adjustment needed. I never did a major rewrite job."[2]

Originally, the producers, Kasha and McKenna, had wanted Gower Champion to direct She Loves Me. Champion, however, had another show to do and asked them to wait for him. Harnick recalls:

> None of us wanted to wait. So, roughly we said no. Then when we started to think who we did want, we thought of Hal. We had worked with Hal on two shows as the producer, and we liked him, and we also had seen his production of the straight play The Matchmaker. And we had also seen the remarkable job he had done when he was called in to help a show that was in trouble--the Kander/Ebb/Goldman A Family Affair. We were very impressed with what Hal had

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Leonard Harris, "'She Loves Me' Scribe Sticks His Neck Out," New York World-Telegram and Sun, 20 April 1963, p. 10.

> accomplished in those things. And we knew that Hal wanted to do it. We said, let's take a chance on it . . . let's gamble. And Hal was delighted. Just before we signed the contract, Gower Champion called and said the other show he had planned to do had fallen through and he was now available and would like to do She Loves Me.[1]

Prince offered to step aside feeling he, as a novice director, was not recognized as being in the same league as Champion, who had successfully staged Bye Bye Birdie and Carnival. The writers called a hasty meeting.

> We thought, let's go with Hal . . . we can't take it away from him. And also, suddenly there was something very exciting about the idea of working with this very gifted man, even though it was an unknown quantity. I now believe that if Champion had done it it wouldn't have worked at all. Or, to put it another way, it would have changed direction so totally that I probably would have been fired. I don't think I could have worked with him because watching his shows subsequently, I grew less and less enamored of Champion in terms of the kind of musicals I like. I felt that Champion was cold and technical and funny. Omitting 42nd Street which I loved, I didn't like a lot of the work he did and I don't think I could have worked with him.[2]

Prince has always appreciated the loyalty of his collaborators on She Loves Me for providing him his first opportunity to direct a Broadway musical. When Prince started working on the project, the writing was basically completed. He thought it was wonderful and asked for relatively minor changes.[3] What he asked for, according to Masteroff, "was a good deal of trivial dialogue to be written in the shop

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[1]Harnick interview. [2]Ibid.

[3]Interview with Joe Masteroff, New York, 14 June 1982.

scenes. He felt more comfortable having that to use so that people coming into the shop had their own lines."[1] Masteroff noted that Prince already had strong ideas. One was his feeling about not using stars as box-office insurance. Masteroff said:

> It was the first time I ran into Hal's feelings about stars. Julie Andrews was quite anxious to do She Loves Me. We were going to do it in the spring of 1963 and she said if we could wait until the fall of 1963 she would do it. Hal didn't think it was that important to wait for her and so went with Barbara Cook. Part of his feeling was that stars were really not very vital--that if you have a good show to start with, it didn't matter. This is one case where perhaps it might have mattered commercially. I don't know.[1]

Prince wrote honestly about his decision not to wait for Julie Andrews until she completed the film The Americanization of Emily. He was in a hurry to work, but says, "Julie Andrews would have overridden the sugary reviews. Had I waited six months, the show might have run three years."[2]

Most of the action of She Loves Me takes place in a smart shop in a Middle European city which closely resembles Budapest in the '30s. The shop sells perfumes, cosmetics and bonbons in music boxes. The shop is owned by Mr. Maraczek (Ludwig Donath), who employs Amalia Balash (Barbara Cook) and Georg Nowack (Daniel Massey). The latter

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 100.

two are not aware that for months they have been writing anonymous love letters to each other via a lonelyhearts situation. They bicker and fight in the shop but, through their letter writing, they have fallen in love. Eventually Georg arranges to meet his love at the Cafe Imperiale. Georg now learns the true identity of his mystery love, but he doesn't tell Amalia. Amalia, not realizing that the Georg from the shop is also "her" Georg, asks him to leave her alone. Eventually Amalia leaves the restaurant, sadly believing that her loving correspondent has failed to show up. At the final curtain, however, romance triumphs over everyday antagonism and it all ends happily.

Parallel plots concern the aging owner of the shop, Mr. Maraczek, and his toubles with his faithless wife, and an affair between two of the other clerks in the shop. One, Mr. Kodaly (Jack Cassidy), is a Don Juan who, Richard P. Cooke in the Wall Street Journal suggests, "might pass for a blond wax imitation of John Barrymore and who proves false to the ladies but quite true to the art of stage satire. Played by Jack Cassidy, Mr. Kodaly is an engaging lampoon on the manners of ladies' men of all ages."[1] Miss Ritter, played by Barbara Baxley, is a gullible clerk who succumbs to Kodaly's charms but gives him up for a loyal optometrist. Rounding out the cast is a teenage delivery boy ambitious to

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[1]Richard P. Cooke, "Superior Confection," Wall Street Journal, 25 April 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

become a full-fledged salesperson, and a company yes-man played by Nathaniel Frey.

Prince cast the show with the idea of using people who were equally gifted as actors as they were as singers. He was rewarded with excellent notices for all of them. Barbara Cook, a familiar face in musicals, had been last seen in The Gay Life a season earlier. Her brilliant voice, looks and talent won her raves from the critics in the role of Amalia. Richard Watts, Jr. in the New York Post said, "Miss Cook is a constant joy. She makes the shopgirl wonderfully appealing, playing her scenes of humor and emotion delightfully and singing charmingly, and, when she goes into a moment of exultance in a number called 'Ice Cream' she is what can only be described as terrific."[1]

Norman Nadel in the New York World-Telegram and Sun said:

> The expression "sings her heart out" certainly applies to Miss Cook, who has both the heart and voice to do it. Her clear soprano is not only one of the finest vocal instruments in the contemporary musical theater, but it conveys all the vitality, brightness and strength of her feminine young personality which is plenty.[2]

They had some trouble casting the male lead for She Loves Me, auditioning just about every young male singing

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[1]Richard Watts, Jr., "Refreshing New Musical Comedy," New York Post, 24 April 1963, p. 66.

[2]Norman Nadel, "'She Loves Me' Opens at O'Neill Theater," New York World-Telegram and Sun, 24 April 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

lead in the country. The problem was the shyness of Georg, a boy who had written for months and months to a "dear friend" without ever having the courage to meet her. "Somehow," said Masteroff, "we couldn't get an American who could convince an audience that he was shy. At the last moment, we thought of Massey (the son of Raymond Massey), who lives in England. We paid his fare, took a chance, and he was just what we wanted."[1]

Massey, one of England's most popular stars, was received well in the role. Nadel said, "He has poise, he has voice (listen to him sing the title song), he can act and he can charm a bird, Miss Cook and the audience off a tree."[2] Howard Taubman in the New York Times said Massey was a perfect fit for this type of show. He is "awkward and shy and disarming as the hero."[3] The other cast members also received positive comments from the critics. Barbara Baxley was commended for her work in the musical. She had been known mainly as a straight actress. Edward Sothern Hipp in the Newark Evening News said, "Barbara Baxley, an established comedienne in straight plays, moves over to a different medium and handles her songs with the best of them."[4]

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[1]Harris, "'She Loves Me' Scribe Sticks His Neck Out," p. 10.

[2]Nadel, "'She Loves Me' Opens at O'Neill Theater."

[3]Howard Taubman, "Theatre: 'She Loves Me,' A Musical," New York Times, 24 April 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[4]Edward Sothern Hipp, "'She Loves Me' Darling Musical," Newark Evening News, 24 April 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Jack Cassidy was commended for his portrayal of the shop cad and ladies' man who makes his big mistake by dallying with the boss' wife. His show-stopping numbers included "Grand Knowing You," which he did with great flair as he left the shop after being fired, and the duet "Ilona," which he sang with Baxley. In this number, Miss Ritter "registers exquisite and hilarious pain at being simultaneously seduced and traduced."[1] Nadel liked Cassidy's voice in particular and said, "his sense of humor is another welcome value."[2] Masteroff said that they wrote a part that was the late Jack Cassidy. "He played himself, and played beautifully."[3] Ludwig Donath was well received as the shop-owner, including his rendition of the nostalgic waltz, "Days Gone By."

Prince had difficulties with the actors. He has said that they made his life miserable by continuously challenging and questioning him. He was naturally insecure in this, his first directorial effort, not having established credibility with the actors as a director. He had not had the same problem with A Family Affair because the actors in that show were

> so desperate for help. . . . I am trusted now. I can be as scared on the first day of rehearsal as

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[1]George Oppenheimer, "On Stage," Newsday, 1 May 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Nadel, "'She Loves Me' Opens at O'Neill Theater."

[3]Masteroff interview.

> I was then, but it is different. My record gives them the confidence they need. Actors test directors, much as children do parents, to see how far they can go (often they don't know where they want to go), to see how protected they are. . . . Today I can go dry, waste a day working in the wrong direction. All I have to do is admit it. Invariably it works to my advantage, giving the relationship the mutuality rehearsing requires. . . . In 1963 I didn't know that. I knew only to stay strong.[1]

The only actor that Masteroff remembers as being difficult was Barbara Baxley. "She was famously difficult with every director. Prince handled her in the right way and she proved to be not too troublesome. As far as I could ever see, she seemed to be quite happy--to like Hal a lot and I think they had a good relationship."[2]

Harnick remembers some of the problems with Baxley.

> Barbara was not used to working the way Hal worked. She was an Actors Studio actress . . . a method actress. At first she said it was difficult, but she learned how to work with Hal. Ultimately, she loved the working relationship with him.[3]

Masteroff said that his relationship with Prince while working on She Loves Me was a good one. If this was a frightening time for Prince it did not get in the way of the director's working relationship with his collaborators. Masteroff recalled:

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 100.

[2]Masteroff interview.

[3]Harnick interview.

> I think we all got along wonderfully. He didn't want me to come to rehearsals as he was staging the book. I could understand it; . . . he was feeling insecure and preferred for me to stay away. When he had something to show, I would come in and he would show it to me. I thought in every case what he was doing was terrific. I don't recall that we had any disagreements about any aspect of the show. . . . and I thought that finally, when the show was put together, it was glorious! That what he was doing was terrific. I just loved the look of it, the feel of it, everything about it.[1]

Prince in his first major directing assignment was discovering there was much to learn about putting a show together. He said, "I knew the effect I wanted in She Loves Me but I didn't know how to achieve it."[2] One of the things he attempted was to keep a fresh eye on the total play. He had learned from both Abbott and Robbins that a director can direct good scenes but that is not the whole story. It is important for a director to have an overview. Prince said, "Abbott and Robbins know from beginning to end what the evening is going to be. They may not know details along the way, but they see the total."[3]

Harnick didn't watch Prince's staging very often. He does remember, however, that in many ways he was a lot like Abbott.

> Abbott had a way of telling you he didn't like something but in the most flattering terms. Hal

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[1]Masteroff interview.

[2]"On Craft," New York Times, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 101.

> has his own way of injecting a director/writer relationship with excitement. And with a wonderful feeling that you're going to come up with something absolutely wonderful and that when you do he is the best audience that you will have because he understands every nuance and he is wonderfully appreciative because he himself is so talented, so sensitive. You feel when you've done a song that he likes that you can do anything! He does create an ambiance in which there's excitement and it's fun to explore and work.[1]

Carol Haney, who had played in The Pajama Game, choreographed She Loves Me. Prince liked her imagination and wit as well as her ability to keep seeing the entire production. Prince felt the show needed a modest approach and Haney's ego did not get in the way of her creating the right movement in response to her director's vision. As George Oppenheimer said, "There are no ballets, not even a chorus in this intimate musical and they are not missed. Carol Haney has staged the numbers with humor and grace."[2] The numbers she did stage were a great asset to the show. These included the staging of Christmas Eve with last-minute shoppers fully clothed in their hats and coats, and a "fast, funny" fandango in the romantic cafe.[3] The latter was a triumph not only for Haney but for Prince in its satirizing of the romantic cafe so familiar to Viennese operettas.

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[1]Harnick interview.

[2]Oppenheimer, "On Stage."

[3]Sandra Schmidt, "She Loves Me," Village Voice, 2 May 1963, p. 12, NYPL Clipping Folder.

John Chapman said it "offers a hilarious travesty on restaurant owners and gypsy violinists."[1] Howard Taubman aptly described the scene:

> "A Romantic Atmosphere" is the musical's most ambitious production number. Set in a cafe which is nervously intent on making good its promise to be a lovers' rendezvous, this scene builds with humor and sentiment. Dialogue, song, staging and performance join in creating a diverting and charming atmosphere as well as furthering the story.[2]

Henry Hewes wrote that this scene in the cafe, which comes at the end of the first act, is an obvious example of the way Prince, through the disciplined use of several techniques in the show, manages to both spoof conventionally romantic cliches, and still fill the show "with all the rich Mittel-European pastry-stuffing of a bygone day."[3] Hewes added,

> The most obvious of these techniques is a spoofing of conventionally romantic cliches, best exemplified near the end of the first act in a number titled, "A Romantic Atmosphere," which is sung by a restaurant manager as he tries to preserve his ridiculously ersatz combination of candlelight and gypsy fiddles. . . . Every time he is on the verge of achieving his goal, the magic mood is shattered by an awkward busboy, or by a pair of customers whose romantic progress

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[1]John Chapman, "She Loves Me," New York Daily News, 24 April 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Howard Taubman, "Discipline of Taste," New York Times, 5 May 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Henry Hewes, "She Loves Me," Saturday Review, 11 May 1963, p. 26. NYPL Clipping Folder.

> is not proceeding with prescribed fairy-tale smoothness.[1]

She Loves Me played its out-of-town tryout in New Haven at the Shubert Theatre, opening on March 18, 1963. Harold Bone from Variety said, "There is much to commend this effort as pleasant theatrical fare."[2] He went on to write that

> A thread of charm runs throughout the show as a group of personable characters weave in and out of the action. She Loves Me could well be a welcome change of pace from the brassy, rapid-fire musicals of recent vintage. . . . William and Jean Eckart in their up-to-the-second stage techniques have done an outstanding job of designing a set that has players and settings melding in a fluid manner that promotes smooth story flow. . . . Harold Prince's staging has set a happy pace.[3]

Bone also commented on the fact that there was no standard overture, the play proceeding into vocal action after only a few orchestral bars.

Prince commented on the Eckart sets. "There is more scenery than in any other musical I've ever done. You don't notice it, watching the performance. But it's there. . . . It's a heavy show."[4]

A reviewer with the initials F.R.J. in the New Haven Journal Courier said, "She Loves Me is a musical constructed

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Harold Bone, "She Loves Me," Variety, 20 March 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Ibid.

[4]William Bender, "Musical of Gentle Love and Heady Perfume," New York Herald Tribune, 21 April 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

along 'light opera' lines with recitations alternating with the singing of long songs which sub for dialogue. . . . Often an air of gentle humor pervades the work but there are no big moments for spontaneous laughter for the audience."[1]

The show went on to the Forrest Theatre in Philadelphia. There, Ernest Schier in the Evening Bulletin felt the potential of the musical is "nipped in the bud by a dry, overly literal treatment."[2]

Henry T. Murdock in the Philadelphia Inquirer was disappointed that the "show was short on novelty and surprise. . . . it never gets up on its toes and dances . . . no rousing ensembles appear to shake it from its well-mannered lethargy."[3] He went on to say that it did have many other attributes, a large number of them contributed by Barbara Cook. He wished it had just a few more.

Jerry Gaghan in the Philadelphia Daily News wrote that it was an amiable evening, but felt that "added lift would help."[4]

Prince has felt for a long time that "the level of criticism was dangerous"[5] in Philadelphia and avoids trying

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[1]F.R.J., "She Loves Me," New Haven Journal Courier, 19 March 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ernest Schier, "She Loves Me," Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 27 March 1963, p. 30, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Henry T. Murdock, "She Loves Me," Philadelphia Inquirer, 27 March 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[4]Jerry Gaghan, "She Loves Me," Philadelphia Daily News, 27 March 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[5]Prince, Contradictions, p. 12.

out his shows there when possible. Critics in Philadelphia encouraged audiences to support the wrong shows. They were not truly discerning. When She Loves Me played there, it was Tovarich that did the business.

There were six public previews in New York before opening night. She Loves Me opened on April 23, 1962 at the 1046-seat Eugene O'Neill Theatre and was capitalized at $300,000. Prince considered the Ziegfeld Theatre, where weekly receipts if the show was a hit might reach $75,000. He decided that his romantic love story set in a prewar Budapest perfume shop would be lost in so vast an auditorium so he reluctantly booked the smaller Eugene O'Neill--with a potential gross of $57,000 weekly. Later he admitted that he "overestimated the importance of the size of the theatre on the play's effectiveness."[1]

> There's no question but that there is a kind of play that needs an intimate theatre, but that intimacy exists only Off-Broadway or in the Booth Theatre and is common to England and the Continent. Excepting the D. H. Lawrence plays at the Royal Court, I know of nothing that could not be transferred painlessly from a six hundred seat house to a twelve hundred seat house. She Loves Me played wonderfully in the O'Neill, but it would have played equally well in a theatre half again as large, and we would have made up on Wednesday matiness, on Friday and Saturday nights, what we lost on Mondays and Tuesdays, and doubled our run on Broadway.[2]

Prince followed Abbott's practice of requesting modest billing in the ads and Playbill. When he was asked

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[1]Ibid., p. 102. [2]Ibid.

if his billing, which was only half the size of the supporting players, was unusually modest, Prince replied: "If the show is a success people will know who produced and directed it. If it isn't, you look silly. Anyhow, I'm not going to have my name bigger than George Abbott has his when he's directing."[1]

She Loves Me received excellent reviews from the New York critics with the exception of Walter Kerr, writing for the Herald Tribune. Prince explained about Kerr that "he likes his musicals to punch, and this didn't."[2] Kerr said of the show: "It will have no truck with dancing girls, production numbers, extra scenery, or--for that matter--jokes."[3] He did not care for the Masteroff book either.

Taubman in the New York Times was quite taken with the show.

> The humors of She Loves Me are gentle rather than robust. The characters are the familiar figures of happily bittersweet fairy tales; yet they have individuality and charm. You keep thinking that you cannot digest an array of desserts, no matter how attractive and tasty they are, but you find yourself relishing nearly all of them in She Loves Me. . . . The secret is this: Everyone concerned with She Loves Me has played fair with the basic ingredients.[4]

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[1]Buckley, "Prince vs. Prince," p. 3.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 100.

[3]Walter Kerr, "She Loves Me," New York Herald Tribune, 24 April 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[4]Taubman, "Theatre: 'She Loves Me,' A Musical."

Martin Gottfried in Women's Wear Daily described the show as a "musical that takes a little while to get used to, especially after a long and steady diet of up-and-at-em, razzle-dazzle shows. It grows steadily and blossoms forth in its second act as a rare and lovely thing."[1] And in the Wall Street Journal, Richard P. Cooke said:

> It starts off in bright operetta style, the settings are lovely, the people lively and talented. But as it goes along and the audience bites deeper into it, so to speak, it is found that there is substance and flavor not often discovered in such entertainments. . . . There is not only a fine lyric quality about many of the songs and situations, but there is satire, and there is intelligence and inventiveness.[2]

Hobe Morrison, the critic for Variety, said that the show "looks deceptively simple, for it's an intimate, informal production with a relatively small cast, a single basic revolving set and not elaborate costuming. However, it requires the rare qualities of skill and taste and humor."[3]

Almost every critic complimented Prince, the director, on his "unfailing good taste,"[4] and for presenting a show that is "expert and professional."[5]

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[1]Martin Gottfried, "She Loves Me," Women's Wear Daily, 24 April 1963, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Cooke, "Superior Confection."

[3]Hobe Morrison, "She Loves Me," Variety, 1 May 1963, p. 86, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[4]Chapman, "She Loves Me."

[5]Watts, "Refreshing New Musical Comedy."

Henry Hewes, writing for the Saturday Review, explained that the musical was not really a spoof as some writers had suggested. He points out that Prince managed the difficult feat of both poking gentle fun at the conventional romantic cliches that inhabited the musical theatre ("the falling in love of two appealing innocents is an outmoded and not essentially truthful representation of life"[1]) and yet kept the romantic aura of a "bygone day." Hewes concludes that the show "manages to have its strudel and eat it, too."[2]

Howard Taubman did a follow-up story in the New York Times a week after the show opened and praised the people who made She Loves Me for their courage in remaining faithful to its fragile nature.

> It's a rare musical that denies itself the luxury of a blockbusting production number merely because it does not belong. Such self-restraint requires the discipline of good taste as well as confidence in the integrity of one's work. In the end it is also good business, for the public, less complicated and wiser than the calculating merchandisers of entertainment realize, has an instinct for what fits and what does not.[3]

Taubman went on to suggest that the show was bound to thrive because it did not pretend to be what it is not, and because the creators refused to violate the essential nature of their subject. But Taubman was wrong. The public

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[1]Hewes, "She Loves Me." [2]Ibid.

[3]Taubman, "Discipline of Taste."

didn't come to see the show in spite of the wonderful reviews. Prince was confused as to why it didn't draw audiences. "I have given it more thought than I like to give projects after the fact."[1] He finally decided that the main reasons it did not run more than nine and a half months and was never made into a movie was because "it was a style piece, an unsentimental love story. It had irony and edge to it. It was funny, but not hilarious. It was melodic, but not soaring. There were only two dances, and they were small. No one came to the edge of the footlights and gave it to you. It was soft-sell."[2] Prince still believes that She Loves Me is one of the best things his office has done, and "as far as I'm concerned, it's as well directed as anything I've ever done."[3]

After 302 performances, She Loves Me closed. It had been well received by critics and selected by most of them as the year's best Broadway musical. This led to some of the reviewers wondering about why a show that had been so well received didn't last. Edward Sothern Hipp in the Newark Evening News addressed himself to this.

> I do not often note at length the passing of a Broadway attraction but in the death of She Loves Me there was something to prompt anyone

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 99.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

> charmed by its delights to sit up straight and shake his head. After all those fine reviews, there was a swarming at the boxoffice and Harold Prince's entry was accepted as one of the season's few authentic hits. It was, too--for a time. But after those 302 performances did the investors gather to cut up their profits on a $300,000 production? Hardly. She Loves Me has gotten back less than $50,000 of the $300,000. . . . What is there about the economics of Broadway that seems to make it impossible for a tuneful, wholesome and unpretentious offering to compete with the blockbusters?[1]

Hipp went on to answer his own question. He felt that the show had failed because there were reminders in it of yesteryear's operettas, which however faint they may be now in a show carry the message of "death" at the boxoffice. In addition, the show's unaffected story and lack of production dance numbers probably figured into its demise. Hipp concludes that tourists are also a big part of the Broadway economic scene.

> They have their little list of shows to be seen but it has been selected with emphasis on guffaws or surface stirring. The girly-girly musical, the comedy saturated with belly-laughs, the so-called serious play in which some facet of sex is the serious problem--these are Broadway's "musts" for most out-of-towners.[2]

In recent years, Prince has become philosophical about She Loves Me. Until recently he felt that because the show lost money, it was a flop. Now, he says:

> A work is not necessarily measured in its own time properly. Success is not measured at the

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[1]Edward Sothern Hipp, "She Loves Me," Newark Evening News, 19 January 1964, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ibid.

> box office. The chances are, if you work often enough, consistently enough, some of your best work will be underestimated, some of your poorer work will get by. If you work consistently enough, it balances out.[1]

Prince in 1963 had yet to direct a big smash hit. Investors would not continue to back him as a director unless he did direct a hit. He also needed more personal reviews about his directing ability. He said: "It has been said that in the best direction you do not see the director's hand. That isn't necessarily true. Brecht was hardly unobtrusive. I was always aware of Kazan. There are projects that should not be co-authored by the director, but I felt I must find a project that begged for such authority my next time out."[2]

MGM recorded the original cast album of She Loves Me on April 28, 1963 and released it in May. The show next played in London at the Lyric Theatre, opening on April 29, 1964.

In the years 1977 to 1980, She Loves Me boasted an ever-growing but relatively select circle of devotees. It was called a "cult" musical and there were various attempts to revive it. An all-star concert version took place in Manhattan's Town Hall and a British telecast was shown repeatedly to much acclaim on public television here. A revival was mounted at Connecticut's Goodspeed Opera House and a Playwright's Horizons production was seen in the

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 102. [2]Ibid.

theatre at Flushing Meadow Park in Queens. Alvin Klein, writing for the New York Times, reviewed the latter production. Klein liked the show and spoke of how the original production was conceived by director Prince as a "soft-sell musical. . . . Nowadays, the intimate musical has become a matter of economic necessity rather than artistic invention. The creators of She Loves Me succeeded in small scale innovation per chance, not per force."[1]

Prince's first directorial project for a musical on Broadway did not become a major box-office smash. And he did not garner many personal reviews for his work. However, the show did establish him as a gifted director of taste, humor and imagination.

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[1]Alvin Klein, "She Loves Me," New York Times, 23 November 1980, Long Island section, p. 19.

CHAPTER VII

PRINCE MAKES BROADWAY HISTORY WITH FIDDLER

> Abbott influenced all of us by making us organized . . . but Jerry influenced me by being more cautious than Abbott . . . Jerry is cautious to a fault. I mean he just never goes into rehearsals--he's so damn cautious. I think that possibly a sense of pictures--stage pictures--is something I might have begun to trust in myself from watching Jerry . . . because those pictures of his are so choreographic . . . and I do like to move people that way . . . I feel very comfortable--I never know quite why. I mean why do you say to an actor--"a foot over that way"--you know--it's about space . . . It's a sense of relationships.[1]

> I try not to dope out what they [audiences] want. My theory is to do what you want and hope they go along with it. Unless you're extremely avant garde in your approach, they're likely to fall into step with you frequently enough.[2]

Fiddler on the Roof

Instead of directing another show after She Loves Me, Prince decided to produce Fiddler on the Roof, which in the words of John Chapman, became "one of the great works of the American musical theatre . . . darling, touching, beautiful, warm, funny and inspiring. . . . a work of art."[3]

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Prince interview, The Dick Cavett Show.

[3]John Chapman, "'Fiddler on the Roof' Great Musical; Zero Mostel Heads Superb Cast," New York Daily News, 23 September 1964, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 25, p. 217.

Fiddler's genesis dates back to 1960, according to the show's three creators, Jerry Bock, Sheldon Harnick and Joseph Stein. They had worked together on The Body Beautiful, and were looking for a new project. A friend of Harnick's suggested he look into Wandering Star, a novel by Sholem Aleichem, thinking there might be a musical in it. The story concerned a Yiddish theatrical troup touring Russia and the three writers loved it. Stein, however, felt the story was too big and sprawling for the stage, and they decided to look into other material by Sholem Aleichem.[1]

They read Aleichem's Tevye stories and felt that "within the character of Tevye, there was the basis of an intriguing musical."[2] The stories are monologues by Tevye. Seven stories are about Tevye's daughters; Tevye originally had seven daughters. For Fiddler the number of daughters selected was five. In addition to the stories about Tevye and his daughters, there were still other stories about Tevye. Stein said, "Out of all this material, we selected three (and some of a fourth) stories around which we felt a total overall story could be written."[3] Ewen quotes Stein as saying, "The structure of the play required the creation of new scenes and new dialogue. Practically none

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[1]Altman and Kaufman, The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof, p. 20.

[2]"Landmark Symposium: Fiddler on the Roof," Dramatists Guild Quarterly 20, no. 10 (Spring 1983): 11.

[3]Ibid.

of the dialogue from the original stories was usable, since the original material was not written for the stage, and the dialogue within it had a very special appeal."[1] Tevye in the original stories was a simple, passive man but Stein felt it was necessary to give the role sufficient strength to make him the moving force while still keeping character shadings of the original. The world of the stories was the

> esoteric world formerly completely ignored by the popular musical stage. It was the world of the East European Jew, bound to century-old traditions, whose customs, beliefs, superstitions, way of life and thought, ideals, habits, and dress were all as exotic to non-Jews (and even to a great many Jews of American birth) as might be those of a remote African tribe or those of characters in a Kabuki theater.[2]

A rough outline was sketched by the middle of 1961 and Bock, Harnick and Stein began negotiating for the stage rights to the material. The story line constructed at that time is basically the one used for the production. "It's never changed," said Stein.[3] It tells of a poor, Jewish milkman, Tevye, from the Russian village of Anatevka around the turn of the century. One daughter, Tzeitel, wants to marry the poor tailor, Motel, whom she loves, rather than a well-to-do butcher. Another daughter, Hodel, falls in love with a penniless student who is sent to Siberia for

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 130.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Altman and Kaufman, The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof, p. 21.

revolutionary activities. Chava, a third daughter, runs off with a gentile and "pushes Tevye and tradition too far."[1] There is a pogrom which banishes Jews from their homes and leads, by the end of the production, to the exodus of the Jews.

In the fall of 1961, Bock and Harnick started writing the music. The first song they wrote was "The Tailor Motel Kamzoil," the background for Tevye's dream. During the next few months they finished nineteen more songs--enough to work with. "Only a handful of these found their way, ultimately, into the show," said Stein.[2]

The unique thing about Fiddler was that this was the first show that Bock and Harnick had ever done that they had decided to do. They had always created pieces as assigned or commissioned by producers.

Harnick and Stein differ in their recollection about one matter concerning the creation of Fiddler. Harnick thinks that the realization that the stories added up to the changing of a way of life came later. "In the early stages of creating the show we concentrated on the romances of the various daughters and Tevye's relation to them and not so much on the dissolution of the culture."[3] Stein

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[1]Norman Nadel, "'Fiddler on the Roof' Is Humorous, Tender Musical," New York World-Telegram and Sun, 23 September 1964, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 25, p. 214.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"Landmark Symposium: Fiddler on the Roof," p. 12.

believes that at an early stage, in order to change the original material into a stage piece, "we decided to make it the story of this community--the story of the breakdown of this community with the stories of the three daughters illustrating that breakdown."[1] Whether the concept was incorporated into the script at an early or late stage, the rupture of a community became the spine of the piece.

Excepting the number "Tradition," written later, the show from the beginning started with the house scene, and continued in much the same way as it would on opening night, including the wedding scene and the pogrom. The first act has always ended with the pogrom and the second act, with the exodus to America.[2] Some scenes were dropped in the rewrites. Stein explained:

> In the first act there was a scene with Tevye and Perchik in which they played chess while Perchik outlined his attitude towards society and why he was a revolutionist. That was dropped because we found that we could say it much more simply and quickly in his very first appearance. There were a number of similar scenes that were dropped later. We had a scene which lasted up to the opening in Detroit in which Tevye read a letter from his brother-in-law in America. It was an amusing scene, and it led to a song called "Letters from America" or "Anatevka" in which the people sang of how very happy they were about being in Anatevka. . . . After that scene and that song were dropped, a piece of that happy song became the basis for the song now known as "Anatevka."[3]

With their first draft nearing completion, they approached

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 14. [3]Ibid.

Prince because "We were closest to Hal."[1]

Prince read the script and had two immediate concerns. He remembers thinking:

> One, ethnically, I have no background; I don't understand it so I can't direct it, and originally I was looking for a show to direct as well as produce, after all the years of being a straight producer, which I was beginning not to like. Two, I don't think it's universal in its present shape. I suggested that they either get Jerry Robbins to direct it, because only he could give it the universality it needed, through the expression of movement, or else put it away and forget it. As far as I'm concerned, Jerry remains the only person who should have directed that show. And I still say, "Put it away if you can't get him." There are not many projects you'd feel that way about, but I absolutely do about this one.[2]

Robbins was working on Funny Girl, however, and was unavailable, resulting in the temporary shelving of the project.

What Bock, Harnick and Prince did instead was She Loves Me. Prince said, "I understood that one because I'm an old Hungarian, so we went ahead with it."[3] Work stopped on Fiddler while She Loves Me was being produced, and Stein wrote Enter Laughing. The creators of Fiddler, however, continued to search for a producer.

The show was turned down by many producers. Arnold Saint Subber became interested in producing Fiddler, as did Fred Coe. Both loved the script of what was then entitled

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[1]Altman and Kaufman, The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof, p. 21.

[2]Ibid., p. 22. [3]Ibid.

Tevye and His Daughters. Other titles considered for the show included The Old Country and Tevye. However, they couldn't raise the money needed within a reasonable time. Backers felt the show was too special and "ethnic" for general audiences. Ewen notes: "Fiddler on the Roof was a bold undertaking rooted in and based solely on the textual subject. Bolder still was the way in which little effort was made to commercialize the product by offering a recognizable American musical with some Jewish trimmings."[1] It was shortly before rehearsals began that the title became Fiddler on the Roof, the idea coming from the painting by Marc Chagall of an oval-eyed violinist dangling over the roofs of a peasant village. Prince said, "The title was absolutely suggested by the Chagall picture. I think Chagall hovered over the look of the show for a long time. I remember being asked if I would try and get Chagall to do the ad so I wrote him a letter but he never replied."[2] Harnick recalls that Prince liked the Fiddler on the Roof title because "the word 'fiddler' connected the show with music."[3]

Robbins re-entered the picture as director and choreographer, but he had reservations. As Harnick recalled:

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 130.

[2]Altman and Kaufman, The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof, p. 40.

[3]"Landmark Symposium: Fiddler on the Roof," p. 17.

> He found there was much wanting in what he heard. He loved the source material. Somewhere along the line he told us that when he was six he had been taken to Poland. He said he never forgot the experience because his forebears came from there. Robbins said what he wanted to do was put the shtettel life onstage--to give another twenty-five years of life to that shtettel culture which had been devastated during World War II. That was his vision. . . . he kept asking and hammering at us for months: "What is this show about?" If we gave him an answer like, "Well, it's about this dairy man, and he has three daughters," he would reply, "No, if that's what the show is about, then it's the previous adventures of the Goldberg family, and it's not enough." He said, "We have to find out what it is that gives these stories their power." And he kept asking that same question: "What's it about?" I don't know which one of us finally said it. Maybe it was Jerry in one of those endless preproduction meetings. But somebody said, "Do you know what this play is about? It's about the dissolution of a way of life." Robbins got very excited. "If that's what it's about," he said, "then we have to show our audience more of the way of life that is about to dissolve. We have to have an opening number about the traditions that are going to change." This number had to be like a tapestry against which the entire show will play. And that was the beginning of "Tradition."[1]

Robbins had found a concept or theme on which to base the musical. Prince would eventually incorporate this specific defining of a production into his own method of directing.

Robbins became upset when he was unable to sign contracts with the people he wanted, such as set designer Boris Aronson. Coe, who was still the producer, hadn't as yet raised the needed money. Robbins became nervous and requested Prince as co-producer. It was explained to Robbins

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[1]Ibid.

that Prince hadn't wanted to do the show. "However," says Harnick, "Jerry talked to him, and maybe it was because this time we had more of a show, or maybe it was because of Robbins, but Hal finally said yes."[1]

Prince and Coe did not work out as co-producers. Coe was doing the movie A Thousand Clowns and unavailable a good deal of the time. Prince said:

> I was doing the work and I didn't want to have a co-production with somebody who wasn't available. Also, I had a feeling I'd be spending all my time on the phone being nice, and he wouldn't know how to deal with me either and would probably feel he'd have to be nice in return. He wanted to make a movie and I wanted to do the show, so why should we waste time patronizing each other? I put it to him just as straight as that, and he agreed to let me buy him out, which I did. He has a substantial interest in the show, of course, and has made a great deal of money out of it.[2]

The prerehearsal time of about six months was a period of endless probing and questioning. Harnick said of Robbins, "Before he set foot on that stage he did as much work as possible, so that it would be right and he wouldn't be panicky in rehearsal or on the road."[3] This method of working before rehearsals would eventually be adopted by Prince. Finally, rehearsals were scheduled to begin in June 1964 after many delays due to Robbins' constant fear that the show was not ready. He also asked Prince for an eight-week rehearsal period. When the June

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[1]Altman and Kaufman, The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof, p. 22.

[2]Ibid., p. 23. [3]Ibid., p. 41.

rehearsal date arrived, Robbins again procrastinated. At this point, Prince sent Robbins a telegram telling him he would have to pay the $55,000 that another delay would cost. Prince told Robbins that if he did not pay the additional costs, he would be sued. Robbins was very upset but he was forced to start the rehearsals. Prince said:

> I understand it all much better now than I did at the time, and I'd probably be more compassionate about it--because the day before Follies [a show Prince directed in 1971] went into rehearsal, I thought I had hepatitis, and I went to the doctor for a checkup. The next day I realized it was not an illness, just naked fear. That's all it was. I suddenly didn't know what I was going to do with that stage or those fifty people. I didn't think I knew what the style of the show was, after all that time, or what I was actually going to do.[1]

Fiddler was capitalized at $375,000, not high in 1964 for the size and scope of the production. As Altman (Robbins' assistant) said, "Hal was a savvy producer; he knew when to spend money and when and how to cut corners. Even with new numbers added out of town and old ones dropped, there was very little waste."[2]

Robbins had a total vision for Fiddler that extended to every aspect of the production. He was indispensable. He helped clarify what the musical was about: the struggle of parents to preserve traditions in changing times. This theme gave the show a universality which was communicated to people of all races and nationalities. As with West

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[1]Ibid., p. 97. [2]Ibid., p. 23.

Side Story, each person in the cast from Tevye and his family down to the townspeople of Anatevka, all were given backgrounds and became individuals. Opening the show with the entire company singing and dancing "Tradition" set the style, tone and theme of the evening.

Robbins, who staged and choreographed the entire production, worked tirelessly for authenticity. He studied life in the "Shtetl" (or "little Jewish town") as it was lived by the middle-European Jews. "One of his basic sources was a sociological study called Life Is With People."[1] As he had done in West Side Story, Robbins used improvisations to help with the acting scenes. He did not pre-block and there did not appear to be an order or plan for the day. Prince remembers two improvisations in particular:

> One took place in a white-owned bookstore in the South and involved the attempts of blacks to purchase books. A lesson in minority relations. The other took place in a concentration camp after the time covered by Fiddler. Again Robbins created respect in the actor for himself and for what the play was about. I borrowed liberally from the experience with Fiddler when I did Cabaret.[2]

Robbins chose Boris Aronson to design the sets for Fiddler. Aronson would become one of Prince's most important collaborators in later years. As Prince said, "I

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 131.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, pp. 108-109.

consider the day I met Boris second only to the day I met Abbott."[1] Russian-born Aronson was only in his sixties when he worked on Fiddler. He had been designing shows for Broadway since Abbott's Three Men on a Horse in 1935, having spent the first twelve years in the U.S. working in the Yiddish theatre in New York. Aronson, a gifted and versatile painter and sculptor, was equally happy designing operas, plays or musicals. He wasn't completely satisfied with Fiddler and Prince agrees that the show didn't utilize the designer's gifts to the fullest. Aronson said that, because of Robbins' vision, he was too influenced by Chagall. Given another opportunity to design the show, he would do it differently.[2] Aronson and Prince, unaware that they would become close collaborators on such shows as Cabaret, Zorba, Company, Follies, A Little Night Music, and Pacific Overtures, did not foresee that not only would they initiate changes in the specific style of Aronson's set designs, but also in stage designs for the future American musical. Prince explained:

> Over the years Boris and I, mutually encouraging, moved further and further from naturalism, from props and doors and tables and units, wagons with rooms on them, until with Follies there were no tables, no chairs, no doors, no windows.[3]

Aronson found working with Robbins somewhat exasperating. Robbins was tireless in his trial-and-error tactics

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[1]Ibid., p. 106. [2]Ibid., p. 107. [3]Ibid.

and Aronson found this hard to deal with. More an artistic designer than a technician, Aronson was annoyed with Robbins' constant demands that things be made bigger or smaller. Aronson was not particularly concerned about how things worked or how they got on or off stage. He was lucky to have as his assistant Lisa Jalowetz (Mrs. Aronson), a very gifted craftswoman knowledgeable about theatre mechanics. Aronson found Robbins' prodding annoying and Robbins was impatient with Aronson's slow articulation of his intentions and feelings. Altman said, "Apparently, no such gaps have separated Boris and Hal."[1] Prince, addressing his debt to Aronson, said, "I thank Jerry Robbins for Boris Aronson every day of my life."[2]

Robbins created memorable dance numbers for Fiddler. The opening dance to "Tradition" gives the piece a feeling of a ritual. The wedding dances, too, were vital and energetic. Walter Kerr wrote:

> A quartet of bearded dancers are able to do an across-the-floor-of-the-sea swoop during a wedding festival without losing the bottles that are perched trembling on their black-capped heads.[3]

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[1]Altman and Kaufman, The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof, p. 47.

[2]Ibid., p. 48.

[3]Walter Kerr, "Fiddler on the Roof," New York Herald Tribune, 23 September 1964, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 25, p. 216.

Zero Mostel was Prince's choice for Tevye. Robbins wanted Tom Bosley. Among others discussed were Danny Kaye, Alan King, Howard da Silva, Danny Thomas, and Julius LaRosa. Prince wanted a strong presence and eventually signed Mostel even though Mostel only agreed to a nine-month contract. Prince liked the short contract, as Mostel was known to "cut up" as soon as he got bored in a part. In addition, "If an actor is signed to a long-term contract in a starring role and becomes identified with the show, it's very possible and even likely he will be encouraged to make greater and greater demands on the management because he feels indispensable."[1]

Joanna Merlin, who won the role of Tzeitel, later became casting director for Prince's organization.

Bock created musical numbers with an Eastern-European Jewish flavor "without resorting to quotation or direct imitation of Yiddish folk songs."[2] Some of the memorable songs in the show were "Matchmaker, Matchmaker," sung with delight by Tevye's three eldest daughters as they sweep the home. Yentl, the matchmaker, is about to match them with the town's eligible young men. In "If I Were a Rich Man," Tevye has a one-way conversation with God, asking why he is poor and fantasizing about how different his life would be

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 106.

[2]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 131.

if he were rich. "Sunrise, Sunset" is Tevye's and Golde's duet after the marriage of Tszetel and Motel, the poor tailor. They wonder where the years have gone; yesterday's babies are now grown women. "Do You Love Me?", another duet for Tevye and Golde, questions their love after 25 years of marriage.

The costumes were designed by Patricia Zipprodt, who had done the costumes for She Loves Me. She had to dip and dye the peasants' clothes until they looked sufficiently worn and aged. Jean Rosenthal, a dynamic, yet gentle, woman, did the lighting. She would go on to light other Prince shows, such as Baker Street, Poor Bitos and Cabaret. Although Robbins was easily upset, Rosenthal handled the temperamental director well. Robbins dedicated a ballet, "Dances at a Gathering" to her after her death.

Prince trusted Robbins implicitly and rarely felt the need to intervene artistically. Altman said, "Prince never attempted to compete directorially with Robbins."[1] They respected each other and worked well together as producer and director. Prince did make creative contributions to the show. Robbins was preparing a big second-act production number (an eleven o'clock number) to be inserted just before the conclusion of the piece. Fiddler ends with the dark but hopeful mood of people forced to abandon their

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[1]Altman and Kaufman, The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof, p. 63.

homes, and there was no reason for a big splashy number.

> Robbins had come up with a fantasy number to enliven things. Prince realized this was not a formula show and the fantasy was extraneous. He suggested that they drop the fancy production number and concentrate on the story. Thus, "Anatevka" was born, a simple number in which the Jews sing wistfully, ironically of the shabby, dangerous "home" they are leaving as they set out for America.[1]

Here is Harnick's version of what happened:

> We were working on a song for that moment called "A Little Bit of This." Robbins had very inventively created a band out of items that these people who had been forced out of their homes carried onstage--their pots, their pans. Suddenly, all these sound effects made a percussive and rhythmic beat. He did some absolutely beautiful things for the girl dancers. But he wasn't sure about the number. He showed it to Hal--as much as there was to show--and Hal very objectively said, "You can't do that. It's not that kind of a show. This is, in effect, the villagers gamboling on the green, and they wouldn't do that." He said, "Let's be brave and do what the moment <u>really</u> is. It's a serious moment." At that point, Robbins agreed and decided we should take that piece of music we were talking about before--which was originally a Russian dance--and slow it down and put a new lyric to it. That, introduced by some of the music from "A Little Bit of This," became "Anatevka." Out of these pieces was developed a moment which was right for the show and which the audience accepted.[2]

In Washington, Prince became concerned about the length of the show.

> He felt strongly that judicious trimming was necessary to sustain audience interest and fend off somnolence, particularly during that book-heavy second act. He continually prodded the creative staff to

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[1]Kissel, "Side by Side by Prince," p. 63.

[2]"Landmark Symposium: Fiddler on the Roof," p. 25.

> go through the script as though with a microscope, and to cut anything superfluous. "We don't want a shred of fat," he insisted, and he pushed the point relentlessly.[1]

The result, according to Altman, was that every excision, no matter how small, helped to make Fiddler tighter and economical. It also sharpened audience response. Prince's input with the script in Washington, according to Altman, helped it to function like "a precision instrument--consistently and predictably."[2]

Fiddler opened in Detroit for its pre-Broadway tryout during the summer of 1964. There was a newspaper strike and thus no reviews, but business was very good. The show was a success at the box-office. Variety did print a review and it was "devastating," according to Stein. "I don't remember the exact words, but it said something like 'an ordinary, run-of-the-mill show, looks like all of the other shows, amateur time, etc.' We were all very depressed."[3]

After four weeks in Detroit, where extensive repairs were made on the second act, the production opened in Washington, D.C. The second-act opening, a song for the revolutionary Perchik called "As Much as That," was cut. The number "A Letter from America" was changed. Another number cut was the tailor's song, "Dear, Sweet Sewing Machine," which had never worked.

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[1]Altman and Kaufman, The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof, p. 63.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"Landmark Symposium: Fiddler on the Roof," p. 22.

The show was very well received in Washington and was just about sold out. Harnick remembers that the reviews were very good. Word filtered into New York that there was a good show in Washington. Then came previews in New York. "Anatevka" was listed in the program in New York for the first time, although it had been seen in Washington.

Fiddler on the Roof opened in New York at the Imperial Theatre on September 22, 1964 after an eight-week rehearsal period and an entire summer spent in Detroit and Washington. "In retrospect, that may have been too long," said Harnick.[1] Most of the out-of-town work was on the second act. The first act remained pretty much the same. The long ballet in the second act, which occurs when Tevye learns that his daughter has married a gentile, was originally a ten- or twelve-minute number. Feeling that the show died at that point, the creators urged Robbins to cut it, which he did. "Finally," said Stein, "it was down to that tiny little crossover called 'Chavaleh.' That helped the show."[2]

The reviews in New York were very favorable and singled out the star, Zero Mostel, for praise. There were one or two critics who expressed some minor reservations. Walter Kerr's review in the Herald Tribune had some negative observations. His lead: "Fiddler on the Roof takes

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[1]Ibid., p. 23. [2]Ibid.

place in Anatevka, a village in Russia, and I think it might be an altogether charming musical if only the people of Anatevka did not pause every now and again to give their regards to Broadway, with remembrances to Herald Square."[1]

Finally, he wrote:

> Emotion does reach out and claim us before the evening is thoroughly done. A leavetaking scene in which all of Anatevka--particularly a daughter who had married a Gentile--lift hands in silent farewell, blown leaves in the cold wind of a pogrom, is directly affecting. Character is there to be touched. But Fiddler on the Roof dips below its own best possible level by touching character too casually and sometimes soiling it with the lesser energies of easy quips, lyrics that stray too far from the land, and occasional high-pressure outbursts that are merely marketable. The result is a very-near-miss, and I very much miss what it might have been.[2]

Prince was not upset by the Kerr review. Altman said that the reviews were read aloud at the Rainbow Room after the show. Prince recalls:

> The thing I remember about that evening was I wasn't interested in reading any reviews. This was because of my total confidence that the project was off and running. I never doubted it for one second. The minute I saw the show on the stage in Detroit, the minute the sets and costumes were there and it was all of a piece I knew that this was to be a very special theatrical experience.[3]

Taubman in the New York Times said that

> The new musical which opened last night at the Imperial Theatre is filled with laughter and

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[1]Kerr, "Fiddler on the Roof." [2]Ibid.

[3]Altman and Kaufman, The Making of a Musical: Fiddler on the Roof, p. 107.

> tenderness. It catches the essence of a moment in history with sentiment and radiance. Compounded of the familiar materials of musical theater--popular song, vivid dance movement, comedy and emotion--it combines and transcends them to arrive at an integrated achievement of uncommon quality.[1]

Although Richard Watts, Jr. of the New York Post said that the fact that the show "works out as effectively as it does is due partly to the taste and imagination of the production,"[2] he also felt that the show was successful chiefly because of the brilliant performance of Mostel. His reservations:

> It is admirable both in its notable central characterization and its faithful capturing of the sad, bravely humorous, wistfully pathetic atmosphere of folklore, but it lacks something of the compelling dramatic power implicit in its story. It tends to lose itself in the employment of the musical and dance aspects of its rich material, and it seldom reaches the sustained excitement of which a musical play is capable in the flush of its most satisfying accomplishments.[3]

Fiddler won the Critics' Circle Award as the best musical of the New York season and nine Tony Awards in 1965--Mostel (musical star), Maria Karnilova (featured actress in a musical), Pat Zipprodt (costumer), Prince (producer), Stein (author), Bock and Harnick (composer and lyricist),

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[1]Howard Taubman, "Mostel as Tevye," New York Times, 23 September 1964, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 25, p. 216.

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "The Brilliance of Zero Mostel," New York Post, 23 September 1964, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 25, p. 215.

[3]Ibid.

and Robbins (director and choreographer). By this time, the show has grossed over $20 million at the box-office.

It became clear to Prince after the opening of the show that Robbins would not return to check the production as is the custom of some directors. According to contract, a director is supposed to keep an eye on his show during the run to help the staging remain clean and fresh and to tighten any staging that has somehow drifted. Robbins was very displeased with Mostel's "fooling around." When Mostel's nine-month contract came up for renewal, Prince didn't want to meet the actor's terms and asked his collaborators how they felt. This was the time to see whether it was the show or Mostel who was the success. Fiddler continued to play to packed houses with Luther Adler, Hershel Bernardi, Harry Goz, Jerry Jarrett and Paul Lipson, all of whom followed in the role of Tevye.

Fiddler eventually toured with a national company and also played in 32 foreign countries. "Of particular historic significance was the fact that in 1970 it was produced by the Komische Oper in East Berlin, one of Europe's most eminent opera companies, under the personal direction of the distinguished operatic producer-director Walter Felsenstein."[1] It was performed in sixteen languages and cut eighteen original cast albums. The show was sold to United Artists

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 134.

for $2 million, which, according to Prince, is "less than was paid for Man of La Mancha, My Fair Lady, Mame; but the 25 percent of the distributor's gross after recoupment of cost will more than compensate for the discrepancy."[1]

Fiddler ran 3,242 performances on Broadway, becoming the longest-running Broadway musical. It was at the 2,845th performance that Fiddler passed the longest-running production at the time, Hello, Dolly!. The show closed on July 21, 1971.

Prince said that Fiddler

> was like a rent-controlled apartment that you leased eight years ago. The economics were based on contracts drawn eight years earlier. Though our minimums adjusted with each new contract, our royalties remained what they were in 1964. We were able to break even on a weekly gross of $47,000. If Fiddler were to open today, it would take $75,000 to operate each week, and that would curtail the run by more than three years.[2]

Fiddler was an important show in the history of the American musical theatre and made an important contribution to Harold Prince's career. For the next dozen years or more backers supported anything he chose to do. "In effect, his experiments in musical theatre until the mid-seventies were subsidized by the loyal, grateful backers of Fiddler," explained Howard Kissel.[3] And Fiddler and Robbins exposed Prince to the idea of basing a musical on a "concept."

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 109. [2]Ibid.

[3]Kissel, "Side by Side by Prince," p. 63.

"Plainly after Fiddler, Prince saw himself as Robbins' successor."[1] Prince would one day use Robbins' ideas, expanding them to create his form of the American musical. Mordden called Fiddler a concept show, comparing it to Hello, Dolly!, which he believed had no concept; "few pure musical comedies do."[2]

Prince had gradually become more and more interested in the possibilities of musical theatre as a serious medium. He felt it was impossible to live in the modern world and not recognize the "awful disillusionment of people."[3] Although he had to make money to stay in the theatre, he was not in the theatre to make money. Years later, after he directed two of his groundbreaking shows, Company and Follies, he compared them to Fiddler and pointed out where they differed. Prince said,

> Fiddler is no girlie show. But it views its world through rose-colored glass, especially when compared with the harsh complexities of Company which examines the ambiguities of marriage (and of bachelorhood), and, even more so of Follies which is a study of disenchantment on several levels.[4]

After Fiddler, Prince continued his quest to express his own vision as a director through the medium of the American

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[1]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 126.

[2]Mordden, Better Foot Forward, p. 290.

[3]"Fiddler on the Roof," Newsweek, 26 July 1971, p. 68, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[4]Prince, quoted in ibid.

musical theatre. He would produce only two or three productions in the future which he did not also direct.

Baker Street

Baker Street is a musical which was adapted from several Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stories about Sherlock Holmes. Long before Harold Prince became involved in the project, Jerome Coopersmith, who had done a great deal of writing for television (he had won the Robert E. Sherwood Award for TV), was writing a musical book about Holmes. Alexander Cohen liked the work and said he would produce it. A young lyricist-composer team that had worked with Coopersmith was replaced when potential backers and directors disparaged their music. Coopersmith recalls:

> Alex then brought in Marian Grudeff and Ray Jessel to write a new score. Ray was a Welshman but the two were living in Canada at the time. . . . Ray eventually became a TV writer (as I did) and now lives in Los Angeles. Marian, I believe lives in Canada and teaches piano which she did before Baker Street. She was a great concert artist as a child, a prodigy. Alex knew them from Canada because Alex in those days was the chief booking agent for the O'Keefe Center and knew a lot of Canadian theatre people. He apparently showed Marian and Ray the script and asked them to spec on some songs. I didn't know about this until one day Alex called me and said, "I want you to hear something." That was when I met these people for the first time.[1]

Coopersmith was pleased with the new numbers and still thinks the Jessel and Grudeff score is a good one.

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[1]Interview with Jerome Coopersmith, New York, 24 February 1984.

In fashioning his book into a libretto for the musical, Coopersmith used several of the original Doyle stories, such as "A Scandal in Bohemia," because, said Coopersmith, "It was the only one that had a woman [Irene Adler] in it."[1] He also used "The Adventure of the Empty House," in which Holmes pretends to be dead but comes back to life, as well as "The Final Problem" and "A Study in Scarlet." Coopersmith's libretto for Baker Street was hailed as a superior book which wisely followed the spirit, not the letter of the Sherlock Holmes adventures, and preserved the Doyle wit. Norman Nadel said: "He [Coopersmith] has used this material exceptionally well, so that Baker Street has the flavor, the purposeful pace, and the piquant surprises of a Conan Doyle original."[2] The original libretto was not changed very much in the process of creating the piece as a musical. "I was lucky," said Coopersmith, "because the construction of the book was pretty solid."[3]

After choosing the various Holmes stories on which to base his musical, Coopersmith felt he needed something to tie all the stories together, some element that would unify the show. He said:

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Norman Nadel, "Irregulars Help Solve 'Baker Street' Problems," New York World-Telegram and Sun, 17 February 1965, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 26, p. 374.

[3]Coopersmith interview.

> I went to the public library and studied the period [Victorian England] for a long time. I felt something would emerge that would tie all those things together. One day after going through a lot of 1890s material, something did leap out at me and that was the Diamond Jubilee parade and festivity which they had in 1897 (exactly the period when Holmes was a private detective) and it was the biggest event in Europe, let alone England. It was the 60th Anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign. Expensive gifts were sent to her from all over the world and there were parades through the streets of London and celebrations and galas. That was the unifying event for me and as soon as I saw that I knew that I was home because I could tie all the things into that event.[1]

The Holmes stories have had a long history on Broadway, although this was the first musical attempt. The original dramatization of Sherlock Holmes was adapted by William Gillette and Arthur Conan Doyle from the latter's stories, and was produced by Charles Frohman at the Garrick Theatre in New York (November 6, 1899). Gillette played the title role for the run of 256 performances. Frohman revived the melodrama for a 28-performance engagement in 1902 at the Knickerbocker Theatre and Gillette repeated the leading role. It was revived and lasted 56 performances at the Empire Theatre in 1905. It played the Empire again in 1910 and for a final time in 1915. Chamberlain Brown produced the play at the Cosmopolitan Theatre in 1928 with Robert Warwick as Holmes. The next Broadway revival--45 performances--of the drama was presented by George C. Tyler

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[1]Coopersmith interview.

and A. L. Erlanger at the New Amsterdam Theatre in 1929. At the New Amsterdam, Gillette again played the title role. Still later, a new dramatization by Ouida (Mrs. Basil) Rathbone, and starring her husband, was produced on October 30, 1953 by Bill Doll for a three-performance run at the Century Theatre.

The story line selected for the musical Baker Street dealt with Holmes' attempts to retrieve some letters sent to the actress/singer, Irene Adler. Holmes quickly turns her into his ally, and they're off in pursuit of Moriarty, who is planning to steal Queen Victoria's jewels during the celebration of her Diamond Jubilee. The first act ends with Holmes and Watson on Moriarty's yacht which is moored on the Thames,

> with an infernal machine ticking off the minutes they still have to live. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, of course, not only manage to survive but also to track down their man (with Holmes appearing in various disguises--as a vicar, a mourner, a London underworld character) and thus save the Queen's jewels.[1]

Michael Langham, who later became the artistic director of the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, was then directing at the Shakespeare Festival in Canada. An Englishman who had never done a musical, he was asked by Cohen to direct Baker Street. However, he did not stay with the show for long. Coopersmith said:

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 32.

> Langham was a very nice man, but he really had no experience with musicals. Whether that was the reason for his leaving the show or not I don't know. They never tell you. One day you just find out they've left.[1]

The second director was Joshua Logan and Coopersmith was very pleased to be working with such a gifted and successful man of the theatre. The songwriters and Coopersmith spent many months collaborating on the production with Logan in his New York apartment. However, Logan eventually decided not to do the project.

It was not long after this and after Prince had established himself as the able Broadway director of She Loves Me that Cohen approached Prince. Prince was amenable.

> I had always figured that some day I would give up producing and direct exclusively for other managements. I would put behind me advertising campaigns and theatre terms and actors' agents and union negotiations; that would be my nirvana.[2]

After an audition at which Prince heard the score, he decided that he liked only two of the songs. His agreement stated that if the new numbers that Grudeff and Jessel would write by Labor Day of 1963 were unacceptable, they would be replaced by Bock and Harnick. Prince worked closely with the composers on the score.

Labor Day arrived and Prince asked that Bock and Harnick be brought into the show.

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[1]Coopersmith interview.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 113.

> I was told that Alex Cohen was committed to Grudeff and Jessel and that if I backed out now, it was too late to replace me and the rights would revert to the Conan Doyle Estate, forfeiting four years of work and massive out-of-pocket preproduction costs.[1]

Prince decided that it was not worth giving up the show. "I was easier to work with in those days, stifling demands, deferring explosion until it was too late."[2] He has since said, "It is calamitous to accept inferior material. And arrogant. There are so many surprises in the making of a show, unanticipated disappointments, problems, you cannot afford to make compromises up front."[3]

One major compromise Prince made was in regard to size. Prince had planned a much more intimate show than was ultimately presented, but since he was not the producer of this show he did not have final say. He wanted the 1,100-seat Broadhurst Theatre but instead Cohen arranged for the 1,800-seat Broadway Theatre. Consequently, Prince had to make adjustments. "Bring on the dancing girls, bring on the sets and costumes."[4] Coopersmith remembers that as soon as they were booked into the Broadway Theatre, Prince said, "We're defeated. This show needs some intimacy between the audience and the performers and that is such a huge barn we'll never get it. The audience will be separated from the show by a huge gulf."[5] Elliot Norton, writing for the

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[1]Ibid., p. 115. [2]Ibid., p. 114.
[3]Ibid. [4]Ibid., p. 115.
[5]Coopersmith interview.

Record American in Boston, agreed. He said, "Baker Street is also handicapped at the present time by the size of its physical production, which is vast and cumbersome."[1] Near the end of its Broadway run, Baker Street was moved to the Martin Beck Theatre. There, according to Coopersmith, "it played much better. Hal was obviously right about that. There were too many chorus girls, too big a spectacle. But I think Alex liked it that way."[2]

Eventually, there were 34 people in the show, which was capitalized at $600,000. Cohen is known for his tremendous public relations campaigns and Baker Street was no exception. As Norton Mockridge in the New York World-Telegram and Sun said, "Alexander Cohen spent four years to acquire the rights to Conan Doyle's material, get the thing written, cast it and produce it and launch one of the most powerful publicity campaigns I've ever seen."[3]

During the show's pre-production period, Prince was still busy with Fiddler on the Roof and he and Coopersmith exchanged many letters. Prince was also in London part of the time, with Coopersmith working in Hollywood and at his

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[1]Elliot Norton, "Some Fun, Trouble Too, in 'Baker Street' Show," Boston Record American, 29 December 1964, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Coopersmith interview.

[3]Norton Mockridge, "Baker Street," New York World-Telegram and Sun, NYPL Clipping Folder.

home on Long Island. Much of the correspondence deals with ideas and changes in the show that Prince wanted. He also expressed his thoughts about the musical. "Prince had input into every single department," said Coopersmith, "script, score, costumes, design."[1] There is a letter which he wrote to Oliver Smith, the set designer, in which Prince explains a point. Prince, as director, involves himself in all details.

> Probably not important, but as you are making out your ground plans I would like in the Moriarty Yacht scene, when the Buddha upstage swivels revealing Moriarty, that he be on a rather high pedestal in front of his blackboard. It should not be obvious to the audience except that when he steps off it we see how short he is. This whole aspect of the Moriarty-Holmes encounter will be heightened by the fact that the ceilings are low enough to cause Holmes discomfort and to intimidate him. If he is hunched over and Moriarty is able to stand up straight, the audience will see that he has taken the psychological advantage.[2]

An American actor, Fritz Weaver, was cast in the leading role of Sherlock Holmes. Aware of the many distinguished actors who had preceded him, Weaver spent over a year in preparation. He visited London and the famous 221B Baker Street address (non-existent in the 1890s) where Holmes and his faithful Dr. Watson had their "digs." He toured the familiar landmarks and immersed himself in the Holmes atmosphere. Weaver, who had made his Broadway debut

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[1]Coopersmith interview.

[2]Harold Prince, letter to Oliver Smith, 29 July 1964.

ten years earlier, had portrayed numerous characters. A gifted Shakespearean actor, he had spent several seasons at the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut. His musical debut was in All American with Ray Bolger. When Baker Street was trying out in Boston, Elinor Hughes said of Weaver:

> He has the hawk profile, the deerstalker cap, and Inverness cape, but he is considerably younger than Dr. Watson's friend is usually shown, and quite brisk enough for the physical acrobatics of the new script and for an appreciation of the charms of the beauteous Miss Irene Adler.[1]

Cohen tried to convince Prince that George Rose should play the role of Dr. Watson. However, Prince preferred Peter Sallis and in a letter to Coopersmith, Prince expressed his feelings on the subject.

> Alex, having failed at convincing me that George Rose would be good as Dr. Watson, called the composers and put some pressure there just before he left. I don't know what his objections are to Sallis except that Sallis is too young. Bosh. And humbug. (I always speak in the language of my plays. It's a great relief giving up mazeltov.) Sallis is the same age as George Rose and quite settled.[2]

Martin Gabel was cast as Professor Moriarty and his voice, said Richard Watts, Jr. "had the perfect quality of menace for the sinister genius of crime."[3]

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[1]Elinor Hughes, "A Musical Adventure for Sherlock Holmes," Boston Herald, 29 December 1964, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Harold Prince, letter to Jerome Coopersmith, 21 August 1964.

[3]Richard Watts, Jr., "Sherlock Holmes' Musical Career," New York Post, 17 February 1965, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 26, p. 376.

In mid-August, Prince hired a choreographer for Baker Street. Various contenders for the job were Onna White, Donald Saddler and Danny Daniels who, said Prince in a letter to Coopersmith, "are known to me via their work, and I must say it is awfully difficult to work up any enthusiasm."[1] He had asked Bob Fosse to do the choreography and the musical numbers for the show but Fosse was only interested if he could also be co-director. Prince said, "I didn't see how I could share the job [of directing] effectively."[2]

Once again Prince proved, as he had in the past and would in the future, that he is willing to hire a young and untried talent. Prince admired Lee Becker (now Lee Theodore). She had played the role of Anybody's in West Side Story and had gone on to some choreographing. Prince wrote:

> There is a ground swell of excitement about her work, and I have been getting unsolicited advice from Steve Sondheim, Jerry Bock, and Jerry Robbins' dance composer and dance assistant on Fiddler, both of whom worked with her last year. The feeling is that she has fresh talent and inventiveness. . . . I think she promises more than the others and I would prefer taking the chance. The point being, I don't know what we would get with the others. Let me point out, this is not the first time I have made this decision. I did it in 1954 when Bob Fosse choreographed Pajama Game, and in 1959 when Pete Gennaro did Fiorello.[3]

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[1]Harold Prince, letter to Jerome Coopersmith, 14 August 1964.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

Thus, Lee Becker Theodore, now the Artistic Director of the American Dance Machine, was given her first Broadway choreographing assignment. In an interview with Theodore, she explained that she had originally met Prince when she was hired as a chorus replacement in Damn Yankees. She had gone to the audition and they asked her to sing. She angrily spoke up and explained that her mother had not spent all that money for her daughter's dancing lessons for her to come to what she thought was a dance audition and be asked to sing. Prince raced down to the stage, obviously moved by her outburst, and said, "Just sing a few lines of 'Happy Birthday' for everybody and I'm sure you'll be all right." She did just that and got the job. She then went on to do the part of Anybody's in West Side Story. Abbott later wrote her into Tenderloin. Eventually, she staged Tenderloin for Prince in Las Vegas. Theodore explains that Carol Haney was Prince's first choice for choreographer for Baker Street but unfortunately she passed away. Although Becker was an untried Broadway choreographer when Prince hired her for Baker Street, he did have knowledge of her ability and talent.[1]

Theodore said that after she read the script of Baker Street she began preparing madly. Then Prince, rather than asking her to come up to his office to discuss her

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[1]Interview with Lee Becker Theodore, New York, 23 February 1984.

ideas for the show took her for a walk in Central Park.

> He was as adorable as always. And I told him all my ideas. And he said they sounded good. And he said, "C'mon Lee, I'd love you to do the show." And we became very close. And I had a chance to get to know him. That was the first time I really had a chance to get to know Hal. He was like a child. Childlike in his enthusiasm and in his approach to things. He got so interested and excited about things. He was never blase. I just liked his enthusiasm. He knows how to behave with choreographers . . . he knows we're not the most articulate people (choreographers don't have to be--we deal in dance images and impulses and we invent during rehearsals). He understood that and just liked my general attitude and the thoughts that I had about the play. I feel that I can relate to a script and Hal thought I could also. In other words, he would find an ally on a show with me and that we could share a lot of the basic challenges and problems of a Broadway show and I felt he knew that I could be a good colleague to him, a good collaborator. And it turned out that that was true.[1]

Theodore turned out to be a good choice and many of the reviews of the show Baker Street praised her work. Adjectives such as "spirited, "unusual," and "graphic" were used, and Norman Nadel in the New York World-Telegram and Sun said:

> Just in time, there were the Baker Street Irregulars, with an exuberant young Englishman named Teddy Green as Wiggins, their leader. "Leave it to us, Guv," they sang, as they swung into the first of two life-giving dance numbers by Lee Theodore. Only then did Baker Street begin to glow with something more than the electric lighting which Jean Rosenthal has deployed ingeniously in all its scenes.[2]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Nadel, "Irregulars Help Solve 'Baker Street' Problems."

Theodore created a dance group called the Baker Street Irregulars who would portray in choreography the London urchins that Holmes called upon to help him in his cases. Some production numbers featured the group led by Wiggins as played by Teddy Green. There was a chase through designer Oliver Smith's byways and cellars of foggy London, and a dance of mourners around a casket filled with loot to the song "Jewelry." In spite of these choreographed numbers, Walter Kerr felt that there was "very little dancing" in the show.[1] Kerr did give credit to Theodore for "one fine improvisation, the garroting that follows upon a fog-laden romp through the underworld, even though it seems performed by Bondsmen rather than Holmesmen."[2]

Prince, as mentioned earlier, had input into all phases of the show. In a letter to Coopersmith, he made suggestions about choreography as well as the score. Prince wrote:

> If our song is going to be based on timing and precision cannot a sizable chunk of the dance be done in silence with no accompaniment from the orchestra or possibly just the ticking of a clock? It could be very exciting.[3]

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[1]Walter Kerr, "Walter Kerr Reviews 'Baker Street,'" New York Herald Tribune, 17 February 1965, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 26, p. 377.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Harold Prince, letter to Jerome Coopersmith, 2 September 1964.

Although Prince was full of ideas, he was always willing to defer to a collaborator if the idea was a good one. In another letter to Coopersmith he said:

> Apropos the book, you've won me over. I have come to think the hijinx in Irene's parlor is too much and could be very damaging. Catch me up every time you see that temptation.[1]

The major problem Prince had in working on Baker Street was with the song writers Grudeff and Jessel. In the pre-rehearsal period he told Coopersmith, "my biggest worry on this show is the amount of time it takes them to write numbers. I think we should have at least three or four songs over what we need when we go into rehearsal."[2] Later, in an article in Holiday magazine by Gary Paul Gates, Prince was said to have blamed the score for ruining Baker Street. Gates said:

> I became aware of Prince's disenchantment with the musical portion of Baker Street when I flew up to Toronto to catch a glimpse of the show in the final stages of the pre-Broadway run. By then the situation had so deteriorated that reinforcements had arrived and were busily at work writing new songs for the show. The reinforcements were composer Jerry Bock and lyricist Sheldon Harnick, as formidable a pair of rescue workers as one can find.[3]

Although paid, Bock and Harnick knew that whatever they wrote would be credited to Jessel and Grudeff. Cohen

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[1]Prince, letter to Coopersmith, 21 August 1964.

[2]Prince, letter to Coopersmith, 2 September 1964.

[3]Gates, "Broadway's Prince Charming," p. 107.

did not share Prince's pessimism about the music and said, "The score isn't that bad."[1] Even after Baker Street had been running for six weeks, Prince was involved in arranging for new Bock and Harnick numbers which he wanted added to the show. He never tired of trying to fix a show if he felt it needed it. The songs that Bock and Harnick wrote for Baker Street were "I'm in London Again," which appears on the cast album but was taken out of the show after the Broadway opening. "I Shall Miss You Holmes" stayed in the show as did "The Cold Clear World of the Intellect."

Theodore agrees with Prince that "the score lacked sweep and melody."[2] Critics varied in their response to the music and lyrics when the show opened. Richard Watts, Jr. felt that "the score by Marian Grudeff and Raymond Jessel isn't of vast help."[3] Norman Nadel said that "Neither music--or lyrics--are a strength of Baker Street though those by Grudeff and Jessel usually are agreeably in key with the scenes in which they are used."[4] The numbers that received some positive notices were "Leave It to Us, Guv" and "Roof Space," because they "crackled," along with the ballad "Finding Words for Spring" and a plaint from Watson

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[1]Quoted in ibid., p. 106.

[2]Theodore interview.

[3]Watts, "Sherlock Holmes' Musical Career."

[4]Nadel, "Irregulars Help Solve 'Baker Street' Problems."

called "A Married Man," in which he recalls his marital happiness with his late wife. Generally, however, the critics ignored the score.

Prince was particularly proud of one idea he had in staging the show.

> The second act called for Queen Victoria's jubilee procession along The Mall to Buckingham Palace. I asked Bil Baird to build a parade of animated wooden soldiers, followed by a tiny gold coach with Victoria inside, waving a lace handkerchief. Although we had added thirty-six dancers and singers, we retained our puppets in Act II, and they walked off with the show. They showed the multimillion-dollar musical, "with a cast of thousands," on the biggest stage on Broadway, what it might have been.[1]

Coopersmith loved the idea of the puppets that Prince decided to use.

> Oh, it was wonderful, it was a showstopper every time . . . wonderful. Bil Baird was a terrific talent to work with also. It wasn't a lot of people pulling strings. Bil had a puppet device that one person cranked offstage . . . and everything worked with that one person cranking and little carriages with horses came by and Cold Stream Guards. . . . Then finally came the Queen's carriage . . . You don't see the Queen . . . but a lady's hand comes out of the carriage and waves a handkerchief to the crowd. It was enchanting.[2]

The critics were also enchanted with this scene. The Saturday Review called it a "theatrically effective moment."[3] Walter Kerr wrote, "the attitude is fundamentally

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 115.

[2]Coopersmith interview.

[3]"My Fair Irene," Saturday Review, 6 March 1965, p. 22, NYPL Clipping Folder.

promising and the special effects are more than that, they deliver, particularly when Bil Baird is arranging a military procession with right-angled puppets."[1] Howard Taubman in the New York Times said, "There is a charming moment, managed with the help of Bil Baird's Marionettes, which creates a sense of delightful magic as the Diamond Jubilee Parade and the Queen in her royal coach pass by."[2]

The sets by Oliver Smith were thought effective. Taubman praised Smith's use of fog and clanging Big Ben in a scene where Holmes and Irene wander through the haunts of the underworld. He said, "Baker Street has atmosphere and illusion."[3]

Prince never changed his original view and felt that the show would have been better had it kept to more intimate production values. He would have preferred one set, no chorus, and the elimination of the love interest. He said that when he first read the script he felt it was "well constructed, and nicely written, a small atmospheric show."[4] He would have set the whole show in Holmes' study with "red flocked wallpaper, Victorian furniture, steaming beakers, and sliding panels."[5] However, he wasn't the producer.

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[1]Kerr, "Walter Kerr Reviews 'Baker Street.'"

[2]Howard Taubman, "Sherlock Holmes to Music," New York Times, 17 February 1965, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 26, p. 376.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Prince, Contradictions, p. 114. [5]Ibid.

In addition, he thought the antiseptic love affair between Irene Adler and Holmes was a bad idea. Inga Swenson, however, had been set for the role of Irene when the director took over and "the lady and the love story were a part of the package."[1]

John McClain in the New York Journal American agreed with Prince about what the show might have been. McClain felt that it was an almost impossible chore to capture the essence of the Sherlock Holmes series on stage. He said:

> The background of the era that captured me was the coziness of the rooms in Baker Street, the clop clop of horses' hooves pulling hansom cabs, the rarefied suggestion of international intrigue, and the leisurely manner in which Holmes, between bouts with his violin and an occasional shot of cocaine proceeded to solve his cases. It was a beautiful period of ease and grace.[2]

Coopersmith enjoyed the collaboration with Prince.

> Hal is a dynamo. He's a very energized kind of person. There's a motor working inside him at all times. There's always a little smile on his face. He had a kind of elfin, boyish, mischievous quality. That boyish quality is one reason why he sometimes goes into farce a bit. He knows that. He says, "I have this tendency, so please watch me and catch me on it every time I do this."[3]

One bit of staging that Coopersmith did not like followed the scene in which Holmes has a life-and-death struggle with Moriarty. The audience is led to believe that they

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[1]Ibid.

[2]John McClain, "Alas, Poor Holmes," New York Journal American, 21 February 1965, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Coopersmith interview.

both die in a plunge from a cliff. The next thing you see is a twin funeral and you see one coffin being led in from stage left and the other coffin is being carried from stage right. The crooks are carrying Moriarty's coffin and the Baker Street Irregulars are carrying Holmes' coffin. As the coffins come towards each other ("and that would have been enough of a joke," said Coopersmith), Prince had staged it so that the two coffins bump into each other. Coopersmith didn't care for it. Prince wanted it that way and it was done that way for some time. It was eventually cut but Coopersmith does not remember why, when or under what circumstances.[1]

Cohen got a sudden impulse during the preparations for Baker Street to have Richard Burton make a recording of one of the show's songs, "A Married Man." While he was at it, Cohen also persuaded Elizabeth Taylor to record another of the show's numbers, "Finding Words for Spring." Tom Prideaux in Life said "It [Burton's record] came out sounding, inevitably, like Burton's endorsement of his own marriage, has far outsold any song in the musical, and its first five bars have been profitably used as a radio plug for the show."[2]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Tom Prideaux, "Hiring Hamlet to Promote Holmes," Life, 2 April 1965, p. 138.

During the out-of-town tryout in Boston's Shubert Theatre beginning December 28, 1964, Elinor Hughes in the Boston Herald said Baker Street was "an excellent musical show which keeps to the spirit of the character and the period and offers fine period style with elegance, action and that splendid ringing prose which we all associate with Holmes and his devoted Dr. Watson."[1]

Following the Boston tryout, the show played Toronto, prompting the Toronto Telegram critic, Ronald Evans, to make this prediction:

> There's going to be a traffic jam at the intersection of Baker Street and Broadway. . . . It has a brilliant, fog-filled Victorian London setting by Oliver Smith that continually provokes its own ovations; and . . . a good, literate, witty, down-in-the-sewer-and-up-in-the-balloon book . . . a marvelous squad of scruffy street urchins called the Baker Street Irregulars who dance rings around London; . . . and a gently mocking mood that makes the . . . hours in the theatre a tonic.[2]

The show received mixed notices when it opened in New York at the Broadway Theatre on February 16, 1965. John Chapman of the Daily News called it "an absolutely captivating entertainment."[3] Howard Taubman of the New York

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[1]Elinor Hughes, "Sherlock Holmes Set to Music with Elegance, Action and Fun," Boston Herald, 29 December 1964, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ronald Evans, "Cover Story," Toronto Telegram, April 1965, p. 22, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]John Chapman, "'Baker Street' Is a Captivating Musical about Sherlock Holmes," New York Daily News, 17 February 1965, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 26, p. 375.

Times felt that the musical overcame some of its problems early in the show. "Before the end of the first half it has caught the master detective's mood and style, and the second half is capital fun."[1]

Richard Watts, Jr. in the New York Post was not complimentary. He did, however, like Weaver's Holmes, and Gabel's Moriarty, wishing that Gabel had been given more to do in the show. He was unhappy about Holmes being pursued by a woman in love (which he felt had been added to appeal to the musical comedy audience). He said, "It was the curious flatness of the whole ambitious enterprise that should have given them pause. Baker Street is most disappointing."[2]

Walter Kerr felt the show had a potentially jolly attitude but it didn't keep it up. He also found fault with the love premise and the fact that the song, "A Married Man," didn't fit into the scene in which it was sung. He said,

> While Holmes and Watson are strapped to chairs listening nervously to that ticking chronometer, Watson thinks of his deceased wife. Music cue. Watson sings a tender ballad, already somewhat successful, called "A Married Man." It's the last thing he should be doing in the circumstances, you see. And that's how the whole of Baker Street has been conceived.[3]

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[1]Taubman, "Sherlock Holmes to Music."

[2]Watts, "Sherlock Holmes' Musical Career."

[3]Kerr, "Walter Kerr Reviews 'Baker Street.'"

Although Prince received some good notices as director, such as Chapman's comment that "Prince has kept the show in steady motion," and on his Jubilee Parade as the most imaginative touch in the show,[1] he was taken to task by Kerr.

> There's a certain fuzziness about the staging, which has been attended to by Harold Prince, that fails to say exactly when a particular joke is being made. The tongue-in-cheek point is there, somehow, but in a very generalized, lazy unfocused way.[2]

Prince, who had hoped to give up producing and to direct for other managements, learned from his experience on Baker Street that if he wanted to truly direct a show his own way with full artistic control, he would have to keep his production office open. In order to be free of the many business aspects of producing which he disliked doing, he would have to begin delegating these responsibilities to his staff. Ruth Mitchell would eventually become his associate producer, and Howard Haines would soon succeed Carl Fisher as general manager. He realized that, by arranging things this way, he could be more in control of the projects he directed. Another motivation which made him decide to retain his production office was his fear of being replaced on a show. Knowing that even the most successful musicals are in some trouble during their out-of-town tryout period,

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[1]Watts, "Sherlock Holmes' Musical Career."

[2]Kerr, "Walter Kerr Reviews 'Baker Street.'"

Prince worried that another producer "might get jittery and fire me."[1] And, too, if he gave up producing, he would be at the mercy of job offers. "On Broadway, unlike in the West End, there is simply not enough work, and able directors are forced to accept inferior material in order to work. As a producer I create my opportunities."[2]

Baker Street ran for 313 performances and closed November 14, 1965. It was until then the longest-running play about Sherlock Holmes that had ever been staged. Coopersmith said that the show might have run longer if there had been TV commercials for Broadway shows at that time.

Baker Street received three Tony Award nominations. They were for the best leading actress in a musical, the best set and for the best book for a musical. It was, however, the year Fiddler won virtually all the awards.

After Baker Street, there were no offers for Prince to direct. In fact, it took three years before another producer offered him a directing project. Instead, Prince got involved in producing Flora, the Red Menace.

Poor Bitos

A production of Poor Bitos by the French playwright Jean Anouilh was playing in a small theatre club in London

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 116.

[2]Ibid.

at the time Harold Prince was directing the London production of She Loves Me. Prince liked the production, feeling it was "the most astonishing play I'd seen in too long."[1] He decided to present it in New York. Prince knew that Poor Bitos had limited commercial possibilities. "Disregarding the obvious,"[2] Prince remarked about his actions that he became involved in presenting a production for its artistic merits rather than for its monetary potential.

Poor Bitos is a black comedy in which Anouilh juxtaposes the political upheavals of France in 1955 with a searing flashback to the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution, striking at the heart of political extremism. The play was first produced in France in 1956 when the country was hopelessly entangled in Vietnam and after Dien Bien Phu had fallen. Algeria was in revolt and the old Empire was crumbling.

The action of the play takes place in the dungeon-like great hall of a one-time Carmelite priory in a French provincial town on an evening in 1955. Charles D. Gray plays the role of Maxime. He has inherited this ruin and has planned to give one dinner party before selling it. It is to be a "wig party." Guests may wear modern dress but with an eighteenth-century wig. They are asked to impersonate famous personages of the French Revolution. It was the

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[1]Ibid., p. 110. [2]Ibid.

custom in France at this time for political parties to give dinner parties and Anouilh uses the device to bridge the gap between present-day political ideas and those of the past. Although the party appears to be a light and sophisticated affair, there are vengeful overtones--"to get the town's assistant prosecutor and destroy him."[1] Bitos, the prosecutor (played by Donald Pleasence), is portrayed as an unyielding man who is still hunting down collaborationists although the war has been over for ten years.

Maxime assigns historic roles such as Marie Antoinette, Mirabeau, Sainte-Just, Danton, Lucile Desmoulins, Tallien and Camille Desmoulins and victims of the French Revolution to his guests and servants. The role of Robespierre is played by Bitos, who comes in full costume in addition to his wig.

During the first act, the light bantering level is replaced by hatred as the guests remind Bitos of what an "insufferable grind he was at school and what a cold fish he is now. He could, for example have spared the life of a friend who was executed for being a collaborator."[2] Bitos, as Robespierre, defends his actions but reveals his own hatred towards his companions. The purpose of the

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[1]John Chapman, "Jean Anouilh, Donald Pleasence Make 'Poor Bitos' Good Theatre," New York Daily News, 16 November 1964, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 25, p. 147.

[2]Ibid.

evening appears to be to "bait Bitos, to bring Bitos to his awkward, drunken, humiliated knees. If Bitos dies of the experience, no one will care much."[1]

Bitos survives the evening but is then lured to a cabaret. The girl who has refused to marry him warns him that, although she doesn't love him and can't love a man like him, she hopes to save him from the final "coup de grace" that is planned for him by his angry friends. "Before he goes, he pauses to look once more at the woman who has had enough pity for him to tell him the truth. And he tells her, very directly, that if ever he finds himself in a position of absolute power, she will be the first to fall under his axe. He goes, and the play ends."[2] At the end, Bitos is a "fierce, racked animal whose only response to a kindness is that he has another injury to avenge."[3]

To bring the play to New York, Prince capitalized the three-act production at $90,000 and the backers lost the full amount.[4] Prince presented the Lucienne Hill translation in association with Michael Codron and Pledon Ltd. The play rehearsed in New York with an American cast with

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[1]Walter Kerr, "Poor Bitos," New York Herald Tribune, 16 November 1964, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 25, p. 148.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Howard Taubman, "Jean Anouilh's 'Poor Bitos' Opens," New York Times, 16 November 1964, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 25, p. 148.

[4]"Poor Bitos," Variety, 13 February 1974, p. 90, NYPL Clipping Folder.

the exception of Donald Pleasence and Charles Gray of the London company. Shirley Butler, the director who had staged the play in London, was an American and restaged the production in New York. Prince recalls:

> We recreated to the last detail the London set, although the United Scenic Artists insisted that we credit an American designer who in fact did nothing more than supervise the building and the hanging of it in the theatre. I deplore anything which inhibits a free flow of creative talent between countries. Much has been said about protecting the American actor from the infiltration of the British and vice-versa, but not enough to convince me. There are periods Broadway is British and vice-versa and over the years it comes out even.[1]

Butler duplicated the London production except for the costumes, designed here by Donald Brooks. Prince felt that there was no fun in doing the production because it became an exercise in repeating what had been done on the London stage. Pleasence had expresed the hope that the staging might be different in New York. As Prince explained years later: "My work probably is best characterized by precisely that production Pleasence sought, but at the time I didn't know what he was talking about."[2] Prince admits that in 1964 he was ignorant about the type of surrealistic staging that might have given the piece what it needed to overcome its wordy, static elements. He was quite willing to leave things as they were and "listen to the play."[3]

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 110.

[2]Ibid., p. 111. [3]Ibid.

Later when he saw Andre Gregory's version of Poor Bitos at the Theatre of the Living Arts in Philadelphia "with sets, costumes, performances outsized, and the ideas at the heart of the play moving, I knew for the first time what Pleasence meant," said Prince.[1]

Poor Bitos opened in New York on November 14, 1964 at the Cort Theatre after two weeks of sold-out preview performances. The critics did not like the play but they found it arresting. John McClain in the Journal American said:

> Like The Rehearsal, this is an enlightened experience--perhaps a little aimless at times--but certainly performed brilliantly and produced to perfection. . . . It is a magnificent commentary on the frayed fabric of the human make-up, the inflexible blindness of the dedicated, but it is doubtful that it will have general appeal as a theatrical attraction. . . . There aren't enough people that want to be disturbed.[2]

Walter Kerr in the New York Herald Tribune said:

> Poor Bitos is a cold play about cold men, on both sides. Perhaps Anouilh has intended just that. Perhaps Shirley Butler, in redirecting it after its success in London, has somewhere lost the warming crackle that might have come from language alone; there is still wit to be listened for. . . . In any case, the contest is too long unclear, the incidental invention too diffuse, to sustain us while we are making our way to that last chilling judgment.[3]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]John McClain, "Brilliantly Performed," New York Journal American, 16 November 1964, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 25, p. 147.

[3]Kerr, "Poor Bitos."

Norman Nadel in the New York World-Telegram and Sun praised Harold Prince for bringing the play with Pleasence and Gray to New York. Howard Taubman in the New York Times wrote:

> Poor Bitos is an angry play, as vindictive about smallness and cruelty as its principal antagonists. It has no use for the malicious well-born, rich and powerful and even less for the sanctimonious, murderous bearers of change. It is so busy demolishing those whom it hates that it scarcely adumbrates the possibility of decency. Though not a comforting play, it cannot be ignored, thanks to its controlled wrath and Mr. Pleasence's remarkable work.[1]

After the show opened, business slumped at the box-office. Prince reduced ticket prices to keep the show running on a week-to-week basis, "meeting expenses, with no possibility of profit, but no one came. Two weeks later we closed."[2]

Poor Bitos had been Prince's second production of the season. The first had been Fiddler and before the season would be over, he planned to complete a directorial assignment on Baker Street and launch yet another musical, Flora, the Red Menace, under the Prince production banner. Flora would be the last play he would produce that he didn't direct (with the exception of Side by Side by Sondheim in 1977). To add to his already busy schedule, Prince

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[1]Taubman, "Jean Anouilh's 'Poor Bitos' Opens."

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 112.

at the time was also serving as president of the League of New York Theatres. Indeed, there was scarcely time to mourn the passing of Poor Bitos.

CHAPTER VIII

FLORA, THE RED MENACE

(A Last Show with Abbott)

AND

IT'S A BIRD . . . IT'S A PLANE . . . IT'S SUPERMAN

Flora, the Red Menace

Flora, the Red Menace was the last of the shows that Prince produced that he did not direct. Based on the book, Love Is Just Around the Corner by Lester Atwell, the story is of a spunky young girl, Flora, looking for a job as a commercial artist in the '30s and her involvement with the Young Communist League. The show aimed to be a nostalgic satire about the idealistic American communists of the post-Depression era. Flora, the Red Menace was Prince's third musical which he either produced or directed in the season of 1964-1965, and it was his fourth show that year. Early on, Fiddler had been followed by Poor Bitos and, at this time, Baker Street was trying out in Boston.

John Kander, who had written the music for A Family Affair, and the lyricist Fred Ebb were asked to compose some songs for Flora. Prince had known both creators individually but he now teamed the two songwriters for a

show. (They had worked together on the ballad, "My Coloring Book.") Ebb came to musical theatre in 1963 with the show Morning Sun (produced by the Phoenix Theatre), for which he wrote both the book and lyrics. There followed lyrics to various revues and to the television show That Was the Week that Was.

Garson Kanin was asked by Prince to do the adaptation but he suggested Robert Russell, with whom he had written a Tracy-Hepburn film. Russell had also co-authored the Jackie Gleason musical, Take Me Along. Prince at first thought that Russell would be ideal for the job since he had had some personal experience with the "movement." Russell gave the show its title, Flora, the Red Menace, which Prince believed hit the tone of the show perfectly: "Affectionate, somehow rueful."[1] However, it did not take long for Prince to realize that Russell was not adept at writing a musical libretto. Prince recalled, "there was an obduracy, an unwillingness to bend, an impracticality, difficult to analyze. I came to think he had an uneasy compact with failure on this one, the result perhaps of his experiences during those painful years. Eager to work on the one hand, but pessimistic about the outcome. The cynic had replaced the idealist."[2]

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 118.

[2]Ibid.

Prince asked Abbott to co-author with Russell and to direct the project. Prince hoped that the more experienced Abbott would be able to use Russell's good work while adding his own professional touch. Abbott liked the original source material and some of Russell's dialogue. However, the first draft Abbott sent to Prince contained very little of Russell's original material. Now, the best song numbers did not fit the libretto, and the show somehow lacked emotion. Prince sent Kander and Ebb to Abbott in Florida to work on integrating the script and score, and to try and put the missing emotion back into the show. Returning to New York, Prince worried that Abbott's terse manner with the songwriting team had given them a false sense of assurance. Prince said, "Abbott's granitelike stability tranquilized them. More appropriately, they were intoxicated, and this pattern prevailed. Each time they would come to me justifiably worried about the material, I would send them to the typewriter, or to the telephone to contact Abbott, and each time they would return in orbit."[1]

"Although Prince didn't direct Flora," said choreographer Lee Becker Theodore, "Hal was already becoming the director as we know him today. He would not sit back any longer and say 'Let the creative people do what they want.' He'd go right in there. I think probably in the early days

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[1]Ibid.

Hal was in the shadow of Abbott. But now he was growing up creatively and artistically. And he now had opinions and insights of his own, that were his own personal perspective."[1]

Abbott, who enjoys the warm Florida climate during the winter months, was not willing to come north for any extended period of time to work on the show. Instead, he tried his hand from a distance and it just didn't work. Russell was very angry about the way the project was going but was at a loss as to how it could be fixed. And Prince admits that, "because he [Russell] didn't and he was the outsider, we closed ranks around Abbott. Sometimes protecting Abbott took precedence over protecting the play."[2] Prince admits that he was wrong not to insist that Abbott come to New York to work on the show or at the very least, he now feels, he should have postponed the project until the following season. However, Prince did none of the above. They moved ahead and even the supervision of the scenery and costumes was left to the producer because of his absentee director. Prince feels that they were not ready when they went into rehearsal since the script was not completed.

Russell had written his first draft for Flora with Barbra Streisand in mind, but she was unavailable and 19-

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[1]Theodore interview.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 120.

year-old Liza Minnelli was cast as Flora. She had auditioned for Prince two years earlier and at that time he felt she was too young for the role. She then appeared in an Off-Broadway production of Best Foot Forward, which provided her with a perfect showcase. Subsequently, she toured with The Fantasticks and Carnival. She also appeared frequently on television and at the London Palladium. When she auditioned again for Flora, she wanted the part badly but the audition was somewhat less than successful. However, this time she was not considered too raw, or too youthful a performer "with nothing but her parents' names to recommend her."[1] Called back for a second reading, Harold Prince told her exactly what he wanted in the role. She pleased him and was hired. Minnelli claimed that to prepare for the role, she took her first formal vocal lessons. She also observed acting classes conducted by Uta Hagen and Herbert Berghof.[2]

The story of Flora, the Red Menace takes place in the autumn of 1935 when Federal job programs were available and in the spring of 1936--when the gloom of the Depression was beginning to lift. Hunger riots and bonus marches were over, but the memory lingered on. During the worst years

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[1]"Flora Role Ended--But Her Melody Lingers On," Diplomat, September 1965, p. 6. NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]William Glover, "Liza Minnelli Determined to Make It on Her Own," Lawton Constitution, 7 June 1965, p. 28.

of poverty, people had discussed the choice between fascism and communism, but by 1936 it was clear that Americans had chosen to stay with democracy.

A prologue turns the clock back to the 1933 of breadlines and despair. The voice of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Art Carney) offers the nation hope. The scene then shifts to a graduation ceremony at New York City's High School of Commercial Art where Flora Meszaros (Liza Minnelli) is delivering the valedictorian address. She urges her classmates to be optimistic even though the future looks bleak. She sings "Unafraid," of which Norman Nadel of the New York World-Telegram and Sun said, "As for the anthem, "Unafraid," one of several good songs by Kander and Ebb, it is wonderfully stirring."[1] Nadel felt the graduation scene was "one of the happiest moments of this season on Broadway."[2] The scene is somewhat reminiscent of the prologue of Merrily We Roll Along, a musical Prince would direct sixteen years later and which also opens at the protagonist's high school graduation ceremony where he is delivering the valedictorian address.

In the following scene, it is the fall of 1935 and Flora is applying for a job as a fashion illustrator at a Fifth Avenue department store, Garrett & Mellick. As she

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[1]Norman Nadel, "A Happy Moment on Broadway," New York World-Telegram and Sun, 26 May 1965, p. 26.

[2]Ibid.

fills out an application form for what seems like a hopeless cause, she enthusiastically sings "All I Need (Is One Good Break)." She meets another job seeker, Harry Toukarian (Bob Dishy) and they leave the office together. Harry is a stammerer and puts pebbles in his mouth, like Demosthenes, to help his public speaking. They make plans to meet again the following day so that they can get better acquainted, singing the duet, "Not Every Day of the Week."

Harry is an avowed communist and we see him planning a rendezvous with his comrades. They include Ada (Mary Louise Wilson), Charlotte (Cathryn Damon), and Jackson (Clark Morgan). Soon Flora is in love with Harry and invites him to her studio where she rents space to artists and also teaches classes in fashion illustration. Flora entertains the idea of renting Harry space in her studio since he gives her an apple every time they meet, doing something special to her. Flora's other tenants, a unique bunch, are wary of Harry, realizing he is a "red." Harry soon convinces Flora to join the Party in the number "Sign Here."

At Flora's first cell meeting, she learns of the activities of the group. They picket, make public speeches and go on marches. Flora wants to become part of this exciting adventure, although she is aware that her inexperience will make her vulnerable to any roughing up she might suffer from the police. "Ada highlights the meeting as she

recounts her unorthodox doings in pursuit of her idea of a better society."[1] They do a number called "The Flame," which "pleasingly mixes Slavic rhythms and misguided idealism, to give a teasing taste of what the musical as a whole might have been with more inspiration on the part of Kander and Ebb, collaborators on the score."[2]

While Flora goes back to Garrett & Mellick to check on a job, her tenants rehearse the song "Palomino Pal" for an appearance on Major Bowes' Amateur Hour. At the department store, executives offer Flora $30 a week while expressing their fears of having communists infiltrate their establishment. Flora sings "A Quiet Thing" "with a delicacy that speaks well not only for her self-restraint but for the discipline imposed by her wise and experienced director, Mr. Abbott."[3] Flora accepts the position at the department store. Her friends and comrades are delighted and feel she'll now be able to do more productive things for the cause, such as selling the Daily Worker.

A red rally takes place in Union Square, with Flora right in the middle selling her papers, calling all who refuse to buy fascists. Charlotte is after Harry, but Harry

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[1]Flora, the Red Menace, record liner notes, by Mort Goode, RCA Red Seal CBL1-2760.

[2]Frederick H. Guidry, "'Red' Musical," Christian Science Monitor, 15 April 1965, p. 9, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Howard Taubman, "Flora, the Red Menace," New York Times, 12 May 1965, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 26, p. 330.

is after Flora. He propositions her. She says she loves him but won't go home with him--yet. Flora talks about how deep her feelings are for Harry--more than just physical. Somehow, though, she finds herself walking toward Harry's apartment and the first act ends with the number "Dear Love."

The second act opens in Harry's apartment where Flora assumes that Charlotte and Harry are having an affair, after accidentally finding Charlotte there in a state close to nudity. It is the seductive Charlotte who has pushed things this far and the innocent Harry is not to blame. Flora is very upset, doesn't believe Harry's explanation of the situation, and rushes off.

Later Harry appears at Flora's studio to make amends and they have a spat. Even worse, Charlotte shows up to rehearse "The Tree of Life" ballet with her comrades. It is communist propaganda and Flora begins to question her role as a Party worker. Charlotte sabotages Flora by planting copies of the Daily Worker in her locker at the office. Flora's boss discovers Flora's Party membership and fires her. Flora then sings "Sing Happy," a bluesy number "with a desperately nonchalant rhythm and with outbursts of passionate, lamenting sound."[1] Flora soon throws all the communist pamphlets out of her studio. Harry wants to remain

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[1]Ibid.

a Party member though his standing is ruined. After Harry goes, Flora's boss arrives to tell her that some stuttering fellow called him and explained about how the incriminating evidence had been placed in her locker by someone who wanted to "frame her." All is forgiven and she can have her job back.

Flora realizes that it was Harry who had cleared her name. Still confused about her future with the communists, with the final song, "You Are You," she is convinced by her friends that she should resign from the Party and that "the whole experience was merely 'chapter one in a young girl's life.'"[1]

John Chapman in the Daily News suggested that the most amusing turn in the show was "Express Yourself," done by the leading man, Bob Dishy, and Cathryn Damon. "It is, thanks to Miss Damon's twists, turns and curves, a more satisfying satire on sex than Flora is on communism."[2] Another novelty number that critics agreed was exceptionally entertaining is "Knock Knock," played by Mary Louise Wilson and James Cresson. The script is studded with timely references to sidewalk speeches, the Major Bowes Amateur Hour, and knock-knock jokes.

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[1] Flora, the Red Menace, record liner notes.

[2] John Chapman, "Liza Minnelli Puts Needed Zing in Songs of 'Flora, the Red Menace,'" New York Daily News, 2 May 1965, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 26, p. 330.

In an interview with Stuart W. Little of the Herald Tribune, George Abbott, at the time rehearsals were about to begin, suggested that this may well have been the first musical to take a kidding view of the radical movement of the 1930s and Union Square communists. At least Abbott couldn't remember any others. "I wouldn't want to do this one if I could think of any others," said Abbott.[1]

Abbott and Prince cast the musical mainly with performers unknown to the Broadway musical scene. This was Minnelli's first Broadway musical, as it was for five of the fifteen principals. Bob Dishy, who played Harry, winning Flora's love while luring her into communism, had received national exposure on TV's That Was the Week that Was and was a replacement (Rocky) in Damn Yankees, and a veteran of "Second City." Cathryn Damon, who played Comrade Charlotte, had played Shelley Berman's girlfriend in A Family Affair, and had done some Off-Broadway shows. Mary Louise Wilson (Ada) had last been seen in a comedy role in Hot Spot, as well as in Julius Monk's revues. Abbott claims that he does not ask what experience actors have when they audition for him. He is only interested in their talent and how well they will please an audience.[2]

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[1]Stuart W. Little, "Flora, the Red Menace," New York Herald Tribune, 2 February 1965, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Abbott interview.

Flora was capitalized at $400,000. Abbott, involved with his 105th Broadway show at the age of 77, was to share with Prince in 55% of any net profits earned by the musical. Backers were to share 45% of the profits. Prince and Abbott were general partners of the limited partnership venture through their respective firms, Sonjud Theatrical Enterprises, Inc., and Susie Theatrical Enterprises, Inc.[1]

Lee Theodore was hired to do the choreography for Flora. Prince was happy with her work as choreographer on Baker Street and before that show had even opened, Prince asked her to choreograph Flora.

> Hal liked a "serious approach." . . . He didn't like a lot of fluff and nonsense and I felt that influence very strongly in Flora. Flora was pitted against the backdrop of communism and Hal was not content to ignore that. . . . He wanted a head-on confrontation really--and a facing-up to the theme of that show. And Abbott didn't have the same viewpoint. Abbott was doing Meet the People. He was doing an entertainment and I think that they were in conflict on that show. . . . I was privy to a lot of the production meetings out of town when the show opened. Hal was very generous that way. He wanted me to learn and felt that he had been given many, many opportunities and apparently I was lucky enough to be chosen by Hal to sit in on almost every possible production meeting whether with the designer, the backer, a tech person or the lighting person. . . . I was privy to these meetings even though I didn't participate very often. I was thrilled that Hal dragged me around on all this top level stuff.[2]

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[1]"Flora, the Red Menace," Variety, 3 February 1965, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Theodore interview.

T. K. Morse in the Boston Patriot Ledger said that Theodore's choreography in Flora is "so fresh it seems to improve the music. 'Blood on 23rd Street,' a sort of pirouette-in-cheek Marxist ballet, is rollicking entertainment."[1] Robert J. Leeney, in the New Haven Journal-Courier, called Cathryn Damon's seductive number, "Express Yourself," which she performs in a visit to Harry's monastic apartment, as an "unforgettable few moments of fleshy theorizing in dance. . . . She is a fine dancer and in this bit (reminiscent of what director Abbott once did with 'Whatever Lola Wants'), in 'The Flame,' and in a satiric ballet, 'Blood on 23rd Street,' she and a high-stepping ensemble have the show awhirl with interesting choreography by Lee Theodore."[2]

Elinor Hughes in the Boston Herald was upset with the costumes in the "Blood on 23rd Street" number. She said:

> Would it be possible to liven up the costumes of the dancers so that the audience really has something to look at besides a group of grimly dedicated young men and women doing "Blood on 23rd Street" in black leotards? I know it is supposed to satirize the gloomy proletarian ballet and theatre of the 1930's but while Miss Becker's [Lee Theodore's] choreography is clever, all those black leotards are depressing.[3]

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[1]T. K. Morse, "Reds at the Colonial," Boston Patriot Ledger, 15 April 1965, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Robert J. Leeney, "Musical for the Masses," New Haven Journal-Courier, 6 April 1965, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Elinor Hughes, "'The Red Menace' Needs Some Work," Boston Herald, 18 April 1965, p. 18.

Dance Magazine suggested that the musical "shot its bolt in the first act and has nothing left for the second."[1] However, the article goes on to discuss the dance sequences in the show:

> Except for a small and soon-ended outburst of Russian-tinged dances during a Party meeting, Lee Theodore's choreography is allotted to one second act number, called "The Tree of Life." It is Comrade Charlotte's (Cathryn Damon) personal expression of the rise of the proletariat and the fall of capitalism. The Vine and Trunk (reedy Robert Fitch and rotund Neil J. Schwartz) are seen as parasitic growths, stifling the Twigs and Branches. Their extinction allows the Spirit of Revolution to run about in streaming red draperies (Mary Ann Niles) proclaiming the arrival of a new era.[2]

The reviewer ended with the observation that Theodore's work had a "curious flatness" about it.[3]

John McClain in the New York Journal American liked Theodore's work, suggesting that it was "generally swift and precise."[4] McClain called "The Tree of Life" ballet an "ambitious bit of symbolic ballet suggesting the Spirit of Revolution had a little trouble getting started but came to life quickly with the introduction of what in my experience was a famous first . . . a fat chorus boy" (McClain refers to Neil J. Schwartz).[5]

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[1]"Flora, the Red Menace," Dance Magazine, July 1965, p. 23, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

[4]John McClain, "'Flora'--Honest Musical," New York Journal American, 16 May 1965, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 26, p. 329.

[5]Ibid.

Flora, the Red Menace played its out-of-town tryout in New Haven at the Shubert Theatre through April 10, 1965. Harold Bone in Variety said of its New Haven production:

> "Flora" has enough good points about it for it to rate consideration as a hit potential. Shy on name values, it is going to have to rely strictly on its entertainment merit for solid acceptance. The merit is there, however and needs only skilled nursing to cash in.[1]

Florence Johnson in the New Haven Register liked Minnelli in the show, though she felt the music was a bit heavy on the brass. She suggested that Abbott and his aides do some "cutting and clipping here and there and perhaps toning down the big music numbers. There's so much material here that some judicious tailoring should point up the main theme."[2]

Robert Leeney summed up the show's assets:

> Flora, the Red Menace is a literate and lively adventure on memory lane; a deftly handled spoof of the Marxian fantasy which was part of our Depression illness and which has not always been treated with as much laughter, or understanding; and a neatly designed vehicle for Liza Minnelli's talent. It had the showmanship trademark of George Abbott all over it--which means the seal of approval comes built-in.[3]

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[1]Harold Bone, "Flora, the Red Menace," Variety, 6 April 1965, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Florence Johnson, "Flora, the Red Menace," New Haven Register, 6 April 1965, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Leeney, "Musical for the Masses."

Prince felt the reviews in New Haven were excellent and much better than they had expected. He was worried nevertheless that the show still "didn't have the right tone . . . and it's been very sluggish. There's still an awful lot of work to be done."[1] In the midst of the run in New Haven, Prince had to return to New York to attend a meeting of the League of New York Theatres, an organization composed of Broadway producers and theatre owners. Prince at the time was serving as its president. Gates quotes Prince as saying that he was quite confident he would win that season's Tony Award for producing Fiddler, but spoke with guarded optimism about Flora. He praised Minnelli and the score, but said there were things in the show he was not happy with but hoped they would be resolved before the Broadway opening.

On April 15, 1965, Flora opened in Boston's Colonial Theatre and played there for the following two and a half weeks. Once again, as in New Haven, it was well received by the critics. Alta Maloney in the Boston Traveler said:

> It's a nostalgic show, with every conceivable type of humor from the subtle to broad farce, a credit to its director, George Abbott, who probably soon will have his third hit on Broadway simultaneously.[2]

Kevin Kelly in the Boston Globe felt that Abbott had some work to do on the book. However, he thought that the

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[1]Quoted in Gates, "Broadway's Prince Charming," p. 108.

[2]Alta Maloney, "'Flora, the Red Menace' at Colonial," Boston Traveler, 15 April 1965, p. 39.

show was a good bet. He said Flora "began at a fast clip, fell into a plot-induced stasis, lost its edge, then suddenly found a vorpal sense of satire which director Abbott maintained right up to the 11 o'clock finale."[1] Kelly compared Minnelli to Streisand and felt she had the "same halting innocence, the same homely grace, the same deference of personality . . . She is personable, talented and winning. Her voice, however, is always over-projected and is sometimes tryingly thin, but it is a real voice with size, substance and passion."[2]

Elinor Hughes claimed that the major problem with Flora was the fact that it was a show without a hero, which left its heroine, Flora, rather lonesome at the close of the production. She said, "The character of Harry, the dedicated, stammering, not very bright Communist who talks Flora into joining the party because it's really for democracy, isn't appealing and as a lover he makes a pretty good clown."[3] Hughes' suggestion to remedy this situation was to build up the character of Mr. Stanley, the pleasant, helpful young man who employs Flora to do fashion drawings. He, she felt, was a better romantic prospect for the leading lady than Harry.

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[1]Kevin Kelly, "'Flora' Has the Stuff, But Needs Work," Boston Globe, 15 April 1965, p. 15.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Hughes, "'The Red Menace' Needs Some Work."

Abbott and the other collaborators continued to work on the show and it showed signs of improvement. Prince didn't bother much with it at this point since he was sure it was doomed. However, the improvements were so striking during the New York preview performances that even Prince's hopes were raised.

Flora, the Red Menace opened at the Alvin Theatre in New York on May 11, 1965. The reviews were generally poor and the show ran only 85 performances. Taubman in the New York Times said of the show, "It has the appearance of being pasted together with bits and pieces. A promising idea has not been enlivened by a creative spark."[1]

Walter Kerr questioned whether there was really so little "bubble" to those days during the Depression era. He asked, "Wasn't there--even in the worrying--more heart and more fun?"[2] He summed up the show's problems:

> The comedy is matter-of-fact and the party-line romance highly tentative. Perhaps nobody wanted to get our heroine in too deep. Is that why "Flora, the Red Menace" pulls its punches? And why it so often chooses to wander afield? Having decided to look at an era fairly, the show hedges, can't quite cut loose. In spite of competence everywhere, some heart is hesitant.[3]

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[1]Taubman, "Flora, the Red Menace."

[2]Walter Kerr, "Kerr Reviews 'Flora, the Red Menace,'" New York Herald Tribune, 12 May 1965, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 26, p. 331.

[3]Ibid.

The critics liked the Kander and Ebb score. Prince, in his book Contradictions: Notes on Twenty-Six Years in the Theatre, said that Abbott, too, found the songs brilliant. However, recalled Prince, "he quarreled with the best of them on the grounds that they were overemotional, even turgid."[1] Fred Ebb said he never understood that passage in Prince's book because it seemed to him that the songs that Abbott was fondest of were "It's a Quiet Thing" and the songs that were in fact "emotional." Ebb said, "'It's a Quiet Thing' was not one of my favorite songs, but it was Abbott's favorite. So, I never knew what he meant by 'the overly emotional ones.' And there are really no sentimental songs in the show except for 'A Quiet Thing.'"[2]

Prince was disappointed at Flora's short run. He felt that things needn't have turned out that way. He had been very anxious to direct the show himself and felt that had he directed it things might have turned out differently. However, he lacked the courage at that point in his directing career to tell Abbott what he wanted to do. Now, Prince feels, had he approached Abbott with the idea that he direct, Abbott might have been surprised but characteristically, after the surprise wore off, he [Abbott] might have liked the idea. Prince feels had they worked together,

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 118.

[2]Interview with Fred Ebb, New York, 1 February 1982.

he might have been able to create a consistent attitude toward the material. One of the problems Prince saw with the show was that Abbott did not have enough sympathy for the subject matter of the production. Prince said, "Abbott brought to Flora no clear attitude about the Party. His Communists were cartoon characters some of them farcical, others evil."[1] He went on to suggest that Abbott's inability to identify with the theme was due to the fact that Abbott had been "secure financially for over sixty years. He is essentially an apolitical man."[2]

Fred Ebb, when asked how Flora might have differed had Prince directed it instead of Abbott, said:

> I don't know what might have happened to that show if Hal had directed it. I think it might have been a little tougher in fact. Tough shows seem to be what Hal always (at least at that stage in his career) was attracted to most, personally. He wasn't producing them, but I think that down deep that's what he wanted to do. Out of which came Cabaret. I think he may have taken a harder view of the Flora material. I know he was disappointed with what the show eventually looked and sounded like.[3]

Although Flora, the Red Menace was not successful for Prince, it did have, as with many of his shows, important consequences in the world of the American Musical Theatre. He had teamed two songwriters, Kander and Ebb, who had

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 118.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ebb interview.

never done a show together before, and they wrote a score for Liza Minnelli, who was a young, 19-year-old performer with one Off-Broadway show to her credit and a pair of famous parents. John S. Wilson, reviewing the RCA Victor cast album of the show for the New York Times, said, "Kander and Ebb in their first collaboration for Broadway, have written a set of songs that not only serve their purpose well in the structure of the show but, more importantly, have provocatively comic or tuneful qualities that provide the bases for distinctive performances."[1] Wilson went on to say that Flora is "like an old fashioned musical comedy in the sense that it is not simply a star vehicle, as Funny Girl is for Barbra Streisand or Hello, Dolly! for Carol Channing, but a show that depends on the skills of a number of performers."[2]

After their collaboration on Flora, Kander, Ebb and Minnelli would work together on many important projects and the Kander-Ebb-Prince collaboration would flower shortly as the show, Cabaret.

Almost immediately after his busy 1964-65 season ended, Prince took some time off from the theatre and spent much of that summer and fall working for his friend, John V. Lindsay, in the campaign that resulted in New York gaining

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[1]John S. Wilson, "Liza Minnelli and 'Flora,'" New York Times, 25 May 1965, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ibid.

its first Republican mayor in twenty years. When the election was over, Prince had planned to take a well-deserved vacation. But, as usual, idleness tended to unnerve him and he soon jumped headlong into his next project: producing (in association with Ruth Mitchell) and directing It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's SUPERMAN. Since another project he had been working on--a musical to be titled Cabaret--had been put on hold for awhile, he found doing the SUPERMAN show a timely opportunity.

It's a Bird...It's a Plane... It's SUPERMAN

The successful songwriting team, Charles Strouse and Lee Adams, of Bye Bye Birdie fame did not originate the concept of doing a show about Superman. They did, however, want Esquire writers Robert Benton and David Newman (who also scripted the film Bonnie and Clyde) to write something for the theatre on which they could all collaborate, since they felt they were "very funny satirical writers."[1] Benton and Newman had invented the "Dubious Distinction Award" for Esquire. Adams and Strouse had met them and felt that they were talented young men. "We asked them to come up with an idea for a show and they came up with the idea for SUPERMAN. So the four of us got the rights and did it."[2]

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[1]Interview with Lee Adams, New York, 8 March 1984.

[2]Ibid.

After David Merrick dropped his sponsorship, the four writers began looking for a producer and director. When the show was partially written, they asked Prince to read it. He liked it and decided to produce and direct. Prince was not deterred by the fact that, although there had been a successful musical based on the comic strip "Li'l Abner" with its interesting Dogpatch characters, that show was considered a freakish exception to the negative rule regarding musicals based on comic strips. (This was, of course, years before the tremendous Annie hit.) The success of Li'l Abner was attributed to a bouncy score and a cast headed by such lovely actresses as Edie Adams and Tina Louise. Earlier efforts to turn comic strip favorites into theatre projects, such as the stage adventures of "Mutt and Jeff" and the "Katzenjammer Kids," had proved less fruitful. In truth, such attractions were often shelved before reaching Broadway. As usual, Prince was undaunted by the unfavorable statistics concerning shows based on comic strip characters.

Ruth Mitchell, for the first time, became co-producer of SUPERMAN. She was virtually Prince's assistant director, taking charge of the technical elements of the production and leaving him freer to concentrate on the creative aspects. Mitchell started her career as a dancer and an actress, and then went on to become assistant stage manager and production stage manager for Broadway shows, many of which

were Prince productions. Mitchell had been Prince's production stage manager since West Side Story.

Original musicals are not as common as adaptations and successful originals are rarer still. The script of It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's SUPERMAN (the show will hereafter be called Superman) deals with the Superman legend and parodies the hero in a kind of pop art fashion. The show was written in 1964, anticipating the pop art craze. Prince expected that their show would be the first theatre piece incorporating that style. However, the show which opened in 1965 after taking thirteen months to write actually followed on the heels of the pop art fad, which had already reached its zenith in the intervening months between the creation and the presentation of the musical. A Batman series was being presented on television and pop art and camp were seen everywhere. Prince said, "This show was another case where the show lost its uniqueness in the time it took to put it together. Superman was planned long before Batman appeared on the TV tube, but it seemed old hat by the time we presented it."[1]

Superman is the protagonist of both the musical and the celebrated comic strip on which it is based. He is the virtuous hero from the planet Krypton, who is constantly saving girl reporter Lois Lane and the city of Metropolis

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[1]"The New York Harold," interview with Harold Prince, Theatre One, International Theatre Institute of the U.S. (New York: DBS Publications, 1969), p. 39.

from scoundrels. Superman is disguised a good deal of the time as the meek and humble Daily Planet reporter, Clark Kent. Kent, who is stronger and more principled than anybody, is, in this story, pitted against a couple of bad guys who are determined to bring him down. His antagonists are a mad, revenge-lusting atomic scientist named Abner Sedgwick, scarred because he has not won a Nobel Prize after trying for forty years, and a miserable Daily Planet newspaper columnist named Max Mencken, bent on unmasking Superman and making money in the process. In one of the more amusing sequences, the mad scientist breaks down the invincible Superman by means of psychoanalysis.

During the course of the show, Superman tries to save the city from an atomic attack by a new Chinese Communist weapon. Lois Lane stays steadfast in her belief in Superman, and although, in Richard Watts, Jr.'s words, "there are times when it looks as though he may be grounded and immobilized he rallies before the final curtain and takes off once again in his effort to aid mankind."[1]

Casting just the right actor/singer as Superman was not an easy task. Shirley Rich, who was then Prince's casting director, put out a call for a 6' 4"-tall, 190-lb. actor who had a facial and physical resemblance to the

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[1]Richard Watts, Jr., "There's No Denying It's Superman," New York Post, 30 March 1966, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 27, p. 311.

super character. There were additional physical expectations which eliminated the last fifty or so competitors. Prince specified he wanted someone who had a 17 neck, 50 chest, 32 waist, 37½ hips, 18½ biceps, and 26½ thighs. Bob Holiday, who had played the law clerk in Fiorello!, won the role. For his audition he sang songs from Camelot and Fiorello!. He read a scene from Superman and Prince advised him not to "characterize it; play it straight."[1] Sometimes Prince ruled out a candidate for the role on physique alone. Those who looked promising and sounded musical were given a Clark Kent scene to read. If they passed that test, they got to read a few lines of a Superman scene. The critics praised Holiday in the part. Watts in the New York Post said that he "has the physique and stalwart good looks just right for the title role, and acts with likeable and appropriate modesty."[2] Kerr said that Holiday "played with a forthright cloddishness."[3]

Michael O'Sullivan was hired to play the villainous nuclear scientist. He received excellent notices for his work. Although most critics pointed out that the tone of

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[1]Sam Zolotow, "Superman Toils for Musical Role," New York Times, 17 November 1965, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Watts, "There's No Denying It's Superman."

[3]Walter Kerr, "Kerr Reviews '...It's Superman,'" New York Herald Tribune, 30 March 1966, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 27, p. 310.

the show, a mixture of the comic and the serious, was guilefully accomplished, Watts said that "the performance that delighted me most almost destroys this theory. Michael O'Sullivan, who portrays the villainous nuclear scientist driven mad by never quite winning the Nobel Prize, obviously doesn't take his role seriously for a moment. He is clearly having the time of his life making fun of villainy, science and I suppose the cult of camp. Instead of thereby destroying the spell of the game, he adds to it prodigiously."[1] Stanley Kauffmann in the New York Times felt that O'Sullivan gave the audience a good time. Kauffmann said of the actor, "He is theatrically vibrant, with a good voice, some humor and an effective presence."[2]

Patricia Marand, who played Lois Lane, was called "beauteous" by John McClain. He went on to say that she has "a splendid voice and figure singing things like 'What I've Always Wanted' and 'I'm Not Finished Yet.'"[3]

Linda Lavin, as Sydney, Max's secretary, played a jeering employee who long ago has recognized the columnist for what he was. The songs for which she received

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[1]Richard Watts, Jr., "Through the Skies with Superman," New York Post, 17 April 1966, p. 6.

[2]Stanley Kauffmann, "'It's a Bird...It's a Plane... It's Superman,' It's a Musical and It's Here," New York Times, 30 March 1966, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 27, p. 313.

[3]John McClain, "Superman," New York Journal American, 30 March 1966, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 27, p. 311.

outstanding notices were "You've Got Possibilities" and "Ooh, Do You Love You." Cue magazine said of Lavin:

> Linda Lavin, who has graced a number of off-Broadway shows, including the Mad Show, still going strong at the New Theatre, is living proof of the superiority of girls from the College of William and Mary. She is a delightful comedienne, and her ironic lines are delivered with deadpan perfection. Singer, dancer, actress--Linda's a comer.[1]

Television viewers some ten or twelve years later got to know Lavin as the star of the successful series, Alice.

Although many in the cast were critically acclaimed, the one actor who was the favorite of the reviewers was Jack Cassidy in the role of Max Mencken. Norman Nadel said that Cassidy

> blends oily smoothness, unshatterable conceit, staunch singing and all the vaudeville razzmatazz in the book into his part as a Daily Planet columnist. Note--and enjoy--his "The Woman for the Man," in a style reminiscent of the stage and screen musicals of a generation ago. Slick.[2]

This number was lyricist Adams' favorite in the show along with the number "You've Got What I Need," which was a duet between Michael O'Sullivan and Cassidy which Adams said "was kind of a funny, odd--not love song, but these two enemies of Superman were getting together, I like that number a lot. That was a big raucus number."[3]

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[1]"The Theatre," Cue, 9 April 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Norman Nadel, "The Theatre," New York World-Telegram and Sun, 30 March 1966, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 27, p. 312.

[3]Adams interview.

Kerr felt that Cassidy made the best use of the available material. He said:

> When the story-line isn't doing much, and the song he's singing doesn't really matter to it, Mr. Cassidy takes off on his own, with variations. During a song called "You're the Woman for the Man Who Has Everything," he tried dancing with his teeth (I think that's what he was doing last night). He slides on his knees to a finish that must fire the wardrobe-woman's horrors if she's watching from the wings and worrying about the company's supply of trousers, he tiptoes and spins and behaves like a lavender-shirted sneak, wearing the expression of a dirty-minded angel as he purloins the show. It's all invention, it is of no conceivable significance, and it's nifty.[1]

Lee Adams described Cassidy as playing a Walter Winchell type character. He said, "I can't describe what he did but it was very funny and very effective. . . . Walter Winchell was an ex-hoofer . . . an ex-dancer, so Cassidy did a lot of fake balletic stuff and a little funny step at the end of the stanza. It was very funny."[2]

Prince did not enjoy working on this show. Not as yet granted respect for his directorial talents, Prince was challenged by certain stars in his cast. During the rehearsals for Superman, Prince found it necessary to expand the subordinate role played by Jack Cassidy. After the show opened in Philadelphia to bad reviews, Prince realized that the show needed to be cut. Cassidy, unhappy with Prince's decision, continued to suggest additional lines and business

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[1]Kerr, "Kerr Reviews '...It's Superman.'"

[2]Adams interview.

for himself at each cut in his role that the director made.

Lee Adams discussed the rough time that Cassidy gave Prince. Adams said:

> He [Cassidy] was a very strange guy. He was a funny, wonderful man but he had his own problems. He would come in with scenes he had rewritten, rewritten lyrics, suggestions for music. Jack was full of ideas, that's all. When you're trying to get a show together, it's a very complicated process. . . . You've got too much else to worry about without having the actors telling you how to write it. But Jack was superb in the show . . . a funny man![1]

Prince dealt with the Cassidy situation as best he could. He said of the conflict between him and Cassidy:

> I won, or I think I did, but I realized how castrating an actor can be if he chooses. We are all familiar with the occasions in which a director can bully an actor into confusion, but there are just as many times when actors run off with the play. Stars do it all the time.[2]

This was one more incident in Prince's many years of experience producing and directing musicals that may have led to his preference for not using stars in his shows.

Superman was capitalized at $400,000 and Prince had an opportunity to utilize some of his ideas and visual stage pictures in staging the project. A scene applauded by almost all the reviewers was one in which the director made the stage appear as if it were a page in a comic book, with a progression of boxes set up for the actors to appear

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 123.

in as if they were in the comic strip itself. It was not an easy visualization to accomplish on stage. Variety's Philadelphia critic, Jerry Gaghan, said, "there is one standout multi-sectioned set in which the whole company appears as though on a comic book cover."[1] Whitney Bolton in the Morning Telegraph said, "thanks to all for that comic strip set in which the boxes filled with cartoon figures, personalized, give us a merry moment."[2]

Other staging ideas which received plaudits were the telephone booth which bowed and danced away each time Superman had to change into his newspaper-reporter costume; Superman striking an "Atlas-supporting-the world" pose as he lifted a platform loaded with orators; a documentary film tracing Superman's background, in which the narrator asks, "How much do we really know about Superman?"; and Superman flying up and away across the Alvin stage on a wire, with the wire in full view of the audience. After a graceful landing, Superman would consciously back up to a spot where a colleague would unhook him. The fact that Superman is held up by a wire that gleamed in plain view was, in Kerr's opinion, "a comment that all our dreams were nonsense."[3]

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[1]Jerry Gaghan, "Shows Out of Town," Variety, 23 February 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Whitney Bolton, "'Superman' Is Camp and Mostly WHAM!", Morning Telegraph, 31 March 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Walter Kerr, "A Self-Conscious Smirk on Superman's Face," New York Herald Tribune, 16 April 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Prince's adept direction was noted by Richard Watts, Jr. of the New York Post. He said, "most of its [Superman's] invention has gone into the mechanics of the staging. It is essentially an achievement of the electronic age in the theatre."[1] Adams remembers that the use of so many technical things gave them problems. He said of Superman, "That show had to have those effects because he [Superman] had to fly. The show is done, however, in amateur productions and summer stock and he doesn't fly. He just points his hands and runs offstage . . . but there they can't fly people, it's too expensive."[2]

Ernest Flatt, known for his work in television, staged the dances for the show. Prince, as he had done with She Loves Me, kept dance in Superman to a minimum. He wanted to pare away the customary reliance of musicals on big dance numbers. The Variety reviewer in Philadelphia noted that whatever dance there was

> because of the actional storyline tends to acrobatics and calisthenics in simulated brawls. . . . the format of Superman is on the spectacular side, but the production has no big dance number as such nor any chorine terping displays. Dependence on performances and gimmicks make it seem more like a play with music added.[3]

Although the critics in Philadelphia thought the show was well mounted and cast, audience reaction was mixed.

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[1]Watts, "Through the Skies with Superman."

[2]Adams interview.

[3]Gaghan, "Shows Out of Town."

Superman opened at the Shubert Theatre in Philadelphia on February 15, 1966 and Jerry Gaghan, the reviewer for the Philadelphia Daily News, said: "Despite this mixed audience reaction, the trip back to the one-dimensional school of crime fighting is fun, alloyed at the moment with tryout sketches of dross and at the mercy of a lot of mechanical aids and props."[1]

The future did not look bright for Superman during its out-of-town tryout in Philadelphia. Prince called the reviews there "humiliating."[2] The engagement had to be curtailed for intensive repairs by its collaborators, and Joan Hotchkiss, who was playing the role of Lois Lane, was replaced by Pat Marand. Lee Adams feels that Superman had problems similar to most musicals. His own recollection is that it was a happy work experience and the show eventually came out well. Discussing the work that is done on a show while it is out of town, Adams said:

> There are very few shows that haven't had big problems out of town. A musical is such a complicated animal to get together--so much to do. A play has a few sets, a few costumes, a few light cues. In a musical, you may have 400 light cues. Everything is to the 10th power in a musical . . . The complications are enormous. You change a number and everything shifts, so there are always problems. You can't see the forest for the trees when you're working on something. When you're doing a musical and

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[1]Jerry Gaghan, "'Superman' Lands for a Stay at Shubert," Philadelphia Daily News, 16 February, 1966, p. 32.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 123.

> you're starting from scratch, you want to go from here to there . . . and the show is getting better . . . As far as you go it's all the way up to here . . . but maybe it's only up to here . . . because it is getting better, it's getting smoother, it's getting more polished. The actors begin to know what they're doing, finally. The music starts to sound balanced, etc. But you never know how much better it's getting . . . whether it's getting good enough. And audiences tell you some but not everything. Most opening nights are terrific. Everyone screams and yells, the backers are all there and you think you have a hit. It's a horrible business, it's just terrible.[1]

Superman opened in New York at the Alvin Theatre on March 29, 1966 to generally good to glowing reviews, with some critical resistance dampening the enthusiasm. One of the more glowing reports was that of Stanley Kauffmann for the New York Times, who called it

> easily the best musical so far this season, but, because that is so damp a compliment, I add at once that it would be enjoyable in any season. It has some tunes that are at least recognizable as tunes, brisk lyrics, some clever staging and some very engaging performers. What's best, the whole show has been based on a witty point of view.[2]

This point of view, which Kauffmann as well as others referred to, and which they felt made the production special, lay "between doing it straight--in comic-strip or TV-serial fashion--and doing a broad burlesque, which would have run dry."[3]

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[1]Adams interview.

[2]Kauffmann, "'It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's Superman,' It's a Musical and It's Here."

[3]Ibid.

Kerr felt that Prince's direction was "unusually tidy" but that the self-conscious camp which he felt at the core of the show's concept did not hold up for more than the first part of the production. He said, "It works out surprisingly well for about a third of the way. . . . It is just about here that we begin to run out of laughter."[1]

George Oppenheimer liked the show and felt Prince produced and directed with "his customary taste and flair."[2] He agreed with Kerr, however, that when the show came to the two-thirds or three-quarter mark, "suddenly what has been a happy spoof of a comic strip becomes a straight comic strip, complete with clumsy cliff-hanging. . . . I wish Superman could have stayed out of town another month or two. It's so damned good, it should be better."[3]

Richard Watts, Jr. called the production "ingenious."[4] Whitney Bolton commended the score. He said, "Charles Strouse has written just the right score, brassy, swift and impish, with Lee Adams giving the songs scoffing lyrics designed to make square lyricists blush for shame."[5]

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[1]Walter Kerr, "Superman," New York Herald Tribune, 17 April 1966, p. 32. NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]George Oppenheimer, "It's 'Superman' and He's in a Broadway Musical," Newsday, 31 March 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Watts, "There's No Denying It's Superman."

[5]Bolton, "'Superman' Is Camp and Mostly WHAM!"

Edward Sothern Hipp agreed about Adams' lyrics, calling them "the cleverest lyrics of the Broadway season."[1] The songs that Hipp liked most, along with other critics, are "You've Got Possibilities," "We Don't Matter At All," "What I've Always Wanted," "You've Got What I Need," and "Oh, Do You Love You!"[2]

Cue magazine felt grateful that the collaborators of Superman did not camp up the show.

> Instead, the writers and director Harold Prince give us a gentle, affectionate satire which never descends to vulgarity. The satire touches lightly and brightly on a number of subjects--self-righteousness, male ego, Fourth of July pomposity. Mr. Prince et al. take it for granted you are intelligent and don't need your entertainment heavily underlined.[3]

Douglas Watt did not enjoy the show. Although he thought some of the Charles Strouse and Lee Adams score was good, including the title number and "You've Got Possibilities," and that the staging, costumes, sets and choreography were "all that could be desired," he felt the show as a whole was "an exercise in low camp, to vary the jargon of the day."[4]

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[1]Edward Sothern Hipp, "Superman, Now a Musical Hero," Newark Evening News, 30 March 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"The Theatre," Cue.

[4]Douglas Watt, "The Musical 'Superman' Shows Early Hardening of the Arteries," New York Daily News, 30 March 1966, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 27, p. 312.

Superman had built up a modest $100,000 advance but despite the many good reviews and the Kauffmann rave, the show did not sell well. Prince tested a new ticket price system with this show. He provided lower-price tickets in the orchestra as well as balcony, in hopes of finding an audience. The prices he established for the 437 balcony seats at the Alvin ranged from $2 to $5, with the mezzanine at $8 and orchestra at $9, $10 and $12. The higher price for the first eight rows made it possible to charge only $9 for not-as-choice locations--a low orchestra price for Broadway musicals at that time. Despite this ticket-price range, the show did not sell out. Prince soon realized that, although the show was not designed for kids, it appealed to them and so he introduced extra matinees in hopes of boosting ticket sales. But the show still failed and closed in four months. Prince feels the pop art craze had peaked, and he added, "we couldn't compete with Batman five nights weekly on television, ZOWIE sweatshirts, and Andy Warhol."[1]

At the time Prince was directing Superman, he was still unsure of himself as a director. He said:

> As in Flora, there was another show in Superman, but I had neither the self-confidence nor comprehension of what I might bring to the work of other people. The trouble is, everything the show might have been became clear after I'd done it. A concept, a point of view emerged after

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 123.

> the work. That was because I had not yet begun to think of myself as a director. It was a costly way to learn.[1]

When asked what he thought of working with Prince, Adams said that he enjoyed him very much as a director. He said, "I respected him." Adams went on to describe Prince.

> Hal is a very kind man. He's also very convincing. He can be very seductive in getting what he wants, both from writers and actors. His best quality for a writer is his enthusiasm. He makes you feel you're onto something terrific and he appreciates your good stuff. . . . If he doesn't like something he tells you right out front--"That isn't good enough," or "that doesn't work." He's very straightforward. He's not devious. Some directors are. I enjoyed working with him.[2]

Years later Prince said that he felt Superman might have had a better chance if it had been done realistically, revealing "the quality of urban life in the 1960s with real villains instead of mad scientists."[3] Boris Aronson, in a conversation with the director long after the musical had closed, said that Superman was the one show that he wished he'd been asked to design because it could have been the definitive contemporary musical.[4]

Adams felt the show worked very well and doesn't know why it didn't run.

> Audiences liked it, critics liked it and yet people just didn't come. At one time there was a theory

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[1]Ibid., p. 124.

[2]Adams interview.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 123. [4]Ibid., p. 122.

> that it didn't succeed because they were showing Batman on television free and people weren't going to come to see a comic strip for whatever the tickets cost. I don't know if that's true or not but it just didn't catch on with a large audience. . . . Now it's become a kind of cult musical . . . a lot of people like it. It's a good score and I think the book was very funny. . . . the trick with a satirical show like that is, and it's very hard to do . . . with this sort of thing you have to walk a very thin line. You can't be campy. You have to stop just short of camp and have a polish and satire on it. It's hard to describe how to do that. Very few shows succeed in doing this. It's so easy to cross over into camp when you're sort of kidding something on the square. . . . What you can't do is wink at the audience. . . . You can't say, Hey! Aren't we being funny? We played Superman absolutely straight. We played him very seriously. You have to. It's like farce, you can't kid around with farce. You've got to play farce very simply and very real . . . Real! Otherwise it's not funny. . . . To me the show worked on that fine line mostly, but not always, and apparently not for everybody. But it's hard to go back 18 years and remember it.[1]

Soon after the closing of Superman, Prince was off to California for the San Diego opening of the national company of Fiddler on the Roof with Luther Adler. He was also discussing a film he would soon direct based on The Cook, published by Random House. Prince described the story as "black comedy, about gluttony."[2] He was also planning to go into rehearsal by the fall of that year (1966) with Cabaret. Once again, Prince didn't leave himself much time to brood about a past project that hadn't turned out as successfully as he had hoped.

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[1]Adams interview.

[2]Lewis Funke, "A Happy Prince Heads Westward," New York Times, 10 April 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

CHAPTER IX

CABARET'S A HIT!

ZORBA IS NOT

> I really do not think that a successful play is the reason for living. . . . I don't think that each play is the most important thing . . . You can destroy your personal life--lose your friends . . . It seems silly to me . . . It's just a play and there will be another play after it. I dedicate a lot of my time and love and emotions to the success of a play--but there'll be another play. It seems silly to think of it differently.[1]

> The Taganka Theatre was traumatizing (in a good sense). It totally changed my life--there's no question about that! That one performance in the theatre totally altered my vision of the stage and what I would want to do with that space . . . It's very simple--it's saying look at the stage and put there what cannot be done by films and television. Take stage machinery and identify what is unique and exciting about a stage. . . . in the vernacular of today: what turns you on! It's all instinctive obviously.[2]

By 1965 the American Musical Theatre appeared to be beginning a period of decreasing creativity. The war in Southeast Asia had been escalating daily. There were riots in cities across the country and on campuses. The government for a long time was insensitive to the growing unrest

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[1]Prince interview, The Dick Cavett Show, videotape.

[2]Prince interview.

and negative feelings about the unpopular war. Politicians spoke out against the breakdown in law and order but the government itself was not immune.

The streets adjacent to the New York theatre district were becoming sleazier and there were perceived possible dangers to the theatregoing crowd because of the porno shops and derelicts in the Times Square area. Inflation didn't help the theatre either. After holding the line pretty much through the '60s, ticket prices kept rising steadily and by 1970 were hovering around a $12 top. To compensate for the increasing costs of producing a show and to deal with the smaller audiences, producers began to reduce the number of performers hired for chorus jobs and to cut budgets of costumes and sets. Basic unit sets and simple ones at that became prevalent.

In addition, with the lucrative rewards of films and television, the best young talents who appeared and were lauded on Broadway soon left. As a result, there were few exciting musicals offered during this late '60s period. Some were repeats of past shows and forms.

The most notable influence on the musical at this time was the music of the Beatles who, in 1964, came from England to appear on the Ed Sullivan Show. They helped propagate a new musical sound across the country. In the American Musical Theatre the tradition of the melodic show tune was being severed. Bordman said, "As far as memorable

melodies went, the American Musical Theatre had suddenly become not very musical. With rare exceptions audiences rarely left new musicals singing their music."[1] The role of importance usually reserved for the songwriters of musicals was now moving towards directors and librettists. Gower Champion, Bob Fosse and soon Harold Prince and Michael Bennett became the names more closely identified with a work instead of a Rodgers or a Gershwin. In addition, said Bordman, "the director sometimes assumed dictatorial creative control--originating the very ideas for their musicals and shaping their entire development."[2] The stage was being set for directors with strong personalities and imaginative and artistic visions.

Harold Prince was ready for the challenge. His next project was the production and staging of the musical Cabaret--a musical that broke new ground. Its unusual content and form, as well as its use of stagecraft, influenced the shape of the American Musical Theatre for decades afterward.

Cabaret

In the opinion of Martin Gottfried, the director's major work began with Cabaret. Gottfried wrote, "Since the concept musical was still in a formative stage this was a

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[1]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 643.

[1]Ibid.

schizophrenic show. One-half of it was an orthodox musical play whose story unfolded in dramatic scenes with duly integrated book songs. The other half however, startled and changed Broadway."[1] Prince effectively applied different levels of realism: the expressionistic and the conventional.[2]

"The idea for Cabaret," said librettist Joe Masteroff, "came from Hal Prince."[3] The two had just finished working together on She Loves Me when Prince suggested doing I Am a Camera (the John van Druten play based on the Berlin Stories of Christopher Isherwood) as a musical. Once the collaborators for Cabaret were set, it took a while to establish the form of the project. Eventually the show used the Isherwood stories rather than I Am a Camera as a jumping-off point. Prince and his collaborators saw a parallel between this material, which dealt with anti-Semitism and the spiritual decline of Germany in the 1920s, and the racial hatred here, which led to assassinations, violence in the streets and the march on Selma and Chicago in the summer of 1965. Prince recalled, "I went so far in one draft of the show to end it with a film of the march on Selma and the Little Rock riots, but that was a godawful idea, and I came to my senses."[4]

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[1]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 29.

[2]Ibid., p. 126.

[3]"Landmark Symposium: Cabaret," Dramatists Guild Quarterly 19 (Summer 1982): 13.

[4]Prince, Contradictions, p. 126.

Musicalizing I Am a Camera had occurred to a number of people. At first it didn't appeal to Prince, probably because all the drafts he had seen were motivated by the desire to find a star vehicle for Gwen Verdon or Tammy Grimes. Prince explained the kind of approach for the show which turned him off:

> She [Sally Bowles] works in a club, see, and she dances and sings, sings all night long, and it's racy . . . No point. It was only after we'd come by a reason for telling that story parallel to contemporary problems in our country, that the project interested me.[1]

One version, with book as well as music and lyrics by Sandy Wilson of The Boy Friend fame, was to star Julie Andrews. Masteroff said:

> Hal came to me telling me about the Sandy Wilson project and explained that Julie Andrews was anxious to do the show but that she thought the book needed some work. She thought that the songs were great, however, and she wanted Hal to direct or produce it. Prince then suggested I might be able to do something on the book. As I recall, we went to somebody's apartment to hear Sandy Wilson play the score. I realized there was really nothing wrong with the songs except they all sounded like The Boy Friend. The fact that it was 1920s Berlin had led Wilson to do the same thing as he had for 1920s Brighton (or wherever it was). When we left the meeting I said to Hal and Hal quite agreed that it isn't the way I would hear that show at all. If you were going to do that show then it should sound like Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya. That's the sound this musical had for me. . . . So we let it go at that. Then there were lots of negotiations and dealings and somehow Hal Prince turned out to be the producer of that show and Sandy Wilson was no longer involved in it. However, I was never privy to everything that went on. All I know is

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[1] "The New York Harold," Theatre One, p. 38.

> that suddenly we were free to do it. And a producer named David Black who had been the original producer was somehow no longer involved but was getting some share of the property. What Sandy Wilson got, or what the deal was with him, I really don't know. But he was out and we were in.[1]

Wilson expressed his side of the story in a letter to the Dramatists Guild Quarterly. He said:

> At no time did Julie [Andrews] read my script, so there was no question of her being "not too happy" with it. Her manager refused to consider letting her play such a part, and shortly after that she was cast in The Sound of Music. . . . In the late fall of that year I went to New York, taking my script and about two-thirds of the score (I shall never forget the date of my arrival: Nov. 22, 1963). Mr. Black [who had commissioned Wilson to write the show] suggested that another author should be called in on the book--to which I gladly agreed, particularly as his first choice was Hugh Wheeler. But he was having problems with the rights, as they were all tied up in the estate of John van Druten. . . . One evening Hal Prince, whom I knew well at the time, invited me out to dinner. He asked me what I was working on, and when I told him, he was astonished. "But that's what I'm working on," he said, "and I think I'm going to get the rights." In view of Hal's status as a producer, this seemed more than likely. He then told me that he had engaged Joe Masteroff to write the book but had not decided on a composer and lyricist. Would I be prepared to play the score to him and Masteroff? I naturally agreed. Hal gave me tickets for She Loves Me at a matinee, after which I went and performed my score. At the end Mr. Masteroff told me that he liked my work, but it did not fit in with his conception of Sally Bowles. And that was that. A few months later, Hal wrote and told me that he had indeed secured the rights and was going ahead with the show. The rest, as they say, is history.[2]

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[1]Masteroff interview.

[2]Sandy Wilson, "Letter to Editor," Dramatists Guild Quarterly 19 (Winter 1983): 47.

When Prince was ready to hire a composer and lyricist he suggested John Kander, the composer who had done the music for A Family Affair, and Fred Ebb, the lyricist (both had scored Flora, the Red Menace) to Masteroff and asked what he thought of them. Since Masteroff was a great admirer of the score of Flora, the Red Menace, the project got underway. Ebb remembers Prince approaching him to do the show:

> Sometime during the Boston run [of Flora], Hal said, "Would you like to do I Am a Camera?" He said, "No matter what happens to Flora, the day after it opens we'll go to work." That seemed like a good deal to me. So we agreed to do it. I didn't have a clue how to do it, I must say. The fact is, Flora was not a success; and the fact is, at four o'clock the next afternoon we did meet.[1]

Cabaret distanced itself from I Am a Camera. In order to develop the concept, Prince arranged, as Masteroff recalls, for "thousands of meetings."[2] The show had a slow metamorphosis. Masteroff wrote the first outline in the summer of 1963. Until the show opened in November 1966, there were many drafts, based on many notes from Prince to Masteroff and from Masteroff to Prince.

The collaborators worked very closely on the project. Ronald Field was eventually hired as choreographer. He had been doing nightclub work all over the world at the time.

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[1] "Landmark Symposium: Cabaret," p. 14.

[2] Ibid.

Previously, he had done a couple of unsuccessful shows on Broadway, but his staging of Liza Minnelli's nightclub act was an enormous success. Kander and Ebb used their persuasive powers to convince Prince to hire Field for Cabaret. After Prince signed the choreographer, he saw a production of Show Boat that Field had staged at Lincoln Center (a production that the choreographer felt was terrible). Field said, "I was told he [Prince] was having great trouble with the decision he had made and that he was very nervous about me. So it was under that cloud I went into rehearsal for Cabaret."[1] Field had not been hired in time to attend all the preliminary meetings on Cabaret but he did spend a summer with Prince discussing the show. Prince chose Field because he liked his enthusiasm for the project. The choreographer proved to have a wealth of ideas to contribute to the many numbers he was responsible for staging. Field said in reference to his collaboration with Prince, "Let me say that in the mature age I have gotten to, I now realize I paid no attention to the things I should have paid attention to working with that man."[2]

The idea of the cabaret as the central metaphor of the show evolved gradually. Prince wanted to establish the show's atmosphere at the opening. He asked Kander and Ebb for a melange of songs set all over Berlin to show what was happening there at the time. The composers wrote five short

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[1]Ibid., p. 15. [2]Ibid.

songs as a kind of prologue. One was about Herman the German. One took place in a radio station, and one was a Chinese song sung by a Chinese girl to show the decadence of the period. One of these five songs was called "Wilkommen" and was the first song written for the show. It was decided during early production meetings that at the end of these five songs (or prologue), the story of Sally Bowles and writer Cliff would begin and that this "story" part of the show would have its own score.

Prince recalled his experiences when he was stationed with the army near Stuttgart in 1951. He had vivid recollections of the shows presented at Maxim's, a nightclub situated in an old church basement.

> There was a dwarf MC, hair parted in the middle, and lacquered down with brilliantine, his mouth made into a bright red cupid's bow, who wore heavy false eyelashes and sang, danced, goosed, tickled, and pawed four lumpen Valkyres waving diaphanous butterfly wings.[1]

These images helped formulate the ideas for Cabaret. Soon the little man was the MC and thread for the entire musical. They decided to insert the five prologue songs between the book scenes in random fashion instead of at the beginning of the show. The songs intruded on the book scenes, however, and "Wilkommen" was the only one of the five songs that was retained. The MC's first numbers reflected his and Germany's low self-esteem. As the show

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 126.

progressed, the MC changed. He found his strength through National Socialism, although it corrupted him morally. The MC, through the eight numbers he eventually did, became the metaphor for Germany "in an ascending curve energetically and descending curve morally."[1] The cabaret's mindless gaiety is played out against the menace of inflation-gutted pre-Nazi Berlin of 1929-1930. By turns funny and chilling, the production was ultimately "a challenge to audiences conditioned to the jolly predictability of our musical stage."[2] John Chapman of the Daily News said after the show opened that the collaborators in an unusual move in musical theatre, ended the show "in a down beat--out of necessity."[3]

Masteroff created Clifford Bradshaw, the Isherwood character of the Berlin Stories, as an American instead of the Englishman he was in the original. Sally remained very much the same as she had been written in I Am a Camera. However, Masteroff never felt her character worked successfully in Cabaret. He said, "This worried me a lot until it was pointed out to me that there just isn't time in a musical to develop characters very thoroughly. If I'd had more

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[1]Ibid., p. 27.

[2]J. M. Flagler, "Cabaret," Look, November 1966, p. 72.

[3]John Chapman, "Cabaret," New York Daily News, 21 November 1966, p. 64.

stage time, I think Sally could have been a much more interesting character."[1] Because he believes he had not fleshed out the role, Masteroff feels that none of the actresses who have played the role of Sally have ever been very successful. Masteroff said in an interview, "It had seemed to be a star part but it kept getting smaller and smaller as other things kept poking their way into the show and eventually it turned out to be not that crucial a role. The whole show had swung around and Sally Bowles was still in it but she was no longer the sine qua non of it."[2] Although I Am a Camera, which starred Julie Harris on Broadway, was a play about Sally Bowles, with Cabaret it didn't really matter. Prince made the point to his collaborators while they were in Boston that the show would not live or die because of the Bowles character. He felt that even if her character didn't work, the show could still succeed. Ultimately, Bowles was given only two and a half songs to do. "In many ways," said Masteroff, "Prince turned out to be right."[3]

There were some critics who were disappointed with Prince's choice of Jill Haworth in the Bowles role. Walter Kerr was the most emphatic. He called the casting of

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[1]"Landmark Symposium: Cabaret," p. 17.

[2]Masteroff interview.

[3]"Landmark Symposium: Cabaret," p. 24.

Haworth the show's "one wild wrong note."[1] Kerr felt that Bowles according to the narrative is a "fey, fetching, far-out lassie with a head full of driftwood and heart she'd rather break than shackle. She is a temperament, and she needs a temperament to play her."[2] Kerr stated that this miscasting of a pretty but essentially flavorless ingenue in the role was for Harold Prince "a totally uncharacteristic lapse of judgment."[3] Other reviewers were less critical of Jill Haworth. In Richard Watts, Jr.'s opinion, "Sally may be a blind, wayward, somewhat soiled heroine, but as played by the talented and attractive Jill Haworth, she is a charming one."[4]

Kander and Ebb wrote about 47 songs for the show; eventually, only 15 were used. Ebb said, "The narrative kept shifting, and there were many more scenes that were seriously considered that never were done. Also, characters were being added. The whole Lenya-Gilford relationship came later, I think."[5] As was the case with Bock and Harnick in She Loves Me, Joe Masteroff gave Kander and Ebb an outline with no moments for songs marked. He left it

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[1]Walter Kerr, "Cabaret," New York Times, 21 November 1966, p. 62.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

[4]Richard Watts, Jr., "The Innocence of Sally Bowles," New York Post, 21 November 1966, p. 54.

[5]"Landmark Symposium: Cabaret," p. 18.

to his composers to select the spots for songs. Masteroff said, "I wrote the scenes and Fred and John plucked the songs out of them in every case. I'm talking about the book songs, of course. We never talked about it in advance. They just took the scenes and found what turned them on."[1] The pineapple exchange was originally dialogue in which Fraulein Schneider is touched by the gift of a pineapple from Herr Schultz, the fruit-store owner. Kander and Ebb turned the scene into the song, "It Couldn't Please Me More," which John Chapman called "an affectionate, endearing song number."[2]

The scene of the show, then, is Berlin and the time, just before New Year's Eve in the year 1930. The Master of Ceremonies welcomes us with "Wilkommen." We meet the cabaret girls and the Kit Kat Klub kittens, the members of the all-female band, who help set the Germanic jazz tone. The story begins when Clifford Bradshaw (Bert Convy), a one-book novelist from America, on a train from Paris to Berlin helps Ernst Ludwig (Edward Winter) through customs. In appreciation, Ernst promises to help Clifford in Berlin. He finds the young writer a room in a boardinghouse run by Fraulein Schneider (Lotte Lenya). They are joined in a drink by another boarder, Herr Schultz (Jack Gilford).

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Chapman, "Cabaret."

Clifford then visits the Kit Kat Klub where me meets Sally Bowles (Jill Haworth), the club's star singer who sings "Don't Tell Mama." Sally visits Clifford and in the song "Perfectly Marvelous," she suggests that she move in with him. Before Clifford can accept the offer from "this enchanting but crazy English girl,"[1] the taxi man has appeared with her luggage.

Ernst continually asks Clifford to take on smuggling assignments for political reasons, which Clifford refuses. And landlady Fraulein Schneider begins a liaison with boarder Herr Schultz.

Back at the cabaret, the Master of Ceremonies, along with two chorus girls in see-through skirts, sings "Two Ladies," which explains his penchant for a menage à trois. Then, with the waiters singing a capella, they perform the pastoral, "strength-through-joyous 'Tomorrow Belongs to Me.' After this hymn to the future and the fatherland, our Emcee goes back to work out the future--à la 'Mein Kampf.'"[2] Norman Nadel called this number a lovely ballad, "and its metamorphosis into a Nazi marching song is one of the most ingenious musical turns of the evening."[3]

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[1] Cabaret, record liner notes, by Charles Burr, Columbia KOS 3040.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Norman Nadel, "Cabaret," New York World Journal Tribune, 21 November 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Sally soon informs Cliff that she is pregnant. Cliff is uphappy about the situation because of his desperate financial situation. Sally suggests having an abortion but Cliff vows to get a job to earn money for the child's support. He is now ready to accept Ernst's bribe to go to Paris on a mission.

Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz plan to get married but they receive a warning from Ernst who reminds them that Schultz is a Jew and in the new Germany this might become a most dangerous liability. The first act ends in the cabaret as the Master of Cermonies, "like a messenger of doom, crosses the stage of the Kit Kat Klub as the scenery vanishes and the curtain descends on the first act."[1]

In the second act, Fraulein Schneider decides not to marry Schultz, since she is afraid of losing her boarding house license should the Nazis come to power. Clifford decides that he will return to America. Sally is singing at the club again. She introduces the hit number of the show, "Cabaret." Sally tells Cliff that for the price of her fur coat she has had an abortion; she says goodbye. Ewen sums up the ending of the show:

> Aboard the Berlin-Paris express, Clifford begins jotting down his memories of Berlin. As he does so, the people he writes about come to view--and, as in the opening scene, the Master of Cermonies assures the guests that at the cabaret life is

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[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 62.

> carefree and gay. But there is an ominous cloud hanging over these proceedings; and the music that accompanies them is discordant. Sally is heard in one more chorus of the title song before she and all the other characters disappear. Only the Master of Ceremonies is left on the stage. His last words are "Auf Wiedersehen. A Bientot." Then, with a wave of the hand, he bids his audience good-bye.[1]

Prince had very specific actors in mind for most of the roles in the show. Ebb said, "One of the miracles of Cabaret was that we got them. I mean, the people we had in mind were the people we got."[2] They were really writing for Lenya and Gilford as Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz and for Joel Grey as the Master of Ceremonies. But they did have a lot of trouble with the other two leads, Sally and Cliff. "I don't think we ever found exactly what we wanted for those parts," said Masteroff.[3] Kander and Ebb wanted Liza Minnelli in the Bowles role. Prince was strong in his decision not to use her. He said, "She [Minnelli] wasn't British--I'm not sure why that was important to me--and she sang too well. I still think that was a flaw in the film."[4] The aforementioned Jill Haworth was eventually cast in the rcle of Sally Bowles.

At a point in the creation of the show (1965), the collaborators became stymied. Prince had no idea of how

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[1]Ibid.

[2]"Landmark Symposium: Cabaret," p. 23.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Prince, Contradictions, p. 126.

the show should look and how it all would work. Rather than do the show with only "half a concept," he postponed it and did Superman instead. Prince maintains that if an audience can predict what it's going to see on the stage, it's more than likely going to be disappointed. Since Cabaret would be dealing with popular, familiar material, he felt that it was important to locate surprise in his concept. After Superman had opened and closed, Prince took a trip to Russia. The trip proved to be critical in his thinking as a director.[1]

While in Moscow, he saw a performance of the Taganka Theatre. He had arranged well in advance to attend the theatre, perhaps at the suggestion of Boris Aronson, his set designer for Cabaret. Aronson was born in Kiev in 1900. He came to this country in 1922 while he was in his twenties, just five years after the Revolution. He had worked in theatre in Kiev after the Revolution and was informed about the innovations in theatre craft in both Russia and Germany. Aronson, who had worked in the United States as an artist, sculptor and set designer, first designed for the Yiddish Art Theatre in Manhattan and the Unser in the East Bronx, and went on to be one of our most gifted Broadway theatrical designers. His first production here in 1924 was Cabin in the Sky. For the Group Theatre he did sets for Odets' Clash by Night. During his career he designed about 140 theatrical productions, including I Am a

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[1]Ibid., p. 128.

Camera. Aronson felt in the latter years of his career that "naturalism is deadly in theatre today."[1] Expressing his ideas about stage design in an interview with Garson Kanin, he explains that he liked working with Harold Prince since, by the time Cabaret was done, he had decided "only to take on projects that would not compromise his experimenting."[2] Aronson was compatible with Prince since he felt that the greatest achievement on a show was when all the people collaborating on it "have the same approach. . . . There has to be a common language."[3] This is also an important goal for Prince and why he spends so much time meeting with collaborators for years prior to a show's going into rehearsal.[4] Aronson explained, "I have no interest in symmetrical scenery. I design from inside of the people who inhabit the play, not architecturally. . . . Basically I'm more concerned with the nature of the script. . . . The tendency is to do beautiful sets. Some shows and their themes and characters don't call for this."[5]

Prince was most impressed with the Taganka Theatre techniques, which borrowed heavily from Vsevolod Meyerhold, a Soviet director who had become prominent during the years following the Russian Revolution. He differed from

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[1]"Garson Kanin Interviews Boris Aronson," videotape, 20 March 1975, Theatre on Film and Tape Project of the Lincoln Center Library.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid. [4]Ibid. [5]Ibid.

Stanislavsky and realism, fostering symbolism, mechanization and the de-emphasis of emotion. Meyerhold and Alexander Tairov were advocates of constructivism. Simple cubes replaced cumbersome chairs so as not to provide the audience with a literal, realistic presentation. At this time in Russia, the theatrical world was innovative. In a production of Mystery Bouffe (1918), a propaganda play by Mayakovsky which was a pageant parodying the biblical story of Noah's Ark, "Meyerhold, who had broken with Stanislavsky's realism, directed the actors as if they were poster figures. Kazimir Malevich created backdrops using geometric forms and constructions rather than real props."[1]

At the Taganka Prince began to rethink his ideas about stagecraft. Until this point he had believed that the book was the most important element of a musical and the score, the secondary. The text he saw that night in a political revue suggested by John Reed's Ten Days That Shook the World was "absurd."[2] However, "the techniques, the vitality, the imagination to make every minute surprising, involving, yet consistent with a concept"[3] were primary at the Taganka Theatre, and the mounting would influence Prince's future work.

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[1]Tobia Frankel, The Russian Artist (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 111.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 129.

[3]Ibid.

> The Taganka was conventional in that there was the stage, the proscenium, the orchestra pit, the auditorium: nothing environmental about it. However, there were technical devices which knocked me out. An apron built over the orchestra pit into which searchlights were sunk. These lights, slanted over the heads of the audience to the last row of the balcony, when lighted, instead of blinding, became a curtain of light behind which the scenery was changed. Paintings on the wall spoke, inanimate objects animated, disembodied hands, feet, and faces washed across the stage. There were puppets and projections, front and rear, and the source and colors of light were always a surprise. All of it made possible by the use of black velour drapes instead of painted canvas. I date my love affair with black velours from that performance. . . . Each of these ideas capitalized on the special relationships of live actors and live observers. It is that relationship which is exclusively ours in the theatre. Film and television cannot touch it. And properly appreciated, it gives us the chance to make connections, to string unseen emotional bands between actor and audience. The business of physical contact is the least of it.[1]

Prince admitted that these techniques were not necessarily new, but that he had never seen them used so effectively. A few seasons later he saw the Taganka production of Hamlet and noted the use of fabric strung from guy wires which when moved in various directions could suggest walls, furniture or a door. Prince also saw a production of Hedda Gabler directed by Ingmar Bergman, and was impressed with the way the actors effortlessly "moved a blood-red screen, about the size of a door and mounted on casters, to divide rooms, to construct unseen walls, to isolate the interior workings of a character's mind from his external behavior."[2]

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[1]Ibid., pp. 129-130. [2]Ibid., p. 130.

Later, as Prince became more and more respected for his directing work, critics compared his innovative techniques to those of Brecht. Prince feels, however, that his major influences came from the Taganka Theatre and their Meyerhold-like staging and from working with Aronson, who was well-versed in the innovative Russian and European theatre techniques of the '20s.

> I'm tired to death of reading about how influenced by Brecht I am. I am not influenced by Brecht. I don't like Brecht all that much. That whole alienation thing. Alienation by definition is alienating. And I want to be enveloped, engaged in the theater. Now that does not mean I don't have respect for some of the Brecht I've seen. I'm very, very fond of The Caucasian Chalk Circle. There have been along the way, Brechtian experiences that have thrilled me. But I do not feel remotely--or at least not consciously--influenced by Brecht. No, I'm influenced by Meyerhold, that's who I'm influenced by, and I'm influenced by Piscator. I know where my influences come from.[1]

After his trip to Moscow, Prince was ready to get to work on Cabaret. He and Aronson would now have a vision for his show. Kissel of Horizon magazine felt that Prince created a concept musical with Cabaret; it was created around a key metaphor rather than a conventional plot.[2] Prince describes his first directorial collaboration with Aronson:

> We talked for three months, rarely of things visual, mostly of the characters, false

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[1]Allan Wallach, "Harold Prince," Newsday, 3 February 1980, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Kissel, "Side by Side by Prince," p. 64.

> motivations, interpersonal behavior, people in different countries, ethnic peculiarities, emotional expression as affected by national or ethnic consideration. Of course, he collected thousands of photographs, but he never observed the predictable; never the leg of a table, the shape of a lamp post, the ironwork on the hotel balcony rail. Rather he would call my attention to the quality of light in a room, the emotional content in the architecture of a section of the city. . . . when Boris talks, I hear and see things I neither heard nor saw before.[1]

Aronson had a penetrating vision of people, time and places. During his long sessions with Prince, he would be working on the set designs. When the meetings seemed to have come to an end, Aronson would produce his beautifully rendered (in watercolor and gouache) set designs. He would also offer a quarter-inch scale model. Usually nothing major needed to be changed. After the small details were corrected, Aronson would construct a half-inch scale model. This would be utilized by the builders of the set, the stage managers and by Prince to help him and the actors become familiar with his set. The pieces of the model were large enough to remove and hold in your hand. It was very detailed and finely realized down to the texture of wallpaper, or the design of a stained-glass window.[2]

For Cabaret, black velours were used to surround the rear and sides of the stage and side panels could be flown quickly to enable the scenery to be rolled in on winch-operated trucks. An iron staircase was designed by Aronson

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, pp. 131-132.

[2]Ibid., p. 132.

although it was not asked for by Prince. However, Prince was delighted with this "surprise" from his designer and it enabled him for the first time to experiment with the idea of using observers on the stage. He placed chorus members on the staircase, lighting cigarettes, observing the realistic scenes indifferently. This image made a comment on the theme. Prince said, "They became the surrogate German population."[1]

In another surprise, Aronson presented Prince with a mirror, a trapezoid that hung above center stage, to reflect the audience, and which "cast an additional, uneasy metaphor over the evening."[2] Aronson said, "I asked Hal why are you making this musical? His answer was, 'My main reason is to show that what happened then in Berlin could happen here now.' I felt the only way to get this was the mirror tilted to show the audience. Since then I have seen more mirrors in shows where it has no reason. There it meant a lot."[3]

Walter Kerr explained:

> The first thing you see as you enter the Broadhurst is yourself. Designer Boris Aronson, whose scenery is so imaginative that even a gray green fruit store comes up like a warm summer dawn, has sent converging strings of frosted lamps swinging toward a vanishing point at upstage center. Occupying the vanishing point is a great geometric mirror, and in

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[1]Ibid., p. 133. [2]Ibid.

[3]Aronson interview, "Garson Kanin Interviews Boris Aronson," videotape.

> the mirror the gathering audience is reflected. We have come for the floor show, we are all at tables tonight, and anything we learn of life during the evening is going to be learned through the tipsy, tinkling, angular vision of sleek rouged-up clowns, who inhabit a world that rains silver.[1]

Prince was happy with the unexpected design elements. He likes to be surprised by his collaborators and is therefore thrilled when they come in with something more than he could conceive of at the time.

Remembering the lighting at the Taganka Theatre, Prince asked Jean Rosenthal, his lighting designer, for a curtain of light so that scenery could be changed behind it. She felt this was impossible because of the size of the Broadhurst Theatre. The throw from the source of light to the top of the balcony wouldn't be intense enough to accomplish Prince's aims. They had to devise some other way to deal with the material. Prince came up with the idea of splitting the stage into two areas--one representing the "real world" which would encompass scenes taking place in Sally's boarding house, the train, or the cabaret. The other area would represent "the mind." The Master of Ceremonies would do some of his numbers in the area representing the cabaret and other numbers in the area which became known as "Limbo," to suggest changes in the German psyche.[2] Responding to this idea, Rosenthal produced a

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[1]Kerr, "Cabaret."

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 130.

light trough which was placed six feet upstage of the edge of the apron. It was covered with a wooden shield and rose electronically at a 45-degree angle upstage to the rear wall. Downstage at 45 degrees, the audience was momentarily blinded and at 90 degrees straight up into the flies, it produced a curtain of dust. Prince was able to send his chorus across the stage with only their legs lit. The light trough also became the MC's footlights. The lighting enabled communication with the audience. It explained and clarified without the use of words or music. Prince said:

> At the climax of the show, Sally Bowles sang "Cabaret," lost track of her audience, broke down, and for the first time in the evening, stepped across the footlights into the "Limbo" area and the audience understood. Rosenthal used subtle realistic lighting for the book scenes, and a sinister edge of spotlights for the "Limbo" numbers. . . . It was Joe Master-off's idea to hang high a neon sign depicting the cabaret on hanging wires with flashing on and off lights.[1]

A major problem arose in regard to a song that Joel Grey sang titled "If You Could See Her Through My Eyes." The Master of Ceremonies sang it as a love song to a gorilla dressed in a pink tutu. They hugged each other and danced together. It all seemed harmless and silly until the final line of the song when Grey looked at the gorilla and sang as if in a whispered confidence to the audience, "If you could see her through my eyes she wouldn't look Jewish at all."

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[1]Ibid., p. 131.

Ebb claims to have dreamed the idea for the number. Ebb recalls his dream which took place on the movie set of Hello, Dolly!:

> What happened on this runway was that Joel Grey came out, and there was a gorilla in a tutu . . . No words, no music, but that was the image. And then I told Hal I had dreamed it. I said that I dreamed about a number in which Joel would come out with a gorilla in a tutu, and he thought that was kind of baroque. Which it was. And then I tried to get a song--I know it is silly--to fit that image. It was clear to me that it would look wonderful. Eventually the song came. It was him, of course, loving this gorilla. . . . So the song could serve to show how anti-Semitism was creeping in. I thought it had a dramatic validity.[1]

Prince loved the song and used it in the show. Audiences laughed and then when they realized what they were laughing at, they would stop laughing. It made them very nervous, which, Ebb said, "was exactly what Prince wanted."[2] The collaborators felt that everybody knew the ending of the story, and knew that the Nazis were going to come to power. However, towards the end of the Boston run, they started to get letters, including one from a rabbi who was terribly upset. Towards the end of the previews in New York, a woman accosted Ebb in the lobby and told him that if the lyric weren't changed, pressure groups would be after them.

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[1] "Landmark Symposium: Cabaret," p. 20.

[2] Ibid.

Prince was deeply worried about the issue. Ebb remembered:

> There was a visit to his office where there was a real threat of cancelling theatre parties over one lyric line. There was a meeting at the bottom of the Broadhurst Theatre, which I remember vividly, where I was asked to take that line out. Hal (who is noted for his courage and his daring) could not at that moment in his life--with as much as Cabaret meant to him and to all of us--take the chance of bucking an enormous group.[1]

There were many others who made it clear to Prince that he had to change the song's ending. Finally, Ebb changed the line to "She isn't a meeskite at all." Prince felt that he had made the right decision since it would have been foolish to allow the show to close over one line in a song.

Ebb was angry with Prince for what he felt was his pandering to the public.

> I wasn't doing it [changing the lyric] with a full heart. I wasn't doing it for what I thought was the good of the show. I was doing it for what I felt were the wrong reasons. But I knew it had to be done anyway. . . . I wish Prince had held firm. But it was his first big chance at having a successful show as a director and I can now understand and have great compassion for his not wanting to blow it for something as seemingly mild as one line in a song.[2]

The original line was sometimes put back into the show. Ebb asked for the line when Walter Kerr came. He also wanted it used for the Actors' Fund performance. "And

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ebb interview.

Joel would literally go out and say it as if he had just forgotten that he was forbidden to say it."[1] But the new line stayed in the show for the three years of Cabaret's run in New York. Bob Fosse, when he did the movie, was willing to put the original line back. But, said Ebb, "If you listen very carefully, it is totally tacit in the movie. Joel turns to the camera and says (whispering): 'She wouldn't look Jewish at all.' There is no music. And that is because, had he had any flack, he could have gone in and re-recorded it."[2]

Kander, discussing the incident, explains it as a miscalculation that they made which he cannot understand to this day. He said,

> The song was to end that way, to have you laughing and then catch your breath, to make you the audience realize how easily you could fall into a trap of prejudice. And the Jewish members of the audience, my family included, all insisted that the song was really saying that Jews looked like gorillas. It's a puzzle that has never been solved.[3]

Another miscalculation was the original idea to do the show in three acts. They thought it would be fun to open in three acts because musicals were generally done in two. It didn't work very well and so they immediately returned to the two-act form. It was an improvement. Ebb was unhappy that in the changing they lost two songs that

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[1] "Landmark Symposium: Cabaret," p. 20.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

he liked, one of which was "The End of the Party."

Ebb said that the song "Meeskite" was one that he and Kander wrote while on the telephone with each other. Ebb's mother had told him the exact story of the song. It was about two very unattractive people that she had known and they had this fabulous-looking child. The purpose of the song in the show was to expose, at his own engagement party, that Gilford's character was in fact Jewish. Prince asked Ebb is he could possibly make the song comic. So with Gilford being seriously thought of at this point for the role, Ebb wrote the song with him in mind. Gilford, as the shop owner, sang the song as he vainly tried for some understanding.

The title number, "Cabaret," became the major hit of the show, but other songs in the score were highly effective, such as "It Couldn't Please Me More" (a duet by Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz); "Why Should I Wake Up?" (a duet by Sally and Clifford); and two numbers sung by the landlady, "What Would You Do?" and "So What?" To achieve the style of music they wanted for the show, Kander and Ebb obtained records of German jazz and German cabaret songs of the '20s. By listening to the records, they achieved the flavor they were after. Some critics, however, felt that Kander had written watered-down Kurt Weill. Kander told Lenya (who was Weill's widow) that he never intended to imitate Mr. Weill. According to Kander, Lenya

"took my face in her hands and said, 'No, no, darling. It is not Weill. It is not Kurt. When I walk on stage and sing those songs, it is Berlin.'"[1]

Prince was generally firm in his decisions about which songs of Kander and Ebb would be used and which would not. Ironically, the hit and title song, "Cabaret," had originally been turned down by Prince. He hadn't wanted to use two title songs and he felt "Wilkommen" contained the "welcome to the cabaret" in it already. According to Ron Field, Prince didn't want another song with the word "cabaret" in the second act.[2] Field loved the number and persuaded Prince to reconsider. Prince gave the song another hearing and they decided to use it after all.

Ebb compared working with directors Abbott and Prince, since he had done so with Abbott on Flora and with Prince on Cabaret. He didn't think they were very similar in their directing methods. Comparing them, he said, however,

> they do have some similar terrific traits such as their professionalism, never coming late, etc. And they're clear, sure and authoritative. . . . They're both good captains, and are never wishy-washy. In Prince's long association with Abbott, Prince must have learned a great deal about just how to manage a show. It's a very difficult, complicated thing to do and they both do it extraordinarily well. They make it look easy.[3]

Ronald Field said he prepared himself to create the choreography for Cabaret by imagining himself a

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[1]Ibid., p. 24. [2]Ibid., p. 26. [3]Ebb interview.

choreographer in Berlin in 1930. He thought about what he would do if he were in Berlin staging dances in a second-rate nightclub and felt that his point of reference might be American movies.

> I understood European choreographers. They were always ten years behind us. . . . The genesis was always on this side of the ocean. So I imagined that I was a German choreographer. . . . everything became harder and more Germanic. The time-steps weren't Fred Astaire-like. They were Brunnhilde-like. . . . And I hired girls with sort of heavy thighs and had the costumes cut in sort of the wrong places.[1]

According to Fred Ebb, one of the "best musical comedy dance moments I have ever seen"[2] was Field's staging of their "Telephone Song." In the cabaret, there were phones on the tables and people would make table-to-table connections before meeting in person. In other words, one could call and make a date with one of the establishment's "girls." Ebb said, "Ron went one step further. These people who met by phone connected. He had one couple who met and kissed and never stopped kissing. They never broke their embrace from the beginning of the number to the end. I remember they were called the "kiss couple."[3] The number had such energy and excitement on stage that when the cast album was recorded the tempo was doubled in order to capture the feeling of the number.

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[1]"Landmark Symposium: Cabaret," p. 25.

[2]Ibid., p. 28. [3]Ibid.

Jerome Robbins attended the run-through before Cabaret went to Boston. He thought the show was wonderful, but suggested that any dancing that didn't take place as part of the performance at the Kit Kat Klub be cut from the show. He recommended cutting the telephone number as well as the engagement party dance that Lenya did with some sailors. To Field's relief, Prince, in spite of his respect and affection for Robbins, did not take his advice and the numbers stayed in the show and played successfully.

Another suggestion came from Goddard Lieberson, the record producer, and from others who knew the director was still fixing the show. The song "Cabaret" was to be removed from the end of the show and used to replace Sally's first song, "Don't Tell Mama," which introduces her to the audience. In the place of "Cabaret," Prince was advised to use "I Don't Care Much," a song that Kander and Ebb had not written for the show, but which Prince liked. Lieberson, who was producing the original cast album, felt that "Cabaret"--which was by that time a hit song--would be stronger in the first act. Although Prince was against it, he decided to try it mainly because so many people were advising the same thing. Three days before the New York opening, they put the new song in and, as Kander recalls, "it was a disaster."[1] Prince explains:

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[1]Ibid., p. 27.

> It went in that night and destroyed the show. The climactic moment of Cabaret was half as effective with the new song. The song, coming at the top of the show, went by unnoticed; the giddiness of "Don't Tell Mama" was missing. It was as though we had leveled the emotions of the show across the board.[1]

Prince put the songs back in their original spots.

Masteroff remembers that the show did not do well during its Boston tryout. He said, "People just kept streaming out of the theater. Ten minutes after the curtain went up, people started departing."[2] The reason for this, Masteroff feels, is that the title of the show did not prepare the audience for what they would see. They expected a normal kind of Broadway musical and within ten minutes, they had seen these not-so-great-looking chorus girls, and the show seemed to be on the grim side. The librettist remembers Boston as a depressing time for the collaborators.[3]

Cabaret was capitalized at $500,000 and because of Prince's track record and his good fortune with Fiddler, it was not necessary to hold backers' auditions to raise the money.

Cabaret opened in New York on November 20, 1966 at Broadhurst Theatre. The reviews were excellent. Walter

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 136.

[2]"Landmark Symposium: Cabaret," p. 22.

[3]Ibid.

Kerr gave the most favorable review.[1] Kerr said that other than the fact that he felt Jill Haworth was a poor choice of casting, he liked the show and said its "marionette's-eye view of a time and place in our lives that was brassy, wanton, carefree and doomed to crumble is brilliantly conceived."[2] Richard Watts, Jr. in the New York Post called the show

> brilliant and remarkable. . . . It is all wild, hysterical fun and sex, but from the first there is that rising undercurrent of decadence and vulgarity that was preparing the way for the ease with which a brutal racial insanity was able to take over a country. . . . It is the glory of Cabaret that it can upset you while it gives theatrical satisfaction.[3]

Some reviewers felt that it was the cabaret scenes rather than the realistic book scenes that made the show a success. Edward Sothern Hipp in the Newark Evening News said that the show is "at its best when it departs from the original and holds to its own invention, a tough, cynical Berlin cabaret on the eve of the Hitler take-over, and those scenes are enough to make Cabaret a box office hit."[4] Norman Nadel in the New York World Journal Tribune said,

> Isherwood's careful reportage supplies the people and the relationships. But the greater impact of

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[1]Prince interview, The Dick Cavett Show, videotape.

[2]Kerr, "Cabaret."

[3]Watts, "The Innocence of Sally Bowles."

[4]Edward Sothern Hipp, "Cabaret," Newark Evening News, 21 November 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

> the musical is harshly symbolic. "Life is a Cabaret Old Chum," goes the title song, with the entire show underlying that metaphor. . . . One thing that never lapses is director Prince's sense of theatre. Even to the final ensemble scene, which is anticlimactic and a trifle mawkish, he sets a commanding stage. He makes the decadence of 1930 Berlin as memorable as Rome's.[1]

George Oppenheimer cited "the integrity of the project which attempts a superior musical,"[2] but in his opinion did not reach what it attempted. He said, "Divertissements interrupt plot so constantly that little seems real and no one seems dimensional."[3]

There were a few negative comments about the second act not having the impact of the show's first act, and that the characters did not maintain interest.. John Chapman in the Daily News said, "The story runs down quite disappointingly in the second act."[4] Alan N. Bunce in the Christian Science Monitor said of the people who inhabit the play, "their story never becomes strong enough to give the show the structure it might have."[5]

Aronson's sets were given such plaudits as "brilliant" (Chapman, News) and "flashy" (Nadel, World Journal Tribune).

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[1]Nadel, "Cabaret."

[2]George Oppenheimer, "Cabaret," Newsday, 21 November 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Chapman, "Cabaret."

[5]Alan N. Bunce, "Cabaret," Christian Science Monitor, 28 November 1966, p. 8.

Prince received positive personal reviews about his directing as well as an enormous box-office success which created a new awareness about him. Most reviewers had assumed that George Abbott had produced the early Griffith-Prince musicals and so underestimated the producers of record. Cabaret changed this. Prince now was a name based on his talent and ability both as a showman and director. Richard P. Cooke in the Wall Street Journal said: "That able showman, Harold Prince, has done it again. Cabaret is one of the most exciting, imaginative and effective musicals to come to Broadway this year or any other."[1] Whitney Bolton, in the New York Morning Telegraph, said:

> Harold Prince has directed a show in a period when he could not have been more than a gurgling infant. How he got the feel, unless Miss Lenya imparted it to him, defies answer. But he has it down pat, follies, naughtiness, audacity, sadness, despair, all of it the air of Berlin as the Nazis found it and fouled it.[2]

Joel Grey became an overnight sensation. He had been a successful and talented performer for 24 years in almost every medium of show business but had never received the kind of recognition that this project provided him. Writing of Cabaret, Martin Gottfried said: "With Joel Grey as the androgynous master of ceremonies in the Kit Kat Klub, Broadway had never seen anything like the visual metaphors

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[1]Richard P. Cooke, "Cabaret," Wall Street Journal, 22 November 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Whitney Bolton, "Cabaret," New York Morning Telegraph, 22 November 1966, NYPL Clipping Folder.

of decadence that Harold Prince daringly presented on a stage accustomed to pretty pictures."[1]

Grey, when asked how he was able to make the MC character real and full without dialogue, said it was Prince who helped him achieve his outstanding performance. Grey said, "He [Prince] knows what he wants and has tremendous taste."[2]

According to Ewen, Cabaret was the "hottest ticket" on Broadway in 1966.[3] It won the New York Drama Critics' and the Antoinette Perry Awards as the best musical of the year. Little more than a year after opening on Broadway, a national company began a tour, opening in New Haven on December 16, 1967, that lasted several years. Other successful productions were presented in London, Iceland, Holland, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Finland, and Sweden. The New York company played 1,166 performances and finally closed on September 6, 1969.

Although Prince achieved success with Cabaret, and was soon being offered plays to direct by other managements, he has often stated that if he were to do the show again, he would do it differently. He and his collaborators had

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[1]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 127.

[2]Prince interview, The South Bank Show, videotape.

[3]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre, p. 62.

persuaded themselves that the musical comedy audience required

> a sentimental heterosexual love story with a beginning, middle, and end to make the concept palatable. Not content with that, we added Lotte Lenya and Jack Gilford in a subordinate love story. The structure, indeed familiar: Ado Annie and Will Parker, Hineszie and Gladys, Adelaide and Nathan Detroit. . . . In my opinion we were wrong. The plotless musical might not have worked, but had it, the whole project would have been consistent with its aspirations. If we had Cabaret to do all over again, I believe we would have made the audacious choice. In defense, it was 1966.[1]

Zorba

The idea to turn the Nicos Kazantzakis novel, Zorba the Greek, into a musical was Hershel Bernardi's. He and librettist Joseph Stein approached Prince. Since Prince had liked the philosophical ideas and the exciting moments of music and dance as presented in the Michael Cacoyannis film (based on the novel), he thought it might make an interesting project and agreed to produce and direct it. Kander and Ebb were equally enthusiastic and they were signed to write the score. The team of collaborators was basically the same as those who had created Cabaret, except for the librettist, Stein (Masteroff had done Cabaret), and lighting designer, Richard Pilbrow (Jean Rosenthal had done the lighting for Cabaret).

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 135.

The concept fell into place easily. Prince used a facsimile of a Greek chorus to comment on the action. It was led by a girl dressed in black, supported by several bouzouki musicians. Prince had observed a similar group of musicians in a bouzouki restaurant near Piraeus. He remembered them:

> Thirty-eight men and women sitting in a semicircle, each holding a musical instrument, dressed in the gaudiest of makeshift costumes with spangles, smoking, talking, singing solos or in unison, interrupting each other with horseplay and laughter.[1]

The musical is set in a similar bouzouki cafe in modern Greece. Clive Barnes said, "The concept of placing the entire action within the framework of a cafe works very well, giving the piece a shape it would otherwise have lacked."[2] The song that is performed here is "Life Is." It focuses our attention at the start on the philosophical theme of the show. "Life is what you do while you're waiting to die," say the lyrics of the song.

> More important is the way this number and designer Boris Aronson's seemingly simple scenic arrangement set a style that director Harold Prince consistently follows throughout the production. This style employs a device wherein some of the people in the opening number change costumes to enact roles in the story, and others become a chorus, which both evokes action and makes comment on it.[3]

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[1]Ibid., p. 139.

[2]Clive Barnes, "'Zorba' Is Here with Music," New York Times, 18 November 1968, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 29, p. 174.

[3]Henry Hewes, "The Theatre," Saturday Review, 7 December 1968, p. 36.

The events of the story occurred in Crete in 1924 and so the musical goes back forty years to introduce Zorba in a waterfront cafe similar to the one in the early scenes. It reveals the evolving maturity of Nikos, a university teacher from Athens who has inherited an unworked mine in a small Crete village. On his way there, while he is waiting in Piraeus for a boat, he meets Zorba. Zorba is a happy, earthy man with a free anarchic soul, lover, drinker, philosopher and fighter, who enjoys trying to liberate the "uptight" people he encounters on his journey through life. The musical deals largely with Zorba's attempt to teach this guileless young man about the mysteries of sex, masculinity and running a coal mine--not to mention the mysteries of one's attitude towards life. He teaches Nikos the secret of living in the moment, as if whatever he is doing, each time is the first time, and as if each moment might also be his last.

Zorba travels with Nikos to Crete. The adventures of Nikos, his inherited mine, and of the beautiful young widow comes to love, are all part of the dramatic action. In a tragic scene, the young widow who has ignored the advances of the local men, is murdered by the villagers.

In Crete, Zorba meets, woos and moves in with Hortense, an aging French cabaret singer, but he refuses to marry her. In another sad scene, Hortense dies in her tacky bedroom. She is bedecked with her souvenirs while

being tenderly watched over by Zorba and Nikos. As her mind wanders, she recalls how proud her mother was of her on her sixteenth birthday. She floats from her bed and begins to dance and sing a song called "Happy Birthday." In Brendan Gill's words, she is "simultaneously incarnating the dying old woman in the bed and a pretty girl dancing in her new white organdie dress."[1] In a bleak commentary, as soon as she dies, the old women of the village run off with her possessions.

This is not a light musical comedy. Watts said that it is "decidedly a musical drama, and a grim one at that, despite its interludes of humor."[2] Barnes said of Prince in his review of the show, "He is trying--even more than in his previous West Side Story and Fiddler on the Roof--to demonstrate, admittedly with only uncertain success, that the musical can be a reflection of life. Indeed life and its meaning is the essential theme of Zorba. . . . Mr. Prince possibly makes the most commanding attempt yet at a truly serious musical."[3]

By the final curtain, Zorba, who represents the joy of life--wine, women and song--has converted his young

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[1]Brendan Gill, "Zorba," New Yorker, 23 November 1968, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "The Musical Debut of 'Zorba,'" New York Post, 18 November 1968, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 29, p. 176.

[3]Barnes, "'Zorba' Is Here with Music."

friend, Nikos, who realizes that in living only a life of the mind he has missed much.

Members of the cast played various roles and "they used their chairs and props to imagine a waiting room on a dock and their musical instruments to create the sounds of the wind and the sea, and the scraps of material from the women's skirts suggested costumes," said Prince.[1]

Prince decided to team Maria Karnilova (Hortense) with Bernardi (Zorba) since they had had such success playing together as Tevye and Golde in Fiddler. He thought that audiences would want to see them together again. Instead, their playing together created unnecessary comparisons with Fiddler and worked against the show.[2] Eventually Bernardi and Karnilova began fighting. Bernardi's personal problems turned into physical problems and he began to miss performances. "Karnilova," said Prince, "matched him performance for performance, and soon both stars were out."[3] The reviewers, however, loved Bernardi and Karnilova. John Chapman called their performances "star-spangled, throat-catching."[4] There were other comments, however, that suggested that Bernardi had patterned his performance after

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 139.

[2]Ibid., p. 140. [3]Ibid.

[4]John Chapman, "Bernardi, Karnilova Are Superb in a Great Musical Play, 'Zorba,'" New York Daily News, 18 November 1968, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 29, p. 175.

Anthony Quinn's portrayal of Zorba in the film. Barnes suggested that "the result is far from disaster, but it remains a pity."[1] The rest of the cast was well received and Watts said that Carmen Alvarez was "touching and lovely as the murdered widow, John Cunningham is believable as the visitor [Nikos], and Lorraine Serabian is attractive as the leader of the modern Greek chorus."[2]

Aronson's sets for Zorba were basically blacks, greys and whites. Prince described Aronson's work for the show:

> Boris' basic unit was the classic Greek amphitheatre with levels in a semicircle. Onto these levels he introduced fragments of scenery, an olive tree, the entrance to a church, a restaurant, a store, a balcony, and by the third scene in the play we'd constructed a realistic village in Crete, made of molded styrofoam, and climbing the side of a hill. By then the entire company was realistically costumed.[3]

Henry Hewes felt that Aronson's scenery was abstract in the scenes where Nikos and Zorba move to Crete.

> He [Aronson] brings in a banner of choppy white sky, a sculpture of sun-bleached rooftops in the distance, a few more realistic foreground elements, and a lovely stylized tree. Except for the faded green of its foliage, the scenery is all in black and white in order to challenge the story's main characters with the cruelty of nature and the bleakness of death. . . . In only two scenes do the settings acquire a splash of color. One of these, the cafe where Zorba gains temporary respite from the hard life of the village, seems

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[1]Barnes, "'Zorba' Is Here with Music."

[2]Watts, "The Musical Debut of 'Zorba.'"

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 139.

> appropriate. The other, which furnishes an ornate background of bright green rubber tomato vines around the mine the men are working in, is distracting and ugly. It may be that it is meant to suggest the unnatural brightness men emerging from a dark mine into the sunlight might experience, or the monstrosity of nature's excesses, but the point is never made clear.[1]

The director and designer did more thinking about space than they had done in their other shows. Give and take led to experimentation on people standing around, observing, and commenting, or as Prince describes it, "be[ing] within the story and without it, touched on in Cabaret, amplified subsequently in Company and Follies."[2] Prince was still experimenting with his ideas on staging musicals. His visions were emerging but at this stage in his career he was not yet adept at carrying out his ideas. He describes one such example:

> There was a ballad in the second act of Zorba in which a young man sings to the woman he loves, and it becomes a trio as a lady representing the Greek chorus observes the scene and joins in. I never got it to work. . . . In Follies several years later I had a man sing to an apparition of a young girl he'd been in love with thirty years earlier, while her counterpart, the woman she'd grown up to be, stood by and mistook his song as being sung to her. Two women and a man, essentially the staging quite the same. In Follies I knew how to make it work. . . . So you learn. Boris said Follies would not have happened had it not been for Cabaret, Zorba, and Company.[3]

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[1]Hewes, "The Theatre."

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 140.

[3]Ibid., p. 141.

Prince was disappointed with the staging of the mine disaster in the second act. In the film, tons of explosives on a real mountain with hundreds of extras helped to achieve the desired effect. On stage, Prince used two smoke pots, a taped explosion and 38 people running about the stage in terror. Prince said:

> Had we acknowledged the limitations of the stage, we might have made capital of the mine disaster. Dance might have worked, though I'm tired of it. There had to be something imaginative, but we were stuck with realism, and what was worse, we couldn't keep the events offstage.[1]

Ronald Field choreographed Zorba. The major dances were Greek celebrations, the most notable being the one at the opening of Nikos' mine. Comparisons were made between Field's work and Robbins' dances in Fiddler. Gottfried said, "Ronald Field's dances for the lovely small chorus of real-people-types move beautifully within the production whole, but the Fiddler on the Roof influence is embarrassingly obvious and Field, like Prince, is no Jerome Robbins."[2] John Simon felt that Field "is considerably more at home with the American thirties than with the Greek twenties."[3] Prince, true to form, did not place much emphasis on dance in the show. Hewes commented:

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[1]Ibid., p. 140.

[2]Martin Gottfried, "Theatre," Women's Wear Daily, 18 November 1968, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]John Simon, "When Greek Meets Shreik," New York, 9 December 1968, NYPL Clipping Folder.

> Although Greece is a dancing country, the musical wisely subordinates the dances to the story. What dancing there is emanates from the action and is never an entertainment interlude. Ronald Field's choreography appears authentic, and a most interesting effect is created in one scene where the movements of a dancer in the foreground are echoed by a spotlighted figure on a rear platform.[1]

A dancing couple spotlighted in a scene would become a kind of trademark in many of Prince's shows. He began with a pair doing the tango in the Cafe Imperiale in She Loves Me and continued to present similar couples gliding across the stages of many of his musicals, including A Doll's Life, the last musical he directed that is covered in this study. In the latter, there were four dance figures: a man and dancers representing three phases of a woman's life--youth, prime, and aged.

Reviewers either liked the Kander and Ebb score of Zorba or were indifferent to it. Barnes liked the score.

> The music by Mr. Kander and lyrics by Mr. Ebb have much of the deft facility that characterized their work for Cabaret and The Happy Time, but here the ethnic Greek element to the music and the cheerfully philosophical note struck by lyrics--often Mr. Ebb is both witty and true--endow Zorba with much more fire and spirit. This is far more stylish than the other two.[2]

The numbers that were singled out as particularly effective were "For the First Time," "Only Love," "Bend in the Road," and the humorous "No Boom Boom," "Viva La

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[1]Hewes, "The Theatre."

[2]Barnes, "'Zorba' Is Here with Music."

Difference," and "Y'Assu." John Wilson felt that the score helped the current musical season on Broadway achieve a level which was several notches above that of the past few seasons. In Zorba he felt variety was achieved with two charming low-keyed songs, "The Butterfly" and "Why Can't I Speak?" which, he said, "are almost lost amidst the eruptive color that splashes all around them."[1]

Zorba had its out-of-town tryouts at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven beginning October 7, 1968, followed by a three-week engagement at the Shubert in Boston. The reviews were good in New Haven and the collaborators thought they had a success. Harold Bone, the Variety critic, said:

> Zorba has the ingredients--and the people who know what to do with them. It should end up as a highly satisfying musical embodying, as it does, an absorbing book, a good score, fine cast, lively choreography, smart staging, and an interesting physical production. . . . is stirring entertainment and a welcome contrast to much of the "protest" and "message" fare that has been occupying the stage currently.[2]

The show was capitalized at $500,000 and had a $2 million advance sale. It opened at the Imperial Theatre on November 17, 1968 after a series of New York previews. It appeared to be a "smash hit," opening to favorable notices and strong box-office business. Barnes in the New York

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[1]John S. Wilson, "A Fired-Up 'Zorba,'" New York Times, 15 December 1968, p. 12H.

[2]Harold Bone, "Shows Out of Town," Variety, 9 October 1968, p. 67.

Times, who liked the show, called Prince "one of the very few creative producers on Broadway--a man who can put his own imprint on a show, and that imprint is planted all over Zorba like a sterling silver mark."[1]

Richard P. Cooke in the Wall Street Journal said that after a dull period on Broadway, "the Broadway theater season has perked up again with a new musical at the Imperial Theatre. . . . Mr. Prince has again come up with a musical whose every detail has been carefully thought out."[2]

Richard Watts, Jr. was unhappy with the second act, which he believed was unfeeling because of the murder of the beautiful young widow and the unpleasant scenes surrounding Hortense's death. He felt that the show is not a musical comedy but a musical drama and a "grim one at that, despite its interludes of humor."[3] The Daily News' John Chapman called the show "magnificent--a great work of musical theater."[4]

In spite of good reviews, the advance sales gradually faded and by the early summer of 1969, there was a drastic slump. The stars' fighting and their subsequent absences did not help. Prince didn't have the motivation to replace

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[1]Barnes, "'Zorba' Is Here with Music."

[2]Richard P. Cooke, "Broadway Perks Up," Wall Street Journal, 18 November 1968, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Watts, "The Musical Debut of 'Zorba.'"

[4]Chapman, "Bernardi, Karnilova Are Superb in a Great Musical Play, 'Zorba.'"

the two leads. He said of the show, "it hung on without either joy or relief."[1] On August 9, 1969, Prince closed the Broadway Zorba after 305 performances and began putting together two touring companies, one for the Civic Light Opera in Los Angeles with John Raitt and Barbara Baxley, and Chita Rivera as the chorus leader, and the other company to tour the country, with Michael Kermoyan and Vivian Blaine. Boris Aronson won a Tony Award for his settings for Zorba.

The failure of Zorba was disappointing to its creators. Prince said, "I think Zorba was a first-rate, if depressing show. What exhilarated me evidently depressed others. The opening number was called 'Life Is What You Do While You're Waiting to Die.' Arthur Laurents said that sank us."[2]

Fred Ebb feels that the show left audiences with a "down" feeling.

> There were a lot of deaths in it and it was Greek and there was philosophy. I wondered if they were as entertained as they thought they'd be when they walked into the theatre and getting Hershel and Maria. . . . maybe you think you're going to get Fiddler and then when you don't maybe you're disappointed, and maybe that's why . . . I don't think the show failed for any real artistic reason other than it lacked popular appeal. And the fact is, I don't think there's any such a thing in the theatre anymore as "Art," unless you succeed in business first. Zorba didn't succeed as a business but I thought it succeeded as a work of art. . . . Now we could lighten it a bit . . . we would lighten

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 141.

[2]Ibid., p. 140.

> the "feeling" in revival. I loved that piece and it was a happy working experience and I thought when it came out it came out exactly the way we hoped it would, which is unusual enough. . . . We received fine notices but the public didn't take to it.[1]

Zorba ran over a year out of town without paying off the investment, losing about 27% of its financing. Although the show has not yet recouped its investment, it continues to be revived. Prince said,

> It's interesting that Zorba has had rather more life in Europe than in this country, and that has to do with the prevailing blackness of its mood, its European acceptance of mortality. I loved it at the Theatre an der Wien in Vienna. It was also a success in the Scandinavian countries, particularly Finland, where there were four companies playing simultaneously.[2]

A major revival of Zorba was mounted at the Broadway Theatre in New York on October 16, 1983. It ran almost a year, receiving mixed reviews for the show, but rave notices for the performance of Anthony Quinn (who earlier had played the role of Zorba in the film version). Frank Rich in the New York Times suggests that Michael Cacoyannis, who directed the revival, had lightened the show and eliminated "the studied bleakness that Harold Prince originally gave to the musical."[3] The show's opening lyric was softened: life was no longer "what you do while you're waiting to

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[1]Ebb interview.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 142.

[3]Frank Rich, "'Zorba' and Quinn," New York Times, 17 October 1983, p. C15.

die" but "what you do till the moment you die." However, Rich favorably recalled Prince's use of a "fierce female narrator (or, if you will, Greek chorus) to establish his production's dark mood."[1]

Whitney Bolton in the Morning Telegraph expressed sorrow when Prince closed the original version of Zorba. "I count it a great pity. I loved Zorba from the moment I first saw it. I thought then and think now it is and was a much better musical than it ever received credit for--and nothing can shake me from that opinion."[2]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Whitney Bolton, "Closing of 'Zorba' Loss to Broadway," Morning Telegraph, 6 August 1969, NYPL Clipping Folder.

HAROLD PRINCE, PRODUCER/DIRECTOR

by

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VOLUME TWO

CHAPTER X

PRINCE AND SONDHEIM AND THE "MODERN MUSICAL"

> The man responsible for the musical book's most dramatic change after Hammerstein's development of the musical play was not a writer but a director. Harold Prince created the musical theatre's first production-oriented scripts--the scripts for concept musicals correlating text with performance. These made no attempt to be ordinary plays. They became drastically shorter as more book weight was shouldered by music, lyrics and dance. Prince's name has never appeared on a program as an author. Yet he has been the dominating collaborator on every musical he has directed.[1]

> Company: that was me making my decision to marry Judy.[2]

> Innovation is one of those words I don't think means anything. . . . The two shows I've done that had the most impact on the theatre were West Side Story, because it was a new way of blending song, story and dance, and Company because it was the first show on Broadway that I know of that had a story but no plot; that is to say it was the first plotless musical that wasn't a revue and that ushered in the whole era of shows such as A Chorus Line, for an example, which depend on vignettes and not on plot. So those two shows have had the most impact. One can say there are innovations in all other shows--but those two shows, it seems to me, have had lasting effect on other writers, etc.,

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[1]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 29.

[2]"Prince on Company," New York Sunday News, 20 June 1976, NYPL Clipping Folder.

> and other shows. . . . The only thing that really matters in that area is whether a show influences other shows or not.[1]

Company

Sondheim and Prince had last worked together on A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum. Since then, Sondheim as composer and/or lyricist had had two failures on Broadway, Anyone Can Whistle (4-4-64) and Do I Hear a Waltz? (3-18-65). He had also been involved in various other projects that did not reach fruition. Prince, on the other hand, had had a good deal of success as producer/director, and was at the time represented on Broadway by Fiddler, Zorba, and Cabaret. Now, they were about to collaborate again on a musical entitled Company, that would ultimately be hailed as one of the most innovative in the modern American Musical Theatre, and which would influence future Broadway musicals. Martin Gottfried would call the show "revolutionary."[2] In addition, this show would establish Sondheim as a most gifted composer/lyricist and would usher in a series of Sondheim-Prince shows, many of which (though not commercially successful) would be considered courageous departures from the usual Broadway Musical Theatre offerings.

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[1]Interview with Stephen Sondheim, New York, 20 July 1984.

[2]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 32.

George Furth, a West Coast actor and friend of Sondheim's, had written eleven one-act plays titled Company. A few of the plays were about some of the marriages he had known in Southern California. A Broadway production was planned for the fall of 1968 and a stage manager, Philip Mandelker, and Porter Van Zandt, who had been a production supervisor on various shows such as The Goodbye People, owned the rights. Kim Stanley was expected to play all the wives and George Morrison was set to direct. However, they could not raise the money for the production and so in January of 1969 Furth called Sondheim in despair and asked his advice. Sondheim suggested that they send the plays to Prince. Prince recalls:

> I read them and told Steve that although I felt that Kim Stanley was one of the best actresses in the country, I thought it wasn't viable to have her running around having eleven makeup jobs and eleven wigs and being eleven different people.[1]

Prince did, however, like Furth's writing and it suddenly occurred to him that the plays contained a wonderful idea for a musical. For the past few years Prince had had a notion of doing "a kind of autobiographical musical about contemporary marriages." Prince described his reactions to Furth's plays:

> I was knocked out by them, seeing a potential musical which could examine attitudes toward marriage, the influence upon it of life in the

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 143.

> cities, and collateral problems of especial interest to those of us in our forties.[1]

Sondheim was excited about this new approach and brought Furth to meet Prince. They discussed Prince's ideas which were for a "kind of freewheeling, unconventional musical, borrowing from the revue form and lifting those of Furth's plays dealing with marriage."[2] The three agreed to begin work on "this newly devised modern musical comedy titled Company in which a central character--thirty-five, unmarried, and unable to make a commitment to anyone--was created to observe his married friends' lives."[3] Sondheim named the character Robert "so that he could be referred to differently by each of his friends. In other words, "'Bobby,' 'Bubbi,' 'Baby,' 'Robbie,' 'Rob,' and so on."[4]

Sondheim was working at the time on another musical, The Girls Upstairs, with James Goldman, and rehearsals for that show were scheduled to begin in the fall of 1970. The plan, therefore, was for Company to follow in the spring of 1971.

The major difficulty the collaborators faced was finding an effective form for Company. They knew that the kind of songs Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote, in which the

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 143.

[2]Ibid., p. 144.

[3]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 129.

[4]Prince, Contradictions, p. 144.

characters express their feelings, wouldn't work with Furth's script since he writes, explains Sondheim, "the kind of people who do not sing."[1] Sondheim felt that exploring the characters wouldn't work because they were primarily presented in vignettes and to try to expand them by means of song would be a mistake. The composer suggested the Brechtian approach of comment and counterpoint, although he doesn't really like Brecht. He felt this would be a difficult task since the style of writing that would emerge was not common in American musicals. He had never worked on a show before which didn't have a clear linear story line. This show seemed to work best in an episodic form. Having been geared to integrate his songs, the fact that now half of the songs would happen unexpectedly made Company a unique experience for him. You can't always tell when the dialogue is building to a music cue. Sondheim explained:

> In Forum the songs were respites from the relentlessness of the comedy. In Anyone Can Whistle there were comment songs. This [Company] is a combination--respites that are comments.[2]

Introducing songs in this unexpected manner was not an altogether new technique. Prince and Sondheim, after seeing Joan Littlewood's production of The Hostage some years earlier, were "both struck by the way Littlewood propelled those fragmented songs at you unexpectedly and by

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 129.

[2]Mel Gussow, "Sondheim Scores with 'Company,'" New York Times, 28 April 1970, p. 50.

their force and theatricality. Suddenly somebody burst into song."[1] They had always felt that someday they would want to do something like that and Company would be the result.

Prince agreed that Furth's script would lose pace if interrupted by musical numbers. They didn't want only love songs or songs about marriage. In the end, Sondheim composed a score for the members of the company not involved in a particular vignette--"the observers," said Prince. These observers' songs would interrupt the story and comment on the action taking place in much the same way as a Greek chorus. Company is not sentimental and needed a structure to suit its cooler, drier attitude.

Only three of Furth's original short plays were retained for the musical; he adapted a fourth and wrote a fifth. Two of his original scenes retained are of the karate couple and the pot-smoking couple. The show has five married couples, Robert, and three single girls, Robert's inamoratas--fourteen in all.[2] This was a small cast for a Broadway musical. Some of Furth's one-act plays not used for this production as well as parts of others were retained by the playwright for a future project, a play called Twigs.

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[1]John Kane, "'Company': A New Landmark?" Plays and Players 9, no. 5 (February 1972): 25.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 144.

From May until July of 1969, Prince worked on the show with Sondheim and Furth and, although no songs were written (Sondheim is notoriously slow getting a score done for a show), the director's work with the writers went well. Boris Aronson, who was hired to do the sets, was busily involved designing the show. Prince had already booked theatres in Boston and New York for the following spring, and planned to go into rehearsals by February. Elaine Stritch was cast as Joanne, a role that was basically written for her. Prince left for Germany that summer to direct the film Something for Everyone.

At the end of July, he received a call from Sondheim explaining the troubles they were having with The Girls Upstairs. Sondheim and Goldman had reached an artistic impasse with Stuart Ostrow and Joseph Hardy. Ostrow dropped the show. Hardy then wanted rewrites and Sondheim asked Prince to postpone Company to give him some extra time. Prince, upset at the idea of postponing Company because of all he had already done on the show and because he did not want to be without a show himself the following season, refused.

Sondheim was now depressed by the fact that The Girls Upstairs, a show he had worked on for so long, would be dropped. He said he could not work on the score of Company in this state of mind. Prince, as a friend, had originally read The Girls Upstairs five years earlier (at the time he

had been working on the final draft of Cabaret) and didn't like it very much. It was then to be produced by David Merrick and Leland Hayward. However, because of Sondheim's present situation, Prince once again thought about The Girls Upstairs. After getting some new ideas about how the show might be improved, he told Sondheim to get to work on Company and, as soon as it opened, he would produce the other show. Sondheim went right to work and shortly flew over to Germany to deliver three songs to Prince. One was "Company," which became the show's opening number. Sondheim wrote this number after going to see the model of Aronson's set. He likes to know the way the stage will look before he begins writing. These things free him.[1] He recalls saying at the time, "Now I see why he [Prince] thinks this ought to be a musical, and this was after talking for four months."[2] Aronson explained that his set was very complex, and yet Prince did something that "no other producer would do. He had a wooden replica built of it--very expensive--so the cast could rehearse on it and get the feel of the levels and stairs."[3]

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[1]Sondheim interview.

[2]Sondheim interview, "Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim," videotape.

[3]Louis Botto, "'Company,' Broadway's Oddest Love/Hate Hit," Look, 8 September 1970, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Two other songs written by Sondheim at this time were "The Little Things You Do Together" and "Marry Me a Little," which was replaced as the closing number during rehearsals with "Happily Ever After." "Marry Me a Little," says Prince, was "brilliant and harshly cynical. Robert had covered no distance, learned nothing in the course of the evening. He would marry someone and they would go their separate way, which isn't exactly what we had set out to say about marriage."[1] In the second version, "Happily Ever After," the lyric intended to suggest that Robert was lying, and that what the audience was seeing was "empty bravura, but the audience took him at face value, and the statement was defeatist," Prince explained.[2] During the last week of the tryout run in Boston, Sondheim wrote the third and final version of Robert's closing song, "Being Alive." Prince and Sondheim have always insisted that the show is intended to be pro-marriage and a plea for interpersonal relationships. However, there are those who insist the creators of Company had the opposite in mind. Sondheim was quoted in an article in Time magazine on the the subject of whether the show is anti-marriage or not. He said, "It [Company] says very clearly that to be

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 146.

[2]Ibid., p. 151.

emotionally committed to somebody is very difficult, but to be alone is impossible."[1]

The show with libretto by Furth was capitalized at $550,000. It shows us a bachelor, Robert, in his mid-thirties, going from one apartment to the next observing married life among his friends. It deals with the loneliness of people in big cities. Individuals seeking to change their solitary and independent existence by linking up with another lonely person may achieve fulfillment or risk losing themselves. As the action begins, Robert's best friends, five married couples, all dote on him. He's attractive, witty and bright. He's also guarded and distant. His friends give him advice, mother, criticize, are jealous of, and try to find him "a nice girl" whom they know will never be good enough for him.

The show opens with Robert arriving home to find his friends giving him a surprise birthday party. They sing "Company" and, as the couples drift away, they all agree that friends are company which is what life is all about. The songs set the style and "the ground rules for the evening," said Prince.[2] The director also felt it was probably the best song in the show.[3]

"Stephen Sondheim," Time, 3 May 1971, p. 74. NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 146.

[3]Ibid.

In the next scene, Robert's friends Sarah (Barbara Barrie) and Harry (Charles Kimbrough) entertain Robert in their apartment. Harry is on the wagon and Sarah is dieting. They compete with as well as love each other. Sarah studies karate and when she demonstrates her skill, both Harry and Robert end on the floor. Then Joanne (Elaine Stritch) leads the other couples to comment on "The Little Things You Do Together." This number "established the technique of characters observing in song the non-musical material," said Prince.[1] Harry answers Robert's question--whether he is sorry or grateful that he got married. Harry says yes to both questions, and two other husbands sing "Sorry-Grateful," discussing the pros and cons of married life. This number, said Douglas Watt, "shows ambivalence in relationships. . . . it is in aaba form but the six-four time gives this gracefully searching song about marriage the extra dimension it needs to make its affectingly inconclusive point.[2]

Susan (Merle Louise) and Peter (John Cunningham) are the married couple who achieve happiness by their decision to divorce. They then can live happily together.

The pot-smoking couple are Jenny (Teri Ralston) and David (George Coe) who blame Robert for bringing the ugly weed into their home.

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Douglas Watt, "Musical Events," New York Daily News, 11 July 1970, p. 94.

Robert claims he wants to marry but hasn't yet found the right girl. A trio of lovelies sings "You Could Drive a Person Crazy," explaining that, if he weren't so unbalanced and confused, he'd have been married long ago. John Chapman of the Daily News, who found that most of Sondheim's music made him nervous, enjoyed this trio--Donna McKechnie, Susan Browning and Pamela Myers. He said, "My favorite number is a brilliant little trio--musically and lyrically brilliant."[1] All five of Robert's male married friends sing "Have I Got a Girl for You," describing a bevy of possibilities for their pal. Robert sings "Someone is Waiting," a gentle, lyrical number about the one girl of his dreams who may be waiting for him.

Suddenly Robert is joined on a bench by a succession of young women: April (Susan Browning), who came to New York to live in Radio City; Kathy (Donna McKechnie), who once wanted to marry Robert but is resigned to moving to Vermont and settling down; and Marta (Pamela Myers), who, after discussing her strange theories, sings "Another Hundred People," which tells of the scores of hopefuls who come into Manhattan every day and yet the city remains a city of strangers.

Amy (Beth Howland) and Paul (Steve Elmore) are about to marry when the bride-to-be panics at her wedding

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[1]John Chapman, "Company," New York Daily News, 24 May 1970, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 31, p. 263.

breakfast. She becomes hysterical and the number "Getting Married Today" humorously leads us to believe she's not getting married. But she does.

The second act opens again with the surprise party and the number "Side by Side by Side." Although Robert's friends joyously embrace him, their remarks unsettle him. "What Would We Do Without You?", done in tap-dancing, vaudevillian style--with hats and canes--has all the couples professing to be Robert's best friend (except for their spouses, of course). At the end of the number, however, the message is loud and clear: everyone has a partner to dance with except Robert. He "goes his way by himself."

Robert then brings stewardess April (Susan Browning) home for the evening. She responds to Robert's question, "Where are you going?" as she starts to leave at 4:30 A.M., with the number "Barcelona." The scene is both comic and ironical. While Robert is in bed with the airline stewardess, his friends are assuming he is unbearably lonely.

"Poor Baby" is sung as the married ladies worry about their friend Bob's need for tenderness. Certainly his young romances are just passing fancies, they feel. The song "Tick-Tock" describes the stream of consciousness that occurs during a sexual encounter. The dance solo during the number is performed by Donna McKechnie.

One of the show-stopping numbers in Company is "The Ladies Who Lunch," which was performed by Elaine Stritch

as Joanne. Tired and a little drunk, Robert is being entertained by Joanne in a late night discotheque. She proceeds to scorn several ladies present (at the same time deprecating herself). It is a "comment delivered with sardonic brilliance in a toast to women with hollow pleasure-seeking lives."[1] Robert's final reply to Joanne, who offers to take care of him in return for certain attentions, is--"But who would I take care of?" This is meant to show he has finally grown up; although he questions what one could possibly get from the kind of relationships he has seen throughout the show, he does discover "that a part of a man's life is that he must commit himself to one woman and that she is certainly going to make him happy and unhappy, and that's what it's all about, isn't it--"Being Alive."[2] "This," said reviewer Robert Cushman, "is meant to represent a Great Moral Step for Robert, whose love-life has hitherto consisted of a series of enviable one-night stands."[3]

Robert, at the finale, seems to be ready to move on to become involved, and make his own life instead of clinging to his married friends. At least he "seems" ready to begin.

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[1]Roderick Nordell, "Prince's New 'Company' and Its Concept," Christian Science Monitor," 26 March 1970, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Company, record liner notes, by Charles Burr, Columbia OS-3550.

[3]Robert Cushman, "Her Majesty's Company," Plays and Players 19, no. 6 (March 1972): 34.

The collaborators set their show in New York City because, said Sondheim, "We want to make a metaphor about Manhattan and marriage."[1] Prince and Sondheim like to use secret metaphors that nobody knows except the authors and some of the other collaborators. It helps to hold the entity together. In Company, they are making a comparison between contemporary marriage and the island of Manhattan. "We made a vaudeville joke about it in the middle of 'Side by Side by Side,' and then took it out because we decided never to let anybody know that that's what we were about. But it justified my writing a song about Manhattan, 'Another Hundred People,' which is the only song that doesn't deal with one-to-one relationships."[2] There were times, however, when the two collaborators thought differently about the show. To Prince, it dealt with marriage and relating to people. Sondheim said Company was about the increasing difficulty for people to relate to each other in a mechanized society. But they never had fights or disagreements about their slightly different viewpoints.[3]

Prince discussed the scenes representing Robert's birthday party. It is not always clear whether it is the

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[1]Kane, "'Company': A New Landmark?"

[2]Stephen Sondheim, "The Musical Theatre: A Talk by Stephen Sondheim," Dramatists Guild Quarterly 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 13-21.

[3]Sondheim interview, "Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim," videotape.

same (35th) birthday party or different years of birthday parties. Prince explains:

> We constructed a framework of gatherings for Robert's thirty-fifth birthday, each appearing to be the same, but dynamically different from the others. Pinteresque in feeling, the first was giddy, somewhat hysterical; the second (at the end of Act I), an abbreviated version of the first; the third, hostile and staccato; and the final one at the end of the show, warm, loving, mature. Since Robert never arrives for the final celebration, there was some question whether they represented one birthday or a succession of them. I am certain they were one.[1]

The script reads like a movie. There are close-ups, cross fades, dissolves--all film techniques. When Elaine Stritch stood looking down, saying "It's the little things," it was if a camera were brought in for a quick cut to her face. Prince would use similar techniques in his later shows.

Boris Aronson, who had done the sets for other Prince shows, such as Fiddler, Cabaret, and Zorba, was signed to design Company. He felt that Company was his most successful work with Prince, that on this show he had done his personal best. He felt, as all true theatre men wish to do, that on this show he had added something that went along with all the elements. Mrs. Aronson explained that her husband did not wish to produce a set that would be acclaimed for itself. He was only interested in what it did for the show.[2] Prince, in answer to the question of how

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 150.

[2]Interview with Lisa Aronson, New York, 6 June 1984.

he picks a set designer for a particular project, says:

> You cast a set designer just as you cast any other creative person. Certain set designers have a gift for the primitive abrasive . . . those are complimentary words. That's the stuff I like, just in case anybody is misunderstanding me. Other designers have an incredible gift for props; others enormous structural facility and no patience whatsoever with props. You just have to pick the right person for the material.[1]

In an interview with the late Boris Aronson's widow, Lisa Jalowetz Aronson, who worked as her husband's assistant, she explained that Prince never type-cast her husband as any particular style set designer as producers often do with designers. She said, "He [Prince] didn't pigeon-hole Boris into the idea of being good at only one mode of design. Instead, Prince challenged him on each show they did together. And each one was obviously in a style unique and fitting the project."[2]

At first Prince and Aronson worked towards a spare production for Company, with a minimum of tables, chairs, a bench, a bed and a few pots and pans. They agreed that the set had to be a structure which would make possible the change of five separate bedrooms into a kitchen, a nursery or a library. Prince explained,

> The couples would move from room to room in the course of living even the mundane moments of their lives. And the decor in each room would identify

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[1] "On Collaboration Between Authors and Directors," Dramatists Guild Quarterly 16, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 28.

[2] Lisa Aronson interview.

> its married couple. To focus our attention on a particular couple, we would reproduce their room--center and stage level. As if that weren't enough, company numbers ("What Would We Do Without You?") would be performed on the entire unit without any scenery."[1]

This idea proved too difficult to carry out and was discarded.

Aronson studied how many buttons he pushed from morning to night in order to find the characteristic picture of movement in New York. Aronson said:

> New York is like a gold mine. I could never have done the set for Company years ago when I first came here. It took me fifty years to know New York and to know it isn't only Times Square and Coca Cola signs. New York is becoming one enormous cubist painting. . . . We live in a button-pushing world. So I made notes on how many buttons I pushed from morning to night. I was all over the place . . . in a modern city . . . get the hospital quality. . . . My whole inspiration was the lobby of Lincoln Center. . . . Get the essence of a place and what the city does to you. In New York you keep moving from place to place to keep from getting run over.[2]

Garson Kanin, in an essay on Aronson for the brochure of an exhibition of the designer's theatre work at the Vincent Astor Gallery in 1981, said:

> In Company, Boris put New York City on the stage for the first time. Before beginning so much as a sketch, he walked and walked the streets of the city, with his beloved and invaluable Lisa at his side; circumnavigated Manhattan Island on the Circle Line; studied hotels and apartment houses and restaurants; and, finally, discovered the key: cubism. . . .

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 145.

[2]Boris Aronson interview, "Garson Kanin Interviews Boris Aronson," videotape.

> "You know what is New York?" he exultantly asked me at lunch one day. "Cubist!" It took them fifty years to catch on. But the cubists influenced the architects and the architects the builders--all of them, van der Rohe and Johnson and Stone and Saarinen and so now we got here a cubist city on account of because a bunch of French painters who got sick from painting the same, the same as always.[1]

Aronson discovered his design concept for Company while sitting in the reading room of the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center. He looked out at the multi-level buildings that make up the Lincoln Center complex and realized what he wanted to do. The result was a breath-taking set of metal and glass, using projected backgrounds behind louvered walls. Six hundred slides were projected in the Broadway show and forty in the national company. The shiny rectangular frames of the massive construct became the various rooms needed in the show and they were "as cold and sterile as the shadowy people caught in their metallic embrace."[2] There isn't one bit of paint in the Company set. Only steel, projections and plastic. Prince, always delighted when a collaborator surprises him, was very excited by the two elevators Aronson had included in the design. The reviewers were enthusiastic about Aronson's

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[1]Garson Kanin, Boris Aronson: From His Theatre Work, brochure from exhibition, 31 March-15 August 1981 (New York: New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, 1981), p. 10.

[2]Samuel Hirsch, "'Company' All Glitter, Cleverness," Boston Herald Traveler, 25 March 1970, p. 21.

work. Stanley Kauffmann's review in the New Republic epitomizes the response:

> Boris Aronson is seventy--probably the oldest scenic designer now active in the American theatre. This is much more than a moist-eyed Grand Old Man note because his setting for Company is marvelous. Aronson's styles have ranged through his career, from the naturalism of Awake and Sing to the abstraction of J.B., but for Company he has made a setting quite unlike any of his work that I know. It is a skeletonized structure of (seeming) plexiglass and steel with two open elevators in it and a huge cyclorama behind it on which rear projections flow past to supplement or specify the action. Yet this is no mere stack of boxes like Robin Wagner's set for the recent feeble production of Mahagonny; Aronson's setting dramatizes the cellular, scarily clean feeling of a modern Manhattan apartment house including a touch of wit and a lot of good, varied playing spaces. Like so much that is new, the basic concept is a fresh use of the not-new. The mode is Constructivist and suggests the influence of two Russians, the sculptor Tatlin and the director-designer Meyerhold (Aronson was born in Russia and lived there until he was twenty-three, so possibly knew their work first-hand). . . . I dwell on the setting because first, it is excellent, and second it is the best element in Company, and third, I'm convinced that, in a decisive way, it "makes" the show. The ultra-hip tone of Company rests on the work of this seventy-year-old designer.[1]

Aronson's set has split levels. People talk face to face, on a diagonal, and across platforms, and between levels. Rich spatial relationships are thus made possible. In an article in the New York Times which discussed the design of Aronson's 1972 modern home, which is similar to

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[1]Stanley Kauffmann, "Company," New Republic, 23 May 1970, p. 20.

the 1970 set design for Company, Joseph Giovannini said:

> The minimalism of Mr. Aronson's designs make people stand out. Neither his stage sets nor his house were conceived as showplaces. "The luxury," Mr. Aronson said, "was in the empty space."[1]

John Simon in his book Uneasy Stages: A Chronicle of the New York Theatre 1963-1973 suggests that the effect of Aronson's stylish and fascinating set for Company conveyed a sense of

> some sort of newness in the theatre. It is heartening to see such an old-timer as Aronson, whose decor was always substantial but also ponderous and old-fashioned, daring to undertake so graceful and radical a departure and fully succeeding.[2]

Mrs. Aronson explains that Prince made it possible for her husband to function at his best. Prince created a climate in which his collaborators were able to do fertile and creative work. She says that Aronson believed that working with Prince freed him to accomplish his best work. Prince encouraged his collaborators to "dig as deep" as they could and "stretch" their creative specialties into their best. Lisa Aronson suggests that Prince was always there as a kind of editor--taking what he liked from his collaborators and rejecting what he felt would not "work."

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[1]Joseph Giovannini, "For Theatre Set Designers, All the Home's a Stage," New York Times, 24 February 1983, p. C6.

[2]John Simon, Uneasy Stages: A Chronicle of the New York Theatre 1963-1973 (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 294.

However, Mrs. Aronson said, "He challenged people in a big way and helped them to come up with unexpected ideas."[1] Prince was as demanding of Aronson as he was with all his collaborators, but Mrs. Aronson felt that his tendency to be demanding was a very good quality. Prince is not an insecure man, Mrs. Aronson suggests, and does not expect his creative staff to come up with precisely what he has asked for. He prefers inspiring them to come back with surprises, his position as captain of the ship secure.[2]

Ironically, the set which Aronson designed to give the illusion of spareness was heavy and difficult to assemble. It required six tons of steel, two electric SCR motorized elevators, and 28 carousel projectors. Prince explained how the projections were utilized.

> Most of the front projections operated from the balcony rail and the balance from X-rays on the front light pipe behind the proscenium. These were abstractions designed to support the emotion of scenes. Occasionally they contradicted the apparent mood, illuminating instead the undercurrents. The remaining slides were projected from the rear. For the scenes we used black-and-white photographs in some detail of locations in New York City; for the songs we used reverse negatives of the photographs, painted in color. There were six hundred slides in all, and most people weren't aware of them, which is as it should be. . . . Our projections were designed by Robert Ornbo of Theatre Projects London, and I think up until Company opened, projections had never been used as well on Broadway.[3]

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[1]Lisa Aronson interview. [2]Ibid.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 151.

Tony Perkins, whose only previous musical was Greenwillow in 1960, and known for his role in the Hitchcock thriller, Pyscho, was slated to play Robert in Company. However, he asked to be released from the commitment since he was anxious to begin a career as a director. Within a few weeks he was directing an Off-Broadway production of Steambath, and Dean Jones was hired to play the central character. The agent Flora Roberts felt that Jones was an inspired choice. "Dean broke your heart . . . he looked so dopey and innocent."[1] Since there was no singing or dancing chorus in the show, each cast member doubled as character and company. The "karate" couple, Sarah and Harry, were played by Barbara Barrie and Charles Kimbrough. The "happily married/happily divorced couple," Susan and Peter, were played by Merle Louise and John Cunningham. The "pot smokers," Jenny and David, were played by Teri Ralston and George Coe, and Amy and Paul, the "newlyweds," were played by Beth Howland and Steve Elmore. Howland went on to a successful career in television and became known for her role as the "ditzy" waitress on Alice. The fifth couple, Joanne and Larry, were played by Elaine Stritch and Charles Braswell. Although most of the cast were actors who could sing, they were also required to dance. Some moved quite gracefully. "Others," said Prince,

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 135.

"were klutzes, and we wanted that."[1] The one professional dancer, Donna McKechnie, had the only dance solo. Prince wanted his company to seem like real people and not a singing or dancing chorus.

Michael Bennett was hired to choreograph and stage the musical numbers for Company. He had staged the dances for four previous Broadway musicals, the two most recent productions being Promises, Promises and Coco. The pairing of Prince and Bennett proved to be an exceptionally inspired move. As Lisa Aronson said, "Bennett was a wonderful balance artistically for Prince."[2] However, they would do only two shows together, since Bennett wanted and had the ability to direct on his own. He has had a very successful career on Broadway, with his major hits being A Chorus Line and Dreamgirls.

Company proved to be a difficult show and took six weeks to rehearse. With most musicals, the director rehearses the principals while the choreographer rehearses the chorus in another area. Here, with the principals and the chorus one and the same, Prince had to wait while Bennett set the musical numbers. Furth was also anxious to get on with the dialogue rehearsals so that he could see what needed to be done on the book.

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 150.

[2]Lisa Aronson interview.

Prince, although he loved the form of the show, found it "to be the most difficult experience as a director."[1] In many ways, the show's theme affected him personally and made him uncomfortable. "It was painful from beginning to end," said Prince. "Because it took me until I was thirty-five to get married and Bobby was thirty-five in the play."[2]

The first number in Company is extremely long and took four hours to stage on the first morning of rehearsals (Fritz Holt, production stage manager of the show, said that this number took longer to stage than any number he'd ever been involved with).[3] "Each person was assigned his 'Bobbys' and 'Babys' and 'Bubus.' It took the first morning of rehearsals--four hours--to do the first page. Everyone was scared."[4] However, Bennett said that the opening number of Company was "the best thing I've ever done."[5]

> What I did in Company was to choreograph the characters. I think that a lot more of the show was choreographed than most people who saw it realized. I believe that one of the best things I've ever done was the opening number, the Company number. It was heightened reality. The characters were taken and the physicalities of those characters were broadened. I don't think anyone has demanded of nondancers as much movement as I did in Company. . . . I knew I had a chance to do something different because there was so much subtext. Lots of times in musicals the characters are so shallow that you really don't have anything to work with.[6]

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 150. [2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 135. [4]Ibid., pp. 135-136.

[5]Ibid., p. 137. [6]Ibid.

When Bennett began rehearsing the number "Side by Side by Side," using the married couples as partners, he found he needed an additional middle section for the number. "Something," said Bennett, "like 'We love you, Bobby, We love you, Bobby,' something over and over. I told him [Sondheim] to give me something that I could do over and over and over, so that I could do it in many different styles and that it becomes grating."[1] Sondheim responded with "What Would We Do Without You?" The only disagreement that the composer and choreographer had during the rehearsal period was about the tug-of-war staging in the "Side by Side by Side" number. Sondheim didn't like the image it evoked and Bennett thought it worked very well in the number. They finally decided to retain the segment.

Bennett gave the cast many pep talks, urging them to keep their energy up during performances of Company. He called rehearsals fairly regularly (an unusual move) after the show opened. Bennett explained:

> I found that it isn't a good thing to build things in a show, to build numbers that require that much energy for performance because they [actors] don't want to give it eight times a week. They don't mind it if they are the star, but in an ensemble show like Company, it gets boring for them to do.[2]

Bennett and orchestrator Jonathan Tunick suggested that four additional singers be hired to sing from the pit to augment the voices on stage and to supplement the

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[1]Ibid., p. 139. [2]Ibid.

orchestra (acting as surrogate musical instruments). This was a technique that had been used in Promises, Promises.

Tunick's orchestrations gave the show a contemporary urban sound influenced by pop and rock music. There are many "city" sounds and mechanical sounds. The arranger usually asks the director and songwriter to describe what they want in metaphoric terms before going off to create his arrangements. Company was especially difficult because every song had to have a new style created for it. You could not pick a song and say that this was the big ballad or the '20s number. Tunick wouldn't use gimmicks.[1]

Although the rehearsal period was difficult in some ways for Prince and Bennett, they were genuinely aided by Sondheim. Bennett said that working with him was different than working with anyone else. Although there were the usual long waits for his material, when the material finally does arrive, it is not only fine work but truly written for the stage. Sondheim explained that, when he worked on West Side Story, Jerome Robbins taught him how to write for a show and he never forgot it.

> I always stage every number within an inch of its life when I'm writing. As I write a number, I always explain in great detail what I intend. Then the director is free to change it or not but he has a blueprint. He never has to turn to me and ask, "What am I going to do here?" I always give him more than enough. One of the things Hal has complained to me about on a number of occasions is that the songs are overstaged when I give

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[1]Ibid., p. 174.

> them to him because I stage everything. I time things, I time beats out. If you want the character to cross from here to there, or has to pick up a coffee cup and drink it or whatever it is, I time those things here in my studio. Then I say OK now, during these beats or in between, he empties the coffee cup. The director may say, I don't want a coffee cup in the number and that's all right. But that's the idea and almost no other composers do this. When I first worked with Michael Bennett and I did the opening number for Company he couldn't believe it. He said that he never had anybody give him stuff like this before. He'd always had to invent out of nowhere. I explained that I learned it from Jerome Robbins and you can take what I give you or throw out what you want but at least there's a blueprint for you to work from. I saw Boris' design for the set of the show, and that allowed me to write the opening. I staged that entire number in my head around that elevator. I asked Boris how long it would take the elevator to get from the top to the bottom so that I knew that I could get the people off the stairs and onto the stage level and that's what that climax is about. That's why I built that number of bars over the word "love" to allow the elevator to move and allow all those people to get down onto the stage. . . . So then Michael could take what he wanted to take.[1]

Bennett also appreciated Sondheim writing for character and specifically for the show. He doesn't write show tunes in the Rodgers and Hammerstein mode. You have to live with his music awhile and get familiar with it. "Steve, of all the composers I've worked with, understands more about the musical theatre than anyone," says Bennett.

Sondheim, discussing his songs for Company, felt that they were

> the subtext of the scenes ranging from simple rock to bossa nova to traditional musical comedy

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[1]Sondheim interview.

[2]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 137.

> "Pastiche." It's full of counterpoint and simultaneous singing. . . . I only use rock where I think it's emotionally justified. Too many people use it because it's the contemporary sound. There's a mystique about rock that it's an arcane language. One of the salient features is the freedom of form, which I think is terrific. There's no such thing as being too old to write rock. Was Stravinsky too old to go into twelve-tone music?"[1]

Mel Gussow, in his second review of the show, suggested that the impulse of the scenes came from the music and not from the book. He felt that the score was "distinctly superior" to the libretto.

> On re-hearing, Stephen Sondheim's elegantly intricate score deepens in sophistication, intelligence and lyrical and musical inventiveness.[2]

Although Sondheim's score received positive reactions from reviewers, with descriptions such as care, imagination, freshness, vitality, wit and intelligence, there were those who felt his lyrics were more entertaining than the music. Douglas Watt suggested that Sondheim does not necessarily create new forms but enriches old ones. "It takes several hearings for one's awareness to grow," said Watt.[3]

During the show's out-of-town tryouts in Boston, everything went smoothly. There were no cast changes (Prince was very pleased with the casting), no major revisions and no delay in the Broadway opening date. One

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[1]Gussow, "Sondheim Scores with 'Company.'"

[2]Mel Gussow, "'Company' Anew," New York Times, 29 July 1970, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Watt, "Musical Events."

minor conflict occurred between Prince and librettist George Furth. Before one performance, Furth gave Beth Howland a note which messed up one of her exits that evening. Fritz Holt explained:

> Hal was furious and I don't blame him. You just can't do that. And George realized that, he's an actor. He apologized for it and that was that. But it was never evident that there was anything the matter between George and Hal until way after we opened. And that's essential . . . regardless of what's happening there's a place to determine where your feuds are and where you appear united.[1]

The number "Side by Side by Side" was moved from the latter part of the second act to the opening of the act. It explained Robert's current status with his friends. "Another Hundred People" was cut but soon put back into the show to the great relief of all who loved the number.

As mentioned earlier, Sondheim wrote "Being Alive" to replace "Happily Ever After" during the last week in Boston. Prince felt that the latter imposed a happy ending on a play which he wanted to remain ambiguous. However, "Happily Ever After" seemed to frighten audiences. Prince said, "It was the bitterest, most unhappy song ever written, and we didn't know how devastating it would be until we saw it in front of an audience. . . . Stephen was writing an affirmative song, but he put <u>everything</u> in it and that <u>everything</u> overrode the affirmation."[2] Sondheim,

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[1]Zadan, <u>Sondheim & Co.</u>, p. 141.

[2]Ibid., p. 140.

because his collaborators kept using the word "negative" about "Happily Ever After," wrote the replacement number. He loves "Being Alive," but he feels that the ending of the show is a "cop-out. When Bobby suddenly realizes that he shouldn't be alone at the end of the scene, it's too small a moment and you don't believe it."[1] Prince disagrees. The director asserts that the last minutes of Company are not a cop-out but are not as skillfully done as the rest of the show. He adds that they just "never got it quite right. The marriages in the show are not bad marriages--they're just marriages that are holding together because people either live little lies or look the other way. It's called human. What happens to Robert in the end is what we wanted to have happen to him. We didn't ease into it properly and that's what's wrong with the show . . . there'll always be something."[2]

At first the show in Boston played far too seriously. Prince felt that the cast, who were all well-trained actors, were playing motivations, subtext and concentrating on the neurotic, dark side of their characters. The comedy of the piece was lost. Prince said: "I suggested they take everything they'd learned about their characters, turn it upside down, and let the comedy rise to the surface. At the next performance everything was where it should be."[3]

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 141.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 151.

Prince also utilized a technique he had learned from Abbott. "No amount of light is enough on an actor to get laughs."[1] He filled the stage with light and had the actors play as many scenes as possible in a shallow area down stage to involve the audience sufficiently to make them laugh."[2]

The reviews in Boston were mixed. Kevin Kelly in the Boston Evening Globe called the show "brilliant, just brilliant!" and "not only is it the most original musical I've seen in a very long time but, unless I miss my guess, it's destined to become a classic in the American musical theatre. . . . On its own hard-headed, straightforward, uncompromising merits, Company is in a triumphant class by itself."[3] He could imagine people complaining about the production being cold and stubborn (which they did). "So it is," said Kelly, "So, my friends, is life."[4] Kelly's statements about Sondheim are typical of other reviewers.

> Mr. Sondheim is his own man and his music owes nothing to anyone but himself. For once in a new musical there are no borrowed beats from the Beatles, no "trickily" fashionable syncopations for the sake of fashion--nothing, in effect, other than a perfectly imagined style beautifully fitted to Mr. Furth's book. Mr. Sondheim's lyrics are perfect.[5]

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[1]Prince interview, "Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim," videotape.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Kevin Kelly, "You're in Brilliant 'Company,'" Boston Globe, 25 March 1970, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[4]Ibid. [5]Ibid.

Samuel Hirsch, on the other hand, did not enjoy the show. He suggested that until the collaborators

> decide which way to go with their material, their show is all surface glitter and cleverness, smart, bright and remote. . . . Company has so much potential. It's seeking a new form and a new sound and if the authors and their director can solve the identity problem and find out what they're really trying to say, this musical may find lots of good company.[1]

David Sterritt's article in Boston After Dark called the show "amusing, inventive and hummable. And its chances for success are well-nigh impossible to determine. . . . I don't know if New York is ready for Company yet, but we in the hinterlands can be grateful for another good opportunity to see where the musical theatre is and should be going."[2]

Although some comments in Boston papers pointed up the bleakness and bitterness of the show, the most damaging review was Variety's. Guy Livingston accused Furth of being a woman hater and said that his show was "for ladies' matinees, homos and misogynists."[3] Prince's comment about the Variety review to a reporter from Look magazine who asked him about it, was that it was "interesting."[4]

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[1]Hirsch, "'Company' All Glitter, Cleverness."

[2]David Sterrett, "'Company': Amusing, Inventive, Hummable," Boston After Dark, 1 April 1970, p. 4.

[3]Guy Livingston, "Shows Out of Town," Variety, 8 April 1970, p. 120.

[4]Botto, "'Company,' Broadway's Oddest Love/Hate Hit."

Company opened in New York on April 26, 1970 at the Alvin Theatre. It received excellent reviews except for Clive Barnes, who at the time was the powerful first-string critic on the New York Times. He found the characters unlikable and said:

> The conception has two difficulties. In the first place these people are just the kind of people you expend hours each day trying to escape from. They are, virtually without exception--perhaps the airline stewardess wasn't too bad--trivial, shallow, worthless and horrid. . . . Creatively, Mr. Sondheim's lyrics are way above the rest of the show; they have a lyric suppleness, sparse, elegant wit, and range from the virtuosity of a patter song to a kind of sweetly laconic cynicism in a modern love song. The music is academically very interesting. Mr. Sondheim must be one of the most sophisticated composers ever to write Broadway musicals, yet the result is slick, clever and eclectic rather than exciting.[1]

Barnes also commented on Bennett's work. "Michael Bennett is one of those artists who carry the past into the future, and stylizes his view of it into a signature. Of course you can see the influence of Gower Champion, and all the other champions, yet his choreography has genuine vitality, and it is one of the major joys of the show."[2]

Walter Kerr praised the show. He thought that Sondheim had never written a more sophisticated score, and that Bennett had applied endless inventive high-pressure patterns. "Often he [Bennett] uses entirely traditional

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[1]Clive Barnes, "'Company' Offers a Guide to New York's Marital Jungle," New York Times, 27 April 1970, p. 40.

[2]Ibid.

devices, say straw hats and canes, in provocative new ways, letting the hats slash the air and the canes slap the floor to stress the harshness of what is being stomped out in "Side by Side by Side."[1]

Kerr also liked Prince's staging.

> Mr. Prince's own work is immaculate; jog-trotting waiters spin past tables without colliding, or without taking orders, like jagged metal figures on a children's game board; the entire company dissolves and reassembles at will in the heavens, malicious gods and goddesses changing shapes as cumulus clouds do.[2]

In spite of all this praise, Kerr suggests that if he were asked if he "liked" the show he would have to say that he didn't. And yet he said, "I admired it, or admired vast portions of it. . . . I left Company feeling rather cool and queasy, whatever splendors my head may have been reminding me of, and there is a plain reason for that. At root, I didn't take to Mr. Jones's married friends any more than he did. . . . On the whole I had difficulty--what do you call it?--empathizing."[3]

John J. O'Connor of the Wall Street Journal felt that the credit for the show's vitality must go to director Harold Prince. "Mr. Prince makes such clever and imaginative use of his small cast that, on leaving, the spectator is bound to start recounting those names in the program to

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[1]Walter Kerr, "'Company' Original and Uncompromising," New York Times, 3 May 1970, p. D1, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

make sure he hasn't overlooked a couple dozen performers."[1]

Jack Kroll of Newsweek and Ted Kalem of Time loved the new musical and called it "a landmark." And Brendan Gill in the New Yorker magazine raved.

> Company is the kind of musical that a number of increasingly distracted champions of Broadway have been begging for--not a conventional adaptation, however skillful and energetic, of a previous success in some other incarnation but an original piece of work, and one, moreover, that joyously breaks new ground. Not all that much new ground, mind you--just enough to let one reflect that "My Fair Lady" happened fourteen years ago and "Oklahoma!" twenty-seven years ago, and that, since everything else in the world moves, the musical theatre ought to be capable of moving, too. What a pleasure it is when a work of art not only delights the eye but also astonishes it![2]

Richard Watts, Jr. felt it was "surprisingly uningratiating,"[3] and Henry Hewes in the Saturday Review said that as a work of art the show "has remarkably distilled the essence of today's middle-generation New York life."[4] John Lahr summed up his comments thusly: "Whatever the limitations of Company, it is attempting to advance the musical

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[1]John J. O'Connor, "Company," Wall Street Journal, 28 April 1970, p. 21.

[2]Brendan Gill, "The Theatre," New Yorker, 2 May 1970, p. 83.

[3]Richard Watts, Jr., "Lesson from the Married Set," New York Post, 27 April 1970, p. 45.

[4]Henry Hewes, "The Theatre," Saturday Review, 9 May 1970, p. 4.

form. . . . Thanks to the energy of Stephen Sondheim and Harold Prince, the genre is not yet a fossil."[1]

Bennett said that this was the only time in his career that he didn't care about the reviews. "It was a show that I loved, it was a show that I was proud of, and there wasn't a review in the world that could damage that."[2]

One of the problems pointed out was that Robert, playing an observer, was basically portrayed as an unpleasant cipher, an antihero. Price replied: "Of course. He is a cipher, an empty vessel--but who says you can't do plays about empty vessels? The world is filled with walking empty vessels."[3]

Sondheim felt that Company was controversial because it dealt with the increasing difficulty of making one-to-one relationships in an increasingly dehumanized society. "One of the reasons we had it take place in front of chrome and glass and steel was that it took place in an urban society in which individuality and individual feeling become more and more difficult to maintain."[4]

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[1]John Lahr, "On-Stage," Village Voice, 7 May 1970, p. 15.

[2]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 143.

[3]Robert Waterhouse, "Hal Prince and Boris Aronson Talk to Robert Waterhouse," Plays and Players 19, no. 6 (March 1972): 16.

[4]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 131.

The star of the show, Dean Jones (Robert), became despondent soon after the show opened in Boston. Although he appeared to be physically ill, Prince suspected that his problem was a psychosomatic one. Jones was going through his own divorce at the time and felt that the show was anti-marriage, "perhaps because," said Jones, "at the time I was antimarriage."[1] To insure a performance from him on opening night on Broadway, Prince offered to replace him after the previews. Grateful, Jones gave a fine performance for the critics and two weeks later left the show. The news release claimed that he had contracted hepatitis. Larry Kert stepped into the role. Business remained unaffected and Prince remarked, "I don't know whether I would have been so generous had I thought it would be."[2]

Prince felt that with Kert the show became more of a musical comedy. It wasn't the show he had intended, nor did he think it was as good as the one on opening night. It was softer and the laughs were more indulgent. However, audiences enjoyed Kert more than they had liked Jones. Prince said, "had Dean stayed, there's no telling whether the show would have been successful."[3]

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[1]Ibid., p. 143.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 156.

[3]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 144.

Bennett was sorry that Jones had left. He, too, felt that Kert was too much the Broadway performer for the role of Robert. The fact that Jones was personally troubled had helped. Bennett said:

> In "Being Alive" Dean suffered; with Larry it was Larry Kert doing the show-stopper. The difference was that Larry performed with the fourth wall gone and with Dean it was there--you were witnessing as opposed to being a part of something. I did think Larry improved enormously in the part and when he went to London he was absolutely wonderful. He had matured a little and Hal and I worked with him and he got a lot better.[1]

Gussow did a highly complimentary follow-up review in the New York Times in July. He said, "With Kert's performance one feels the character's rootlessness, emotional reserves, and incipient anguish at not connecting."[2]

According to Prince, except for the show's final moments, Company represented the first time he had worked without conscious compromise. "It represents as total a collaboration of authors, director, choreographer, and actors as I can remember. Cabaret established me as commercially successful. Company established me in my own eyes."[3]

Although the musical received enough favorable reviews to produce a long run, Company truly had only limited audience response. It played to sixty percent of capacity

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Gussow, "'Company' Anew."

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 157.

and never had a sold-out week. However, it did pay back its investors and it did show a profit. "And that is what commercial theatre must ask of itself," said Prince.[1]

Company won the New York Drama Critics' Award as best musical of the season and six Tony Awards (including one for best musical). An original cast album was recorded by Columbia Records and produced by Thomas Z. Shepard.

The show ran for twenty months. Prince blames the Barnes review in the Times. "Audiences are influenced by reviews."[2] Sondheim disagreed, suggesting that even if Barnes had raved about the show it would not have turned out differently. In Sondheim's opinion, many of the Prince-Sondheim collaborative efforts are shows that tell the audience what it doesn't want to hear. Sondheim said, "Shows that run a long time tell the audience what they want to hear."[3]

Both Prince and Sondheim were probably right about the audience response. In addition, however, the show had no plot, no singing or dancing chorus, no real costume changes, no lovable characters, and no stars. George Abbott, whom Prince likes to invite to run-throughs or tryouts because he values Abbott's opinions, said that he

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Prince interview, "Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim," videotape.

[3]Sondheim interview, ibid.

went back to see Company twice because he wasn't sure about the ending. He told Prince that he had received different messages. Prince responded: "Good, that's what I wanted."[1]

A small but growing audience, however, appeared to be looking forward to the new and adventurous concepts that Prince and Sondheim seemed ready to deliver. Martin Gottfried summed it up:

> Harold Prince's direction of Company blended music with dialogue and dance and even scenery as had never before been done in the musical theater. Boris Aronson's chromium and glass structures and skeleton elevators gave Prince a picture through which to set the style, mood and point of the show. No musical had ever looked like this one, so abstract and self-contained and cool. Sets have moved vertically before, but only in the sense of scenery being flown down from above the stage. Here, Prince also set his human traffic moving vertically on the elevators giving the feel of life in New York's chilly skyscrapers. Doubtless, few directors could have conceived of a musical made from George Furth's related playlets about marriage. Prince's literary imagination gave him the edge.[2]

Company opened in London with most of its original cast intact. It received outstanding reviews, but it ran in London for only six months with Kert and Elaine Stritch and only a little more than two months with British replacements.

Richard Pilbrow, co-producer of the London production as well as London's foremost lighting designer, is quoted in Craig Zadan's book as saying, "The investors

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[1]Abbott interview.

[2]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 127.

wrote in to say that they were sorry the show was closing but that they were glad they were involved in it. They'd lost their money happily. Company advanced the musical theater in this country . . . we'd never seen anything like it before."[1]

Company remains a landmark show. Although it was not a huge commercial hit, it affected future Broadway musicals. It contained an innovative book and structure, extended the use of music, and broke down the old rules for dancing and singing choruses. Prince and Sondheim had become a creative musical team to watch.

Follies

> John McMartin, approaching 50--realizing his youthful dreams and ideals were lost forever--that was me getting scared about getting older.[2]

As Follies, Prince's next show after Company, was being readied for production, Prince turned 43. At this point in his career (with Company running and receiving many major awards), he was considered by critics and collaborators a director of original, offbeat and revolutionary musicals. Some reviewers feared, however, that his shows were calculated to send musical comedy audiences scurrying up the aisles. Prince agreed. "I'll never

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 147.

[2]Prince, quoted in "Prince on Company," New York Daily News.

do a show that some people won't walk out on."[1]

During the 1970-1971 season, only 46 productions opened, "the puniest record in the history of the American Theatre."[2] Of the season's seventeen new musicals only No, No Nanette, a revival, and Godspell, produced Off-Broadway, returned investments. Litton said, "Only one of the season's offerings, Follies, affirmed unequivocably that the American Musical Theatre still had creative energy.[3]

During the summer of 1970, the problems of Follies were being thrashed out among Prince, Sondheim, Bennett and James Goldman at Prince's summer residence in Majorca. The show, however, had been conceived at least five years earlier.

Sondheim and James Goldman had discussed the possibility of their doing an original musical together in 1965. Goldman, who had read an item in the New York Times about a Ziegfeld Girls Club, thought they might try to work on something related to that. With his interest in the past and in "secrets," he thought it might be a good idea to base a script on a reunion. He thought that the subject of unfinished business in people's lives is one that stirs up the emotions.[4] Goldman and Sondheim called their new project The Girls Upstairs and by the end of 1965, the first

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[1]"Prince and His Follies," Look, May 1971, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 300.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 125.

draft of the libretto and five songs were finished. David Merrick and Leland Hayward were scheduled to produce. They had asked John Dexter to direct the musical, since Sondheim had worked with Dexter on Do I Hear a Waltz?. Eventually Merrick, who didn't want to work with a partner, and Hayward, who couldn't raise all the money himself, dropped the project.

Sondheim next sent the script to Prince to read as a friend. Prince said:

> I found the script to be awful and I didn't know how to cushion how bad I thought it was. It was about two men who took out two girls who were in the dressing room upstairs, and it was a personal story and they were four people self-pitying and, as far as I was concerned, pitying themselves sufficiently that I didn't have to involve myself in their problem. I then heard some music and, well with Steve, that's devastating because he's just that good. Jim Goldman is a very good writer. He'd written Lion in Winter, but this had none of the strength and vitality, none of the self-consciousness, and the best of his writing has an edge of self-consciousness which I like, a literary quality, but these mundane people were speaking down so I didn't feel there was any style in this work.[1]

Prince also felt that the play didn't work in its realistic form. The couples in the script remembered, but did not relive their past. Prince envisioned something more abstract and "audacious" (a word he often uses). The show should have a "gauzy feeling," he said.[2]

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[1]Ibid., pp. 131-133.

[2]Mel Gussow, "Prince Recalls the Evolution of 'Follies,'" New York Times, 9 April 1971, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Stuart Ostrow picked up the option on the show and a new draft was written. Prince read the new draft and still didn't like it, but as a friend, he wrote a long, 3,000-word summary of what he thought was wrong with the script and what they could do about it. Soon Joseph Hardy was hired to direct The Girls Upstairs and the plan was to go into rehearsal by the end of 1969.

At this point, Prince was busy with Company and with Sondheim's agreement to write the score, began working on the project. Sondheim, however, wasn't getting anything written for the Prince show because he was still absorbed in The Girls Upstairs. While Prince was making the film Something for Everyone in Germany, things fell apart on The Girls Upstairs. Sondheim was despondent. He said, "I feel like a father with a kid and I've been over this kid for five years and I cannot write Company until I've done The Girls Upstairs."[1]

Prince then recalled what he had written in his summary three years earlier. He believed that Jim Goldman had to be made into a brand-new playwright.

> He's got to be able to write these people big and if they're small, really small, he's got to be able to use of himself what was so remarkable in his previous plays. I mean Ben and Phyllis [one of the two couples in The Girls Upstairs] are the Kennedy fellow and the Kennedy wife. They're a king and queen. Well, if he could write that king and queen in Lion in

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 133.

> Winter, he could write these characters for me. This show is not The Girls Upstairs, this show is Follies.[1]

Prince encouraged the dispirited Sondheim to get to work on the score for Company, promising him that as soon as the show opened in New York, he would produce and direct the troubled musical The Girls Upstairs.

After Company, Prince was ready to concentrate on a concept for the show that was now to be re-titled Follies (the new title was meant to be a triple play on the word). It could suggest the Ziegfeld Follies, the French word folie (which means madness), or be thought of as a foolishness in the British sense. In Gussow's opinion, the title Follies also "accented the increasingly symbolic nature of the show."[2]

Prince used a photograph of Gloria Swanson, which had originally been published in Life magazine, as his visual metaphor. The aging star was captured on film while standing in the rubble on the site of what had once been the Roxy Theatre. The photographer, Eliot Elisofon, had photographed her standing glamorously in the rubble. Prince said that "Elisofon had captured the metaphor." The photograph is now included in The Best Remaining Seats: A History of the Great Movie Palaces of the '30s.

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[1]Ibid., p. 135.

[2]Gussow, "Prince Recalls the Evolution of 'Follies.'"

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 159.

Years before, Prince had been asked by an agent of the Italian director Federico Fellini whether he would be interested in creating a musical of the film 8½. Prince said, "The movie is a masterpiece, and I was flattered and tempted but came to realize soon that it represented Fellini's autobiography and not mine."[1] He arranged a screening for Michael Bennett and Ruth Mitchell, his associate producer. Prince claims he was reminded of 8½ because The Girls Upstairs had as its hero a character, Ben Stone, who is "the perfect 1970s monolith approaching menopause on the cusp of a nervous breakdown."[2] Prince's idea was for Follies to become surrealistic, as inspired by 8½, using rubble as a key word. Prince said,

> Metaphoric rubble becomes visual rubble. A theatre is being torn down. On its stage a party in celebration of that. The celebrants for whom the theatre represents youth, dreams lost, a golden time, are to be orphaned. . . . Is the theatre torn down? Will it be torn down tomorrow? Or was it torn down yesterday? Keep it ambiguous, a setting for the sort of introspection that reunions precipitate, a mood in which to lose sight of the present, to look back on the past.[3]

Sondheim and Goldman approved of Prince's scheme for the show and went to work on yet another draft. They had done at least thirteen drafts between 1965 and 1970. Prince asked choreographer Bennett to work on the show, since he felt their collaboration on Company had been, in Prince's

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid, p. 160.

words, "so profitable creatively, and stimulating and easy for both of us."[1] However, Bennett turned down Prince's offer, feeling he was now ready to begin directing himself. Prince offered to share the directorial duties on the project with him and Bennett agreed. The arrangement was that Prince would direct the scenes and Bennett would oversee the concept and the way the show went, as well as staging the musical numbers.[2] Although they worked well together, there were disagreements. Prince recalled the partnership: "A difficult arrangement for two giant egos. . . . there were conflicts, but never with respect to what we want the evening to be, to say nor the quality of its theatricality."[3]

The new musical took a year to get ready for rehearsals. The realistic/naturalistic The Girls Upstairs became the surrealistic Follies. In the process, one draft took on a back-stage murder mystery quality with an attempted murder being planned. This idea was dropped. Early drafts were more foolish and melodramatic and the roles were originally older than in the final production. Prince, working with his collaborators, decided to use only the characters (the two couples), the locale, and four of Sondheim's original numbers. Four new figures would represent

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[1]Ibid., p. 159.

[2]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 159.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 159.

the leading characters as they were thirty years earlier. "They were to wander as silent memories across the paths of their present selves."[1] As this idea took hold, they intruded more and more into the script. Goldman gave them lines to speak. They confused time, in a Proustian manner, confronting the past as well as the present. "Ultimately," said Prince, "in a sort of collective nervous breakdown, they took over."[2] Sondheim remembers that they had thought Prince's idea about the "ghosts" or "shadows" corny. Prince, however, had insisted that they would be corny only if they were staged cornily. Sondheim said,

> Before Hal became involved we never had the past embodied on the stage. We had the principals falling into the past and talking and behaving as though they were twenty years old--they were middle-aged people sort of playing a charade. Hal said that he thought we were assiduously avoiding the use of flashbacks. . . . Through a series of discussions, Jim got an idea of how to utilize the flashback images. So during the summer of 1970, the book changed drastically with the addition of the young people, the shadows, the ghosts.[3]

After floundering for five years, Prince became the new collaborator who influenced the final shape of the piece. Sondheim now described the show as "a dream play, a memory piece."[4] It was Bennett's idea to dress these figures of

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[1]Ibid., p. 160. [2]Ibid., p. 161.

[3]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 152.

[4]Gussow, "Prince Recalls the Evolution of 'Follies.'"

the past in black and white with light makeup in contrast to the older members of the cast, of the present, in full color. Prince felt it was a brilliant concept.

The final draft of Follies tells the story of two unhappily married middle-aged couples, Ben and Phyllis and Buddy and Sally, who had met during their youth when the women were showgirls in the then-popular Weismann (read Ziegfeld) Follies and the men, typical of the era's stage-door "johnnies," were courting them. They now meet after about thirty years. The scene is the crumbling stage of an old theatre, on the eve of its demolition. Weismann has invited the old stars and performers to a farewell party. They remember their early romances, their struggles, their successes. As they recall the days of their celebrated youth, they perform as they did then and, as Harold Clurman said, "we see them shadowed by the mirage of their former selves."[1] We learn that long ago, Ben (John McMartin) and Sally (Dorothy Collins) were in love. She still carries a torch for him, whereas he, "disillusioned with life and his marriage to Phyllis [Alexis Smith] is attracted again but not enough to do anything legal about it."[2]

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[1]Harold Clurman, "Theatre," Nation, 19 April 1971, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]George Oppenheimer, "'Follies,' A Cornucopia," Newsday, 5 April 1971, p. 32.

Their younger selves constantly remind them of their pasts and reproduce moments and scenes from bygone days via songs, dance, and dialogue. The aging couples are no longer involved with the stage; they are now rich but unhappy. It appears that they were mismatched and we are led to believe that they may dissolve their unhappy unions imminently. During the evening the characters get crazier and crazier. But they do not leave each other and in the end make some kind of adjustment to their lives. "Notes of bitterness, dissolution and regret are sounded in their meeting in the night but dawn brings sweet resignation and promises of hope."[1]

During the last twenty minutes of the musical, it turns into a metaphorical Follies.[2] The segment is called "Loveland." Tall, lovely girls descend the traditional staircase. At first the creators of the show thought that the "Follies" section should be realistic. However, Prince and Bennett felt that a literal use of "Follies" was a mistake. During this episode, each of the four principals does a song and/or dance number denoting his or her folly. T. E. Kalem says, "Buddy's is self-hatred; Sally's, being in love with love; Phyllis', a blurred identity; Ben's, self-proving quests, no satisfying goals. . . . Rarely have such

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[1]Clurman, "Theatre."

[2]Prince, in Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 153.

searching, unsentimental questions and answers been put to a Broadway audience with such elegance and expertise."[1]

> They were able to make an adjustment to each other. I think we have a terrible tendency in life, when things are going wrong, to look into the past and moon over it. The point of the show was that you should use the past to look into the future.[2]

Prince was very interested in the "memory" aspect of the show. He did not want the musical to be about failing marriages. Sondheim explained what Goldman wanted the show to express:

> The reason Jim chose the Follies as a metaphor was that the Follies represented a state of mind in America between the two world wars. Up until 1945, America was the good guy, everything was idealistic and hopeful and America was going to lead the world. Now you see the country is a riot of national guilt, the dream has collapsed, everything has turned to rubble underfoot, and that's what the show was about also--the collapse of the dream. It's not about how difficult it is to stay married over a period of thirty years. . . . It's how all your hopes tarnish and how if you live on regret and despair you might as well pack up, for to live in the past is foolish.[3]

Casting for Follies began in 1970. The principal roles were filled by actors, singers and dancers who had not been super stars in their day, but well known "names" in their various media. Because of the somewhat plotless nature of the libretto, the collaborators could insert roles when outstanding auditions were delivered by these

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[1]T. E. Kalem, "Theatre," Time, 12 April 1971, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Prince, quoted in Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 153.

[3]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., pp. 152-153.

performers. Actresses Ethel Shutta and Fifi d'Orsay, both well known performers in musicals during the '20s, were given numbers in Follies after "wowing" them at the tryouts. Yvonne De Carlo, who was well known to audiences of the '40s in movies, seemed wrong for the role of Phyllis but "fit perfectly the rebuilt part of Carlotta, the mantrap."[1] Prince was the one who decided that Alexis Smith, another movie name of the '40s, "would lend the show a permanent radiance in the role of Phyllis."[2] She was not taken the first time she auditioned. However, she spent months taking singing and dancing lessons and then satisfied Prince. She proved to be the one that the critics unanimously adored. John Simon, not generally known for handing verbal bouquets to Broadway ladies, had this to say about her and it parallels what almost every other reviewer said:

> But there is Alexis Smith, whom I used to like in the movies, but never suspected of harboring such a cache of dazzlement. Miss Smith sings decently, dances infectiously, and delivers her lines with the most supple finesse. She acts out her songs with exemplary conviction, and stays pungently in character even doing a standard dance step. She is also irresistible, with a cosmopolitan elegance that travels well through time, a polyglot beauty that speaks to all eyes.[3]

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[1]"The Once and Future 'Follies,'" Time, 3 May 1971, p. 71.

[2]Ibid.

[3]John Simon, "Follies," New York magazine, 19 April 1971, p. 41.

Dorothy Collins, cast as Sally, was well known from television's Your Hit Parade, but had settled down to being a homebody and bringing up her family. Gene Nelson was a popular song-and-dance-man in films and Prince felt he was right for Buddy. Prince insists he did not cast these stars of yesteryear in order to be campy or produce a nostalgic effect. These particular actors were the best ones for their roles. Martin Gottfried is quoted as saying that he felt the casting could be looked on as cruel since the above-mentioned stars, along with Mary McCarty, were chosen to embody the point of Follies by their very presence.

> The audience knows these people from its own past, remembers their faces from a performing youth. Now they are aging and we see them aged, and Follies is about aging and age. In a sense these actors are being used as people rather than performers. . . . And since John McMartin [Ben] is the catalyst in the story, he is the one major cast member who is not a shadow from the past.[1]

Gottfried said of McMartin: "He is the one lead with no roots in our youth but, having always had something oddly of the past in his presence and being one of the few singing actors in the theater, he is impeccably cast."[2]

Bennett and Prince went to Las Vegas to cast the tall, beautiful showgirls who would portray the "shadows" or "ghosts."

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 155.

[2]Martin Gottfried, "Flipping Over 'Follies,'" New York Times, 25 April 1971, sec. 2, p. 1.

The script of Follies, at Prince's request, was more like a screenplay than a stage play. As was done in Company, Prince utilized equivalents of pans, wipes, tracking shots and dissolves. It seemed as if the action never stopped. He created the effect of a close-up by isolating an actor. With lighting and movement, Prince created a movie-like appearance on stage. With such effects Prince also created a cinematic simultaneity of action. This was necessary since he was unable to use the film technique of flashbacks. However, Prince would find these techniques useful in his future productions. In Follies, Michael Bennet said, "there was a place for your eye to go every minute."[1] Goldman felt that the way the scenes bled in and out in the show was very similar to the movies. He said:

> One of the best numbers I've ever seen was "Who's That Woman?" The physical impression you got from that was anguishing. To see the decay of the flesh--all those bright young beautiful girls and their lovely bodies with all the sense of youth and the promise of what's to come contrasted against what actually became of it. That's devastating . . . very disturbing and very movielike. The theatre rarely utilizes visuals to make important statements, but films do. It's putting the picture in front of you and there was a lot of that in Follies.[2]

Prince capitalized Follies at close to $800,000, which was the highest budget he had ever contemplated. There was no problem raising the money (since The Pajama

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 159.

[2]Ibid.

Game Prince hadn't worried about capitalization for his shows). In fact, $60,000 was returned to eager investors. There was a cast of fifty and a large orchestra. Aronson designed a modern, complicated setting. By anyone's standards, this was an enormous show. Prince, however, felt that the high production budget was necessary, that the show could not have been done on a smaller scale.

Although Prince had proven himself a knowledgeable and gifted director, he is not super-human. The day before rehearsals for Follies were scheduled to begin, he appeared to have all the symptoms of hepatitis--fatigue, stomach ache and yellowed eyes. After all tests proved negative, Bennett asked him what he had. Prince finally realized what the problem was. "Fear. . . . It was panic. I always panic. It usually lasts 24 hours."[1]

Rehearsals were hectic. "We were busy every living, breathing moment from the time we went into rehearsal. It was like trying to get eighty-five shows on at the same time."[2] The day's rehearsing rarely ended before midnight and then there were meetings with Sondheim for an additional hour or two to help him understand

> about each of the four characters and how best to explain what they had learned during the evening at the party, what insights into their

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[1]Prince interview, The Dick Cavett Show, videotape.

[2]Prince, quoted in Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 153.

> conflict had been revealed. During these sessions, it became clear that Buddy [Gene Nelson] was a masochist, rejecting love, courting rejection. So Steve wrote "Buddy's Blues" and Michael Bennett staged it. . . . Dorothy Collins' Sally learned nothing from the evening. Stripped of her life, she went mad. Inadvertently, Steve had written her song. "Losing My Mind" gave her the chance, in Follies terms, to be Helen Morgan.[1]

Bennett had difficulties because each of the principal players had "rhythm problems."[2] The number "Waiting Around for the Girls Upstairs" was one of the most difficult to stage. The actors were unsure and performed it tentatively--"and," said Bennett, "that number cannot be done tentatively."[3]

There was much pressure because of the limitations of time during the rehearsal period. When some of Sondheim's numbers were taken out of the show, he had to write new ones. Costumes had to be ordered for new numbers that hadn't been seen or heard as yet. Orchestrations had to be done hurriedly. While waiting for the new numbers to be written, Bennett had the showgirls walking in slow motion for hours. Bennett said, "We had the show staged so that the girls changed with each scene, almost like a new drop coming in."[4]

They didn't decide on the entire "Follies" sequence until they were in rehearsal. John McMartin recalls reading

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 163.

[2]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 153.

[3]Ibid. [4]Ibid., p. 155.

his first script and when it came to the "Follies" section the script said "to be written."[1]

Bennett has been quoted as saying that he did not know why Steve had to write "Lucy and Jessie" for Alexis Smith to replace "Uptown Downtown." Bennett said that he liked the "Uptown Downtown" number much better. "It also lost me a phrase to hang her dance on. I was originally able to differentiate the character's two personalities by having half the phrase strutting up and other half strutting down. It was terrific having just the backs of the chorus. When I lost the song, the number turned into merely a number about backs."[2]

Sondheim has a different recollection of why "Uptown Downtown" was replaced by "Lucy and Jessie." It was at Bennett's request that he changed the number. Once the new number was staged, the choreographer/co-director was pleased with the replacement. Sondheim said:

> Suddenly I had to write the entire "Follies" sequence while we were in rehearsals (which is five songs). Actually I had already written "Losing My Mind" but the others were all written during rehearsals because nobody knew whether the "Follies" was to be "fantasmagoria" or whether it was to be a "dream sequence" or whether it was to be "real" or what it was to be. So I couldn't write it until we decided. We decided about the end of the first week of rehearsals what it should be in terms of its tone. So then I started to write it and the last number I wrote was "Uptown Downtown." It was given

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[1]Interview with John McMartin, New York, 10 June 1982.

[2]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 160.

> to Michael two days before we left for Boston. Michael had to put it on its feet in about 48 hours, which annoyed him. But it wasn't even my fault. It was everybody's fault. He therefore turned against the number and said he thought there should be another number. So the number I replaced it with is virtually the same number (it's a different song--but the same kind of number). But Michael had more time to work on it and so he felt better about it. So it was at his request that I changed that number.[1]

In spite of the problems that the two numbers may have given Bennett, the reviewers loved "Lucy and Jessie." A Time magazine article said the song was the show's high point. "The second crescendo is Alexis Smith's "Story of Lucy and Jessie," a flame-red, high kicking number in the old top-hat-and-tails tradition, an echo of a Cole Porter patter song."[2]

There was disagreement between Bennett and Sondheim over the couple Vincent and Vanessa, who did the "Bolero d'Amour" number. Bennett felt they were necessary for the show in order to break up the "purple" numbers--"Don't Look at Me," "The Road You Didn't Take," "In Buddy's Eyes," and "Too Many Mornings." Sondheim didn't like them, but Vincent and Vanessa stayed in the show.

The taps that were heard during the show and that seemed to be coming from the performers' feet came from the tapping of chorus boys in the basement. This was repeated

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[1]Sondheim interview.

[2]"The Once and Future Follies," Time.

every performance because the actresses on stage could not tap out the sounds. "In fact," said Bennett, "no one on stage wore tap shoes."[1] Bennett liked the effect; the tapping had a ghost-like quality.

Various numbers were prerecorded and tape was used along with live singing on the stage.

Boris Aronson said that Follies was about "American women picketing their own ages and about: In this country, cities have no time to develop a patina. As soon as a building goes up, they make plans to tear it down. They're right!"[2]

The designer created a multi-level set: culs de sac and planked paths connected by metal stairways. With the rubble that he used to frame the stage, he achieved the effect of a building which had been torn down and was crumbling away. The set had three motorized sections which could move upstage, downstage, and then diagonally offstage. Prince said, "From the start we had to decide where we would put every scene and number though most were yet to be written."[3] There was nothing on stage that would help indicate who people were, where they were, or the chronology

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 157.

[2]Kanin, Boris Aronson: From His Theatre Work, p. 15.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 164.

of their actions. It helped to achieve the abstract effect of the production. Saal in Newsweek said:

> Prince went with the spirit of the set and staged the work abstractly, by implication, using the proscenium much as Peter Brook used it in his A Midsummer Night's Dream, as a place, space, the air, the universe. Characters enter and exit on different levels in the middle of sentences; scenes change with the lifting of an eyebrow, and the focus of a spotlight provides a precinct of privacy on a crowded stage.[1]

Rehearsals during the first four weeks were held at the American Theatre Lab, which was Jerry Robbins' dance studio. They worked on a mockup of the set with indicated elevations (one foot to every five). During the final two weeks of the six-week rehearsal period, they moved to the Feller Scenic Studio in the Bronx and worked on the finished set. The stage was raked and the company was shocked to learn that they would have to sing, walk and tap dance at such a steep angle. However, Prince said, "It saved a great deal of money adjusting there (instead of in Boston with stagehands and orchestra hanging around)."[2]

For the Loveland sequence in Follies, Aronson used mirrors and tinsel and lace. Clurman summed up the brilliant effects created by the designer:

> Boris Aronson once again demonstrates the multiplicity of forms his imagination can assume. His decayed and gutted "backstage," in which a

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[1]Saal, "How to Play at Hal Prince," p. 68.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 164.

> constructivist design is not only evocative but theatrically furnished--a machine for movement--together with the airy frivolity which gays up the "Folly" numbers at the end, create a masterpiece in decor.[1]

Sondheim's score (23 songs) was acclaimed for its dramatic intensity and stylistic diversity. Only six of the original songs were retained and the composer had to write sixteen new ones for the production. Henry Popkin in the Wall Street Journal felt as many reviewers did that Sondheim's songs "do a better job than the book of conveying the characterization . . . they do more than that, achieving the correct period quality for the songs and the right individual note for the performer. They give practically everyone a high spot for the evening."[2]

It is not unusual for Sondheim's songs to seem custom made for a performer. He writes songs for both the performer's abilities and limitations. He also writes more quickly when he knows whom he is writing for. Sondheim explains:

> You look at the stage and you know exactly who you're writing for--you know what the performer's capabilities are so you can write for him. You can write for that spot in the show--you know exactly what the tone of the number should be because of where it occurs--you see it! It's not in your head anymore--it's on stage. It's much easier to write.[3]

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[1]Clurman, "Theatre."

[2]Henry Popkin, "The Theatre," Wall Street Journal, 7 April 1971, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Sondheim interview.

A favorite number was Yvonne De Carlo's "I'm Still Here." This number had replaced (in Boston) "Can That Boy Fox Trot," which Bennett felt De Carlo was not handling well. "I'm Still Here" contained idiomatic expressions and internal rhymes for which Sondheim was noted. "Waiting for the Girls Upstairs" is a tender number in which the two couples reminisce affectionately about their courtship days. Gene Nelson sang the comic "God-Why-Don't-You-Love-Me-Blues." Among the songwriters Sondheim tries to echo during the course of the evening are Kern, Berlin, Rodgers, Porter, De Sylva-Brown-Henderson, Victor Herbert, Rudolf Friml, Arlen, Gershwin and Coward. Mel Gussow quotes Sondheim as saying, "The score is not satirical . . . it's a pastiche. . . . I was looking at the past with affection, respect and delight. In no way am I pointing out how silly the songs were because I don't think they're silly. What they are is innocent."[1] Sondheim said that he was aware that these numbers would evoke other periods for the audience. However, rather than outright parody, they were done with great affection. "In Follies I imitate people. But in each of the songs, there's always something of me added to the imitation of Kern or Arlen or whoever it is. That's something I couldn't avoid--my own comment on the style."[2]

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[1]Gussow, "Prince Recalls the Evolution of 'Follies.'"

[2]"The Once and Future Follies," Time.

Brendan Gill in the New Yorker said:

> I admire Mr. Sondheim for not hesitating to explore again the wastelands of aloneness and self-repugnance that he opened up for us in Company, and I hope it is clear to him that what has proved unworkable in Follies is its subject matter and not his great themes.[1]

The review that Clive Barnes gave Sondheim's score was scathing. He said:

> Mr. Sondheim's music comes in two flavors--nostalgic and cinematic. The nostalgic kind is for the pseudo-oldie numbers, and I must say that most of them sound like numbers that you have almost only just forgotten, but with good reason. This non-hit parade of pastiche trades on camp, but fundamentally gives little in return. It has all the twists and turns of yesteryear, but none of the heart--and eventually the fun it makes of the past seems to lack something in affection. The cinematic music is a mixture of this and that, chiefly that. I doubt whether anyone will be parodying it in thirty or forty years' time. . . . The lyrics are as fresh as a daisy. I know of no better lyricist in show business than Mr. Sondheim--his words are a joy to listen to, even when his music is sending shivers of indifference up your spine. The man is a Hart in search of a Rodgers, or even a Boito in search of a Verdi.[2]

Gottfried answered the negative statements about Sondheim in a Sunday New York Times article. He said, "Sondheim's qualities as a theater composer can hardly be overstated. He is constantly extending his vision, a composer applying a trained imagination to a stage he intimately understands."[3]

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[1]Brendan Gill, "Casting Out Remorse," New Yorker, 10 April 1971, p. 67.

[2]Clive Barnes, "'Follies' Couples, Years Later," New York Times, 5 April 1971, p. 49.

[3]Gottfried, "Flipping Over 'Follies.'"

McMartin's number, "Live, Laugh, Love" was finally written during the last week of rehearsals. Bennett had to choreograph the dancers and complete the staging with McMartin in the Bradford Hotel ballroom in Boston and on the stage of the Colonial Theatre as the stagehands hung the set and focused lights.

Follies was barely ready to open for its out-of-town tryout in Boston. Prince recalled:

> Coming out of McMartin's number, we planned a Felliniesque kaleidoscope of impressions of the events of the evening. Jim Goldman improvised a scene, I staged it, ending in chaos, using the fifty members of the company all over the set. Again, in Boston, at dress rehearsal, with Tharon Musser still lighting, the cast in costume, and the orchestra in the pit for the first time, the chaos was choreographed, adapted to the moving scenery, and something achieved acceptable to open with.[1]

Prince always tries to schedule his openings out of town on a Saturday so that he can polish on Sunday. On Monday he schedules a full technical rehearsal, and by Monday night "the show is beginning to look like something."[2] However, in the case of Follies, he did not open in Boston until Wednesday, which allowed him six full technical rehearsals before the critics would arrive.

A disagreement between Prince and Bennett involved the placement of the intermission. During rehearsals and

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 164.

[2]Ibid., p. 165.

tryouts the two-hour-and-fifteen-minute show had been interrupted during the show-stopping number "Who's That Woman?" The curtain came down on a stage full of beautiful women tap dancing in unison and was raised for the second act at the same place in the number. It was effective but tended to cut the applause. Prince explained: "I'm not concerned with creating show-stoppers. I sometimes think that in the name of perversity (integrity?) I frustrate an audience's desire to applaud, which is contradictory in view of how I feel about involvement."[1]

Bennett wanted to change the placement of the intermission. Prince found that no matter where they put the break, it took the show five minutes to regain its momentum. Three days before the show was due to open, there was still no agreement. Ultimately, the show played without any intermission. McMartin felt that Prince and Bennett generally did not get in each other's way. They did their own staging separately. When the show came together if they had any suggestions, they were made privately. "They'd go into a huddle and then a movement would be changed."[2]

Florence Klotz, who designed the costumes for Follies, had to do 140 designs. The job was enormous and the showgirl outfits were lavish. Some were based on

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[1]Ibid., p. 167.

[2]McMartin interview.

originals that the designer found during her research into the Ziegfeld Follies. She exaggerated some of them, such as the three-foot-high headdress of black and white willow ostrich for a backless sheath of bugle beads that spread into a peacock train. It was worn by a 6-foot-2 Las Vegas showgirl, whose platform soles made her look even taller. The costumes were so laden with beads that many had to be folded into cardboard cartons instead of being hung on racks at the end of each performance. Some were hung backstage. They couldn't fit into the dressing rooms and were rushed upstairs when the girls were ready to put them on. The memory costumes for yesterday's people were all black and white. Worn with alabaster makeup and sometimes two sets of sheer white nylon tights to give a marble shimmer, the result was a bit ghostly. All the black fabrics were "reflective," according to Klotz. They were shiny satin or velvet and the beads and embroideries aren't really black at all but deep purple or Burgundy red.[1]

Klotz started her career as assistant to Irene Sharaff on the costumes for The King and I. Prince had first hired her to do A Call on Kuprin, Take Her, She's Mine and Superman. After Follies she did many more Prince productions.

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[1]Eugenia Sheppard, "Flossie's Follies," New York Post, 30 March 1971, p. 39.

The reviews in Boston were mixed. Some nice things were said about the show but there were many negative comments. Variety's critic, Star, said that the production "had too many characters, too many leading players, too many scenes, and the most bewildering plotline in years."[1] Sondheim agreed. In Boston during the tryout period, he said, "Our main problem is that there is too much of everything. It's the biggest, most complicated musical ever, and we're just going to have to cut it down to size. It's an embarrassment of riches."[2]

A major problem was the restaging of the opening before bringing the show to Broadway. It was staged about six times and in different versions. Finally, Follies was ready to begin previews in New York.

During the final week of previews in New York, Gene Nelson's nine-year-old son was hit by a truck in Los Angeles and was in a coma in the hospital and in critical condition. Prince had to make a quick decision about when to open the show officially. Critics had been given a choice of four opening performances, a Prince custom. They had been asked to come on Friday, Saturday matinee or evening, or Sunday. Prince decided to invite all the reviewers in on the Wednesday night preview while Nelson would still be in

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[1]"Follies," Variety, 3 March 1971, p. 3, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 159.

New York. Prince said, "I suggested to the authors and Michael Bennett that we open Wednesday and not run the risk of waiting till the end of the week. Nelson might not be there by then, and even if he were, the pressure of these days would surely affect his performance. Meanwhile, we put his understudy into rehearsal."[1] Prince told the cast that the critics would arrive that night. In spite of the fact that the reviewers were about to come to see the production, Prince put in a new last scene for McMartin and Smith. McMartin, who had the major responsibility in the scene, was perfect that evening and Prince was thrilled. McMartin, in an interview, explained why he and others can "come through" with these last-minute changes and pressures. He said, "I truly believe people 'do' it for Hal . . . they just 'do' it. Because he's so inspiring, so wonderful you do things for him that you wouldn't be able to do for other people . . . and you envy people who get into any Hal Prince show."[2]

Nelson's son remained in a coma for a little over a month and has since recovered completely. Nelson had an additional crisis at the Friday night performance when, during his dance number, he tore a leg muscle and began to hemorrhage. He was not allowed to dance during the next three weeks but managed to walk through his numbers.

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 168.

[2]McMartin interview.

Follies opened at the Winter Garden Theatre on April 4, 1971. Although most of the reviews were quite good, the show's reception was controversial both critically and with audiences. McMartin said that he had never been in a production where so many either loved it and saw it over and over again, or absolutely loathed it. "It was a real love or hate thing," he said.[1] The spectacle and extravaganza elements of the show were lauded, but the book was panned across the board. The critics were confused and bored by the libretto and found the characters either not thoroughly fleshed out or not particularly interesting. T. E. Kalem in Time magazine said of Goldman's book that it "lacks the dry, winy brilliance called for by Prince's direction."[2]

Douglas Watt was one of those who admired the show and didn't hesitate to say so. His review said that Follies is "so stunning in conception and execution that it adds an extra dimension to a Broadway musical theatre that has been, except for such exceptional triumphs as Promises, Promises, Fiddler on the Roof and Company in danger of stagnating."[3]

George Oppenheimer of Newsday felt the show went downhill after a promising beginning, never fulfilling its

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Kalem, "Theatre."

[3]Douglas Watt, "Sondheim-Prince Team Scores for Second Time," New York Daily News, 11 April 1971, p. S3.

initial promise or premise. However, he summed up saying that the show is "so much better than any musical we have had this season. It is, in truth, more a revue than a musical play, but it is a cornucopia out of which pour scores of rewards in the form of superior entertainment by superior entertainers."[1]

Richard Watts, Jr. felt the show was "imaginative in conception, tuneful, humorous and warm-hearted, and it has a wonderful cast. It has also been staged with exceptionally brilliant skill."[2] Henry Hewes called Follies the "most important musical of the Broadway season."[3]

Barnes wrote a negative review of the show. He felt the story was shallow and narrow and raised expectations that were never filled.

> It carries nostalgia to where sentiment finally engulfs it in its sickly maw. And yet--in part--it is stylish, innovative, it has some of the best lyrics I have ever encountered and above all it is a serious attempt to deal with the musical form.[4]

Kerr was among those who were upset by the lack of an intermission. He felt it was an exhausting performance

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[1]Oppenheimer, "'Follies,' A Cornucopia."

[2]Richard Watts, Jr., "When Everything Goes Right," New York Post, 5 April 1971, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 32, p. 309.

[3]Henry Hewes, "The Theatre," Saturday Review, 1 May 1971, p. 16.

[4]Barnes, "'Follies' Couples, Years Later."

to view, that the plot was meager, and that the production moved too slowly.

> No one likes to dismiss the ingenuity that producer-director Harold Prince has splattered all over the Winter Garden stage--platforms bearing jazz bands gliding in out of the dark, curtains made of candy-box lace raining down from the skies, the ghosts of showgirls past stalking in black-and-white butterfly wings through the ruins of a once-festive playhouse--but ingenuity without inspiration can quickly become wearing and we are not too long in our seats before we realize that no one on the creative staff has had an idea for the evening capable of sustaining its weight in silvered feathers. . . . Mr. Prince is willing to make his musicals dark, or at least caustic, with liveliness worked in only where it is legitimate; and that is courageous. Unfortunately, the liveliness here is all left-field, and the legitimacy in the love-stories that ought to give the evening its solid foothold is skimpy and sadly routine.[1]

Jack Kroll in Newsweek compared Prince to England's Peter Brook and asked, "How many theatre people in this country have the talent, taste, inventiveness, resourcefulness and high professional standards of Prince? And perhaps it is fitting that this superb director-producer specializes in the musical, where America by popular legend is supposed to have made its greatest theatrical contribution."[2] Kroll goes on to say that Follies is a brilliant show, "wonderfully entertaining, extraordinarily intelligent,

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[1]Walter Kerr, "Yes, Yes, Alexis! No, No, 'Follies,'" New York Times, April 1971, sec. 2, p. 1, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Jack Kroll, "Backstage in Arcadia," Newsweek, 12 April 1971, p. 121.

and having both a stunning direct appeal and a rare complexity of feeling and structure. . . . With Cabaret, Company, and Follies, Harold Prince has created a generation of musicals which captures much of our time in a form that in his hands refuses to die."[1]

Martin Gottfried, in his New York Times response to Barnes and Kerr, called Follies "monumental theatre. . . . moreover, its importance as a kind of theatre transcends its interest as an example of a musical."[2] Gottfried admitted the book of the show was weak and that the ending which shows the couples accepting their lost youth with a sense of wisdom was "pure baloney."[3] However, he was most flattering about Prince. The critic coined the phrase "concept musical" about Follies because it is a show whose music, lyrics, dance, stage movement and dialogue are woven through each other in the creation of a tapestry-like theme (rather than in support of a plot). He said, "Mr. Prince, who is heading toward the inevitable elimination of musical books, has stripped this story down, making the production itself the main event."[4]

Prince's concepts and techniques were startling audiences, critics and performers alike. Gene Nelson said, "I

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Gottfried, "Flipping Over Follies,"

[3]Ibid. [4]Ibid.

couldn't make heads or tails of it. . . . It was all in Hal's mind. This was a whole new kind of theatre, multiple scenes and overlapping lines, a story in reverse. . . . Hal Prince seemed from the looks of this show to be finished with winches, sets with doors, chairs and tables."[1]

Sondheim said that the phrase "concept musical" is just a word for critics. He doesn't feel that he and Prince should be labeled the founders of "the concept musical." Sondheim explained: "Moss Hart did a concept musical. His Thousands Cheer was a concept musical in 1933. Concept musicals have existed forever."[2]

The original cast album of Follies was recorded by Capitol Records and Prince admitted that he erred when he signed the contract with the company. He did not stipulate that the entire score had to be recorded. Capital refused to do four sides, which the 22 songs would have required, saying the album wouldn't sell.

Follies lost $685,000. It cost $80,000 a week to operate, and needed to play to about 70% of capacity to break even. If the show had been completely sold out, it would have repaid its investment in about forty weeks. However, Follies did not sell out. It ran for 522 performances (65 weeks) and grosses ranged from over $100,000 to about $32,000.[3] The show closed on July 1, 1972, with the

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[1]Saal, "How to Play at Hal Prince," p. 69.

[2]Sondheim interview.

[3]"Making a Business of Show Business," Forbes magazine, 1 February 1972, p. 25.

unfortunate effect of eroding the confidence of Prince's long-loyal investors.

Follies won the Drama Critics' Award as best musical of the year and seven Tony Awards, including a best director award which went to Prince and Bennett. Prince sent the show on the road for what was supposed to be a tour of some major cities with the original Broadway cast. The first opening was in Los Angeles, where the show was the premier presentation at the new Shubert Theatre in Century City. The theatre had no subscription audience and, although the reviews were good, business was poor. The show closed and the remainder of the tour was cancelled.

Looking back, the collaborators tried to understand what went wrong and why there was no business in spite of a generally good critical reception. Goldman theorized that older people were made uncomfortable by the subject matter since they identified with the characters who were too old to change the errors of their lives. However, if he had the chance to write the book over again he would probably change the ending and not have Ben and Phyllis get together at the end.

Bennett didn't like the book. It was over this that he and Prince began fighting. Bennett wanted to call in Neil Simon to fix the book and Prince said, "That's where we had our standoff battle."[1] Bennett was bitter about the

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 169.

failure of Follies and felt that 80% of it was the greatest musical ever produced. He said, "So much of that show was better than anything I've ever seen or anything I've ever done."[1] Goldman felt that Bennett was very ambitious for success. Goldman explained:

> He was not at a time in his life when he was interested in the kind of feelings that the show had to have or the risks that we simply had to take. I think if we had gone Michael's way the show might still be running. That's perfectly possible. But at the same time we would have disemboweled it, and I think Michael was perfectly willing to do just that and of course I wouldn't have wanted that to happen. You want something to succeed for being as close to what you wanted it to be, not something else.[2]

Prince feels the show cost too much and that he didn't produce it as well as some of his other shows. On the other hand, he doesn't see how it could have been done for much less money since it needed a lavish look. Prince also said that perhaps the book could have been done a little less naturalistically but that it was not as bad as Bennett felt it was.

Sondheim felt that there were too many pastiche numbers in the show which hurt both the book and production in general. He wonders whether the show would have been more successful with fewer songs.

In the long run, Prince was pragmatic about Follies. He said, "I am happy I did Follies. I could not do it

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[1]Ibid., p. 167. [2]Ibid., p. 169.

again because I could not in all conscience raise the money for it.[1]

David Merrick, quoted in Craig Zadan's book, sums it up this way:

> I thought Hal Prince did a miracle job on Follies. I still found it boring but when they got to all the razzle-dazzle at the end, the cheap stuff, I was interested. I must say that since the show received some sensational reviews and made the covers of the big magazines, I thought it would have done better than it did. But the public vetoed the press . . . It happens frequently these days.[2]

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 171.

CHAPTER XI

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC IN 3/4 TIME

AND AN ENVIRONMENTAL CANDIDE

> Sondheim remembered how he and Prince pondered the future of Broadway years ago. "I remember walking down the street and his saying, 'It's going to be terrific. We're going to be able to do anything we want to do.' And I'm thinking, 'Oh, God, he's crazy. What a fool! We're going to be starving or dead in the gutter in two years.' You see, he was always the positive one. I was the pessimist," says Sondheim with an amused pause, "and he turned out to be right."[1]

Follies may have been a box-office flop, but with its positive critical reception and following as it did on the heels of such Prince hits as Cabaret and Company, it put him in a special category of "star" directors. Fosse, Champion, Bennett and Prince were reshaping scripts, songs and initiating their own projects. Gottfried explained, "There was a recognizable stamp to their shows. Directors were being accepted as those most responsible for what finally takes place onstage."[2] The difference between

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[1]Linda Winer, "Stephen Sondheim," USA Today, 29 October 1984, p. 30.

[2]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 126.

Prince and the other major musical directors of the period was that they had started as choreographers. Prince's one advantage over his choreographer/director colleagues was his book-sense. "He was better equipped to deal with book problems," said Gottfried, "and book problems are the musical theater's main problems."[1]

A Little Night Music

About the time that Follies closed (July 1, 1972), Prince also closed his long-run hit, Fiddler on the Roof (July 2, 1972). The producer-director now found himself in an uncomfortable position. Fiddler had long supported his production office, but now Prince needed a show that would make money. In other words, he needed a "hit." Nevertheless, he wanted to accomplish this in his now uncompromising, artistic and adventurous style. A Little Night Music proved to be the show he was looking for.

The project had its genesis in 1957 when Sondheim and Prince had discussed the possibility of doing a "court masque, a chamber opera, elegant, probably about sex, a gavotte in which couples interchange suffering mightily in elegant country homes, wearing elegant clothes."[2] They considered adapting Jean Anouilh's Ring Round the Moon but Anouilh was unresponsive to Prince's request for the rights and Prince dropped the idea until 1971. After Follies opened, the producer-director again tried to secure the

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[1]Ibid., p. 127. [2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 131.

rights but he was informed by the author's agent that Anouilh did not want the play turned into a musical.

Prince and Sondheim were still determined to do a romantic musical, but found it difficult to find source material with sufficient crises, love and foolishness. Prince then brought the writer Hugh Wheeler in for discussions. Wheeler, in Prince's estimation, is one of the few "serious playwrights who can handle the stresses of musical collaboration. His peers shy away from writing libretti on the basis that the composer and director get all the credit. Hugh's experience with Night Music and later Candide and Sweeney Todd surely has given the lie to that," said Prince.[1] Wheeler had also recently adapted the screenplay for Prince's film Something for Everyone, and for twenty years or more had written mysteries in England under the pseudonyms of Patrick Quentin and Q. Patrick. He had also written the play Big Fish, Little Fish, which had had a limited run on Broadway. Of the many possible sources that they tossed around, the two most promising were Jean Renoir's film, The Rules of the Game, and Ingmar Bergman's Smiles of a Summer Night. They, therefore, arranged a screening of the films. Prince said:

> There are interesting similarities in Rules of the Game, Smiles of a Summer Night, and Ring Round the Moon. Each takes place in a summerhouse

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[1]Ibid., p. 177.

> on a weekend. Each contains a party, each a play within a play. The characters are similar. There is the old lady in the wheelchair who is adjusted to death. There are the young people on the threshold of life. And there are the lovers in varying degrees of frustration.[1]

They felt that the Renoir piece was not right and decided on Smiles of a Summer Night because of its darkness, human qualities and its well constructed screenplay. In a letter to Bergman, Prince assured the filmmaker that he did not intend to do a literal translation of the screenplay. Prince explained that the musical was to be "suggested by" rather than "adapted from." A wire arrived from Bergman on December 7, 1971 with permission for the rights to the property and wishing them all good luck on the project. The royalty arrangement readily agreed to by Bergman's agent was the same as the one Prince had had with Christopher Isherwood for Cabaret and Nikos Kazantzakis for Zorba.

Sondheim was wary of the project, feeling he didn't know much about Sweden at the turn of the century. What he and Prince decided to do was to "lyricize the various aspects of love."[2] Prince, too, found it a difficult show to discuss. None of the collaborators had ancestors in Sweden nor did they relate specifically to the characters in the book.

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[1]Ibid., p. 172.

[2]Burt Shevelove, quoted in Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 203.

Nevertheless, Prince began to visualize his new show. The piece suggested a Magritte painting. It was like "figures . . . anomalies in a landscape. A gentle greensward on which to play scenes in bedrooms, dressing rooms, dining rooms. I wanted the figures in the landscape out of context, for no more reason than Magritte puts them there."[1]

The original Bergman film, set in Sweden at the turn of the century, deals with the problems of an actress who is retiring and wants to marry the father of her daughter--a child he doesn't know is his. The actress' plans, however, are complicated by a current love affair with a jealous dragoon. In addition, the father of her child is now married to an 18-year-old girl who is still a virgin after eleven months of marriage. Finally, the child bride is falling in love with her husband's 21-year-old son by a previous marriage.

After six weeks of work, Wheeler had completed several drafts adapting the film for the stage. When working with Prince, Wheeler said, they always start with the play first. "It's always been--here is this play and then we will use it."[2] Among the revisions he made was to change the actress' child, who is a 4-year-old boy in the film,

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 174.

[2]Interview with Hugh Wheeler, New York, 24 June 1982.

to a 13-year-old girl, and to expand the role of the actress' mother, a retired courtesan. "Basically his book became a straightforward telling of Bergman's story, although Prince and Sondheim planned to treat the show as an operetta instead of a musical comedy."[1] Wheeler, when asked if there was much discussion with him during the creation of the show about a metaphor or concept, said, "Well, the metaphor figures slightly larger in their [Sondheim's and Prince's] minds than in mine. We do have metaphors and in the case of Night Music it was 'The Follies of Love' if that's a metaphor. I don't quite know what a metaphor is! It's a concept, if you want to call it that."[2]

Sondheim literally translated the title of Mozart's "Eine Kleine Machtmusik" to arrive at the show's title, A Little Night Music. Prince found raising the money for the show's $650,000 budget difficult. Despite the director's excellent record of Broadway hits, he found that many of his older and richer investors had died and that some potential backers were now wary because Follies, in spite of its critical acclaim, had been such a commercial failure. Prince was upset at the idea that he might have to go back to auditioning his shows, which he had not had to do since

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 203.

[2]Wheeler interview.

The Pajama Game. To his great relief, the financing for A Little Night Music was finally accomplished without resorting to auditioning.

One of the original concepts for the musical was that it be, in Sondheim's words, "fantasy-ridden." The composer said:

> It was to take place over a weekend during which, in almost gamelike fashion, Désirée would have been the prime mover and would work the characters into different situations. The first time, everybody would get mixed up, and through farcical situations, would end up with the wrong partner. Then magically, the weekend would start again. The next time, everything worked out, but Henrik committed suicide. The third time, Désirée arranged everything right but this time when she was left alone with Fredrik, he put on his gloves and started to walk off the stage because she hadn't done anything to make him want her. . . . Madame Armfeldt, who was like a witch figure, would reshuffle the pack of cards and time would revert and we'd be back at the beginning of the weekend again. The characters would then re-form, waltz again, and start over. It was all to be presented like a court masque with a music-box quality.[1]

Wheeler couldn't make this concept work and abandoned the idea. What eventually helped the writer was Prince's suggestion that he forget all the discussions about concept and that he was writing a musical and, instead, write a screenplay. Wheeler then finished the script in two weeks.

Meanwhile, Sondheim began composing the score, which he and Prince had long before decided would be waltzes or

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 202.

variations of waltzes. The numbers would be in three-quarter time or multiples of that time. There were fugellos, canons, contrapuntal duets, trios, a quintet, a quartet and a double quartet. Sondheim explained that "the score was made up mostly of inner monologue songs in which the characters described their deepest thoughts, almost never singing to one another."[1] Prince said that they were not actually all waltzes but in some "ingenious musical way that I don't understand, everything is indeed in some form of triple time."[2] Besides the waltzes, Sondheim wrote scherzos, minuets, barcaroles, and polanaises. After completing six songs that were dark and bleak and, according to Sondheim, "almost out of Strindberg,"[3] he had Prince listen to them. The composer had written the songs as if the project were dark and Chekhovian. Although they had wanted to do a kind of Chekhovian musical with much exposition early in the show and no big opening number and with the pace fairly slow, Prince felt that Sondheim's first numbers were too dark. Sondheim admits that Prince was correct.

> I usually love to write in dark colors about basic gut feelings, but Hal has a sense of audience that I sometimes lose when I'm writing. He wanted the

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[1]Ibid., p. 203.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 174.

[3]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 202.

> darkness to peep through a whipped-cream surface. And, quite simply, I was writing for Bergman's film, not Hugh Wheeler's play.[1]

Sondheim's revised score, much lighter in feeling, is in the styles of Brahms, Rachmaninoff and Ravel and much more to Prince's liking. When he discussed orchestrations with Jonathan Tunick, Sondheim said he wanted the show to have a perfume-like quality, not just bubble like champagne.[2] Prince wanted Night Music to have a series of reprises of all the songs at the end. In the end, it was limited to five songs, but Sondheim felt it was very effective.[3]

The final draft of Wheeler's libretto, still set in turn-of-the-century Sweden, tells of a prosperous widowed lawyer, Fredrik Egerman (Len Cariou), who had recently married Anne, an 18-year-old girl (Victoria Mallory). Fredrik, who is "somewhat baffled and buffeted by middle age . . . has attempted to regain his lost youth by marrying a child bride who after eleven months is still skittishly virginal."[4]

Fredrik's son by a previous marriage, Henrik (Mark Lambert), a somber 20-year-old divinity student who plays

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Sondheim, "The Musical Theatre: A Talk by Stephen Sondheim," p. 21.

[3]Sondheim, in "On Collaboration Between Authors and Directors," p. 27.

[4]T. E. Kalem, "Valse Triste," Time, 12 March 1973, p. 86.

cello in moments of stress, has a crush on his young stepmother. Henrik, in turn, is pursued by a lusty housemaid, Petra (D. Jamin-Bartlett). As Henrik tries to woo Petra, he sings the number "Later." In the bedroom, Anne sings "Soon" as she promises Fredrik that she will soon consummate their marriage.

Désirée Armfeldt (Glynis Johns), an actress who was once Fredrik's mistress, is seen in her theatre dressing room singing "The Glamorous Life," which extolls the joys of a life of acting and traveling, while lieder singers and her disapproving mother, Madame Armfeldt, make comments.

Fredrik and Anne arrive at the theatre to see Désirée's production. As the couple watch the show, the lieder singers comment on the romance Désirée and Fredrik once had ("Remember"). After taking Anne home, Fredrik goes to see his former love and tells her all about his young wife ("You Must Meet My Wife"). When he attempts to rekindle their old affair, Désirée happily accepts, saying, "Of course, darling, what are old friends for?"[1]

At this point, Madame Armfeldt, a grande dame who epitomizes "a more refined era" and who has been practical enough to acquire a sizable mansion, "emerges from the theatrical shadows to lament with the song 'Liaisons' about the current lack of delicacy in the art of love."[2]

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[1]A Little Night Music, record liner notes, by William Evans, Columbia JS 32265.

[2]Ibid.

Désirée's current lover, a wildly jealous dragoon named Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm (Laurence Guittard), suddenly arrives and Désirée makes up an excuse so the situation will appear innocent. The count sings "In Praise of Women." However, when the Count returns to his wife, Charlotte (Patricia Elliott), he asks her to tell Anne about Fredrik's infidelity, which she does. Charlotte and Anne sing "Every Day a Little Death" as they commiserate about "their mutual matrimonial problems."[1]

Hoping to win Fredrik back, Désirée goes to her mother's splendid country chateau and asks her to invite Egerman and his family out for a weekend. Anne accepts and when the Count hears about the planned weekend, he decides that he and Charlotte will also make an appearance, uninvited ("A Weekend in the Country").

When everyone arrives, the "quintet sets the tone for the magical white night" ("The Sun Won't Set").[2] There is a candlelight dinner which turns into a verbal battle in the elegant dining room. It ends with Henrik furiously smashing his glass and leaving the room as the other guests disperse.

Fredrik finds Désirée in her bedroom and she confesses that she invited him for the weekend, hoping it might help them to revive their love permanently. Fredrik

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

explains that he cannot give up his child bride and leaves as Désirée sings "Send in the Clowns."

Anne soon realizes it is Henrik she really loves and decides to run off with him while Petra, the maid, having made love with Frid, the butler, "expresses her sense of romance in terms of the practical and real in 'The Miller's Son.'"[1]

Fredrik is lightly grazed on the ear by the Count in a game of Russian roulette. Désirée and Fredrik at last realize that they are truly meant for each other, and the Count and Countess are also reunited. The show has a happy ending. Madame Armfeldt tells her granddaughter that the night has already smiled twice, once for the young and once for the fools. "'The smile for the fools was particularly broad tonight.' To the accompaniment of the 'Night Waltz,' the lovers dance through the silver birches as the night smiles down for the third and final time."[2] Madame Armfeldt believes the summer night smiles on the young, the middle-aged and the old, but in different ways.

Sondheim wanted a Liebeslieder group in the show in place of a conventional chorus. He wasn't sure how they would function but he included them throughout the score. Prince decided after three months of pondering on the idea that the singers could do a singing overture and that they

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

might represent the people in the show who weren't wasting time. In other words, "the positive spirits in a negative household."[1] Prince explained:

> Everyone in Night Music is frustrated, humiliated by sexual role-playing. The five Liebeslieder people are secure. Perhaps they are operetta singers, optimistic, extroverted observers. Each is a personality, each has a response to the events of the evening. No two are alike. They make the piece accessible because they lead the audience into it.[2]

In an interview with Brendan Gill, Sondheim said that Prince liked the idea of the lieder singers as an operatic form. Sondheim said, "Instead of a real use of them he only used a poetic aspect of them and intertwined them in the action. They were wanted as a formal element. The use of that quintet was to frame the show."[3] Reviewers later reported that the quintet was utilized to explain the action.

Casting for A Little Night Music began with Hermione Gingold wanting the role of Madame Armfeldt, the most difficult role to cast. Prince felt she was wrong for the role. He wanted the humor to flow from the character, and he thought of her as a comic. Gingold, however, was determined to prove the director wrong and, turning up unannounced at one audition, asked if she could do a reading.

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, pp. 174-175.

[2]Ibid., p. 175.

[3]Sondheim interview, "Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim," videotape.

"'As it turned out,' Mr. Prince says, 'she was magnificent.'"[1] Gingold explained what she went through to gain the part:

> I rang and rang Hal's office and I told them the least they could do was allow me to audition. And I haven't auditioned in forty years! They finally said it would be all right and I went down and sang a song I remembered vaguely that I'd done on TV two or three times. I sang it and Steve said, "now would you sing something else . . . and don't speak it quite so much, sing it more." And I said, "I'm sorry, but I only know one song. I'll sing it again if you'd like." And I did . . . and about ten days later I was told I had the part. I'd never been so nervous in years. I'd played for royalty, but Steve Sondheim and Hal Prince were too much for me.[2]

Glynis Johns, a very successful English actress, and Tammy Grimes competed for the principal role of Désirée. Prince felt Johns was more vulnerable and she eventually won the part. Len Cariou auditioned for the role of Carl-Magnus, Désirée's lover, but was cast instead by Prince as Fredrik. Laurence Guittard played the Count and Patricia Elliott, the Countess Charlotte.

A week before rehearsals were to begin, Equity ruled that the people in the Liebeslieder roles be considered "chorus," since they had no dialogue and had only songs to sing. The ruling required that they sign chorus contracts. By taking this position, Equity, according to Prince, was threatening the future of the show.[3]

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[1]Stephen Grover, "Behind the Scenes," Wall Street Journal, 7 February 1973, p. 19.

[2]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 205.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 175.

> It had been as difficult to cast those five Liebeslieder roles as any in the show. They required not only operatic voices, but presence and acting experience because they had no lines in which to develop character. I know we could not have found acceptable replacements for them from the chorus rolls and they refused to sign chorus contracts.[1]

Prince would not agree to Equity's ruling and he and the lieder singers went ahead with rehearsals while the union harassed them and threatened arbitration proceedings. Eventually, Equity backed down.

Boris Aronson was again asked by Prince to do the set designs for the show. The designer, too, was hesitant about working on Night Music, since he felt his Russian heritage made him unfamiliar with Swedish sensibilities. Prince reassured him that there was very little difference between the landscape in Leningrad and that in Sweden. He said, "It's all birch trees as far as I am concerned."[2] Realizing that there would be a number of scenery changes, Aronson devised a set consisting of six sliding panels hung from three parallel bars over the stage. Made of transparent plastic and painted over in part by a forest of birch trees, the panels might be slid across the stage and arranged in ways that would suggest a variety of settings to the audience. The panels when completed were 24 feet tall. A miniature model was constructed for Prince's approval and then the model was sent off to the Feller

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 176.

Scenery Studios in the Bronx where the actual sets were built at a cost of $150,000.[1] Prince said the effect of the trees on the plastic was like Faberge enamel on crystal. The stage was carpeted to create the effect of a gently rolling green lawn. Again, as in Follies and Company, the scenery was designed by Aronson before the show was written. Prince told of the evolution of the set design:

> His [Aronson's] designs included sections of wall, real doors, and chandeliers encompassed in the woods. Quickly, I eliminated these, reducing the production to choice pieces of antique furniture isolated among the trees. That made Boris nervous up until rehearsals. Over the summer, without my knowledge, he designed a totally new scheme, which he showed me when I came back in September. I didn't care for it and we went right back to the original designs.[2]

Patricia Birch was asked to do the choreography for the show. A former dancer who had danced in the Martha Graham Company as well as on Broadway, she had first worked with Prince in West Side Story as a replacement for Lee Theodore in the role of Anybody's. Birch then went on to do the choreography for the hit musical Grease and You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown, and the musical staging for The Me Nobody Knows. The choreographer was aware that there was little opportunity in the show for many dances. However, according to Prince, "dances don't interest her half

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[1]Grover, "Behind the Scenes."

[2]Prince, Contradictions, pp. 176-177.

so much as character and movement and the total musical. Night Music tried to be seamless, and when we collaborate, it's difficult to know where she leaves off and I start."[1]

Birch remembers that she was called in quite early on all the shows she did with Prince. With Night Music, she did some preliminary work at Prince's home in Majorca. "A Weekend in the Country" had not been written as yet and one of the discussions concerned "what would take place here and who would come in with suitcases there, and we'd do this and then do that . . . It was just major blocking. But we had to wait for the music to really do it."[2] When rehearsals began, Birch said, "There was a lot of discussion and then on purpose he'd leave me alone, quite alone. Then I'd show him something when it was ready. Very often he'd feed me the objective or we'd find the objective together. The thing I do best is moving from the book into the music and back into the book again, making it seamless."[3] Birch had difficulties staging the number "The Glamorous Life" and Prince kept instructing her to have the number "swirl, swirl, swirl."[4] However, Birch couldn't get the number to "swirl." She feels that Sondheim's numbers

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[1]Ibid., p. 178.

[2]Interview with Patricia Birch, New York, 15 June 1982.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 206.

are difficult to stage. During "A Weekend in the Country" Birch found that the only time the movement didn't disturb the lyrics of the song was on the lyric "A weekend in the country." She also had to figure out how to stage numbers for Gingold, who would be sitting in a wheelchair all night. Birch and Prince also spent a good deal of time trying to figure out how to stage the lieder singers. What helped the choreographer was her ability to work on the spot in a spontaneous way. Although she does preplan, finding herself in a room with the actors and the material often gave her the answers to her problems.

Birch said that she did a lot of research for the show and consulted with an expert in Swedish dance forms. "Dance-wise, you have to have a certain amount of vocabulary ready. For this show the Swedish waltz is quite different from other waltzes."[1] Birch said that she and Prince worked well together. She learned a good deal of what was expected of her from discussions with Prince and from watching and "hanging out." She said:

> Hal picks his collaborators carefully, and he and I connect without a lot of words. We worked very closely. Sometimes we'd just look at each other and know something was going wrong or something was going right. We had a kind of mutual respect. There were times he'd ask me if something was working that had nothing to do with dance. And we have a good time working together.[2]

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[1]Birch interview.

[2]Ibid.

Rehearsals for Night Music began on Sunday, December 10, 1972 in the American Theatre Laboratory, a rehearsal studio on West 19 Street. During the first few days of rehearsals, two of Sondheim's numbers were cut. One was "Two Fairy Tales" and the other was "My Husband and the Pig." However, the real problem was that in true Sondheim fashion, only ten of the sixteen songs for the show were ready. Prince suffered trying to stage the show with almost half the score missing. He said, "It was maddening and I'll never allow it to happen again with anyone."[1] Sondheim admits that he is very slow and neurotic about getting his scores finished on time for rehearsals. One of the few songs that Sondheim has written that has become a popular hit is "Send in the Clowns." It wasn't ready until two days before the production left for Boston. Sondheim said, "One day after seeing Glynis perform her second act scene with Len in a different way, I got an idea, went home, and that night wrote "Send in the Clowns."[2] Prince, although hindered greatly by Sondheim's procrastination, admitted that it also had its advantages. As an example, "A Weekend in the Country," the climax of the first act, was written after Sondheim had watched the scene performed in rehearsal. Prince said, "That enabled Steve to blend

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 206.

[2]Ibid.

the song in perfectly with the mood and feeling of the scene."[1]

Prince finished staging the book, and with Birch set Sondheim's eight completed numbers during the first two weeks of rehearsals. The director became restless waiting for the rest of the songs to arrive and decided to play around with the staging of the final scene in Act I with the actors. It was a sequence that included the entire company and Wheeler offered some ad libs to facilitate things. Prince said:

> I began to move the actors around . . . you go here and you hand this person an invitation and you say, "Look what happened, we've been invited to a weekend at the Armfeldts' in the country," and you say, "Well, I don't want to go," and you say, "Oh, please," and you say, "Well, I'll reconsider," and so on.[2]

With additional vocalizing on the part of the actors the scene emerged as a mock opera. When Sondheim saw what was happening he went home that night and wrote the sequence so that Birch didn't have to alter the blocking in order to add additional choreography. Prince said, "'A Weekend in the Country' is such an accomplishment that Steve was prompted to suggest that next time we should stage our libretto without any music, show it to him, then let him go away for six months to write the score."[3]

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[1]Grover, "Behind the Scenes."

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 179.

[3]Ibid.

Prince was very proud of the staging of the dinner-table scene and the final scene, on the lawn. They were extensions of technical work that had begun in Cabaret and in Company. The last scene, which takes place in various areas of the estate, appears to be happening only on the lawn. There is one scene that shows the young wife and her stepson running in a hall and off to the country. Another shows Désirée with her lover in the bedroom. Additionally, the Countess and Fredrik are having a conversation on the lawn. Prince knew that these situations could not be done on a stage and therefore suggested the screenplay idea to Wheeler. Prince said:

> What I did was put it all on the landscape and I don't think the audience quarreled with it . . . or even asked where they were. I think people sense some things. I think people sense that you know where they are so they leave it alone. I think if they ever sense that you're unsure of what you're doing, that insecurity filters through the work.[1]

Johns worked well with Prince. She was quoted as saying about her director, "He has eyes in the back of his head and a real driving force, a life force. And with it goes a great deal of love. He calls us 'crew' and himself 'captain,' and he's heartbroken when the opening night is over, simply because he doesn't want to be away from us. I think he falls in love with his company."[2]

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 212.

[2]Robert Berkvist, "Miss Johns Hits a High Note," New York Times, 11 March 1973, p. D3.

The show moved from the rehearsal studio to the stage of the Shubert Theatre on January 8 for additional rehearsals and a "gypsy" run-through in which makeshift sets were used and the actors performed to piano accompaniment and some on-stage explanations by Prince. The audience, consisting of friends of the cast, gave the show a standing ovation. The run-through was performed with only fourteen of the show's eventual sixteen songs.

On Monday, January 15, the cast boarded a chartered Greyhound bus and headed for Boston for its pre-Broadway tryout. Hal Hastings, the music director, had gone to Boston earlier and was busy hiring local musicians since expenses involved in transporting and housing the orchestra out of town were prohibitive.

Things did not go perfectly smoothly in Boston. There were problems with the spotlights. With close to 400 spots operating from the balcony alone, the six lighting technicians had difficulty picking up the right actor at the precise moment he stepped forward to sing or deliver his lines. In addition to the lighting problems, the sets made "groaning" noises. During the performance the wagon on which the dining table rolled made such a sudden halt that silverware and china flew in all directions. However, things gradually got better night after night.

Not all parts of the show captured the audience's interest. The show's biggest problem was the "slowness" of the first fifteen minutes. Prince wanted the piece kept as simple and quiet as possible. He knew that the show would take time to get started. "I said it's Chekhov in style," said Prince, "let's stick to Chekhov and they've got to go with us. The only reason for doing it was we wanted to do this kind of musical. If we gave them a wham-bam opening number so that they felt comfortable, we would in the long run, fail. And we stuck to our guns and we were popular."[1]

Prince did begin, however, to make cuts. Every night's performance revealed changes to be made at rehearsals the following day. The director decided at one point that a prop invitation was too small to designate a summons to a great manor house. At that evening's performance, larger paper invitations were substituted.

In addition, Prince worried about whether his capital would run out, hoping that reviews would be good enough to help meet operating expenses. Prince said, "There's a sinking fund of $35,000 in each show. It has been that figure for twenty years; $35,000 doesn't last long if you're in trouble."[2]

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 209.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 180.

Another unfortunate occurrence of the Boston stay was the firing of Garn Stephens, the girl who originally played the role of Petra, the maid. During rehearsals, Sondheim had written "The Miller's Son" and, although Stephens' acting ability was fine, she had trouble handling the song. "It was purely a vocal problem. Her firing was a terrible shock to the company," said Birch.[1] Len Cariou was not happy about the situation. He said:

> Nobody was really working with Garn on the song. She was getting better gradually, but she maybe could have done it . . . she was much better in the part. She was earthy and very sexy and her replacement was obviously not that at all, although she sang the song well.[2]

A Little Night Music received good reviews in Boston but not overly enthusiastic ones. Kevin Kelly of the Boston Globe is quoted as saying it stirred admiration but "not much feeling."[3] He believed it was a musical for a special and limited audience. Elliott Norton in the Boston Herald felt it slowed down at the end thereby losing some of its brightness and irony, but he did feel it was a lovely, amusing show.[4] Bonnie Jacobs in Boston After Dark called it "simply the most breathtaking musical I've seen in a very long time. . . . Prince has once again shown himself to be a theatrical innovator and polisher of the first degree--his shows are never 'easy,' and with what he has

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 209.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid., p. 207. [4]Ibid.

to work with, this one is going to be brilliant."[1]

In other changes before the first New York previews, the song "Bang" was replaced with "In Praise of Women," and the servant's only song, "Silly People," was deleted. After the fifth preview in New York, and just three days before opening night, Johns fell ill and was hospitalized. Barbara Lang, Johns' understudy, went on for her and Prince postponed the opening indefinitely. Tammy Grimes was the one possible replacement Prince considered. Prince recalled:

> She [Grimes] came to see it [the show] and we talked about getting her up in the part and opening a week late. She agreed, but she also raised a number of questions respecting interpretation, attitudes, and most specifically, the costumes. It was too late to make the kind of changes she was suggesting. For the show to open with a substitute star in seven days it would have to be the one I had rehearsed, and any alterations, including to the costumes, would have to be just that--alterations.[2]

Prince then considered flying to London for a replacement for Johns. However, the following day his leading lady was ready to return to the show having missed only three performances.

A Little Night Music opened in New York on February 25, 1973 at the Shubert Theatre to excellent reviews. Clive Barnes of the New York Times, who had panned Company

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[1]Bonnie Jacobs, "A Little Night Music," Boston After Dark, 6 February 1973, p. 15, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 182.

and Follies, gave an absolute rave to this show.

> At last a new operetta. A Little Night Music is heady, civilized, sophisticated, and enchanting. It is Dom Perignon. It is supper at Laserre. And it is more fun than any tango in a Parisian suburb. . . . People have long been talking about Mr. Prince's conceptual musicals: now I feel I have actually seen one of the actual concepts. . . . Good God!--an Adult musical![1]

Edwin Wilson of the Wall Street Journal found it refreshing that two such innovators as Prince and Sondheim had created a musical with the charms of yesteryear.

> Ironically, the very men who brought us Company and Follies, Harold Prince, the director and producer, and Stephen Sondheim, the composer and lyricist, are the ones pushing the pendulum back again in A Little Night Music. Sociologists can make of it what they will, but romance and the finer things have made their way back to Broadway.[2]

Richard Watts, Jr. of the New York Post was very positive about the show. "It has a production possessing style and imagination, an attractive score, and a somewhat unusual quality that combines humor with a strain of sadness."[3]

While most of the reviewers were enthusiastic about the new Prince production, some did find it cold and lacking

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[1]Clive Barnes, "A Little Night Music," New York Times, 26 February 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 349.

[2]Edwin Wilson, "A Musical Show with Elegance," Wall Street Journal, 27 February 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 350.

[3]Richard Watts, Jr., "Happy Evening in Sweden," New York Post, 26 February 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 348.

in emotion. This was to become a fairly common complaint about the Prince and Sondheim shows. Some described it as a lack of feeling and others complained that they didn't care about the characters in their shows. Of A Little Night Music, Douglas Watt of the Daily News said:

> Exquisiteness is so much the concern of A Little Night Music, a beautifully designed and staged operetta of intimate proportions that opened last night at the Shubert, that there is little room for the breath of life. . . . it reveals the work of superior craftsmanship. But stunning as it is to gaze upon and as clever as its score is, with its use of trio and ensemble singing, it remains too literary and precious a work to stir the emotions.[1]

Gottfried, one of Prince's greatest champions, said the show was "a great disappointment to me."[2] Gottfried felt the major problem was in the script which he felt dominated the show in spite of its flaccid and undynamic tone. He said, "The story simply goes along, developing plot without much humor or charm, and certainly no dramatic peaks."[3] Gottfried did like the score but not the cast, with the exception of Cariou. He concluded:

> There are moments that suggest frustrated intentions: as if Prince had had a first vision that

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[1]Douglas Watt, "'A Little Night Music': Operetta that's Exquisite but Fragile," New York Daily News, 26 February 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 348.

[2]Martin Gottfried, "A Little Night Music," Women's Wear Daily, 26 February 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 349.

[3]Ibid.

> either didn't work out or is not as clear as he thinks it is: There is an operetta quintet of singing commentators--a Chorus--and several songs begin with a singer practicing the piano or the cello. It is as if the idea of performing music might have been a production scheme. . . . Given Prince's tremendous, proved and important talent, it is a let down.[1]

Time magazine, like most of the others, felt Sondheim's best numbers were Gingold's "Liaisons," "Send in the Clowns" (Johns), and "The Miller's Son," which was now sung by D. Jamin-Bartlett.[2] They went on to say, "Nothing lends the show quite so much strength as Stephen Sondheim's score. It is a beauty, his best yet in an exceedingly distinguished career."[3]

A Little Night Music won the Drama Critics' Award as best musical and the Tony Award as best musical of the year. Additionally, Tonys were awarded for best music and lyrics (Sondheim), best book (Wheeler), best costumes (Klotz), best actress in a musical (Johns), and best supporting actress in a musical (Elliott). Within six months the show had returned its investment and Prince began receiving offers for European productions of the show. It ran 600 performances on Broadway and its touring companies did well.

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Kalem, "Valse Triste."

[3]Ibid.

Sondheim felt that the show was more successful than the two previous shows because it was less tense and made audiences feel more relaxed. It also had a happy ending. He said, "What I really think is that whatever the last show would have been, they would have liked it more than the first two. They're just getting used to our stuff. . . . I suppose I'm finally wearing them down."[1]

Prince could not understand the critics who wrote that there was a natural progression from Company to Follies to Night Music. This was especially bewildering to him since after Follies they noted that he was moving in the direction of the plotless musical, whereas Night Music "has enough plot for two musicals."[2] Prince has said that he didn't enjoy doing Night Music because he didn't dig as deep or extend himself as far as he likes to. Prince called A Little Night Music a stylish and intellectual musical but felt it was too pale and romantic and not bloody or emotional enough. "And it was not very controversial."[3] He feels that Night Music was the "hit" that he needed so badly. Lisa Aronson, however, remembers that her husband felt differently. She said, "Boris did not agree when Hal put off the show as just looking for a hit or being easy. . . . He felt it was Hal's best work."[4]

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[1]Zadan, Sondheim & Co., p. 213.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 183.

[3]Prince, quoted in Wallach, "Harold Prince."

[4]Lisa Aronson interview.

Ingmar Bergman, after seeing A Little Night Music in November 1973, said to Prince:

> I was surprised that it was possible to eliminate the shadows of desperation, eroticism, and caprice without the whole story collapsing. At the moment I forgot that this entertaining and witty musical had anything to do with my picture. I enjoyed it tremendously and I loved your actors.[1]

Candide

> There was not really a successful staged version until Hal Prince came along, with his idea of a brief, racy, stripped-down version.[2]

> There's something going on that's fresh almost every second in Candide. It's just opening up Pandora's Box and letting out all of those wonderful tricks--including the idea of using quadraphonic sound. I was fascinated with it.[3]

Although A Little Night Music was the success that Prince needed at the time, he did not entertain thoughts of doing something in the same vein. Instead he headed towards a production whose theatrical style--environmental theatre--was one with which he had had no experience. Candide presented quite a different challenge to Prince. When it was over, he had another hit.

Prince had lent his name to the Advisory Board of the Chelsea Theatre Center for about ten years. He had

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 178.

[2]Leonard Bernstein, quoted in John Rockwell, "Will 'Candide' Thrive in the Opera House?", New York Times, 10 October 1982, sec. 2, p. H19.

[3]Adler interview.

been impressed with several of their productions, particularly Edward Bond's Saved. Robert Kalfin, the artistic director, asked Prince whether he would like to work on a project with them and Prince agreed. Kalfin suggested a revival of the musical Candide, which had been done originally on Broadway in 1956. Lillian Hellman had written the libretto, an adaptation of the Voltaire novel. Leonard Bernstein had written the music, with lyrics by Richard Wilbur, John Latouche and Dorothy Parker.

Prince didn't think a revival would work. He said,

> I'd seen the original version on Broadway and hated it. It was a heavy, pretentious, labored production that bored me. It had Leonard Bernstein's great score, but it had a bad book, a bad mix of production values and it had been badly directed by a great director, Tyrone Guthrie. It was a "classic" instead of a theater piece.[1]

In addition, Prince felt that

> half the show was politically and socially oriented and the other half was oriented to the satirization of musical operetta, Bernstein's musical-theatre joke. I think it's unfair to say, as some people have, that the book was the villain. Tyrone Guthrie takes second place to no one in recent history, but he made his mistakes and Candide was one of them. The book, music, lyrics, and physical production were inappropriate to one another.[2]

Kalfin continued to want to revive Candide, and asked a young writer to reshape the Hellman libretto. Six

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[1]Robert Berkvist, "'Candide,' or a Very Moving Story," New York Times, 24 February 1974, sec. 2, p. 1.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 191.

months later, Prince, after reading the new treatment, still didn't think it right and he abandoned the idea of doing the piece.

After A Little Night Music opened, however, the producer/director, on the lookout for a project for the 1973-74 season, decided to give some more thought to Candide and read the original Voltaire novel. He said, "I was surprised by how light and impulsive and unimportant it is. Apparently he [Voltaire] wrote it quickly and denied having written it, putting it down as a schoolboy's prank. And that's the spirit of it."[1] Prince felt that Candide needed a fresh concept, one that would be "as outrageous in contemporary terms and, curiously, as naive."[2] Voltaire's novel was classic but Prince felt that the original collaborators on the musical had treated the piece too reverently, not catching the fun and outrageous quality inherent in the work. Prince had to decide on the appropriate structure for a work that contained many high and low moments and no real crises.[3]

This piece could easily become boring. In the director's own words, "the hero beginning his odyssey, runs into negative forces and overcomes them or subverts them, and then runs into more negative forces and more negative forces, and then after a while, a pattern is achieved and

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid. [3]Ibid., p. 192.

the audience loses interest."[1] Prince decided on a relatively short show, about one hour and forty-five minutes, with the second act seeming like a reprise of the first. In fact, the 1974 revival of Candide runs about an hour and fifty-seven minutes and has no intermission.

Prince, as usual, tried to synthesize the project for himself with a visual image. Candide became a cartoon for him, a triptych. He was still struggling, however, with how he could "illustrate this picaresque story in static terms."[2] How could he animate a triptych? He came up with something akin to the mansions of medieval theatrical staging. He said:

> I thought immediately of a sideshow at the circus, a series of elevated platforms, in one, the Fat Lady, in others the Sword Swallower, the Tattooed Man, the Bearded Woman, the Siamese Twins, and so on. . . . Supposing you were guided by the barker (Voltaire?) on foot from one booth to the other along the route of Candide's odyssey. The booths would have little curtains and behind one there would be Lisbon in the throes of a child's-eye version of an earthquake. Another booth would contain war, another a gambling casino in Venice. The booths would be of different sizes, as they are in the circus, and the painting would be primitive, garish, indicating events, leaving the better part of detail to the imagination; the less specific, the more participation from the bystanders. . . . Once I had gone that far, I realized even it was schematic and would defeat an hour-and-forty-five-minute piece. . . . Nevertheless, some version of it would work.[3]

Prince now asked Hellman to write the revised production of Candide. She loved Prince's ideas, saying that his

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid. [3]Ibid., p. 193.

approach was similar to what she had wanted to do originally, but she remained unwilling to work on the new show. She did not object, however, to his hiring a new librettist, with the condition that none of her original dialogue be retained in the revival. Prince agreed. He then received permission from Bernstein and Wilbur for him to do an updated version of the show. Bernstein, too, said that Prince's concept was what he had always wanted.[1] Getting the contracts negotiated was "a complicated business because the original not only had Bernstein as composer and Hellman as author, but Wilbur, Latouche, Hellman, Bernstein and Dorothy Parker as lyricists."[2]

Hugh Wheeler was hired to do the new libretto. He and Prince listened to all the music on the original cast album, underlining favorite parts in the Voltaire work. Glenn Loney, in his article "The Best of All Possible Shows" for After Dark, said that Wheeler preferred going back to Voltaire's work rather than utilizing Hellman's book. The writer hadn't read the Voltaire since college and now rediscovered its satirical charm.[3] Wheeler took two weeks to present a first draft and Prince thought it was "hilarious."[4]

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

[3]Glenn Loney, "The Best of All Possible Shows," After Dark, March 1974, p. 38.

[4]Prince, Contradictions, p. 194.

Prince helped Wheeler to shape the libretto. Loney quotes the writer as saying, "We opted for a free form staging. And I began to make a series of short scenes. Although I used only about a third of the material in Voltaire's work it was still rather long. Then Hal cut it down to size."[1] In addition, Wheeler and Prince rearranged the placement of original songs for the new libretto. Wheeler told Loney, "I think that the new placement has heightened their effect in the show, in addition to making them serve the character more strongly."[2] Wheeler cut the episodes in Venice and Paris, eliminating some favorites from those scenes such as "What's the Use?" and "The Paris Mazurka." Although the Paris scene was eliminated, the theme of "The Mazurka" was retained, Sondheim writing a lyric for it, a lament for Candide. Wheeler and Prince also used episodes of the Voltaire book, such as the one set in Constantinople, that had not been used in the original musical.[3]

Prince also wanted a new opening number. He felt that "The Best of All Possible Worlds" is "a statement of philosophy, the idea rather than an introduction of the character, the emotion. The original version was cerebral, keeping the audience at arm's length. Ours must be

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[1]Loney, "The Best of All Possible Shows," p. 38.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 194.

visceral, must envelop the audience. . . . Once again, we had a show that needed an opening number to tell the audience who its main characters are and set the style."[1] The opening song was to be done in a humorous manner, to set a "lightly cynical, informal tone for the show, and to establish the sensuality and the innocence of the people."[2] The number was created partly out of a Wheeler monologue for the Voltaire character. It oriented the audience to the production's time and place, with four vignettes, some of which Sondheim set to Bernstein's music from the Venice "Gavotte" and called "Life is Happiness Indeed."[3]

Bernstein had some numbers and bits of melodies and themes that had been discarded from the original Candide, such as "I Am Easily Assimilated" and the "Auto da Fe (What a Day)," which he and Latouche had written in 1956. Some of these were now used in the new production. A lyricist had to be hired, however, who would write any new lyrics that were necessary. Bernstein was too busy lecturing at Harvard and could not spare the time. Sondheim was asked to help since, Prince explained, "I had never met Richard Wilbur."[4]

The libretto in its final draft introduces the four young people who live happily in the castle of the Baron Thunder-Ten-Tronck in Westphalia. They are the bastard

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 203.

[3]Ibid. [4]Ibid., p. 194.

cousin Candide, the beautiful daughter Cunegonde, her handsome brother Maximillian, and the luscious serving maid Paquette. Dr. Pangloss is about to conduct his invaluable lessons. Since this is a satire on "optimism," Candide is taught that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. The original Voltaire work was the author's scornful and sharp-witted reprimand to the eighteenth-century establishment. Written in 1758, the novella attacked the then-popular philosophy which held that God had created the best of all possible worlds and that nothing could or should be tampered with.

Expelled from the Baron's castle for the love of beautiful Cunegonde, Candide embarks on a long, lonely journey with only the questionable wisdom of his tutor, Dr. Pangloss, to guide him. Along the way, he is abducted into the Bulgarian army, which is about to invade Westphalia. In Westphalia, all are killed except Cunegonde, "who is spared for the benefit of the Hungarian regiment."[1] Left for dead, she survives by moving from brothel to brothel. In Lisbon, she is showered with gifts from both a rich Jew and a Grand Inquisitor. Candide arrives in Lisbon, learns of Cunegonde's supposed death, and is reunited with his beloved Dr. Pangloss. Soon they are arrested as heretics and dragged off to be punished at the Audo da Fe. Pangloss

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[1] Candide, record liner notes, by William Evans, Columbia S2X 32923.

is hanged but an Old Lady rescues the battered and unconscious Candide. The Old Lady leads Candide to Cunegonde, who is "still alive and yearning."[1] Candide kills both the Grand Inquisitor and the rich Jew.

Attacked by Barbary pirates on a ship at sea, they arrive in Montevideo. Candide meets Paquette and the long-lost Maximillian. Again he and Maximillian feud over Candide's love for Cunegonde. Maximillian is crushed by a statue and once more Candide flees--this time with Paquette.

He and Paquette arrive in Eldorado, where the streets are paved with diamonds. Candide, unhappy, longs for his love. Soon he and Paquette arrive in Cartagena, Colombia, where again they encounter the Old Lady. She tells Candide that pirates are planning to sell Cunegonde in Constantinople to the highest bidder, and they make Constantinople their next stop. In a Turkish palace they discover that the veiled dancing girl is Cunegonde. The lovers are united and Candide buys Cunegonde's freedom.

Maximillian is discovered alive and joins the group. Soon they discover Dr. Pangloss in the guise of a local sage, and ask him what the natural function of man is. The answer reads: "What is the natural function of man? What was it in the Garden of Eden? Dig, spin, work without regret for yesterday or hope for tomorrow. For man, it is only work that makes life endurable."[2] Resolving to adopt

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

this philosophy, Candide and Cunegonde return to Westphalia and create their own Garden of Eden. Candide's undying love for Cunegonde had driven him from Westphalia, through war and earthquake, over land and sea, through feast and famine, only to lead him home again and now in possession of new ideas about the source of true fulfillment.

Prince's idea for the "Glitter and Be Gay" number, Cunegonde's aria and one of the most popular numbers in the score, was to have a pianist, in eighteenth-century French dress and white powdered wig containing shining diamonds, appear from a trapdoor. During the song, Prince said, "Cunegonde would denude the powdered wig of its diamonds, covering herself with them."[1] Raymond Ericson in the New York Times was convinced that "Glitter and Be Gay" was a "satiric masterpiece."[2] Prince also decided that Candide and Cunegonde would undress each other during the song "Oh, Happy We." Prince explained that this would play "against the materialism in the lyrics."[3]

A Fons Pietatis, which Bernstein had created for the original production, was included in this new Candide as was the production number "What a Lovely Day for an Auto da Fe" by Latouche and Bernstein. Additional lyrics

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 195.

[2]Raymond Ericson, "Rare Bernstein," New York Times, 14 May 1975, p. 34.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 201.

were added by Sondheim. Prince discussed other new material.

> We had to find a substitution for the song "Eldorado," something funny, something for two pink sheep and a lion to sing. Eldorado figures importantly in the novel, describing a perfect society where human beings wilt from boredom. There was nothing wrong with the original "Eldorado," except that they had chosen to bypass Eldorado and we had chosen to visit it. Bernstein had written a lovely melody in 1956, "Fernando's Lullaby," and Steven set a lyric to it. . . . When we reexamined the script, in our efforts to keep everything moving, the sameness of pace was boring. We had to find places to stop for breath. The need to slow things down prompted a series of questions by Candide of a disembodied Voltaire. These questions and Voltaire's replies anchor the evening.[1]

Prince hired Eugene Lee to design Candide. He had seen the environmental set Lee had done for LeRoi Jones' Slave Ship at the Chelsea a few seasons earlier. He also knew of Lee's work with Peter Brook. Lee had also redesigned the Broadway Theatre for the musical Dude. Prince discussed with Lee his sideshow concept for the production, while expressing concern about the "schematicness of it."[2] Lee suggested varying the levels and sizes of the stages, using curtains on only several. Prince then thought of playing scenes simultaneously on stages at opposite ends of the theatre. Prince said, "For the first time I remembered the extraordinary Italian production of Orlando Furioso which I had seen in Bryant Park in 1970 and which clearly hovered somewhere in my subconscious."[3]

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[1]Ibid., p. 205. [2]Ibid., p. 195. [3]Ibid.

When Lee and Prince began discussing a trapdoor for the "Glitter and Be Gay" number, the idea was conceived of having people sitting on the set. Prince liked it.

Lee was back in a few weeks with drawings and elevations. Prince, who can't read drawings, asked Lee to construct a model. The designer created a model for the show in a shoebox as it would look in the Chelsea Theatre. Prince studied the shoebox, taking it to Majorca in the summer. The original set contained seven playing areas. In the six-month period before rehearsals started, entrances, exits, trapdoors, and stairways were continually changing. However, the final set retained "seven stages, two of which are proscenium, a connecting ramp, and two bridges."[1] Prince was shocked when he eventually saw the space for the show in Brooklyn. He had been visualizing it in a theatre such as the Broadhurst and not a 180-seat house. He had been told that they would be using a converted ballroom space at the Brooklyn Academy of Music which held 500 people. He had thought about the show with this room in mind. However, Peter Brook had "preempted it,"[2] and it was necessary to make both mental and physical adjustments. The tiny fourth-floor 180-seat house of the Academy of Music was ramped and a modified circus midway created with runways, booths and mini-stages that could be

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[1]Ibid., p. 198. [2]Ibid., p. 196.

changed instantly from a corpse-filled battlefield to the city of Constantinople. Bleachers were placed around three-quarters of the playing space. Some of the audience sat on stools in the two pits that flanked a small central platform, others between ramps, drawbridges, and along runways. The actors, making their way through the audience, could sing and dance on either the platforms or the bridges connecting them. Litton explained, "On the fourth side of the Chelsea loft was a small, shallow proscenium stage, where scenes requiring backdrops could be played."[1] Litton indicated that Prince was "impressed with the idea of environmental theatre and Candide was his opportunity to stage a musical in an environmental setting including in it a bit of 'madcap farce.'"[2]

One thing that particularly bothered Prince about the Brooklyn production of Candide was that there were so few people in the audience watching the show. He felt that

> the relationship of the people with the people, the audience with the audience, is what makes Candide exceptional. The relationship of audience with actor is fairly standard. . . . People are self-conscious about responding when they're alone, and 180 people in the Chelsea were, except in a few areas, very much alone. If they wanted to laugh, they were aware that they might just be laughing by themselves. In Brooklyn we found that sometimes we had celebrations with our audiences, but more

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[1]Smith and Litton, Musical Comedy in America, p. 331.

[2]Ibid.

> often we had silence. Smiling, grinning, nudging each other, but self-consciously editing audibility out of their responses.[1]

Prince doesn't like the actors coming close to and touching the audience, a possibility that was kept to a minimum. He advised the actors that, even though they might be only a foot away from the audience in any given scene, they should respect the audience's privacy. He said, "I instructed them to say 'please' when they wanted something and 'excuse me' and 'pardon me' when they were crossing in front of someone."[2]

Groups of the show's small orchestra sat wherever there was room, "its members cheerfully tootling along amidst the crowd like spectators who had suddenly been inspired to play along for the fun of it."[3] Bernstein wanted to reorchestrate the show to emphasize the smaller groups and Prince left this chore to him, to Hershy Kay, who had orchestrated the original version, and to the musical director, John Mauceri. This trio designed what is now called a quadraphonic concept--"thirteen musicians parceled out in four separate areas of the theatre and surrounding the audience."[4] Richard Adler, who thinks Candide and

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 197.

[2]Ibid., p. 198.

[3]Berkvist, "'Candide,' or a Very Moving Story."

[4]Prince, Contradictions, p. 198.

Evita are the two shows on which Prince did his best work, said he "loved the quadraphonic sound in Candide."[1]

The roles of Candide and Cunegonde in the original version had been cast with an emphasis on operatic abilities. Prince felt the singers were too old for their roles with the exception of Barbara Cook, who played Cunegonde. For the new version, he wanted wide-eyed, innocent-looking young performers between the ages of sixteen and twenty. Even the musicians were to be recently graduated Juilliard students. Eventually, Maureen Brennan and Mark Baker were signed for the roles of Cunegonde and Candide. Brennan had read that Prince wanted a coloratura for Candide and wrote him from Cincinnati. She explained that it cost a good deal of money to fly to and from New York and to advise her if he had already signed somebody for the role. He wrote back telling her to come east. She sang for the show's collaborators and they liked her, but sent her home. A week later they summoned her back to read. They liked her reading but again sent her home. Two days later they phoned her to tell her that she was one of three girls being considered for the female lead, the final decision to be made in September. When Brennan phoned in September, they asked her to return for another reading, agreeing to pay the plane fare. After she read, she asked for a decision, as she had to make plans about returning to the

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[1]Adler interview.

Cincinnati Conservatory. They told her she should not go back to school because she had won the role.

Prince wanted Jerry Orbach for the role of Voltaire/ Pangloss because of his ability as a farceur. Orbach, however, had been offered the lead in the musical Mack and Mabel and was not available for an extended run in Brooklyn. Lewis J. Stadlen was finally hired after Roscoe Lee Brown's agent turned the part down for his client. Stadlen, whom Prince had admired as Groucho Marx in Minnie's Boys, was hesitant because of a stage direction in the script suggesting that the role be played like Groucho Marx. Prince suggested that Stadlen substitute "another harmless, lecherous vaudevillian for Groucho, and he came up with Irwin Corey."[1] Stadlen also impersonated Mel Brooks' Oldest Man in the World when playing the Tibetan Monk.

Prince asked Nancy Walker to play the Old Lady but she wasn't interested. Instead, June Gable stepped into the part. Julie Newmar, originally set to play Paquette the maid, signed to do a play for Joseph Papp and so the role had to be recast with Deborah St. Darr. Sam Freed played Maximillian.

Prince lunched with Pat Birch in a Chinese restaurant and told her about Candide. Prince had assumed that with her many offers, she wouldn't want to involve herself

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 202.

in this Brooklyn production. Birch remembers his saying that there was nothing for her to do in the show.

> But I told him, "yes there is--there's plenty for me to do in it and I want to do it." So off we went to Brooklyn and did Candide and had a wonderful time again. . . . When we were doing the show, I said, "this is a bunk show--like a camp show." We did it all on wooden things. The fun I had working with Hal was that he'd let me go a little wild. I do a lot of humorous, slightly off-beat stuff, and he's the first one to love all that. On Candide we were lucky out there--the main physical part of the set was built, so we did the staging right on the set. It was a lot of fun.[1]

Dance critic Deborah Jowitt discussed Birch's work after the show moved to Broadway. In Candide,

> there is an immense amount of motion, but nothing that the eye is supposed to light on as "choreography"--no people who stand out as trained dancers. . . . she [Birch] must have functioned as an adroit and adventurous traffic cop. . . . As if the failure of Candide in the fifties had convinced everyone that having a distinguished score and distinguished book was no way to succeed in show biz, Prince and Birch have made the action move so fast that you can hardly take it in. They've staged Candide's travels rather like a frantic board game along the perilous ramps that festoon the Broadway Theater: a throw of dice by invisible and capricious hands may send an actor scooting five scenes ahead or immobilize him, while two scenes back someone dear to him is being raped.[2]

Prince hired Eugene Lee's wife, Franne Lee, to do the costumes. She had designed the Andre Gregory production of Alice in Wonderland and Prince felt that her sketches were sophisticated, detailed and witty. The

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[1]Birch interview.

[2]Deborah Jowitt, "Candide," New York Times, 23 November 1975, p. A12.

designer showed Prince a suitcase filled with bits of fabric, remnants of old clothes and costumes. She explained that everything in the show would be made out of some used item, which would give the feeling, Prince said, that

> we had emptied a closet, unlocked an attic trunk, a multiplicty of events, times, places. . . . She put three or four of these pieces on my desk and told me that they looked like the character of the Old Lady. Another collage, Cunegonde. If I put one next to another, against a third, I began to see the characters emerging. Something meshed, something seemed right about that kind of thinking. . . . Had I been doing a show for $600,000, I wouldn't have had the guts to go along with it. And therein lies one of the problems of the commercial theatre.[1]

Rehearsals began on October 21, 1973 in Brooklyn. There were to be six and a half weeks of rehearsals before the first preview. It was a rewarding rehearsal period, one in which there was no pressure--time or otherwise--to produce the "big commercial blockbuster for Broadway." It was fun for Prince because he wasn't worrying about investors. He said, "I was doing a show for five weeks in Brooklyn."[2]

Birch and Prince staged the entire production in eight days. Prince said,

> If we had a sluggish day, we let it go. If things were going well, we worked a full five hours and quit. We rarely bothered to break for lunch--avoided coming back logy and distracted. If someone's voice was bothering him, he saved it. . . .

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 199.

[2]Ibid., p. 206.

> I began to appreciate the privileges of socialized theatre. Also, we had the luxury of four weeks to try it on small groups of friends. Based on their responses, we kept filling and building. Candide evolved.[1]

They opened in a ten-day period at the end of December 1973, with critics at almost every performance. The Brooklyn run was extended for two weeks because the show was sold out before the opening. The reviews were generally good. Geoffrey Holder on NBC-TV said, "Candide is just pure fun . . . and I'm glad I saw it after waiting 17 years for the revival."[2] Jack Kroll said of the director,

> Prince seems to have been influenced in his staging by the astonishing Italian production of Orlando Furioso that came to New York some seasons ago, in which a stadium-size playing space was overrun by performers pell-melling through the audience. . . . The unflagging motion of the show may be too labyrinthine, but it does capture the winds-of-fortune movement of Voltaire's moral tale.[3]

George Oppenheimer in Newsday called the score of Candide an unadulterated delight. He said, "Harold Prince, the proficient, prolific and productive director-producer, has staged with magical effects."[4] Douglas Watt, who called this show an "out-and-out burlesque" and an

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Geoffrey Holder, "Candide," WNBC-TV News, 20 December 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 140.

[3]Jack Kroll, "Voltaire in Brooklyn," Newsweek, 31 December 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 140.

[4]George Oppenheimer, "Candide," Newsday, NYPL Clipping Folder.

"excessively campy production," felt that although reading about Candide's adventures may be entertaining in book form, they "are merely repetitious on stage."[1] Jerry Tallmer of the New York Post accused the creators of camping up this version. He agreed that they did make a valiant attempt to "froth up, brighten up and sauce up the satire," yet he asked, "What is the purpose of a satire of a satire?"[2] Additionally, Tallmer objected to the use of Jewish dialect where not required and the theme of rape as a laugh-getter.[3]

Prince's long-time champion, Martin Gottfried, noted that Prince revealed knowledge of the avant-garde in his use of the environmental setting. He said,

> The main problem is the story itself, still going from one place to another with the same joke in hand; still going with not a character to enjoy; still going on the literary and definitely un-theatrical wheels of satire. . . . Wheeler's book is no better than Ms. Hellman's. . . . What Prince seemed to do was finally give up on the book altogether and stage a theater work of music and movement, which is a great idea but not when meant as camouflage.[4]

Although some of the positive reviews suggested moving to Broadway, the New York Times felt that something might be lost in the transition.

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[1]Douglas Watt, "'Candide' Is Revived in Brooklyn," New York Daily News, 21 December 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 138.

[2]Jerry Tallmer, "'Candide' Rejiggered," New York Post, 21 December 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 138.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Martin Gottfried, "Candide," Women's Wear Daily, 21 December 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 139.

The Chelsea had a hit on its hands and plans were made to move it to Broadway. For Prince, the show's success vindicated his belief that a revival needed a fresh concept. Michael David, Chelsea's executive director, was quoted as saying,

> Candide was approached simply as one of four things we were doing this year. The fact that it was a "hit" left us with the same problem we've always had--we're broke as hell. It cost us about $100,000 to get to the first public performance of Candide and the show ran here at a loss from beginning to end. I know it was a sell-out, but at our low ticket prices that means a maximum weekly gross of $7,000. Our break-even figure for this production was $10,500, so that works out to a loss of $3,500 a week. But that's what we're here for; basically we always lose money.[1]

Chelsea's losses were covered by various grants and the money for Candide's move to Broadway was raised in the traditional way. The decision to run the show on Broadway raised the costs considerably. The many technical problems related to the show's unique staging raised the costs--plus the general economic realities of producing on Broadway. Candide had been produced for $100,000 in Brooklyn; the Broadway capitalization was $450,000. Operating costs were $65,000 a week, the break-even point.

These high costs posed a dilemma. The theatre had to be large enough to accommodate the needed paying audience, but not so large that the intimacy, the close contact between audience and actors, so much a part of Candide's

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[1]Berkvist, "'Candide,' or a Very Moving Story."

success, would be lost. Kalfin, Prince, Michael David, Burl Hash (also with Chelsea), as well as Ruth Mitchell and Howard Haines of the Prince office, began their search for the right theatre. Hotels and ballrooms examined were either too small or unavailable. Haines checked the City Center basement, an abandoned bowling alley, and the Sert Room at the Waldorf-Astoria. Prince, however, liked the idea of the Winter Garden or Broadway Theatres. He envisioned removing the seats and placing some audience on portions of their huge stages. Both theatres were available. The huge Broadway Theatre was selected, which "meant a total revamping of the theater's innards to limit the audience to no more than 900."[1]

To begin making a profit from the move, the period between the closing on January 20, 1974 in Brooklyn and the opening in New York had to be minimal. They met with architects on the restructuring, to keep it within the Fire and Building Departments' regulations. The Broadway playing area became twenty feet longer than the one in Brooklyn, but the stages were identical. An audience of 900 could be accommodated now as against the 180 in the Chelsea space. Some bleacher seats would be sold on a first-come, first-served basis as Prince moved the show into the bleachers area as often as possible. To retain the feeling of

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[1]Ibid.

intimacy, most of the Broadway's endlessly receding balcony was closed and a lighting grid was hung overhead to give the effect of a lowered ceiling. Everything was the same, just a little bigger.

Howard Haines assumed most of the responsibility for the move to Broadway during the seven weeks that it took to get the production on. He worked with the architect, Leslie Armstrong of Armstrong, Childs and Associates, who had supervised the theatre reconstruction for the musical Dude in the same theatre a year earlier. Glenn Loney quoted Armstrong about the move from Brooklyn to Broadway. She said,

> The sense of the show must not be lost in moving it to Broadway. Hal Prince wants the production to be somewhat larger, of course, owing to the need to seat more people, but the pattern of the environment at the Chelsea will be reproduced. We want to create the effect of a town square, not the usual Broadway stage-audience situation.[1]

Others, such as the consulting engineer Henry M. Garsson and the builder Peter Feller, attempted to stay within the specifications of the city agencies. Prince remained apprehensive during the seven-week period while the interior of the Broadway Theatre was being altered. Prince recalled:

> No sooner had we accommodated their rules [the city agencies], but I would come into the theatre and eliminate seats. One day I took out 121 in the bleacher section because of sight-lines. The point is, with Candide, no one in the audience sees everything, but everyone must see almost

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[1]Loney, "The Best of All Possible Shows," p. 39.

> everything. . . . There's no question but that we couldn't have gotten Candide on without Peter Feller's help. Over those seven weeks he would no sooner get the structure up when he would have to change it. Raise this row, take out these seats, raise that stage, put backs on those benches, guard-rails along that aisle, and so on. . . . By the time we were ready for Tharon Musser, she had two and a half days to light the show.[1]

There were problems, too, with the audience. The re-built theatre structure frightened them and some reacted by refusing their seat locations, complaining that they couldn't see. There were also those who complained about sitting on the hard wooden bleacher seats. As Prince explained, "An environment which would have been acceptable to them in a ball park offended them in a theatre."[2]

The lobby was redecorated and the marble floors covered with unfinished plywood. Hot dog and beer stands were set up, balloons and streamers hung, along with the canvas drops from the Chelsea production to hide the crystal chandeliers and the gold leaf of the Broadway Theatre. At a central booth, t-shirts, buttons, and cast record albums were sold. At curtain, a costumed actor entered to announce the location of the ten stages and two drawbridges and to caution the audience against leaving programs, peanut shells, and feet on the ramps and stairs to help safeguard the actors. The orchestra was divided into four

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 213.

[2]Ibid., p. 214.

sections and was coordinated by means of closed-circuit television. The playing areas had to be electronically amplified although Prince prefers a non-amplified show. Louis Stadlen, playing Voltaire, wore a Vega microphone strapped to his leg for three-quarters of the performance.

One thing that disturbed Prince about the move from Brooklyn to Broadway was his unhappy negotiations with the musicians union. Prince blamed the rigidity of the union for the eventual closing of the show. The Broadway Theatre, like all standard musical houses, is supposed to carry 25 musicians under terms of the union contract. As an intimate musical, Candide was scored for 13 musicians. The director asked the union for special dispensation. The union compromised and said the director would only have to hire 15 musicians. Then Mel Gussow quoted Prince as saying, "the union went back on its word."[1] He was told that the members of the union would not accept the compromise. The union demanded the full 25-man orchestra. It was too late for Prince to turn back since he had already signed contracts for the theatre and the architects. Prince said if he had known in the beginning that he would have had to accept 25 musicians, he would not have done the show.[2]

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[1]Mel Gussow, "Prince Lays Part of 'Candide' Deficit to Cost of 'Musicians We Don't Need,'" New York Times, 23 September 1976, p. 29.

[2]Ibid.

He increased the size of the orchestra from 13 to 18 and had difficulty fitting them on the small mini-stages. He said, "There were five absolutely unnecessary musicians. But I couldn't bear the idea of twelve musicians playing pinochle."[1]

For the run of the show the seven extra musicians were each paid $290 a week for not playing. They were listed as "understudies," known on Broadway as "walkers," meaning they walk to and from the show, but don't actually work the show. For Candide they only showed up on Wednesdays to collect their paychecks. Prince said, "The streets are full of such musicians. . . . there are 12 nonplaying musicians in Chicago, five in A Chorus Line, none in The Wiz."[2]

Gussow explained that Prince felt that the

> increased payments that he had to pay the musicians that he didn't need made it extremely difficult for the show to turn a weekly profit for 24 weeks, but only in nine of those weeks was the profit equal to the $4,000 he was paying the unwanted musicians. For 19 other weeks, with author, producer and other creative personnel taking cuts in royalties, the show broke even; the other nine, it showed a loss.[3]

Candide opened at the Broadway Theatre on March 5, 1974 with the same cast that had appeared at the Chelsea.

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Mel Gussow, "Candide," New York Times, 23 October 1975, p. 29.

[3]Ibid.

The critics praised the show. Richard Watts, Jr. liked the idea of an actor handing his shirt to a member of the audience and then asking him to hold it while he did a scene. After the scene was over, he thanked the audience member and recovered his garment. Another thing Watts enjoyed was the delight on a young boy's face in the front row when Candide looked at him wistfully and asked, "Will my trouble never cease?" Watts called the show

> wonderful. Much of its brilliance is due to Hugh Wheeler's adaptation, Leonard Bernstein's score and the lyrics of Richard Wilbur, but what makes it all the more delightful is Harold Prince's imaginative direction which, among other things, has torn the playhouse apart and transformed it into an intimate gathering place where you are part of the show."[1]

Martin Gottfried in Women's Wear Daily felt that in spite of the fact that the show still had book problems the move from Brooklyn was a good one, the show becoming just a little bigger. He said,

> the whole business, the way it moves, behaves and feels--has been made tighter, stronger and smoother . . . is definitely better at the Broadway Theater than it was at Chelsea. . . . Prince's ability to work unitedly with a choreographer--Patricia Birch--is unique and tremendous. Since so much of this production is pure musical theater--virtually a choreographed concert--his [Prince's] concern with the choreographer, the musical director, the physical company and the voices is as admirable as it is uncommon.[2]

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[1]Richard Watts, Jr., "The World of Dr. Pangloss," New York Post, 13 March 1974, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 35, p. 337.

[2]Martin Gottfried, "'Candide' Moves to Broadway," Women's Wear Daily, 13 March 1974, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 35, p. 337.

Clive Barnes wrote that the show was even

> sharper, funnier, wittier and, if possible, more musically elegant than it was in Brooklyn. . . . Mr. Prince has, in the past, given Broadway innumerable gifts, but nothing so gaudy, glittering and endearing as this. It is one of those shows that take off like a rocket and never come down. . . . The cast is perfect. . . . This is a doll of a show. I loved it and loved it. I think Voltaire would have loved it too.[1]

Douglas Watt, like other critics, found fault with the book. The libretto was

> still something of a drag and even confusing at times. . . . But Prince's inventive staging, like an imaginatively prepared party with bright surprises scattered all over the place, helps compensate for the story's repetitiousness, as evidenced by all the smiling faces in the house.[2]

Alan Rich in New York magazine discussed the Bernstein score.

> The special glory of this particular Bernstein score is that it is thoroughly anti-pro. It is a gassy, giggling theater piece that has nothing whatever to do with the traditional theater or traditional theatrical consumers. That is entirely Bernstein's doing. . . . To the casual but all-knowing observer, Bernstein's score is a plagiarist's paradise, from its opening right out of Der Rosenkavalier through its "Glitter and Be Gay" (nee the "Jewel Song" from Faust) to its pure-Copeland final curtain. Bernstein, God knows, is as adept at culling musical quotations from far and near as you and I might be at saving bits of string. But that's too easy an evaluation of

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[1]Clive Barnes, "Superb 'Candide,'" New York Times, 13 March 1974, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 35, p. 338.

[2]Douglas Watt, "A New B'way 'Candide,'" New York Daily News, 12 March 1974, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 35, p. 339.

> Candide; its great glory as a piece of music is not in its pilferage but in its punning. Virtually every note is someone else's music held up to a trick mirror, with the resultant distorted image then subjected to a series of wisecracks. The bravado of the undertaking is awe-inspiring.[1]

After seventeen months, Candide still had a deficit of about $310,000 on its $450,000 investment. The production recouped about $15,000 during its 17-month run. The accounting reveals that only four of the thirteen weeks showed an operating profit. None of the other nine weeks showed losses, but only because of royalty waivers totaling $20,935. Variety felt it was the limited seating capacity (900) due to the alterations in the Broadway Theatre that caused the difficulty. Moreover, since Candide is such a difficult show to mount, its touring prospects were limited, so that it didn't have the prospect of post-New York engagements to recover its deficit.[2]

Candide closed after 741 performances. Prince said,

> It occurs to me that I loved working on Candide in Brooklyn and I hated bringing it to Broadway. . . . I must conclude from this that I am growing older, the wear and tear on the nerves is more difficult to take. Is it possible that explains why so many theatre artists seem to retire in their forties or move away from directing or writing for the theatre into a more solitary creative experience? Or, and this is just as likely, maybe I simply don't enjoy producing.[3]

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[1]Alan Rich, "Candide," New York, 21 October 1974, p. 100, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Hobe Morrison, "'Candide' Still 310G in Red; Has Recouped 15G in 17 Months," Variety, 3 September 1975, p. 95.

[3]Prince, Contradictions, p. 215.

Prince was soon busily planning his next show, Pacific Overtures, and wasn't seriously entertaining the thought of moving away from directing. Since Prince enjoys the musical theatre because of its collaborative effort, there wasn't much danger that he would soon retire to some solitary creative experience. Candide had been a critical success and Prince had liked mastering the environmental theatre form. But now, it was time to try something new.

In the fall of 1982, the New York City Opera decided to produce Candide. People questioned whether it could hold its own on an opera stage. For the new production, the Bernstein score was revised by the composer with the aid of Hershy Kay and John Mauceri. Hugh Wheeler revised the book and Prince re-staged the operatic version for the huge proscenium stage at the New York State Theatre. Donal Henahan in the New York Times (October 24, 1982) titled his review "Bernstein's Candide is Back as a Winner."[1] It proved to be a great success critically and with audiences. On October 17, 1983, a critic for the New York Times said of a performance of the opera, "Harold Prince's direction is full of fine little funny details, and its smart-alec wit has a wonderful instinct for knowing just when to draw

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[1]Donal Henahan, "Bernstein's 'Candide' Is Back as a Winner," New York Times, 24 October 1982, sec. 2, p. H17.

back."[1] After seeing a performance of the production two years after its opening at the City Opera, Donal Henahan said,

> Since the premiere, the cast have tightened their ensemble work considerably. However, the whole cast still seems to be having a grand, uninhibited romp, which gives special gusto to such hilarious moments as the ballroom scene in which silhouetted males toss their partners like the limp dummies they obviously are. The Harold Prince staging is pretty much as it was, a crafty mix of Broadway clichés and vaudeville turns that serves as a counterpoint to the work's black comedy.[2]

Candide is now a successful fixture of the New York City Opera's repertory.

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[1]Bernard Holland, "First 'Candide' of Year by City Troupe," New York Times, 17 October 1983, p. C22.

[2]Donal Henahan, "The Return of Bernstein's 'Candide,'" New York Times, 20 July 1984, p. C3.

CHAPTER XII

A LOW PERIOD AFTER PACIFIC OVERTURES

Pacific Overtures

John Weidman, while still a student at the Yale Law School, wrote an outline for a play about Commodore Perry's expedition to Japan. Having majored in East Asian history during his undergraduate days at Harvard and having done quite a bit of research, he had always felt that the subject would make good material for a play. Although Weidman had never written a play before, he had done a good deal of writing for the National Lampoon as well as other magazines. He wrote a letter about his ideas for the play to Prince.

> I had met Hal once or twice when I was a kid and when my father [Jerome Weidman, who wrote Fiorello!] was working with him around 1959-1960. . . . I sent him a letter saying that I doubt if he would remember me, but I had an idea for a play about the opening of Japan and I just wanted to get a reaction from him. I really did not expect to hear back from him but I did and very quickly, saying he thought it was an interesting idea and if I was in New York I should make an appointment and come in and talk to him. I was in New Haven which isn't far from New York and so I went in to see him. He obviously sparked to the material. There was something about Perry's expedition to Japan which turned him on. He and I talked about it a bit. We had a bunch of meetings in succession at the beginning. It was either during the first, second or third meeting that he suggested that the way to approach the material that was of interest to him was to approach it from the Japanese point of view and to make use of Japanese

> theatrical techniques in telling the story. That idea came from him at the outset.[1]

Prince remembers that Weidman's first idea was to do a realistic play in the style of The Caine Mutiny Court Martial. This isn't the kind of theatre that interests Prince and he suggested to Weidman that he rewrite the script in Kabuki style with the Americans in the story presented as traditional Kabuki villains.[2]

Prince took an option on what was as yet nothing but an idea for a play. During the following summer and fall, Weidman wrote his play, experimenting with alternative ideas as he progressed. Prince liked the first draft, but it was too long, and he asked for many rewrites. As Weidman went to work again, contracts were signed and the New York Times announced the work as Prince's next project. Prince began casting the play, expecting to open it on Broadway the following season. Weidman came to New York regularly for the auditions. They decided that all the Asian parts would be cast with Asians and that Caucasians would play the American roles. Boris Aronson was hired to do the sets.

There was a reading at this time in the basement of the Majestic Theatre with George Irving reading the part of

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[1]Interview with John Weidman, New York, 16 April 1982.

[2]Prince, Contradictions, p. 219.

Commodore Perry, which resulted in a major change of plans. Weidman explains:

> I came in from New Haven for what was going to be the last set of auditions. I went up to meet Hal and he said he wasn't sure any longer about the project. He wanted to rethink the material and think of it as a musical instead. . . . I was a little bewildered by the decision, not because I didn't think it was a good idea, but because it was a bit unexpected.[1]

Prince felt the project needed more "size." A musical would give it "size." Prince said of the original Weidman draft:

> I thought of it as terrific musical theatre material. . . . I'd had in my mind for awhile the notion of doing a play about a serious subject in every theatre style conceivable--French farce, melodrama, opera, musical comedy, vaudebille, burlesque, non-music, blank verse and so on. In other words, treating one subject in the full spectrum of theatre styles and that's what I initially wanted to do with this. Then the idea of doing it in Kabuki style really took hold. But it was a long time before I jettisoned the notion of it being done in farce, done in melodrama and so on. The final version of the play did have elements of all kinds of theatre. But the Kabuki was so strong that it dominated everything.[2]

Prince explained all this to Weidman. He was going to his home in Majorca for the summer, where he planned to read the script to Sondheim. He hoped to interest Sondheim in the project. Weidman went away half thinking that that was the end of the project--that he had come close to getting his first play produced but that it just hadn't worked out.

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[1]Weidman interview. [2]Prince interview.

Sondheim was not receptive at first to the idea of the show. However, Prince said that in a recent conversation with Sondheim, he said it was his favorite work. In my interview with Sondheim, he did say, "I love that show a lot."[1]

They returned from Majorca in the fall and the work began on adapting Weidman's play into a musical. Weidman was frightened but work with both Sondheim and Prince went smoothly. Prince said, "I thought Steve and John worked extraordinarily well together. I felt Steve was kind of inspired."[2] Weidman felt that it was very much a collaborative process, with

> Hal sort of in the driver's seat. Hal had a stronger vision than anyone else in the room of what he wanted--how he thought the piece should work. He would sit with me and Steve and talk about it. Eventually we reached a point where I went away and did the first half of the first act and everybody was happy with that. Then I went away and did the second half of the first act. Hal didn't like that at all and so I did a rewrite which he was much happier with.[3]

By the time Weidman wrote a second act they were well into the process of producing the musical. Although Sondheim had been at all the initial meetings, he waited until a substantial part of the libretto was completed before he went to work on the score. For Sondheim, the most

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[1]Sondheim interview.

[2]Prince interview.

[3]Weidman interview.

important and most difficult thing in creating a musical is for the collaborators to find a mutual tone. In the case of Pacific Overtures, there was struggle to find the exact tone. Sondheim wanted to avoid "cute Japanese," vulgarity, and straight authentic Kabuki. He said, "I'm not going for the impression that one is listening to Japanese music."[1] Finally, all the collaborators (and, as Sondheim explained, it's as much a problem for the set and costume designers) began to locate the tone they wanted for the piece. Sondheim called the show a documentary vaudeville, a show of ideas about America and the world. He said that musicals don't usually deal with ideas.[2]

Prince and Sondheim went to Japan to explore Kabuki and Noh theatre. Their Japanese hosts expected them to be bored with the productions which could last eight hours. However, both Prince and Sondheim enjoyed the shows. Prince said:

> Just that one walk across the stage which takes an hour, I found hypnotizing, and mesmerizing so we very reluctantly left each theatre and always late. . . . The only frustration was that we were never allowed to see anything in toto. We went from Tokyo to Kyoto and went to Kabuki both times and to Noh Theatre in Tokyo. We were just crazy about it. Of course what they really wanted to show us were the show girls in the top hats, tails, and sequins, you see, and all the wonderful western stuff they'd acquired, but we avoided

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[1]"Milan Stitt Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim," videotape, 1975, Writers Weekly.

[2]Ibid.

> it. . . . But once we'd seen it it influenced everything. In other words, the "Poems" song was so influenced by their theatre traditions . . . the story teller's story, with the fan, all sorts of traditions took hold. . . . the rhythm of Kabuki Theatre--the fact that there's such incredible energy all harnessed in this dignified way probably made me reconsider energy in western terms for the rest of my life because American theatre (i.e., Cats), they're all just running around just tearing up the stage and screaming and all the rest of it. And I find I get a more personal message from what the traditional Japanese theatre does with energy. All slowed down and all so concentrated and a sense of muscular control that's extraordinary.[1]

Weidman did not go to Japan. However, he did do a tremendous amount of research and reading. He saw films, immersed himself in Kabuki, receiving much help from the Japan Society in New York. Eventually, Prince asked Hugh Wheeler near the end of the preproduction period to provide additional material for the book. Patricia Birch was set to do the choreography and, along with Aronson's set designs, Florence Klotz and Tharon Musser were hired to do the costumes and lighting respectively. Jonathan Tunick again did orchestrations and Paul Gemignani became musical director after the death of Hal Hastings. Prince once again had surrounded himself with his talented collaborative team.

There were problems casting the show because there wasn't enough of a work pool in the Asian community. The simple decision to try to gather an all-Asian cast for the

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[1]Prince interview.

show turned out to be, in Prince's words, "the hardest show I've cast."[1] Joanna Merlin, who heads Prince's casting department, contacted the Asian community and theatre groups, Asian newspapers and the State Department. "She followed one dancer through Europe by mail and chased a singer on tour with Hair across country by telephone."[2]

Eventually Prince and Merlin went to California and selected some of the actors there. Prince said:

> There were probably more actors available on the West Coast than on the East Coast because there's a large Asian community and because there are movies being made and a lot of television and these guys get to play the yellow peril every week and make a living and life that way. We still were not able to find all the rest of the Asians we needed. Now, mind you, we found good actors--but we were looking for good actors who could sing and dance and that was hell. We did the best we could. We did pretty damn well, in fact. There were a number of paradoxes. We finally ran out of Asians and so there ended up a Greek boy who pretended to be one-eighth Asian, and we grabbed him. So for the length of the run of the show he was an Asian. The minute the show was over, however, he clearly was nobody's Asian.[3]

Most of the cast were Americans (American-born or naturalized Japanese). There were also Chinese, Hawaiians, Filipinos, Burmese and Koreans in the cast. Only one boy was actually from Japan. He had tried to audition for Prince and Sondheim when they were in Japan and could not

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[1]"'Overtures' Opens Doors for Orientals," New York Times, 3 March 1976, p. 24, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Prince interview.

get to them at the hotel where they were staying. So he came to America and auditioned for the chorus call (also known as the open or non-Equity call) and got one of the leads in the show. When the show closed he went back to Japan, returning to live in America after marrying. Prince said, "We probably ruined his life because there simply is not that much employment. He came from a very elegant family and he was a very elegant fellow--he played one of the three leads: the Kayama role, and his name is Isao Sato."[1] There were finally 19 actors cast to play the 61 solo roles. Had there been more actors to choose among, the director would not have doubled up as much on the roles.

Mako was born in the Orient but moved with his parents to this country a long time ago, spending most of his life in California. He had many theatre and television credits and was nominated for an Academy Award as best supporting actor in The Sand Pebbles. A third of the cast, however, were not experienced actors. Alvin Ing, an actor in Pacific Overtures who played a merchant, an American admiral and a delicately homicidal royal mother, and was also the president of Theater for Asian-American Performing Artists, Inc., said:

> The Harold Prince office made a concerted effort to audition any Asian actors who wanted to audition, which is very fortunate for us. . . . It's so heartbreaking that they cast non-Asians in

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[1]Ibid.

> Asian roles . . . so when we have that kind of sincere effort I feel we should commend the producer, for it's been so seldom done.[1]

Prince recalled that the cast was totally American right down to their Adidas and blue jeans. He said:

> Teaching them an Americanized paraphrase of Asian traditions . . . we never pretended to do Kabuki . . . I couldn't possibly be offensive to suggest it--people study it all their lives. But it filtered through my head and Steve's and John's and it then made its way to the stage. Well, even as much as we knew and felt passionately about it, most of our Asian actors were so American that they had no interest in it at all. I think there was even a kind of obduracy, a kind of resistance to having this guy take them back to antecedents that they had buried a long time ago which obviously World War II had even encouraged removal. Well, they started to do "exercises." They started to "concentrate" in traditional ways. You'd come in backstage at one-half hour before the show, and the stage was thirty or forty islands, each man concentrating in his own way, getting into the mood of the evening. You could never disturb it. You could never go near them or give them notes at that time. You'd see them earlier or leave them alone, because they were doing their exercises in a traditional sense. They re-examined what it was to be Japanese on their own and among elder members of the company (those who had been more traditionally oriented). They examined it because of the nature of the text. They developed a kind of pride in what the show was about and in their own heritage which they had not brought with them into the show. And by the time the show closed in California a year later, they had developed respect for their own traditions which they had not brought with them when we hired them. So that was real nice, real nice.[2]

There were some authentic Kabuki techniques utilized in Pacific Overtures. Easily recognizable upon entering

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[1]"'Overtures' Opens Doors for Orientals," New York Times.

[2]Prince interview.

the theatre was the long polished wood ramp or runway called the hanamichi, which allowed performers to make entrances and exits through the house. Actors glided back and forth across the stage--representing journeys. The brightly colored Kabuki-style stage curtain (hikimaku) replaced the customary Broadway brocade. The musical begins with the sharp percussive sounds from the trio of musicians onstage (degatari). The exaggerated wigs and the make-up--white foundation and penciled eyebrows and lips--project characters from heroic samurai to villainous lion. Female roles were played by males in keeping with Kabuki tradition, excepting the final scene, which depicts contemporary life. Still another Kabuki convention were the black-clad stagehands. Black symbolizes non-existence; the stagehands, therefore, are invisible to a Japanese audience. The trio of onstage musicians use wood clappers and other percussive sound effects to underline the action. Finally, the use of a reciter in kneeling position with prompt book resting on a stand (tayu) follows Kabuki tradition.

According to the program notes in the Playbill for Pacific Overtures, the show, with some dramatic license, depicts historic incidents and characters accurately. The United States did dispatch Commodore Perry to Japan in 1853 to reopen commerce with that isolated country. The first act deals primarily with the old Japanese Empire, isolated and frightened by Perry's attempt at "pacific overtures."

The title is a political euphemism coined by Perry in 1853. His diary recounts the historic display of American naval power that President Fillmore sends to forcibly persuade Japan to commence trade relations after 250 years of complete isolation. The threatening presence of four American warships gives Japan a shock which quickly propels this feudal kingdom into the twentieth century. The transformation is what Pacific Overtures is all about.

The production opens by introducing the audience to the quality of life in Japan in 1853. The Reciter (Mako) sits on one side of the stage and acts as a narrator. He comments throughout the show as well as presiding and taking part in it. He explains how Japan has successfully managed to isolate itself and maintain a safe and serene existence. A scene at court introduces us to the Shogun who rules Japan. His councillors have gathered to deal with a Japanese prisoner brought down the hanamichi in a cage. He is a poor fisherman, Manjiro (Sab Shimono), who had been shipwrecked at age 14, rescued by an American ship and taken to America where he was educated. Now he has returned to warn his countrymen of the coming Perry expedition and the four American warships.

The Shogun's chief councillor, Lord Abe (Yuki Shimoda), suggests a plan to avoid the foreigners' arrival. A samurai of little consequence named Kayama (Isao Soto) is promoted to the office of Prefect of Police and is given

the duty of meeting the intruders in a small skiff and sending them away from the harbor. He is to inform them of Japan's sacred decree that no foreigner may set foot on their country's holy soil.

Kayama informs his wife Tamate (Soon-Teck Oh) of his position in the matter. In their duet, "There Is No Other Way," Tamate expresses herself in silent mime-like movements while two observers appear onstage. One sings about her, while the second sings her words and thoughts.

As panic spreads throughout the country, Perry's massive ship, a menacing man-of-war with American officers and crew, comes into view. The Americans are unimpressed with the appearance of Kayama and tell him that they expect a high and politically important person to greet them and to accept their trade agreement. The Shogun's councillors, learning of the problem, dress Manjiro, the fisherman, in regal garb, hoping that his experience with Americans will make him equal to the task.

Kayama and Manjiro go back out to Perry's ship. Perry plans to send a landing party ashore in six days to formally present the treaty. If the Shogun doesn't co-operate, he will destroy their village of Uraga.

The scene then shifts to the Shogun's bedroom. In the song "Chrysanthemum Tea" the Shogun's mother tries to galvanize her son into action to face the American intruders. She decides having no Shogun at all would be better

than having an ineffectual one. She consequently "relieves him of his duties permanently through a small addition to his tea."[1]

Kayama and Manjiro devise a plan for a special treaty house at Kanagawa in which to receive the Americans, since they cannot compete with American artillery. On the way back to Kayama's home, the two men exchange thoughts in the song "Poems." Arriving home, Kayama discovers his wife Tamate has committed suicide.

On the appointed day, the Japanese welcome the American landing party. The Reciter informs the audience that there is no Japanese record of what transpired at that meeting. However, an old man (James Dybas) says he was there as a child and had spied on the meeting from his hiding place in a tree. The song "Someone In a Tree" tells what occurred on that eventful day.

The end of Act I takes the form of a traditional Kabuki "Lion Dance," the lion in this case embodying evil in the character of Commodore Perry (Haruki Fujimoto).

Act II spans the period 1854 to the present. The Emperor (in the form of a puppet) acknowledges Lord Abe, Kayama and Manjiro as the saviors of Japan. They reward the fisherman Manjiro for his good work by elevating him to the rank of samurai.

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[1]Pacific Overtures, record liner notes, by William Evans, RCA Red Seal ARL 1-1367.

Suddenly and to the accompaniment of the song "Please Hello," an American admiral parades down the hana-michi. Emissaries of many countries sing further demands. "The inevitable Westernization of Japan is well under way."[1] Things change quickly as foreign merchants and businessmen come to Japan and set up factories. Kayama and Manjiro opt for different life styles, Kayama growing more Western and affluent and Manjiro remaining the traditional samurai. They sing "A Bowler Hat" to explain their different viewpoints.

"Pretty Lady" shows how the presence of alien cultures disrupts the Japanese. A lovely girl picking flowers is approached and asked to sell her favors to a group of British sailors, who think she is a geisha girl. Her father is angered and kills one of the sailors.

In a battle with a group of traditional samurai trying to save Japan by expelling the barbarian influences, Kayama is shocked to find that it is Manjiro who is attacking him. Kayama is killed in the fight.

The Emperor eventually discards his sacred robes, donning a Western-style military uniform. He proclaims "in the name of progress, the Japanese people must renounce their ancient ways and devote themselves to arriving at the day 'when the Western powers will acknowledge us as their undisputed equals.'"[2]

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

The final scene of the show jumps to 1976 and the entire company in modern dress performs "Next" against a backdrop of neon and ads that might pass for Times Square. They sing and dance in a frenetic manner in a celebration of Japan's progress. The Reciter closes the show with his comment, "There was a time when foreigners were not welcome here. But that was long ago. A hundred and twenty years. Welcome to Japan."[1]

Boris Aronson, who was a gifted painter as well as designer, collected Japanese prints and toys. This passion for Eastern prints benefitted him in his work on Pacific Overtures. He designed the scenery, which was based on prints by Sharaku. "Designing the movable screen, the stylized trees, the brush-stroke clouds," Aronson said, "was a coming together of all my personal interests."[2] The designer also collected Japanese kites (a large black kite is used on the opening curtain) and studied the way Japanese wrap things. Bamboo structures, for example, are held together by rattan or reeds. Aronson also studied Japanese fans and prints of Perry's warships. Aronson said:

> The Japanese artist has a peculiar way of seeing things. For instance, the white backdrops in Pacific Overtures are the way in which the Japanese depict clouds. Since this is a play about issues and not about people and moods, Hal and I

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Robert Wahls, "Cheers for the Designer!", New York Sunday News, 25 January 1976, NYPL Clipping Folder.

> decided on white lighting. The white shows everything on stage. It has a crispness, a simplicity, a directness about it.[1]

The whiteness of the set presented Prince with a major problem, however. Lights bounded off the very light, wooden traditional floor on the stage. He could never obtain a real blackout or a dark enough stage. "Generally," said Prince, "the shows I do are in a black box. This was in a whitish box. The minute it's in a white box it's impossible to get a decent blackout. And that frustrated the hell out of me."[2]

The musical trod a precarious line between Kabuki (or at least a Westernized version of Kabuki) and a full-blown Broadway musical. Sets remained traditionally Japanese--even the arrival of the Americans is seen through the eyes of the Japanese. Onto the stage came wagons bearing a small cutaway house or the Shogun's ceremonial dais, or the puppet Emperor's throne room. Curtains and screens produced the predominant design elements. The proscenium often appeared framed by an outline of Shoji screen panels which cut horizontally across the top of the arch. One curtain showed a water and wave pattern, another contained butterflies and chrysanthemums and a third was painted in colorful abstract kimono shapes and patterns. The moving

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[1]T. E. Kalem, "The Theatre," Time, 26 January 1976, p. 46.

[2]Prince interview.

screens were used to change scenes and were carried by the black-clad stagehands.

Although Aronson achieved the rice paper "look" in his sets, he was prohibited from using real rice paper because of New York City fire laws. He did, however, find a viable substitute. The keynote of his design was "space." A large playing area was usually made available to the actors, and screens were carried delicately on and offstage by company members during songs. Aronson never allowed the stage to become cluttered. The house was on platforms and elevated slightly above the general playing area, providing a multi-level set of visual interest, a Kabuki technique.

Aronson had devoted well over a year of thought and research to the development and execution of the design. He worked closely with Prince and was complimentary of the constant experimenting and looking for new concepts. He said, "Hal knows how to challenge me. He also challenges himself with each production."[1]

The show was enhanced by Florence Klotz's 140 opulent and colorful costumes for ceremonial and everyday use. Klotz said, "It's the most complicated and challenging production with which I've been involved."[2] The costume

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[1]"Pacific Overtures," Theatre Crafts, January-February 1976, p. 58, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]"Japan via Florence," Women's Wear Daily, 9 January 1976, p. 15, NYPL Clipping Folder.

designer made a trip to Japan to observe as much Kabuki and Noh as possible. She was inspired by the way the ordinary Japanese on the street combined colors which she ordinarily would not have thought would go together--especially the area of gray tones. She used this grayed-down effect throughout the show. For fast changes, the elaborate Japanese traditional robes had Velcro closings and lots of reversible fabrics.

Sondheim finally found the musical style he wanted for Pacific Overtures. He wanted a style of both lyrics and music that didn't violate the spirit of Japanese theatre and at the same time was not pretentious or coy. He believed that is what ritualized theatre tends to promulgate. He spent a month researching Japanese music, discovering that the Japanese pentatonic scale had a minor modal feeling and reminded him of the composer De Falla, whose work he likes very much. He began to imitate De Falla's music, taking the pentatonic scale and bunching the chords together until they resembled the Spanish guitar sound. He was then able to relate to it. It had a Western feeling and at the same time a feeling of the East. Having seldom written in minor keys, he was quite excited to try.

Finding the lyric style was less difficult than Sondheim thought it would be. He described it thus:

> . . . a kind of translator-ese, parable sentences, very simple language with very simple subject-predicate structures, and very little in the way

> of rhyme. The only heavily rhymed song in the show is the admiral's song, which is all about foreign powers. . . . The show starts in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Americans came in, and then it's about the Americanization of Japan. I decided that as the score went on it would get a little closer to Broadway, until finally it would become an industrial show. We were very heavily criticized for this. In fact Variety which didn't like it, said, "The last number looks like nothing so much as an industrial show." I took it as a high compliment.[1]

Since Japanese music doesn't have any chords, Sondheim had to invent a way to make a "Japanese" chord which would retain the Eastern sound. The composer also blended Japanese haiku into his lyrics, which was "a lot of fun for the puzzle-nut and amateur mathematician who communicates with equal facility in the three principal languages, words, music, and numbers."[2]

Patricia Birch spent her hours preparing for the musical by looking at film, working with Kabuki people and Haruki Fujimoto, her Kabuki assistant on the show, and learning to use her fan. She spent hours learning symbolic hand language, learning folk dances and rhythm technique. She also realized that her early training with Martha Graham had taught her much of the basics of Japanese dance movement. It was Prince's idea to have the Lion Dance at

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[1]Sondheim, "The Musical Theatre: A Talk by Stephen Sondheim," p. 9.

[2]R. S., "Pacific Overtures," Cue magazine, 10 January 1976, p. 15, NYPL Clipping Folder.

the end of Act I and Birch at first felt it was a rough assignment. However, her Japanese assistant helped her. She created the image for the number, which was General MacArthur's slogan, "I will return." Birch said:

> I stuck everything in there from cakewalks, etc. It was half Americanized and half Lion Dance and half bravura and half cocky American, you know. I took the vernacular of the Japanese dance and turned it in my own direction. In that case Prince was continually supportive. He loved where I was going. And the thing Hal always does with me is stop me from ripping up everything I do. I'll get something to a point where it's really working and then at that stage, I rework maybe a little too much . . . And he was wonderful about that--telling me to go home, or stop, quit, stop![1]

Prince remembers that he had great "fun directing the show. . . . I don't remember being troubled by anything much. All of it was joyful. And then it opened in Boston (11-11-75) and almost none of it worked. It was a unique experience. Everything was off by a jot. Two percent off here, off for clarity, off, off, off. But none of it totally. And none of it so that it was dangerous. Nevertheless, we woke up the day after the opening of the show, which we were very proud of, and read a fistful of terrible reviews."[2] Weidman remembered that Kevin Kelly disliked the show intensely. He said it was too long and needed a great deal of work. In fact, he hated it.[3] Prince

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[1]Birch interview.

[2]Prince interview.

[3]Weidman interview.

continued,

> It played to empty houses, decreasing houses in size. And we fixed everything piece by piece by piece. It was an act of professionalism. We never lost the inspiration we had. But each thing was fixed in some detail and then pulled together, so that by the time that we got to New York, it was the same blamed show we always thought we had, but this time it worked.[1]

Basically what was done during the seven-week tryout period in Boston and Washington, D.C. was a good deal of cutting and editing. Hugh Wheeler wrote one big scene, a replacement for the scene in which the Japanese first meet the American ship. Weidman and Wheeler wrote a few short speeches which were added for the Reciter. The Reciter's speech from Perry's journal replaced a long scene which was thrown out. Weidman recalls that that was Ruth Mitchell's idea.[2] There were also numbers which had to be rechoreographed. The number with the Japanese Madame was restaged several times and "Someone in a Tree" was shortened. The opening number was rewritten and restaged. A good deal of work had to be done.[3]

They next took the show to Washington, where it opened on December 4, 1974 and was very well received. A series of thirteen previews began in New York on December 12 until December 31. Prince related what happened during the early preview performances:

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Weidman interview. [3]Ibid.

> What happened to us was (for whatever reasons, I still don't know why) on the first or second preview of the show in New York, a mouse, believe it or not, dislodged plaster over the standing room section of the theatre in a light fixture (a chandelier). You heard the mouse, but you didn't know what it was. Suddenly you heard rumbling and it was really just a mouse or a rat and then plaster started to tumble down on the people who were standing in the back, very little bits of plaster, but enough to suggest that something was going to happen. And somebody screamed BOMB. And the audience emptied the theatre. At another performance somebody actually phoned in a bomb threat. So, in fact, I think, either two performances in a row or alternately with one decent one we had bomb threats and audiences streaming out of the theatre and it was very nervous making . . . But the show itself was in shape by New York.[1]

Pacific Overtures opened on Broadway at the Winter Garden Theatre on January 11, 1976 to mixed notices. The critics who were negative about the show cited narrative structure and balance and the jolting effect of the finale. They claimed that the play was more of a lecture than entertainment. Those who raved about the show cited it as a significant achievement in the evolution of the Broadway musical and a thought-provoking production for the serious theatregoer. Michael Feingold in the Village Voice said, "The result is far from being a fully consistent, fully satisfactory musical theatre piece--but I would hate to have missed it."[2]

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Michael Feingold, "It's Some Musical But Noh Play," Village Voice, 26 January 1976, NYPL Clipping Folder.

Douglas Watt didn't like the show at all. He called it a "mish-mash" and "a sluggish musical."[1] He went on to say that the musical was "as thin and insubstantial as the painted screen used for scenery. Indeed, the frills are everything in a prevailingly dull, semi-documentary entertainment about the corrupting influence of Western civilization on Asian culture."[2]

Walter Kerr raised questions about the lack of excitement and the plausibility of doing the story from the point of view of the Japanese.

> No amount of performing, or incidental charm, can salvage Pacific Overtures. The occasion is essentially dull and immobile because we are never properly placed in it, drawn neither East nor West, given no specific emotional or cultural bearings. The evening is a Japanese artifact with a stamp on the back of it that says "Made in America." And perhaps turnabout is fair play. But it does raise a basic question, for us if not for the Japanese. Why tell their story their way, when they'd do it better?[3]

Hobe Morrison in Variety felt that the finale, which attempts to show modernized Japan, looks like an annual Milliken industrial show.[4] Weidman said that this number had been tried a number of ways. Because it was like an

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[1]Douglas Watt, "'Pacific Overtures' Is a Pretty Bore," New York Daily News, 12 January 1976, p. 43.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Walter Kerr, "'Pacific Overtures' Is Neither East Nor West," New York Times, 18 January 1976, sec. 2, p. 2.

[4]Hobe Morrison, "Pacific Overtures," Variety, 14 January 1976, p. 84.

epilogue it was possible to change it and not have it affect what preceded it. It was not an accident, however, that it seemed like an industrial show or something out of Grease. He said, "It really was our intention. . . . We did want to show the elegance of this culture which we had all tried to indicate all evening and turned into something very different. And if it felt like it had turned into a number from Grease, Amen! That's OK."[1]

Prince agreed that the end of the show was a problem. It had not been written in time and by the time it was set, the show had already been designed. Prince said:

> Aronson and I either didn't have the money (I expect we didn't) and Aronson didn't have a way to reduce the evening, to destroy the traditional Kabuki environment and replace it with the Ginza, with neon and Trans-Luxes and orange juice stands and electronic pollution. For the last number to have really worked we should have been able to lose the evening the way we had for example when we did Follies. When we went to the last sequence in Follies and did the Follies we lost the whole set environment we worked on. But we knew we were going to do that, so Boris was able to design the total production with that in mind. He was not able to design the total production of Pacific Overtures with the last number in mind because we didn't have the last number until it was too late. The last number doesn't work. It's too angry and it's too bare--it's too spare. The last number of that show should have been its own version of "warm"--you know, "midnight on the Ginza," full of rock and stuff. But we couldn't do it and I think the show was hurt by that.[2]

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[1]Weidman interview.

[2]Prince interview.

Positive reviews cited the show for its beauty, and the creators for attempting such a serious and ambitious production. Clive Barnes in the New York Times said:

> There are generic and stylistic discrepancies in the musical that are not easily overlooked--but the attempt is so bold and the achievement so fascinating, that its obvious faults demand to be overlooked. It tries to soar--sometimes it only floats, sometimes it actually sinks--but it tries to soar. And the music and lyrics are as pretty and as well-formed as a bonsai tree. Pacific Overtures is very, very different.[1]

Alan Rich in New York magazine was unhappy with the final scene as well as the second act. However, he felt the musical was outstanding. He said, "So much is stunning in this show, however, in its exercise of imagination and sheer theatrical courage, that a dwelling on such minor matters becomes sheer churlishness."[2]

Edwin Wilson in the Wall Street Journal felt that "some sections of Pacific Overtures are hauntingly beautiful, both visually and vocally,"[3] and George Oppenheimer in Newsday said:

> I am afraid that Pacific Overtures will not be everyone's cup of saki. I can only feel sad that some who do not like it have failed to share my almost unabated pleasure. I would, however,

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[1]Clive Barnes, "'Pacific Overtures,' Musical About Japan," New York Times, 30 January 1976, p. 39.

[2]Alan Rich, "How the East Was Won," New York, 26 January 1976, p. 54.

[3]Edwin Wilson, "An American Attempt at Kabuki Style," Wall Street Journal, 13 January 1976, NYPL Clipping Folder.

> urge anyone with an eye for beauty, an ear for music and a bent toward the unusual to attend this enchanting show.[1]

Martin Gottfried agreed that the show was physically gorgeous and said,

> At its core is an amazing parallel between Boris Aronson's gorgeous settings and Prince's staging. . . . Prince presented an exquisite, enchanting, touching, intelligent and altogether remarkable work of theater art. Prince is not merely the most important man in the modern American musical theater. He is a man who refuses to repeat himself. He will move, almost contrarily, from the chilly brilliance of Company to the bitter grandeur of Follies. If there is anything that can be expected of him, it is the unexpected.[2]

Howard Kissel called the show "the most original, the most profound, the most theatrically ambitious of the Prince-Sondheim collaborations. It is also, for this viewer, the production in which the team that sets Broadway's highest standards most fully meets the astonishing objectives they set themselves."[3]

Pacific Overtures was a commercial failure. It ran six months in New York, closing on June 27, 1976 after 193 performances, and lost a great deal of money (its $650,000 investment). Prince, who does not invest in his own shows as a rule did so with Pacific Overtures when it ran out of

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[1]George Oppenheimer, "Pacific Overtures," Newsday, 18 January 1976, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Martin Gottfried, "'Overtures'--A Remarkable Work of Theater Art," New York Post, 12 January 1976, p. 18.

[3]Howard Kissel, "Pacific Overtures," Women's Wear Daily, 12 January 1976, p. 28.

capital. When it failed Prince felt that he would not produce again for a while because he would now have to look for investors and this is something he does not enjoy. Prince felt that a basic problem with the production was that it was too much to ask of an audience. Prince explained, "The show was a case of a lot of elements which were too exotic for the audience to assimilate. The style was very unfamiliar and this is a bit to ask of an audience. But this didn't occur to me until we closed. We ran six months here and six months in California where there is an Asian population. . . . But it was all worth it."[1]

Prince, thinking about the project eight years later, felt that the story teller's sequence was too long and that some of his pauses were too long. Although the director thought he demanded too much of an audience who hadn't been exposed to Asian theatre, he loved the show and felt it mostly worked "just swell."[2] "And certain things were extraordinary, like 'The Bowler Hat' number and 'Someone in a Tree.' It was full of good stuff."[3]

Weidman, also looking back on the show, said that he was very satisfied with the final production.

> I think we tried to do something unique and it was that if nothing else and that we succeeded to a

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[1]Prince interview, The Dick Cavett Show, videotape.

[2]Prince interview.

[3]Ibid.

> very satisfying extent. . . . It seemed to me that if there was any problem at the center of the show it was that we had not been totally successful in integrating two different approaches to the story-telling process of the show. One was the story of two particular Japanese men and what happened to them as a result of the arrival of the Americans. Around that, surrounding that and intertwined with that was a great deal of material which was not extraneous to that story, because it all dealt with the process which was affecting these two men but which was not certainly related to the story of these two guys in any plot sense. I was satisfied with the balance that we struck between those two elements but I have sometimes asked myself if a decision to tip more in one direction or the other might not have made the show accessible to more people.[1]

RCA Victor put out the original cast album soon after the show opened. A videotape was made of a performance from the stage of the Winter Garden Theatre for presentation in Japan. It was the first telecast of an American stage musical in that country.

Although the musical was not a commercial success, it was considered by many to be an artistic one. It was awarded two Tonys for scenic design and costume and named best musical of the 1975-76 season by the New York Drama Critics' Circle. In 1982, Prince attempted to do the show at the Mermaid Theatre in London, steamlining everything. However, he was unable to get it financed and the project was dropped. In the fall of 1984, a small Off-Broadway production of Pacific Overtures was being readied for performance although Prince was not involved with this project.

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[1]Weidman interview.

Gottfried summed up Prince's role in the creation of Pacific Overtures.

> The writing of its book marked the most advanced use of libretto the Broadway musical had yet achieved. There had never been so theatrically conceived a musical script. It may seem unfair to credit it to Prince rather than Wheeler or Weidman, as it may seem unfair to credit him with the books of Cabaret and Company, but even if Prince never wrote a word in shaping and dominating these scripts he was most responsible for them. Inherent in the scripts of Prince's shows are their movement and their textual content, their entire mode of presentation.[1]

Side by Side by Sondheim

Prince, having carried the responsibility of director/producer or simply director during the past few years, returned to the role of producer for his next project, the American production of Side by Side by Sondheim.

The genesis of the original London production began when David Kernan, who played Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm in the London production of A Little Night Music, decided to produce a Sunday concert of Sondheim songs. He enlisted Ned Sherrin, who had once produced the BBC television show That Was the Week that Was, and asked him to put the piece together. There had been in London, for a few years prior to Kernan's idea, a kind of small hybrid musical revue built around a theatrical composer with lots of song and a little patter. The shows were created at the Mermaid Theatre and then moved to larger West End theatres. The

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[1]Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 32.

series began in 1972 with a Noel Coward show (Cowardy Custard), and continued in 1974 with a Cole Porter evening.

Kernan and Sherrin were then joined by Millicent Martin (who was well known to English audiences for her starring roles in musicals and for the impact she had as a regular on the aforementioned That Was the Week that Was) and Julia McKenzie (who had appeared in the London production of Company).

The concert led to a production at the 200-seat Mermaid Theatre at a cost of 6,000 pounds or about $10,000. Opening on May 4, 1976, the show quickly became one of the most popular entertainments in London and was narrowly beaten by A Chorus Line in a critics' poll for best musical. About two months after the opening, the show moved to the 400-seat Wyndham Theatre, where it again became a sell-out.

The voices in the show were all different. Martin has a strong "legit" voice and McKenzie has a trained "opera" voice. Kernan is a light baritone. Sherrin played the commentator, explaining what was going on. He also directed the project. Two pianists accompanied the three singers and the musical director was Ray Cook.

Although a few of the Prince-Sondheim musicals had played in London, there were several that had not and Sondheim was not a familiar name there. Apart from his popular "Send in the Clowns," he had not had any standard

song hits. Clive Barnes explains why: "The reason for this is possibly that his music is more sophisticated than the run of theater music, but also perhaps that the songs themselves tend to be dramatically complex. They tell stories. They are, as I suggested earlier, a 20th-century version of lieder."[1]

The composer/lyricist stepped in at one point to help in the preparation of the show. He advised Martin "not to do 'Clowns' as a 'great big number.' Her rendition is quiet and soft. She saves her adrenalin for 'I'm Still Here' from Follies."[2]

Although the response was almost all favorable in London for the cabaret-styled musical, Benedict Nightingale, writing in the New Statesman, felt that Sondheim is a far better lyricist than composer, which is a complaint that has been lodged about Sondheim's work from time to time. Nightingale said, "I like to think of the musical as a popular genre; Sondheim's dry-bones music and dry-ice lyrics would appear to be designed for, and best appreciated by, a conclave of cognescenti resident somewhere between East 80th and Grand Central Station."[3]

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[1]Clive Barnes, "'Side by Side by Sondheim' Is a Dream," New York Times, 19 April 1977, NYPL Critic's Reviews, vol. 38, p. 269.

[2]Mel Gussow, "How 'Side by Side' Came to this Side," New York Times, 7 May 1977, p. 36.

[3]Benedict Nightingale, "Moony Tunes," New Statesman, 14 May 1976, p. 657.

Prince, who had not produced the show in London, decided to bring (his first musical import) Side by Side to Broadway. "The only reason why I did that was it was a natural. It was our material . . . that we worked on together . . . so it seemed I should have something to do with it," said Prince.[1] He capitalized it at $250,000 and presented it by arrangement with the Incomes Company, which is the name the original group of creator/performers gave themselves. The name is taken from a line in the title song of Company ("Phone rings, door chimes, in comes company!"). The Incomes Company shared in the profits and an item in the New York Post said it was "very rare in theatre that performers share in profits."[2]

Prince had to get special permission from Equity so that the original London cast of four could appear in the show in New York. A protest from the Actors Equity membership ensued over the scheduled appearance of four English performers. They felt that the English performers were not unique talents or personalities and that all the songs were American. The material might be performed as well or better by American actor-singers. However, the Alien Committee okayed a waiver of the union's rules. Their decision

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]"Side by Side by Sondheim," New York Post, 23 April 1977, p. 17. NYPL Clipping Folder.

was based on the fact that the show was conceived and arranged by the performers themselves.[1]

The show opened in New York at the Music Box Theatre on April 18, 1977 after five previews which began on April 13. In addition to the original cast and Cook, who continued in his role as musical director, the musical staging was done by Bob Howe and the costumes and lighting were designed by Florence Klotz and Ken Billington respectively. Peter Dockerty designed the sets with Jay Moore acting as the scenery supervisor and Paul Gemignami was musical supervisor. The pianists were Daniel Troob and Albin Konopka.

There were 29 songs presented in the show, plus a medley of perhaps a dozen more including numbers dropped from shows out of town. The stage was bare except for two pianos and stools for the singers, who "go at their work with a sense of love and style that positively glows," said Alan Rich in New York.[2] At the end of the show, vertical rows of lightbulbs were used in a spectacular light show. Sherrin, an articulate, Oxford educated lawyer, used topical jokes that seemed to be plucked from the news of the day as he introduced the various Sondheim songs and

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[1]"Brit Cast in 'Sondheim' Revue Hears Alien Squawk from Equity," Variety, 2 March 1977, p. 71.

[2]Alan Rich, "Side by Side," New York, 13 September 1976, p. 62, NYPL Clipping Folder.

narrated the production. Sherrin said, "What I try to do is read the newspapers daily and add something different every night."[1] Martin Gottfried, a great Prince and Sondheim fan, was unhappy about the show. He found it difficult to understand the use of an English cast for the American composer. He additionally was unhappy with Sherrin's role as narrator. He felt that the stories were trivial, familiar and obsequious. Gottfried felt that Sherrin's "supercilious manner and campy attitude turn the whole performance slantwise."[2] Gottfried went on to say in a follow-up story that "Sherrin, who also directed the production, is so sycophantic toward Sondheim that he appears to be the glib priest for a cult and I hate to see Sondheim or the musical theater subverted that way."[3]

The show was billed as "a musical entertainment" and received generally favorable reviews from the New York critics. Douglas Watt said that Sondheim's "cleverness, skill and daring have never been accorded the warmth of expression given them by these smiling strangers [the opening night audience]."[4] T. E. Kalem in Time magazine said,

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[1]"Side by Side," New York Times, 19 May 1977, p. C2, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Martin Gottfried, "Foggy Sondheim by British Cast," New York Post, 19 April 1977, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 38, p. 269.

[3]Martin Gottfried, "Broadway Starts Singing Again," New York Post, 19 April 1977, p. 32.

[4]Douglas Watt, "The Best of Sondheim," New York Daily News, 19 April 1977, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 38, p. 271.

"The entire evening swings and swings and swings,"[1] and Clive Barnes raved that "this show is happy, funny, witty and so compassionate. It makes you feel good. Turn cartwheels to the box office for this British celebration of a rare American."[2]

Edwin Wilson in the Wall Street Journal felt that Side by Side had established the right format for a showcase of Sondheim's work. He said, "They have the right sensibility and have found just the right key to presenting his material."[3] Wilson also liked the grouping of songs to point up themes which run through Sondheim's work, such as "an ironic, questioning view of marriage, a fondness for reworking older musical forms, etc."[4]

RCA records produced the cast album and, after many months, on November 11, 1977 a new and American cast replaced the English performers. Hermione Gingold played the narrator and Nancy Dussault, Larry Kert and Georgia Brown sang the Sondheim songs. On February 22, 1978, Side by moved to the Morosco Theatre. The show had a Broadway

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[1]T. E. Kalem, "String of Pearls," Time, 2 May 1977, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 38, p. 271.

[2]Barnes, "'Side by Side by Sondheim' Is a Dream."

[3]Edwin Wilson, "A Workable Trio on Broadway," Wall Street Journal, 19 April 1977, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 38, p. 272.

[4]Ibid.

run of 384 performances. Prince said, "It turned out to pay off--but not make any money for anybody to speak of."[1]

Some of My Best Friends

Prince's next project was a new comedy, Some of My Best Friends by Stanley Hart, who had written The Mad Show with co-author Larry Siegel, a show which had run for two years Off-Broadway in 1966 and 1967. A native New Yorker and graduate of City College, Hart had also written a play called Click, which had been performed at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, and the movie Move, which starred Elliott Gould. Hart had also written for Mad Magazine for sixteen years. The producers of Some of My Best Friends were Arthur Whitelaw, Jack Schlissel and Leonard Soloway, who had never worked together on a production prior to this show. Whitelaw had produced, among other things, You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown and Butterflies Are Free. Schlissel had produced Israel Horovitz' The Primary English Class the previous season and Soloway was currently producing The Shadow Box. The new comedy was sent to Prince and he was asked if he would like to direct. He agreed, finding the play "ingenious and hilarious."[2]

The author of the play said it is "about a man who turns away from the everyday world and creates his own

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Ibid.

environment where he can be happy and fulfilled. . . . Then, when the man is threatened he is forced to come up with another more realistic solution."[1]

After agreeing to direct the comedy, Prince worked on rewriting with Hart. He said, "It was fun to do, to work up to rehearsal."[2] The plot of the whimsical fantasy is "an allegory of sorts about happiness, freedom and responsibility,"[3] and tells the story of Andrew Mumford, a former business executive who had several years prior to the time of the play suffered a nervous breakdown and been committed to shock therapy at a sanitarium by his estranged and mercenary wife and his son. Mumford has since frittered away the bulk of his fortune and corporate empire and put all the customary voices around him, including his wife's, out of his consciousness. The implication is that Andrew may have driven his wife and son to their actions, in his former existence as a brilliant, hard bitten and driven industrialist. Now, he is mellowed and converses only with all manner of living creatures--including an Afghan hound, a tree and a baby. He lives with these

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[1]"Broadway," New York Times, 3 June 1977, p. C2, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Prince interview.

[3]Richard Eder, "'Best Friends' Has Talking Oddities," New York Times, 26 October 1977, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 38, p. 161.

unlikely friends in a garret where he enjoys painting. Albert the Afghan is presented as a snob. A talking tree named Irving Buxbaum is delivered. It is a wise and sententious tree that in a previous life was a fish. "Metternich and Millard Fillmore, Sari, a girl drifter, arrives to take up employment as a dog-walker, and she brings her baby who also has things to say."[1] Mumford's wife Dorothy arrives, as does his unpleasant son, Lawrence. They all interact for a while. Dorothy pleads for help. It seems that Lawrence has fouled up a government contract and now faces financial disaster and lawsuits. Luckily, according to Lawrence, their beneficent creditor has agreed to wave re-payment of a large loan for the majority shares in the company and Dorothy's hand in a loveless marriage. It is only a matter of time before Mumford realizes his obligation to right all these wrongs and return to his family. Mumford is now ready to rejoin the world and leaves his dog, his tree, and his apartment to Sari and her baby. Jonathan Takiff in the Philadelphia Daily News said, "Subtle, this play is not."[2]

Rehearsals were scheduled for September 12, 1977, with an out-of-town tryout planned for the first two weeks of October in Philadelphia. A week of previews in New York

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Jonathan Takiff, "'Best Friends' Needs Help," Philadelphia Daily News, 12 October 1977, p. 28.

were to begin on October 18 and the Broadway premiere was set for the week of October 24. Prince had no problems casting the comedy. He hired Ted Knight for the leading role of Andrew Mumford. Prince feels Knight's performance in the play was "wonderful."[1] Knight had played the egomaniacal news anchorman on the Mary Tyler Moore Show on television for seven years and was now anxious to become successful on Broadway. He said:

> You could say Broadway is a tonic. I know I'm gambling. But playing Ted Baxter finally bored me. I was the pompous ass, the butt of all jokes. And I couldn't betray the character by making jokes about the others. I'm a man as well as an actor. That image was rough on my ego, on my emotions. . . . Broadway is still the bastion of real prestige for an actor. The Big Apple really counts.[2]

Others in the cast included Alice Drummond as Dorothy and Bob Balaban as Lawrence. Trish Hawkins played Sari and Gavin Reed played Albert. The tree named Irving Buxbaum was played by Lee Wallace.

Prince discussed the rehearsal period and the aftermath.

> I found the rehearsal period more fun than anything. I just went into rehearsal every day and had to laugh myself silly. I came home at night and said I never had so much fun. I started casting the touring company productions. I was so sure it would be the biggest and most popular

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Robert Wahls, "Footlights," New York Sunday News, 25 September 1977, p. L9.

> success . . . I showed it to people in a rehearsal hall (we worked at the Minskoff). I'd go home at the end of a workday with Ruth Mitchell, who is my assistant, and say, "This is the surest thing, isn't it? I mean we're not crazy are we? This is just hilarious." . . . And then we put it in front of an audience in a theatre and it didn't work for one minute. . . . Stanley Hart and we were all in shock.[1]

Before leaving for Philadelphia, Prince did a performance for a group of invited actors without scenery and costumes and he felt it also worked then. He said, "It was only once it got into a theatre with proper scenery and costumes and a set that we lost it. But we totally lost it. . . . It didn't remotely work."[2]

The comedy opened in Philadelphia on October 11, 1977 at the Walnut Theatre for a pre-Broadway tryout. It was blasted by all the critics. Jonathan Takiff for the Philadelphia Daily News said that "most fantasy yarns come off seeming pat, superficial and hodgepodgey, fine for a youngster but not worth an adult's attention and serious consideration. And that is the regrettable reality of Stanley Hart's new comedy, Some of My Best Friends."[3]

Variety in its out-of-town review said of the show, "The first act generates only mild interest until the second act when labored whimsy gives way to sentimentality.

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Takiff, "'Best Friends' Needs Help."

. . . Ted Knight is believable as the supernaturally endowed hero, but there are funnier portrayals by Lee Wallace, Ralph Williams, Gavin Reed and Bob Balaban as supporting zanies. . . . Harold Prince's staging appears to be inventive."[1]

Bob Sokolsky, the entertainment editor of the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, compared the comedy with the work of both Neil Simon and the comedy Harvey. "And thereby could dwell much of the trouble," said Sokolsky. "It dwells there because basically the work is bouncing in a whole variety of directions, a few of them mildly clever, most of them in need of considerable work."[2] Sokolsky felt both Knight and Prince did commendable jobs coping with the major problem, a poor script.

Prince found it difficult to visualize a dog and a plant as played by actors. He said,

> I don't know what I did wrong, but it didn't work and I didn't know why it didn't work. Harvey worked. Harvey originally had a rabbit on stage. But they eliminated the rabbit, you didn't see him. On the other hand, I could not have eliminated the plant and the dog, because they worked . . . they were hallucinations. But they had so much dialogue. Harvey had no dialogue you see. Harvey was this play that didn't work until they eliminated the rabbit on the stage. In our play, I

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[1]Harry Harris, "Shows Out of Town," Variety, 19 October 1977, p. 230.

[2]Bob Sokolsky, "Ted Stuck with Bum Script," Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 12 October 1977, p. 25.

> couldn't eliminate them. There was a baby in a baby carriage--a plant and a dog and I needed them all there.[1]

Some of My Best Friends opened at the Longacre Theatre on Broadway on October 25, 1977 and the reviews were as negative as those in Philadelphia. Richard Eder in the New York Times described the plot and said, "All this may sound better than it is. Friends seems to be a notion that struggled to become a play and failed, lacking as it does, density, characters, conflict or one single line that is either witty or graceful."[2]

Martin Gottfried wondered what Prince was doing at the helm of this vehicle. He said, "I don't doubt that Prince is wondering himself. . . . A director of not inconsiderable talent, responsible for many great musicals and several earnest engagements with classic plays, Prince has now lent himself to somewhat less than a professional play."[3] The show closed on October 29, 1977 after seven performances and eight previews.

Prince has said that they made a mistake with the set, too serious and dour.

> The designer, Eugene Lee with whom I'd had terrific success, thought it was about a crazy man and so the set should look like a hospital room. He was

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Eder, "'Best Friends' Has Talking Oddities."

[3]Martin Gottfried, "Good Knight, Sweet Prince, Some 'Friends' You've Got!" New York Post, 26 October 1977, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 38, p. 162.

> wrong. It shouldn't have, but that was an additional depressant. But I went along with it and insofar as I'm the editor, I'm at fault. But mostly the play didn't work and yet in rehearsal it did.[1]

Prince, however, learned an important lesson from his experience with Some of My Best Friends. He said, "I learned that there is no correlation between the pleasure I get doing what I do and my creativity. I mean, I had not a hell of a lot of fun doing Sweeney Todd (a musical Prince did in 1979) and I know I did first-rate work. I had a ball doing Some of My Best Friends and obviously my work wasn't first-rate."[2]

Although the failure of the comedy was a disappointment for Prince, he was soon busy on a new project, directing the musical On the Twentieth Century. In a little over three months later, he would be opening this major musical. And again, he would direct, not produce the show. True to form, there would be little time or inclination to ponder a failure.

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Ibid.

CHAPTER XIII

EVITA THE BIGGEST HIT OF ALL

> In Evita, the things Hal uses!! For instance, the way he goes through Peron's ascendency; his rise--with musical chairs--where the other generals are eliminated. That's one of the most brilliant things I've ever seen.[1]

> We were thinking after seeing the sets of Evita, that "he'll [Prince] never get this one done the way he wants!"[2]

> Hal took this LP of Evita and made it into a religious experience![3]

On the Twentieth Century

The musical On the Twentieth Century is based on the 1932 play Twentieth Century set on the famous train, the Twentieth Century Limited, which covered the distance between New York and Chicago in sixteen hours. Writers Betty Comden and Adolph Green and composer Cy Coleman decided they wanted to do a show together. In the mid-seventies they had written a few numbers for an Off-Broadway workshop revue directed by Green's wife, Phyllis Newman, at the

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[1]Adler interview.

[2]McMartin interview.

[3]Judy Prince, quoted in ibid.

American Place Theatre. They had resolved to do a full-length show as soon as they finished the revue. Green remembered their search for a project.

> After some months of digging for an original story and coming up with nothing but frustration and blank paper, we decided to turn a silk purse into what we hoped would be another kind of silk purse. We decided to make a musical of the classic 1932 American stage comedy, Twentieth Century, by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur (which in turn had been derived from an earlier play by Bruce Mulholland).[1]

It was a struggle to obtain the rights, but once they were acquired, the writers and composer re-read the play. They were convinced that, although it was quite funny, it would be very difficult to make it into a musical. It was verbose and contained many subsidiary characters. In addition, Green said, "The frame of association was that of 1930's Chicago newspapermen steeped in the then all-pervasive imagery and cynicism of H. L. Mencken. Also, for God's sake, we were stuck on a train. All around us, people were exclaiming, 'What a great idea! Making 'Twentieth Century' into a musical!!!' Inside us, we heard the constantly nagging query that asked simply, 'How?'"[2]

In addition, they were not permitted to adapt anything by Columbia Pictures from the famous 1934 movie

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[1]Betty Comden and Adolph Green, "A New Head of Steam for the Old 'Twentieth Century,'" New York Times, 19 February 1978, sec. 2, p. 1.

[2]Ibid.

version of the same play which starred John Barrymore and Carole Lombard. The creators then decided to create their own fourth entity.

They streamlined the story of the now glamorous and famous stage and screen star, Lily Garland (in Drawing Room B), who is at odds with a once-big-time Broadway director, Oscar Jaffee (in Drawing Room A) during the overnight train ride from Chicago to New York. Jaffee, a broken man and a theatrical has-been, is desperate to make a comeback. He has had four failures in a row and his future is uncertain. His one hope is to win over Lily Garland, his former star and mistress. He had known Lily when she was Mildred Plotka, piano accompanist to the almost-famous. He found her and made her a star. He had also loved her, she, him. Now, she has a new lover, Bruce Granit, young, handsome and simple-minded.

While on the train from Chicago to New York, Oscar obtains the room next to Lily's. If he can get her to sign his contract to appear in a play, his whole career will be saved. If she doesn't he has no future at all. He attempts to woo her back while they are traveling. His efforts are complicated by the fact that Bruce Granit is aboard the train and that there is a zany religious fanatic also aboard who often gets in his way. The plot is fraught with farcical situations and the possibility of a renewed romance between the protagonists.

In their attempts to tighten the book, the writers completely eliminated two Oberammergau actors in the original play. They were refugees from a lost company of the Passion Play. Comden and Green said:

> We eliminated them completely, but we still needed something of a religious nature to provide Oscar with the inspiration for the project he hopes Lily will agree to star in--the Passion of Mary Magdalene. We did that by building up the character of another passenger on the train, a religious fanatic who goes around putting up stickers that say, "Repent, for the time is at hand." We also decided to make the character a woman--it's a man in the play--because there are so few women in the original story. It became the role Imogene Coca plays.[1]

Although the writers cut much, they also added a few things. They created a new character: the young, dashing and good-looking leading man named Bruce Granit who is Lily's current love interest. At heart he is a small-time movie star and buffoon, his talent limited to his profile. He considers Lily his "meal ticket."

With two larger-than-life leading characters--Lily Garland and Oscar Jaffee, extravagant, egomaniacal giants of the theatre--the writers searched for the right musical style. They did not want to write a '30s musical, nor did they wish to use rock or any other contemporary sound. They began thinking of the show as an overblown bravura musical. Comden and Green explained:

> One day, working with Cy [Coleman], we improvised a musical sequence that was highly flamboyant,

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[1]Ibid., p. 6.

> verging on the operatic. We laughed, dismissed it as "too much," and then suddenly realized that that was really the way Oscar and Lily should sound. In fact, it was the way the entire show should sound. We felt we had the key.[1]

The authors do not suggest that they wrote On the Twentieth Century as an opera. However, they did use certain operatic elements to create what they hoped would be an "irreverent, extravagant musical comedy."[2] When Coleman experimented with the overture in the style of Rossini, they left it that way.

The creators of the show worked on the musical for over a year, taking time out for Coleman to write I Love My Wife and Comden and Green to perform in their own one-woman, one-man show, A Party.

About this time, Prince entered the planning stage. It was much later than usual for him to begin work on a show, but Prince had had some bad years. He had been terribly dismayed that Pacific Overtures had not had a longer run. He also lost some of his own money needed for it to open on Broadway because of the poor reception in Boston. The bad reviews there created losses on the show. Prince explained:

> We ran out of money so I had to use my own considerable sum, more money than I ever dreamed I could afford to lose on a show. And yet I did lose it. We then opened on Broadway. I got a little bit of it back but not much. And the show represented not only something we were very proud

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

> of but something that lost me my shirt. I was worried about being able to keep my office open. I was worried about my future as a producer. I had not saved a great deal of money over the years although I was reputed to have a lot more money than I did have. And so I shopped around for assignments. And the first thing that came up was the movie of A Little Night Music. I took that to make money. I should know better. Every time I take something really to make money, it double-crosses me. So I went away for a couple of years, really--a year and a half or two--and then the next thing that I took on was On the Twentieth Century.[1]

The producers of the musical, Cy Feuer and Ernie Martin, as well as the writers Comden, Green and Coleman, approached Prince to direct On the Twentieth Century. He listened, thinking the idea of doing all the numbers in a kind of chamber opera fashion a good one. Prince recalled:

> That was its idea. In fact, they were not all in a chamber opera fashion and I think that was its only real flaw. I wish it had been of one piece. And if I had worked on it from the beginning, it would have been of one piece. But I thought that the work was ingenious. I thought it was fun and I needed a job. So I took it on.[2]

The style of this show represented a change for the director. Known for his sophisticated, sardonic collaborations with Sondheim, he was taking an excursion into something different. It was an up-beat show (with farcical scenes) intended to make people feel good. The director said, "It's nice to work on something that's up!"[3]

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[1]Prince interview. [2]Ibid.

[3]Mel Gussow, "Broadway to Hear Sound of Musicals," New York Times, 11 January 1978, p. C15.

Prince did, however, insist on some rewrites after he began directing the musical. "For all I know," said Prince, "maybe a number or two."[1] Basically, the material was in hand. He had to get it designed properly, cast properly, and staged. Comden and Green remembered that Prince made important contributions in the creation of the piece.

> Hal sharpened and focused the shape of our book and censored any lyric that might be considered filler. Hal also has a marvelous visual sense. Often, when we wrote scenes, we were never quite sure of how they could be made to happen onstage. We would just write them down in the blind faith that somebody would see how they could be done. Hal worked closely with our scenic designer, Robin Wagner, on the visual effects involving the train, which are quite spectacular. It was also his idea to use train personnel as a kind of connective tissue between scenes.[2]

Feuer and Martin very much wanted Alfred Drake to play the lead. Prince felt it was wrong at this point in his life and said as much. Instead, he cast John Cullum, who had won the 1975 Tony Award as best actor for his performance in the musical Shenandoah. Cullum had also starred in On a Clear Day You Can See Forever and Man of La Mancha. Because of the tensions that this situation created, Feuer and Martin left the show and another group of producers came in. The new group who took over the presentation of the musical were: Producer's Circle 2, Inc.,

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Comden and Green, "A New Head of Steam for the Old Twentieth Century," p. 6.

Robert Fryer, Mary Lea Johnson, James Cresson, Martin Richards, in association with Joseph Harris and Ira Bernstein.

Comden and Green said that they agreed on John Cullum for the Oscar Jaffee role because there was "big" singing in the show. Cullum played the role as a John Barrymore-type "ham." In an interview, Cullum said he wanted a cross between Adolph Menjou, George Brent, Clark Gable and Gilbert Roland. The character Jaffee was an extravagant person in every way.

> I think the character lends itself to zaniness, and I love zany, crazy characters. Hal Prince, the director, and I talked over the role often, and we both felt I could go even further than the script. I don't think it would be very interesting if I played it straight. After all, his lines are not that inherently witty, so you've got to get across that beneath all that drive of his, he's covering up something, and that something is his vulnerability.[1]

Madeline Kahn, who was cast as Lily, "in addition to being a comedienne, is a trained opera singer."[2] Kahn, best known for her roles in such films as What's Up Doc?, Blazing Saddles, and Paper Moon, had also appeared on Broadway in New Faces of 1968.

Prince was very pleased with finding Kevin Kline for the role of Bruce Granit. Kline was a founding member of

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[1]Patricia O'Haire, "Cullum: He Puts on a Good Act," New York Daily News, 24 February 1978, p. 5.

[2]Comden and Green, "A New Head of Steam for the Old 'Twentieth Century,'" p. 6.

John Houseman's Acting Company, and had appeared on Broadway and on tour with the company in many of their productions. He had played Jamie Lockhart in the original Broadway production of The Robber Bridegroom. Kline auditioned for On the Twentieth Century in costume. He had never done that before but he wanted the role. He slicked down his hair, 1930s-style, and wore an ascot, baggy pants and a white jacket. After his first audition, he was told to come back dressed exactly the same way to audition for Prince, and the next day he was offered the part. Prince said of Kline's work in Twentieth Century, "He was very contributive. We built that part up in rehearsal and I thought it was a very strong point."[1]

Kline credited Prince with having shaped his performance into something notable. He said, "Hal created a wonderful climate to work in. . . . He always gave the actors a chance to explore their impulses, so that in a very real way the style of the show evolved organically from all of us. He would tell us what was good and what was bad, and helped to give form to the good things."[2] As an example, Kline cited a bit of business for which he invariably got a tremendous hand from the audience at each performance--the scene in which Bruce Granit is literally swept off his

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Robert Berkvist, "Bound for Glory on the '20th Century,'" New York Times, 2 June 1978, p. C4.

feet when Lily bursts into her Pullman compartment. "Mr. Kline manages to richochet from wall to wall like a rag doll in a slow-motion ballet."[1] The idea to stage it in this way came about one day at rehearsal when Lily burst into the compartment and Kline decided on the spur of the moment to throw himself around. Prince liked it and told the actor to keep bouncing, and then helped him to refine the scene. "That's what I mean about him," said Kline. "He let us be silly. Nothing was too outrageous and so we tried anything. He'd either say 'Great, keep it!' or he'd turn thumbs down. He'd never intimidate you."[2]

Judy Kaye, who played the role of Agnes, was a singer/actress whom Prince had seen in California when he was auditioning for the national company of Company. He didn't use her then, but remembered her. When he got ready to do On the Twentieth Century, he asked his office to "get hold of that girl, she's so talented." The only mistake, said Prince, "is that I should have gotten hold of her to do the lead originally and the show would have been a success. I mean more than it was. It ran a year and a half or something. It would have run on and made a lot of money and all the rest of it, if we hadn't got into the whole Madeline Kahn 'thing.'"[3]

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

[3]Prince interview.

The Kahn "thing" was the conflict that arose between Prince as well as other collaborators on the show and the leading lady, and which eventually led to her being replaced by Judy Kaye. Kahn played the role less than eleven weeks and she often missed performances. When Kaye took over in April of 1978, the official reason given for the replacement was that Kahn wanted to play six performances a week and that this was not condoned by the management. Unofficially, the word was that Kahn had personal problems that kept her off the stage more than she was on.[1]

Prince describes the whole episode as very destructive and claims that "Probably the only grievances that I still harbor about an actor I harbor towards her."[2] Prince, in an interview, tried to clarify what had happened.

> What I really was saying was gratuitous but it has to be said. She's [Kahn] a very talented girl. First of all, we did the show, we went to Boston. I thought Cullum was terrific. She, too, was inventive; she did some funny things that were small . . . they weren't big, which is always a problem in the theatre. Cullum and Judy Kaye and Kevin were all "big" performers. And it is "big farce." One of the reasons I did it, by the way, not only did I do it because I was really impressed with the idea that the three authors had, but because George Abbott had done it on the stage, and it's the sort of theatre I never knew for sure I could direct. I had done The Matchmaker years ago and that's kind of farce, but, in fact, I hadn't

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[1]"Twentieth Century," New York Post, 25 April 1978, p. 10.

[2]Prince interview.

stretched that particular muscle very much and I wanted to know whether I had that particular kind of invention. I found out I did. I thought what Kevin and I did together was, and John (because John was all over the floor, singing and rolling and doing stuff). So I thought that was all fun. Madeline was too small for me, detailed and intelligent and small. But the worst part of it all was, I can encapsulate on the opening night. She resisted the energy to play a show eight performances a week full out. Well, finally when we opened on Broadway, opening night, she gave a really good performance. So I ran backstage at the end of the show and I said, "You see--you can do it!" I had not seen it in so long and I'd only seen it in fits and starts (never consistently over the evening). Well, on the opening night, I was so pleased because I thought that she'd actually done it. I went back having assumed that the reason she hadn't done it up to then was fear. I think people often cover their fears by one or another means. And I rushed backstage and I said, "Well, that's just terrific! You see, you can do it, you did it!" And she said, "I hope you don't think I'm going to be able to do that every night." And my heart sank. And so, looking into the makeup mirror, at this girl, I suddenly realized, well, we're dead. It's not going to happen. Anyone who feels that protective of their energies . . . so it wasn't what I thought it was at all, it was just somebody who really should not be doing that on Broadway. And I waited for when she'd leave. First of all, I waited for when she wouldn't show up, which happened fairly early on. And of course the minute she didn't show up, Judy Kaye went in and knocked the audience out. The trouble was, it got confusing for people. They didn't know who was going to be on. And it took awhile before Madeline Kahn could be persuaded to leave. And she did leave and an adjustment of her salary was made. She was paid regularly for not showing up. And that was the end of it. But it hurt the show. I truly believe it kept the show from being a two-and-a-half-year "smash" that made money for everybody and all the rest of it. So I'll always resent that. It has happened to me rarely, thank God. It also, however, has to do with why I feel the way I feel about stars which I've been reading a lot over the years and the truth is I don't feel the way I'm reputed to feel about stars, not if they're Angela Lansbury and Rosalind Russell and Kevin Kline and people like

> that. It's when they're the other way, that I have no patience at all. In the old days, Merman didn't miss performances, and Martin didn't miss performances. But today, missing performances is such a popular thing that the New York Times dedicated thousands of words to it just a week ago. So I don't have any patience with any of that.[1]

For many of the reviewers, the hit of the musical was set designer Robin Wagner's enormously effective re-creation of the famous Twentieth Century train. Wagner's gleaming Art Deco full-scale mock-up of the famous train cost $196,500. It excited audiences as it surged onto the stage at each performance and then zoomed away again. It could assemble and disassemble into various configurations and the audience was shown its silvery exteriors and its posh interiors. In an article in the New York Times entitled "On Broadway, the Spectacle's the Thing," Geoffrey Holder suggested that the theatre now needed spectacle.[2] If that was the case, On the Twentieth Century was probably the most lavish spectacle on Broadway at the time. Richard Eder of the Times said:

> The train itself, with its art deco fittings, all silver and cream-color, and its constant movement, is one of the more spectacular achievements of the production. Mr. Wagner manages all kinds of extraordinary things; he produces compartments, aisles, and a sense of the night passing by outside. . . . Mostly we are inside the train, but at a moment's notice we are on the platform looking in, or

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Leticia Kent, "On Broadway, the Spectacle's the Thing," New York Times, 12 March 1978, p. D1.

> the engine is bearing down on us. Mr. Wagner even manages a motion-picture-like effect of seeming to alternate closeups of the train with medium and long shots in quick succession. It is a matter of sliding flats in and out and swiveling things, but it looks like plain magic.[1]

Prince had not stepped out of character. It was clear that he felt that content dictates form and that this show demanded glamour and spectacle. The furs, satin negligees and train sets cost a fortune (the show was capitalized at $1,064,000), but Prince felt that the script and its concept warranted that type of treatment. Prince, like Aronson and many of the Prince collaborators, disapproves of spectacle for its own sake, but if the show calls for it there is reason to do it as spectacularly as can be afforded.

In spite of the fact that this was a very different style for Prince to direct (and he liked trying farce), he continued to eschew a more serious theatre. He said,

> During the Nixon years, I couldn't muster the joy to do a musical like Twentieth Century. I'm not one who says, 'Life is so hard that when I go to the theater, I go to be entertained.' When life is hard, I go to the theater to be pricked or to engage in controversy or to talk back. Theater, I think, is probably still headed right where it has been headed for years, and that is toward simpler, more imaginative forms. Black velour is still the most effective thing in the theater--it gives free reign to the audience to use its imagination. Theater is about a black box and some shafts of light and the audience using its

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[1]Richard Eder, "On the Twentieth Century," New York Times, 20 February 1978, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 39, p. 377.

> imagination in collaboration with the director and the actors and the writers and I think that's what it will continue being.[1]

Set designer Wagner claimed to have worked closely with both Prince and Coleman. Prince suggested that he wanted the set to take the place of choreography. The set, besides being thought of as a character, was also meant to complement the score. Wagner explained how the chase scene worked in which Coca, as the religious fanatic, is pursued by virtually everyone on the train.

> In the first sequence, when they begin the number, they're in the drawing room. There's a blackout, creating the impression that the train is going through a tunnel. The next thing you see is those little toy trains going across. Then, a beat after that--all these things were done on musical beats--you see that there are stars in the sky and that you're looking at a distant train and you're on it. It's the trains that pass in the night, the oldest cliche in the world. We move cinematically from scene to scene. There's a close-up of the whole side of the locomotive. And then, for one moment, Imogene sticks her head out of the window and slaps her "Repent" sticker on the outside and disappears. And then that goes up into the air and we're back into the stateroom with John Cullum being discovered and thought to be the "nut" they're all looking for--of course, he's not. That goes off and the next things we hear and see are the whistle of the train, the steam and the headlight coming right at us. And suddenly there's Imogene plastered on the front of the locomotive--between two "Repent" stickers . . . My problem was how to get rid of the locomotive, how to get it off-stage. I thought, "Why not turn it around, show the caboose going away?" Hal loved it and said "Great!" So we put the back of the train on. You see the locomotive coming and the caboose going away--and Imogene waving. I love that moment--it's a spectacle . . . a matter of stage deception.[2]

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[1]Kent, "On Broadway, the Spectacle's the Thing."

[2]Ibid.

The score contains twenty numbers and critic Douglas Watt, writing for the New Yorker, said that it

> contains many either lovely or amusing or disarming moments, yet regrettably, considered as a whole, it weighs me down. The very conceit is to blame: it is impossible to compose with tongue in cheek for very long without numbing the creative faculties . . . the score echoes early-nineteenth-century opera (Donizetti, for instance), Viennese operetta, and I'm afraid, tired old Broadway mannerisms, along with a bit of Wagnerian parody and other elements. It must have been fun in the doing, but, being a pastiche, it has no voice of its own.[1]

The number singled out as the best was the romantic "Our Private World," an expansive duet for the leads. There was also the humorous "I Rise Again," the saucy "Veronique," an elaborate production number settling with deliberate uncertainty into a near-cancan, and "The Legacy," which was "not a strikingly original melody but an appropriate one for Oscar's listing, in a burst of self-pity, of the worthless articles he'll leave behind to his aides."[2]

On the Twentieth Century began its four-week out-of-town tryout at Boston's Colonial Theatre on January 7, 1978. The Variety critic, F. Snyder, felt the show had all the ingredients of a Broadway hit. He suggested, however, that some revisions and cuts were needed in addition to simplifying the elaborate physical production. This critic liked

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[1]Douglas Watt, "Musical Events," New Yorker, 18 September 1978, p. 148.

[2]Ibid.

the cast and noted Imogene Coca was a "standout" in the role of the religious eccentric and with her number "Repent." Prince's direction, he said, "seems well-paced without being hurried amid the elaborate scenic and technical effects."[1]

The musical opened on Broadway on February 20, 1978 at the St. James Theatre. The critics cited the sets and the train itself as the star of the show, the musical receiving wonderful reviews. Richard Eder for the New York Times said the show was a welcome return to musical "comedy." He called the show

> funny, elegant and totally cheerful. Its elegance is not that of a perfectly integrated and organized piece of musical theater. It has rough spots, flat spots and an energy that occasionally ebbs, leaving the cast and the director to re-group their energies for the next assault. . . . But the elegance is there, nevertheless; the kind that allows itself to be unpredictable, playful and even careless. The musical has an exuberance, a bubbly confidence in its own life.[2]

Clive Barnes said that

> Between ourselves it is not basically a very good idea for a musical. It is obvious, trite and it takes place on a train--and most people would admit that only a train should take place on a train. Or perhaps a Hitchcockian movie. A train is not all that theatrical. . . . Yet the musical works like a fantasy. It works because of its style, or rather its comprehension of style at all levels.[3]

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[1]F. Snyder, "Shows Out of Town (Boston)," Variety, 18 January 1978, p. 94.

[2]Eder, "On the Twentieth Century."

[3]Clive Barnes, "Full Steam on '20th Century,'" New York Post, 20 February 1978, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 39, p. 380.

Douglas Watt said that Prince directed the show "cleverly, pacing it well," adding that although Larry Fuller had staged the musical numbers "deftly," there was no dancing to speak of in the show."[1] This was certainly not an unusual occurrence in a Prince musical. Watt, referring to the musical as an uneasy comic operetta, felt that the show at first seemed to be full of promise but that the complexities and the concept of the score got in the way. He said: "Composer Cy Coleman, in a brave attempt to transcend the obvious temptation to indulge in mere razzle-dazzle, has written a sweeping, extravagant, overly ambitious score that too often works against the brisk, farcical nature of the piece, including the well-fashioned lyrics, also the work of Comden and Green."[2]

Edwin Wilson, feeling that the show did not come up to the great array of talent involved in its production, asked the question, "What went wrong?"[3] He said, "Unfortunately, the musical's overall lack of purpose takes its toll."[4]

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[1]Douglas Watt, "Twentieth Century Limited," New York Daily News, 20 February 1978, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 39, p. 376.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Edwin Wilson, "A Lavish Musical Loses Track of Itself," Wall Street Journal, 22 February 1978, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 39, p. 378.

[4]Ibid.

The reviews were somewhat confusing. The critics seemed to like the show a good deal while, at the same time, faulting certain elements. Prince, it was generally felt, brought a great deal of style, pace and farcical humor to the piece. Howard Kissel said that with the sumptuousness of the sets and the glamor of the costumes, the show might seem cold if it were not "complemented by the broadly stylized movement director Hal Prince has given the large cast. . . . Prince has provided a veritable encyclopedia of artifice--the mannerisms he has given the actors seem to have a vitality of their own, as if they had been in moth-balls for the last fifty years and were exhilarated to be back out in the open air."[1]

If Prince needed a boost after the unhappy experience of Pacific Overtures followed by the failure of Some of My Best Friends, On the Twentieth Century helped some. He was happy to learn that he could work successfully in a farcical, heightened style. Clive Barnes in the televised South Bank Show said, "You can see the way Prince has imposed a style on On the Twentieth Century. It's all done (even the acting) in a 30's movie style. In my opinion the overall style of the show is absolutely brilliant . . . all slightly stilted and larger than life."[2]

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[1]Howard Kissel, "On the Twentieth Century," Women's Wear Daily, 21 February 1978, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 39, p. 379.

[2]Barnes, quoted in The South Bank Show, videotape.

The original cast album was recorded by Columbia. Variety called the album "splendid," with the exception of the one weak spot, Madeline Kahn.[1]

Prince commented on his experiences working on the musical. He said:

> I had a nice time. It was laughter; we laughed a lot. Twentieth Century was like an exercise for me. I'd never done physical farce. I wondered what it would be like. Could I make people laugh at Marx Brothers routines in trains, and I did. But I didn't know that I could do that, so I thought, you have to try that and see.[2]

On the Twentieth Century won five Tony Awards and closed on March 18, 1979 prior to a national tour that included San Francisco, Los Angeles and other major cities.

Evita

Soon after On the Twentieth Century opened, Prince began to ready his next project, directing the London production of an original musical entitled Evita. It would be the first time that one of his Broadway productions would begin life in London and it would be the first musical he had directed which had started as a recording.

Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, the composers of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat and Jesus Christ Superstar, brought Prince the demonstration tape of what would soon be their new record. The concept for this

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[1]"Review of Cast Album of 'On the 20th Century,'" Variety, 17 May 1978, p. 446.

[2]Wallach, "Harold Prince," p. 25.

record about Eva Peron began in the early seventies when Rice, on his car radio, heard the end of a play written about the controversial First Lady of Argentina. Gerald McKnight, Andrew Lloyd Webber's biographer, said of Eva Peron, "She was glamorous, sexy, beautiful, adored and had swayed the fortunes of an entire nation. All right, she was a superbitch, but who had that ever robbed of interest? Her cruelties, hypocrisy, even the use she had made of men and her own body, had never been seen as vile enough to quench the mesmeric ardour of her subjects."[1] The radio dramatization made Rice wonder how the theatre world would receive a musical version of Eva Peron's life. Rice approached Lloyd Webber with his idea. His partner agreed that it was potentially exciting, "involving as it did the fiery Latin music of Argentina which such composers as De Falla and Ravel had captured. The passion and glamor of the project were undeniable. But first, he insisted, they ought to complete another work which he and to a lesser degree Tim had been toying with haphazardly for some time: a musical to be based on the Bertie Wooster novels of P. G. Wodehouse, one of [Lloyd Webber's] favorite authors."[2] (This turned out to be Jeeves and was a flop.) With regard to the Eva Peron musical, Lloyd Webber confidentially told Stigwood's London producer, Bob Swash (Robert Stigwood being

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[1]Gerald McKnight, Andrew Lloyd Webber: A Biography (London: Granada, 1984), p. 149.

[2]Ibid.

Rice and Lloyd Webber's producer) that he didn't really want to do "another piece about an unknown who rises to fame at thirty-three and then dies . . . we've just done that with Jesus Christ!"[1]

Rice, although unwilling to be discouraged about his idea for a musical about Eva Peron, nevertheless valued Lloyd Webber's judgment. He also knew that the composer would not work well unless his enthusiasm was complete on a project. After "much lengthy and sometimes acrimonious discussion and debate, he grudgingly agreed to try his hand at the Wodehouse idea first . . . provided that Andrew would also agree to put in some spare time on his Evita notion, composing whatever he could for the words Tim had already written."[2]

Rice's obsession with the Evita project can be seen in the fact that when his first child was born, a daughter, he and his wife christened her Eva-Jane, after the Argentine dictator's wife. When Jeeves failed, Lloyd Webber turned to the idea for the musical based on Eva Peron "if not with relish, at least with none of his earlier reluctance."[3] He was worried about how to handle the piece politically. Lloyd Webber is quoted as saying, "I suppose many composers wouldn't have worried about the politics in the slightest. . . . I mean, the violence and so on. But

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 150. [3]Ibid., p. 163.

Evita from this point of view did worry me. On the other hand it also intrigued me, partly I suppose because of what was going on in Britain at that time."[1]

The composer was referring to the rising tide of violence which, in 1975, was revealed in vandalism, hooliganism and the plummeting decline of wealth in England. He said, "It was very worrying to see it all, and particularly so for those like me who passionately believe in the democratic way of life."[2]

McKnight suggests that Lloyd Webber perceived doing Evita as a kind of "bittersweet political commentary opera."[3] However, he was still "far from convinced that Evita would work on the stage, though the music he was composing for it was as exciting as anything he had ever written. Long discussions with Tim and with David Land, their agent, had so far failed altogether to relieve this pessimistic frame of mind. The shock of failure with Jeeves had been too searing to be banished lightly."[4] Theatrical costs were soaring in London as well as on Broadway and Lloyd Webber did not have total faith in the future of Evita.

Rice probed deeply into Eva Peron's background. He read the books available in England about her but there

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[1]Ibid., p. 165. [2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid. [4]Ibid., p. 166.

was no work which he could call reliable. He went to Argentina to get the feeling of the country and he experienced the semi-mystical legend which, combined with her early death, had made Eva Peron a cult idol. It was this charismatic allure from the grave which excited him and which he passed on to his partner. Lloyd Webber finally admitted,

> She was easily the most unpleasant character I've written about, yet I found her story fascinating. Dying when she did--which must have infuriated her!--there had to be something about her which made people admire her. . . . The hostility of the military and the aristocracy to this jumped-up actress from the sticks, combining effectively with her illness to create a feeling of inevitable doom, was very exciting to compose for.[1]

Rice and Lloyd Webber went to see Prince before the record of the Evita score had been issued. They had produced a rather elegant demonstration tape using the London Symphony Orchestra and a group of wonderful singers. Prince heard it at his summer home in Majorca. He didn't know what to make of it but he was impressed. He was especially excited by the concept of Eva Peron's funeral, which took place within the first five minutes of the tape. The director was challenged by the thought of trying to recreate those 200,000 mourners on stage. Prince recalls that day.

> I listened to the funeral at the beginning of the piece and I thought that was so marvelous, that

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[1]Ibid., p. 170.

> first of all, how do you do a funeral with 200,000 people all gathering in Buenos Aires? How do you do that on the stage? It almost sounded as if 200,000 people were singing. So that was a challenge, that hooked me. About 80% of the material I thought was fun and terrific and inviting. And some of it I didn't. There was stuff in which Che Guevera was an insecticide inventor/salesman and that didn't work for me theatrically and so there were excisions made. In any case there was stuff I liked and stuff I didn't like. But mostly I liked it, and mostly I was challenged by it. I said, "I'll do it, I'll direct it, but the first thing I want is for you to see my notes. And I'll do you a very elaborate memorandum about this piece.[1]

Rice and Lloyd Webber left for London and Prince sent them 3,000 words about the project. He got a very cursory thank you note saying, "Thank you for your suggestions. We think, maybe we're in the record business, we'd better get right on and do our record." Prince recalls, "I never heard from them again. So I said to my wife, 'Well, I guess that's it for me . . . they don't like all my comments.' They had a right."[2]

About a year or a year and a half later, Prince was sitting in his office when his receptionist told him that there were two gentlemen in the reception room and they had something they wanted to hand him. They were brought into Prince's office and it was Rice and Lloyd Webber. They handed Prince their record and explained that it was now not only published but it was the number one record all

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[1]Prince interview. [2]Ibid.

over Europe (but not in the States). The composers were here to release it in this country and they had brought Prince his own copy. Prince thanked them and said he had thought he was never going to hear from them again. Prince remembers their reply:

> They said, "No, not at all. Your notes so frightened us--because they had to do with the show and not with the recording--and we thought this is going to stop our recording . . . let's get our record out and then go back and talk to him. So here we are now. Now, do you want to do it as a show?" And I said, "Yes, I do, but I can't because I have many commitments and would not be available for about a year and a half. Will you wait?" They said they'd have to think about it. Stigwood apparently independently said to them, "Wait! Even though the record is #1 now, if you wait a year and a half the record will no longer be #1 and maybe because it's a show it will get a whole second life, which it wouldn't get if you do the show immediately." So they waited.[1]

When Tim Rice was asked if Evita was a rock musical, he replied that all three of his and Lloyd Webber's shows including Evita could only have been written in the rock era. "I suppose you could say they are 'rock-culture musicals.'"[2] In any event, the musicals these men write may not be considered "rock" by everyone but they do relate to rock in many ways. Eventually the show was called the "new rock opera."

By late 1977, Prince had completed his other commitments, but had also thought about Evita for more than two

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Robert Palmer, "Writing Musicals Attuned to Rock Era," New York Times, 10 February 1982, p. C21.

years. He was ready to go to London to begin rehearsals. The piece had almost no story line or dialogue. The first script was just some "slippery pages in a two-record long-play album. I took them and made a script out of them. This takes place in this scene, this in that, etc. Each scene needed a conflict--almost none of them had one--so they had to write a conflict in."[1]

The notes for the original cast album say that "Evita is an opera based on the life story of Eva Peron, the second wife of the Argentine president Juan Peron. Eva Duarte was born in 1919, illegitimate, poor, without privilege. She became the most powerful woman her country had ever seen, the First Lady of Argentina at the age of 27. She died in 1952 of cancer, aged 33."[2]

The production opens in July of 1952. A young Argentine student, Che, is in the audience at a Buenos Aires cinema when the romantic western movie projected on the large screen which dominates the upper center portion of the stage is stopped. An announcement indicates that Eva Peron has just died. Next we see her funeral, a majestic affair, "a combination of the magnificent excesses of the Vatican and of Hollywood."[3] The number "Requiem for Evita"

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[1] Prince, quoted in "Evita," Hollywood Drama-Logue, 2 January 1980, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2] Evita, record liner notes, MCA Records, 2-11007.

[3] Ibid.

accompanies the vision of crowds, pageantry and lamentation. Strong percussion and diminished chords augment the shock and pain of the people. Their individual grief-stricken faces are seen in close-up on the screen as a spotlight picks them up in the audience. The mourning crowd develops into a funeral procession in the first of the fluid transtions of the play, becoming, "Oh, What a Circus," with Che, who is the only non-participant, singing the number. The spirit is infectious, curiosity high. Who is this supposed goddess who lived among us?

Che acts as narrator and observer in the manner of a Greek chorus. His role has also been compared to that of the Master of Ceremonies in Cabaret. It gives a sense of unity and continuity to the piece. In addition, he is the device that enables Eva Peron to receive personal criticism. Che may also be viewed as the conscience that Eva does not seem to have and his "omnipotent manner reveals the truth beneath the surface. These two polarized revolutionaries, who have similar goals, but entirely different methods of achieving them, create an interesting juxtaposition throughout the play."[1] Che's role has been described as raisonneur, ironic antagonist, satiric commentator and enemy and victim of Eva's ruthlessness. The role is based on the revolutionary character Che Guevara and yet there is no

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[1]Stephanie Mardesich, "'Evita' in London," Footlights, December 1978, p. 28.

evidence to prove that Guevara had ever met Eva. Prince said,

> With historical figures, you have to try to be responsible with facts at the same time you're being theatrical in their presentation. . . . In regard to Che Guevara, they never met [but] historically, there is a connection, indeed. Che, an Argentinian, was deeply influenced by the fight for social justice in his country, and by Peronism. He was a mature 23-year-old college student when she died, so the tie-in is there. . . . Eva Peron was a fascinating woman. She did many good things--working to give women the vote in Argentina--she also was a megalomaniac.[1]

The real Che Guevara was strongly opposed to the Peronist regime during Eva's time. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to conjecture that his revolutionary activity was in part a reaction to the government that was in power in his youth.

As Evita continues, there is a flashback to 1934. Eva is 15. She asks a nightclub singer, Agustin Magaldi, with whom she has had an affair, to take her to Buenos Aires. Once in Buenos Aires, Eva rids herself of Magaldi, and "works her way through a string of men, each of whom helps her one rung more up the ladder of fame and fortune ('Goodnight and Thank You')."[2] She is soon a successful model, movie actress and broadcaster.

In 1943, Eva meets Peron at a charity concert. They realize that they each have something the other one wants

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[1]"Evita," San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle, p. 25, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Evita, record liner notes.

("I'd Be Surprisingly Good for You"). From this point on Eva sees her future in terms of her closeness to political giants. Peron, she understands, is one of several leaders close to the presidency of Argentina. In order to become Peron's lover, she evicts Peron's mistress from his apartment. Peron's deposed mistress has a solo moment as she sings a sweet ballad pondering, yet knowing, her fate ("Another Suitcase in Another Hall"). Eva quickly moves into Peron's life so completely that "she excites the extreme wrath of two factions who were to remain her enemies until her death--the Army and the Aristocracy."[1]

Eva is determined that Peron should try for the presidency. She is supported by the workers, whose backing she has long cultivated ("A New Argentina"). A vast political rally (with banners dropping from above and the entire company waving flags and holding torches) ends the first act, exhibiting Prince's brilliant technique and his use of abstract and constructivist sets. The scaffolding-like stage design and lighting is dynamically used to heighten the excitement of a huge rally. It is also "dramatically effective in its simplicity incorporating the use of still photographs and motion pictures, to create great depth and height."[2] Throughout the musical, the "chiaroscuro

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Mardesich, "'Evita' in London."

lighting sets the mood from the intimacy of a Buenos Aires nightclub to the grandeur of the Casa Rosada."[1]

Act II reveals that Eva's ambition has been fulfilled. Peron wins the presidency and Eva becomes his wife. She receives an even greater reception from the crowds than her husband, "thanks to her emotional and brilliant speech and to her striking appearance ('Don't Cry for Me Argentina')."[2] Soon Eva tours Europe. On her return home Peron points out to his wife that the regime has done very little for the working classes. Eva heads the new Eva Peron Foundation ("And the Money Kept Rolling In and Out"), which does little besides elevating Eva into near goddess stature in the eyes of her followers. Che meanwhile tries to draw out the truth from Eva ("Waltz for Eva and Che"). Soon she realizes that she is ill. As her illness progresses, the anti-Eva feeling among the military progresses as well. Peron loses his grip on the government as his wife loses her health. Eva refuses to accept her illness and attempts to become vice president ("Dice are Rolling"). However, since she knows she is dying, she makes a broadcast to her country, turning down the vice presidency that she knows she could never have won ("Eva's Final Broadcast").

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[1] Ibid.

[2] <u>Evita</u>, record liner notes.

As her life and the show draw to a close, Eva wonders whether she would have been happier as an obscure ordinary person. Maybe then her life would have been longer ("Lament").

While the London production of Evita was being put together, the set designers, Timothy O'Brien and Tazeena Firth called Prince and said that something undefinable was missing from the set. Shortly thereafter, Prince visted Mexico City and, while wandering through Chapultapec Park, saw murals by Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Immediately he knew that this was the answer to the problem. He had great murals prepared to flank the proscenium. They depicted a range of Argentinian peasant types. In Evita's cast of 48, only 5 actors have solos. To add character to the people who did not have solos, Prince suggested that they identify with the people in the murals.[1]

When Prince was ready to cast the London production of Evita, he hired a young musical actress named Elaine Paige for the title role. Paige had been in the chorus of the Lloyd Webber and Rice failure, Jeeves. Joss Ackland was signed to play Peron and David Essex was set as Che. The Irish actress, Siobhan McCarthy, was to play the small role of Peron's ex-mistress.

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[1]John Corry, "Harold Prince: Craft Is the Key," New York Times, 20 January 1980, p. 6.

Prince was at the height of his talent as he went into rehearsals with Evita in London. He had confidence in his ability to stage a show deftly, authoritatively and artistically. His many years of producing/directing both hits and flops had left him with many rich experiences that he might call upon. He said, "Evita is the beneficiary of Pacific Overtures. They're both documentary revues; incidents; highlights. Neither is lineally constructed. I found where I was boring in Pacific Overtures, with Evita I knew how to stop and move on at the right place and get the rhythm right. . . . things last too long in Pacific Overtures."[1]

Prince explained what Evita was about.

> She (Eva Peron) was corrupted by all that power. We try to show both sides. It's less about Eva Peron than about the media--what people see on a screen or hear on the radio--We're living in a horribly media-oriented era, and I'm always fascinated with what happens--on a stage and in real life--when real people are imposed against their media images. . . . On the politics of Evita, both the right and the left adopted Eva Peron (people want simplicity in theatre). My personal view is: she was a villain, corrupted by all that power. But there's also a sympathetic part that draws me to her . . . Evita, illegitimate and a woman . . . a 10th class citizen in Argentina. And she made it sexually. It's grim and grimy stuff . . . the rage of ambition at work.[2]

For Prince, Evita is political theatre. The people in the story are symbols which warn about

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[1]"Evita," Hollywood Drama-Logue.

[2]"Evita," San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle.

> the perniciousness, the dangers, of media hype, of what packaging and selling can do and how you can sell the public anything if the bands make the right noises and the banners are the right colors and everything's set up well. But she's not a heroine remotely, by anyone's standards, but she is a figure. Now it seems to me the form of opera makes these figures, Sweeney and Evita, work better in the musical stage. If you had a lot of book spoken, I tend to think it might trivialize them because, remember, the marriage of music and spoken text is a strange one, and the more spoken text there is, the more artificial the moment is when the character opens his mouth to sing. But if they sing all the way through, then the convention is consistent and it's easier to live with the emotions and truth of the piece.[1]

Prince's concept for Evita was based on the movie Citizen Kane. He looked at the material and thought that he'd always wanted to do on the stage something similar to what he saw in the film. He said, "It was so particularly about movies; I felt Evita can be particularly about the stage. But Citizen Kane, that strange juxtaposition of myth and reality, people and people-as-objects . . . you can either deal with those things, those resonances, those aftertastes, those problems if you want to, or you don't have to."[2] Prince feels that if audiences are unable to see what he wants them to see in Evita, they can still see Evita as a pageant.

The more Prince looked at the material that he had to work with, the more he felt it was "a kind of mystery story because the mystery story question is how in hell did

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[1]Wallach, "Harold Prince," p. 19.

[2]Ibid., p. 24.

this Eva Peron lady get from A to R? How did it happen? And that's a mystery. So you deal with each episode that way and you have a kind of mystery story . . . All right, she came from here, but how did she get from Kuleen, a little dirt road, how did she get to Peron?"[1]

Prince is fond of using a technique which Sondheim said he thinks "works very well."[2] It is a series of reprises of all the songs at the end of a show, similar to what was done in A Little Night Music. When Prince worked on Evita, he was impressed by certain leitmotifs, and by the audience's recognition of them. Like movie music technique, the same emotional underscoring occurs.[3]

Only minor changes had to be made on the show. Very little of the textual substance of the recording was changed for the show. One song was removed and replaced by a new one. One subplot was dropped (Che's hope of becoming an entrepreneur) and the lines of a few songs were changed. Additional narration was written for Che. Lloyd Webber continued to have agonizing doubts about Evita and was sure it wouldn't work. He said at the time of rehearsals, "It looked to me as if it was staggering slowly, blindly towards completion."[4]

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]"On Collaboration Between Authors and Directors," Dramatists Guild Quarterly, p. 27.

[3]Ibid.

[4]McKnight, Andrew Lloyd Webber: A Biography, p. 167.

Prince rehearsed in London for only three and a half weeks before the nine preview performances. Critics came to the first public performance. They were not invited by Prince, the writers or producers and they didn't come as critics. Prince recalls how it all happened:

> The newspapers all came and they reviewed it. In other words the accredited critics may not have come but the newspapers did. So the day after the first public performance the newspaper headlines on the front page were "Don't Cry for Eva - Argentina's a Hit!" and so on. The show was a smash after its first public performance. Then we waited nine more performances until we were properly reviewed and it didn't matter. It was almost anti-climactic. There were lines at the theatre from the first day the box office opened. Then when there were those reviews at the previews the lines got longer. Then there was a phenomenon that I'd never seen before: for at least two years there was a return ticket holder's line that would probably be 150-200 people every night hoping that a bus would break down allowing all 200 people on line to get in. And it was phenomenal. It was an upper. It was very exciting to have happen. Now, you knew that would filter back to New York. We spent the next six months arranging for seats for Americans who were in Europe to see the London production. So you knew there would be all this advance excitement and there was the worry that there would be a kind of deflation, a kind of disappointment when it finally got to this country.[1]

Evita opened officially in London on June 21, 1978 at the Prince Edward Theatre. McKnight in his biography of Lloyd Webber says that the critics almost ran out of superlatives.[2] Elaine Paige starring as Eva Peron scored

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]McKnight, Andrew Lloyd Webber: A Biography, p. 169.

a great personal triumph. The reviewers felt she sang with power and feeling, dancing well and acting superbly.[1] David Essex also received excellent notices. The score was well received and McKnight quotes Derek Jewell of the Sunday Times, who said that "the score is an unparalleled fusion of twentieth-century musical experience. Echoes of the past, Tchaikovsky, Puccini, and church choral music, shimmer hauntingly through. But it is the interweaving of pop, rock, jazz, Broadway, Latin and other elements which make the brew so astonishingly potent."[2] The whole production, said Jewell, was "breathtaking."[3]

Evita played to capacity business. Scalpers outside the Prince Edward Theatre received two and three times the price of tickets for seats which were being booked three months in advance. Although Lloyd Webber could now forget his early fears about the show, his anxieties about the political nature of the show lingered. Lloyd Webber is quoted as saying that he was forced in Evita to take a position about a woman regarded by many as a poisonous, indeed murderous, dictator in her own right. He said, "I had to accept the fact that there would be people who would charge

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Derek Jewell, "Evita," [London] Sunday Times, 25 June 1978, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[3]Ibid.

us with glorifying Fascism," he said. "Of course I worried about it."[1] Rice did not have these qualms. He has since explained, "People tended to have extreme views about Eva Peron . . . they either loved or hated her. I was somewhere in the middle."[2]

The production in London of Evita cost 400,000 pounds which to the producers seemed like an enormous sum, although the Broadway production was a much more expensive one. Stigwood, because of his confidence in the show based on its London success, backed the entire Broadway production himself.

Lloyd Webber has said that he feels Evita was enormously aided by the recording of "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" made more than eighteen months before the show opened on stage.

Anthony Bowles, who conducted the orchestra for the record, was asked by Stigwood to stay and direct the show as well. However, Bowles was fired during the early run of Evita, creating a great deal of ill-feeling in Bowles toward Prince. Lloyd Webber is quoted as saying in answer to why Prince fired Bowles, "For some reason Anthony, from the word go, didn't seem to get on with Hal. A great pity. I'm very, very fond of Anthony, but Hal is a strong-willed man and Anthony is equally so. Hal is an emotional man too,

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[1]McKnight, Andrew Lloyd Webber: A Biography, p. 169.

[2]Ibid.

but in a *great* way. He's so talented that you can't--I mean, it's just one of those things, really."[1] Prince eventually phoned Bowles to clear the air. Prince expressed his hopes that there would be no ill-feeling but that he had a need for someone who "doesn't just come in and throw his weight about while just doing one show a week," which was, Bowles said, agreed to in his contract.[2]

Bringing *Evita* to the United States did not create any major problems. Prince had put a clause into his original contract that the producers and writers of the show could not do this version of the show in America without his permission. When he made his original arrangements with them he explained that

> I thought the show might work in Europe, that I thought it would probably be a great success there and that I was very anxious to work on it--but that I did not think it was for American audiences and that I did not want it seen in America without my permission. So they very unwisely (from their point of view) gave me a contract which would have made it possible for me to embargo the production. What happened was that, of course, it turned out to be *Evita* and I was delighted that it should be seen everywhere. It is also, obviously, the show that has given me the financial independence that everyone thought I always had and that I now do have, which is interesting.[3]

Prince made many changes in order to prepare the show for American audiences. The opening at the initial performances in London was about five or ten minutes longer than the version which is currently playing there now or in the

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[1]Ibid., p. 176. [2]Ibid., p. 177.

[3]Prince interview.

version which played in the United States. The original ending of the play was much longer. Prince explained:

> It's on the record that way. It goes on rather too long for my money. The same thing is true of the bedroom scene that immediately precedes the final kind of reliving of her life in her head. That bedroom scene with Peron is longer. Longer on the record and longer in London, longer originally. We made those cuts after it was such a success in London. Then the performance of Che in London was much more genteel, much more laid back and charming. I would say that he was not the driving force in the English production. He was really charming, but he was more the observer than the driver. When it came to be done in this country, I determined that it should be more political here and that Che would have to be the force that drove the story along . . . that American audiences would not respond to it--not to the same degree as the British had (I found parenthetically that the British prefer their own production and the Americans, when it opened here said, "Well of course, it's a much better show here than it was in London." And I assumed that would happen.) I also thought it would cushion some of the disapppointment that people might feel because, except for Fiddler, I've never been involved with a show where from the moment it was announced in London there were lines. In order to counter that disappointment, it seemed to me that they had to decide propriatarily that this production was theirs and that they liked it better than they had in London and that's why we calculated to do it the way we did. And that's why we made the changes and they were mostly in emphasis. It's also why we went to California and played for four months out of town, so that there would be a build up from out of town of this show . . . this show . . . this show . . . this show! which would start to confuse things. It wasn't just this London show, it was now this California show that was making its way to New York. And it happened precisely that way.[1]

Prince made the show "tougher" for this country. He did everything "tougher."[2] Prince took the show to

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

Los Angeles and San Francisco before going to Broadway. He felt that with this time he might work out some of the things he had wanted to do in London and couldn't. The show did become more abrasive and more political. As for Evita being called an opera, Prince agrees that it is in spite of the many critics who disagree. He said,

> Opera is and always has been, musical theater of its time, presented in a form using limited dialogue. Puccini and Verdi--who are the musical heroes of Andrew Lloyd Webber, incidentally--were pop composers of their era . . . There are certain elitist lines of rigidity drawn around opera. The word tends to carry with it a type of awed reverence that has been a barrier to acceptance of contemporary opera works. But those operas by Verdi and Puccini were the show-biz musicals of their time.[1]

Prince considers Pacific Overtures, Sweeney Todd and Evita modern operas. He anticipated that they would one day join major opera repertoires and as of this writing Sweeney Todd as well as Candide are already in the New York City Opera's repertory.

For the Broadway production, Prince cast Patti LuPone as Eva. She was a graduate of the Juilliard School, who had appeared in The Robber Bridegroom some seasons earlier. Mandy Patinkin was hired to play the role of Che and Bob Gunton the role of Peron. Jane Ohringer was set for Peron's mistress. Firth and O'Brien continued as costume and set designers as they had done in London, and Larry Fuller was hired to do the limited amount of choreography.

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[1]"Evita," San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle.

From interviews with George Martin, who was production stage manager for Evita, and Kenneth W. Urmstom, who was assistant stage manager and dance captain, a picture has been provided of the way Prince worked. Martin reiterated many of the things already stated about the director's working methods, emphasizing his decisiveness, which makes him easy to work with.

> There's never any indecision with Prince. Sometimes directors go back and forth--he never does that. If Prince feels this, you never know it if he's doubting what he's doing. Once he makes decisions, it's made and that's how it's going to be. It's very easy to work with someone that way. I think he does most of his work before he goes into rehearsals. In his head he really knows where the show is going to go. But when something doesn't work he then is flexible enough to change it. . . . Sometimes I think Hal is a little too impatient but that's only because you worry that he wants something right away from the actors and everybody (because of the economy of the American theatre). It seems he's thought about something for so long and he sees it and doesn't know why you don't see it. That's just a small idiosyncracy. He goes with the actor, however; there are some different interpretations, but they more or less look the same. I think Rice and Lloyd Webber wanted Hal to do Superstar but he turned them down. As to the fact that there was no libretto--all those things that are spoken, a couple of speeches--are Hal saying "I think we need this here--you just can't go into the next musical number; you've got to give the public some information . . . as it is, you've got to be pretty aware of what the history is, because it skips. It does start at the beginning--but there are years in between that are not explained." This is one of his [Prince's] biggest hits; visually, I think it's one of the best things he's ever done.[1]

Urmston was impressed with the way Prince worked with large groups of people, in fact, with his whole manner.

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[1]Interview with George Martin, New York, 28 April 1982.

He said that Prince loves stage pictures, and discussed his perceptions of the director in action.

> Prince had a concept that he brought to rehearsal, but he would change it if he felt it wasn't working. But it seemed he had everything worked out in his mind. He worked fast and he just moved . . . moved . . . moved. I was impressed. Prince and Fuller occasionally forgot what they did in London and Jon Yost [a dancer who appeared in London as well as in the New York production of Evita] would fill them in. Hal came the first day and gave a whole talk on the history of it, and he goes on and on, he can talk for four hours, and then they [Prince and Fuller] show slides of the set and slides of Eva and they have a tape of Eva's last speech when she was 33, and it sounds like a 60-year-old woman with an old voice with cancer. Prince does this with each cast. He tells different stories about her. Prince researches for years--the history, even the whole story of the murals and how that came about. He closely supervises all the technical stagecraft. He likes instant results. If he has an idea, he doesn't have patience to go through "method" techniques. He throws out ideas and wants you to give it to him. In five minutes he can sharpen up something by the tone of his voice or his whole manner. I would have taken a week to get it like that . . . just the way he works. I learned from him. . . . He "hollers" a lot. He calls, "STOP, now do this, let's take it again," rather than having a number going all the way to the end and then giving notes, etc. He's not polite. He'll just stop, saying, "You're not doing it! THAT'S IT!" Then everyone's on their toes. Then he gets mad if they don't do that. He tells the actors when they hit it. He works very fast. Some actors can't deal with it. They can only do it if it's "truth within," you know, and that sort of thing. If you do a fake thing for him, you go off on your own and work on it and come back and give it to him. He'll take a lot of suggestions from the people also. He'll listen--mainly according to who it is . . . from someone like a John McMartin, he'll take almost everything. McMartin gives a great deal. Prince knows he basically doesn't have to do much with him, he only has to direct him in traffic and he'll fill in the rest. Apparently, he had Patti LuPone in tears and she was supposedly very stubborn also, although they're supposedly very close. They say she didn't always

> accept everything . . . and even after the show opened she was very difficult to work with. George Martin loves her in the role but he would never want to work with her again, she was so difficult. Even with his collaborators, Prince wants what he wants and fast (from the stage crew also). I'd say he is the last word on his productions. When he comes back to check a show, everyone's on their toes. He'll have notes, but he really gets involved even after a show is running one and a half years, and he'll have a real good rehearsal. He'll help a new actor a lot. It's exciting to watch it. If they don't respond, he'll fight to a degree, but then he'll tell Ruth [Mitchell], "You fix it."[1]

The New York production of Evita opened at the Broadway Theatre on September 25, 1979. The reviews were not outstanding but they were generally quite good. Prince said:

> It's popular to say that the reviews in America were not good. It's not true. If you look in the lobby, you can see that the reviews were fine. What is true is that they were not all good and they were nowhere near as excitingly good as the reviews had been in Europe and for a few weeks there was a moment when ticket sales sort of stopped for a while. The people tried to analyze--is it or isn't it? And then everything was fine again. But our advance was so enormous--three million or some such figure--that it didn't matter.[2]

Martin Gottfried suggested that with Evita Prince had finally become one of the most important directors in the American theatre. He felt that because Prince had achieved this success with Evita, a show done without

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[1]Interview with Kenneth W. Urmston, New York, 26 May 1982.

[2]Prince interview.

Sondheim, that he would now be looked upon as one of the most important creative figures in the modern musical theatre. Evita, said Gottfried, astounded almost everyone and credit for that has gone to Prince rather than the authors of the piece. "For the show's power is in its production concept, its fabulous imagery, and these visions were Prince's."[1] Prince's visualizations were compared by Gottfried to the visual lines used by such artist-directors as America's Robert Wilson and Germany's Peter Stein. They built their shows on visual elements. Unlike them, however, Prince "introduces such innovation to mass audiences; he subjects his shows to the practical, professionalizing demands of commercial theater."[2] By breaking away from Sondheim as he did in On the Twentieth Century and Evita, Gottfried felt, Prince "more successfully straddled Broadway's twin realms of art and commerce. These shows were not above laughs and thrills."[3]

Indeed, Evita did contain a grand array of stage pictures. Prince utilized dynamic lighting (he set dozens of lights flush into the stage floor to create vertical patterns and walls of light). His constructs and black velours produced exciting effects. His use of film clips

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[1]Martin Gottfried, "Evita," Cue magazine, 9 November 1979, p. 31.

[2]Ibid., p. 32.

[3]Ibid.

made strong comments and accented scenes. The murals, projections and exciting stylization which he had mastered since he visited the Taganka Theatre, worked with Boris Aronson, and studied Joan Littlewood's and the new visual artists' work all assured a rich theatrical experience.

The danger, posed Gottfried, is that since Prince could now make anything into a fabulous show, he would have to be wary that "the materials must always come first."[1]

Walter Kerr felt that vital scenes were missing from Evita for a clear understanding about how this "remote heroine managed to get close enough to Peron to work her will on him, what it was she did to endear herself to a gullible population."[2] Because of these missing scenes, Kerr felt that there was no conclusion, no judgment, which could be arrived at. He felt, however, that the evening was not boring. As for Prince's direction, he said:

> Prince has put his customary firm mark on the staging, making economical, highly efficient use of placards, banners, torches and bodies as he conducts the Perons through their open-air rallies and ostentatiously glittering inaugurations.[3]

Edwin Wilson of the Wall Street Journal pointed out what he felt were the show's weaknesses. In spite of the

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Walter Kerr, "'Evita,' A Musical Peron," New York Times, 26 September 1979, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 40, p. 149.

[3]Ibid.

fact that Che is used to show us Eva's shortcomings, and that this was accented even more here than it was in London, "it is not enough."[1] Wilson's major complaint was the authors' "confusion toward the subject."[2] He said, "If the authors do not wish to glamorize Eva and have not succeeded in denouncing her, it is difficult to know what they do want."[3] Wilson also felt there was no clear line of development in the way the authors concentrated on Eva's death. On the other hand, Wilson was most complimentary about the physical production.

> In the theater, mise en scene is a French term that means more than the staging and choreographing of a play and more than the visual aspects of the scenery, lighting and costumes. It means all of these together. For Evita, the new musical that opened last night at the Broadway Theater, it is appropriate to speak of the mise en scene because the play's physical production is dazzling. . . . one is forced to conclude that where its artistic viewpoint is concerned--not to mention its politics--Evita is hopelessly muddled. This is all the more regrettable because the mise en scene is so superb.[4]

The score was only mildly praised. Lloyd Webber's music was considered eclectic but not noteworthy. The favorite number was "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina." Howard Kissel said:

> Lloyd Webber's music frequently sounds like mishummed fragments of familiar tunes. The best

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[1]Edwin Wilson, "Dazzling Production of a Muddled Story," Wall Street Journal, 26 September 1979, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 40, p. 150.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid. [4]Ibid.

> known song in the score, "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina," starts with a paraphrase of the opening line of an old Latin standard, "Yours," veers off into the first line of "Rose Marie," then quotes a few consecutive phrases from Brahms' Violin Concerto before going off on its own. Another song blatantly recalls the Beatles' "Yesterday." Most of the music is characterless, often singsong--perhaps it was kept deliberately simple to guarantee we would be able to grasp Rice's banal lyrics.[1]

Clive Barnes thought the show was stunning but he had reservations.

> Make no mistake about it, Harold Prince's latest venture at Broadway opera, Evita, is a stunning, exhilarating theatrical experience, especially if you don't think about it too much. . . . I have rarely if ever seen a more excitingly staged Broadway musical. Its director, Harold Prince, helped by the choreographer Larry Fuller, has designed and developed a virtually faultless piece of Broadway fantasy that has shadow exultantly victorious over substance, and form virtually laughing at content. . . . it is a definite marker point in the ongoing story of the Broadway musical.[2]

The cast of the show was mostly praised, with an occasional reservation. Patinkin, said Kissel, "has one of the purest, most beautiful tenor voices ever to hit Broadway, projects genuine passion--but the strength of his emotions only emphasizes the hollowness of the material."[3]

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[1]Howard Kissel, "Evita," Women's Wear Daily, 26 September 1979, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 40, pp. 154-155.

[2]Clive Barnes, "A Stunning Evita Seduces with Its Gloss," New York Post, 26 September 1979, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 40, p. 154.

[3]Kissel, "Evita."

Patti LuPone, said Kroll in Newsweek, "can act, sing and dance, and she'll get stronger in the role. But right now she doesn't transmit the driving force, the astonishing charisma that made an ambitious trollop into a tremendous political force and a folk saint for millions of people."[1]

The staging of a few scenes was singled out by many of the critics as being most imaginatively realized on stage. One was the scene in which a group of Argentinian colonels who are in line for the presidency sing about "The Art of the Possible" as they smoke cigars and play the game of musical chairs on a group of rocking chairs. On a screen over their heads we can see tanks and street warfare as the military men look each other over warily and scramble for the remaining seats. Dark, ironic overtones are present in the scene in which Peron wins the game.

Another powerful scene shows Eva using men to help her achieve success. The mirrored door to her bedroom, explains Edwin Wilson, "literally becomes a revolving door. In a song called "Goodnight and Thank You," she escorts one man out, only to have the door turn as another man enters."[2]

The set by O'Brien and Firth, consisting largely of girders and a moving bridge, has been repeated in Prince shows in varying sizes and shapes (Sweeney Todd, A Doll's

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[1]Jack Kroll, "Evita in Soft Focus," Newsweek, 8 October 1979, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 40, p. 152.

[2]Wilson, "Dazzling Production of a Muddled Story."

Life). It provides an impression of coldness and mechanization. Howard Kissel said:

> Flanks of spotlights in both wings make the acting space seem like a sports arena, a place for momentous contests. The starkness and austerity of the basic set are modified by an enormous, mobile movie screen, which, sometimes dominating the forestage, sometimes hovering almost subliminally at the back, projecting images of the real Eva, gives one the sense of watching an epic.[1]

After the show had been running a while, there were various cast changes, including new actresses playing the role of Eva. Prince was often asked whom he liked best in the role. He said,

> They're all very different. Paige created it and she was wonderful. The girl who just left it in London, Stephanie Lawrence, was wonderful. Patti [LuPone] I thought was extraordinary. I love Loni [Ackerman], who is playing it now. I think that all those girls were wonderful. All those girls were equally terrific. No two girls have been the same playing it. That I know for a fact and that's extraordinary. They tap different things in themselves.[2]

Prince discussed the fact that in Evita ninety-nine and nine-tenths of the text is sung. Indeed, the only one who doesn't sing everything is Che, who has a monologue or two that he speaks. Prince said:

> I think that requires a great deal of character input from the artists. They have to find things in themselves that then alter the delineations. Otherwise they're just a bunch of singers up there singing stuff. The thing that makes it work so well is that there is so much of it, the authors

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[1]Kissel, "Evita."

[2]Prince interview.

> put so much in it and I found so much in it. And there's so much in character, so much detail that we know about that other people don't know about. But, I've always maintained that when you are looking at something abstract on the stage, just as in film, . . . that's what made Antonioni's early films work so well, you can be so abstract. But you have to always know where you are. You have to know what that abstraction represents. You can look at a bed with two people in it. If you know that they've just made love you don't have to see them doing it and you don't have to articulate that. But the audience will know something that they would not know if the two people were sitting up in bed having a conversation. . . . If they've just made love and the actors know that the audience knows something about the way they're dealing with each other, they may not be able to say those people have just made love as in the end of the first act, but they'll know something about the way they handle each other and about the way they pass the cigarette between them, that something's happening. It gives you a sense of foundation of comfort. That people who are doing this know where they are when somebody walks across the stage from up stage right to down stage left, even though it's an empty stage--if they are walking down a hallway--in their heads. The audience may not know it's a hallway, but you know that isn't just random walking going on there--that something is happening and that they're observing something as they make that move across the stage. Evita depends a great deal on that, a great deal. The process with Evita was so good, not only because we worked so closely together but because I found them all so cooperative.[1]

Evita ran on Broadway for almost four years, closing in June of 1983. It won seven Tony Awards for the 1979-1980 season, one for the best musical (Robert Stigwood in association with David Land), best actress in a musical (Patti LuPone), best featured actor in a musical (Mandy Patinkin), best direction of a musical (Harold Prince), best score

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[1]Prince interview.

(Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber), best book of a musical (Tim Rice), and best lighting design (David Hersey). It also won six Drama Desk Awards, including one for best director of a musical, and the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award for best musical.

Evita has had three touring companies in the United States and another eighteen worldwide. Prince was delighted with the economic and professional success this show brought him. He finally had proved that he could succeed without Sondheim, but Prince scoffed at this. He said,

> That's just nonsense. One of the things I cannot do, though I sure as hell would like to do anything Steve ever writes, is that I can't just wait for Steve, because then I'll work too rarely. I need to work--all the time. And there's nothing wrong with that. I used to think there was something wrong with that. I used to think, you're a workaholic, or there's a neurotic drive here. I don't think there's anything remotely neurotic about it; I get pleasure and I'm a hell of a lot more fun to live with when I'm working, so why not continue to work?[1]

Prince felt that with Evita he had finally directed a show that would chasten those critics who called the Prince-Sondheim shows cold and cynical. He said of audiences watching Evita: "People were moved, upset, crying. It has some very deep emotional thing running through it."[2] There was some agreement with him, but yet there were those

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[1]Wallach, "Harold Prince," p. 25.

[2]"Evita," Washington Star, 11 December 1975, NYPL Clipping Folder.

who argued that again they had not been made to care terribly much about the protagonist, in this case, Eva Peron. Prince, however, was not too concerned; he was already busy readying his next project, Sweeney Todd.

CHAPTER XIV

SWEENEY TODD, A TOUCH OF GRAND GUIGNOL

> Hal's interests have led him to a different kind of theatre. Evita and Sweeney Todd were cold but thrilling as theatre. That excitement compensated for what was missing in human values--just sheer theatrical excitement and verve and imagination and invention.[1]

> The Harold Prince-Stephen Sondheim collaboration has produced a series of provocative and inventive works that have enriched and advanced the frontiers of the American Musical Theatre.[2]

The story of Sweeney Todd, the Fleet Street barber, was a legend in London dating back to the early nineteenth century and had been the subject of popular plays in England for 150 years. It told of a barber who slit his customers' throats, shuttling their bodies through a trapdoor to the cellar of his shop. They were then made into meat pies with the help of Mrs. Lovett, a neighborhood woman. The crimes are eventually discovered because of a telltale thumbnail.

Daniel Gerould in his book Melodrama supplies "A Toddography" which traces the many varied forms in which

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[1]Harnick interview.

[2]"Sondheim Takes a Stab at Grand Guignol," New York Times, 25 February 1979, p. D5.

the story was told in literature, the performing, and the visual arts. The plays dealing with the legendary barber include George Dibdin Pitt's The String of Pearls (1847) and Wilham Latimer's Sweeney Todd (c. 1900), each presented over the years in various adaptations. There was a British film in 1936 titled The Demon Barber of Fleet Street and a ballet, Sweeney Todd, choreographed in 1959 by John Cranko, with music by Malcolm Arnold and presented by the Royal Ballet Company.

On April 17, 1970, a new dramatic version of the story called Sweeney Todd (The Demon Barber of Fleet Street) by Christopher Bond, a Liverpool playwright, opened at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, England, with the playwright playing the role of Tobias Ragg. Gerould says, "Incorporating elements of Dumas pere's The Count of Monte Cristo and Cyril Tourneur's The Revenger's Tragedy, Bond's play makes Sweeney Todd a victim of injustice and gives motivation for his actions."[1] Bond's play was then produced at the Theatre Workshop, Theatre Royal, Stratford (Joan Littlewood's theatre) in 1973 and was published by Samuel French in London in 1974.

Stephen Sondheim was in London in 1974 helping to prepare the London production of Gypsy. He had always been interested in Grand Guignol and in melodrama. The Sweeney

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[1]Daniel Gerould, Melodrama (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1980), p. 47.

Todds "that existed before the Christopher Bond version were indeed bloody."[1] In these earlier versions, Todd was primarily a villain and Mrs. Lovett, an accomplice. "There was no attitude or tone. It was simply a matter of seeing the villain get caught in the end."[2]

Sondheim heard about the Bond play. He went to see it and thought it was wonderful, since "it had a combination of charm and creepiness. I don't remember being particularly frightened."[3] He bought all the published versions of the story even though he thought they were terrible. He considered Bond's version richer than the others.[4]

Sondheim thought the play would make an opera. After speaking to John Dexter about his idea, Dexter encouraged the composer to try to get the rights. Sondheim says,

> That's how it all started. It was seeing the play at the Stratford East that sparked my desire to write a melodramatic piece--I certainly wasn't thinking about melodrama. I had written melodramas before although I didn't do the music in the case of West Side Story; after all, Romeo and Juliet is a classic melodrama. So I wasn't looking for a melodrama; it was just there.[5]

Sondheim was attracted to Bond's version of the legend because it remained true to the melodramatic

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[1]Sondheim, quoted in ibid.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid., p. 8.

[4]"Sondheim Takes a Stab at Grand Guignol."

[5]Gerould, Melodrama, pp. 9-10.

tradition of the piece, and yet the playwright managed to humanize the characters, giving them more motivation for their actions than had existed in earlier versions. Sondheim said,

> Everyone in Bond's version is larger than life; the characters are not real people. The events are extraordinary, melodramatic in the sense that they are larger than life; in real life there may have been mass murderers and even ones who used razors--but their stories were not compressed and heightened in this way. Sweeney Todd is larger than life as a story and larger than life in technique.[1]

Producers Richard Barr and Charles Woodward were also bidding for the American rights to Bond's Sweeney Todd, wanting it for a straight play. When Sondheim, who had just committed himself to Prince to write the score of Pacific Overtures, approached them with the idea of the three of them doing a musical version instead, they agreed to wait until he had finished his other commitment. Sondheim said, "I didn't get around to starting work on Sweeney Todd until the summer of 1977, so Barr and Woodward have been very patient for five years."[2]

Sondheim approached Prince with the idea of their collaborating on this project, but Prince was not sure he understood how it could work as a musical. Finally, however, he decided to direct it. He elaborated:

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[1]Ibid., p. 5.

[2]"Sondheim Takes a Stab at Grand Guignol."

Sweeney was one of the rare instances in my relationship with Sondheim where I backed in and he was the driving force. This is a show he felt very strongly about and he knew it would make a musical and I didn't understand. First he gave me Christopher Bond's play which he'd seen in London. And I thought it was a little on the campy side. I thought, "Oh, I see what this is, it's about serving meat pies at the intermission, and about almost hissing the villain and applauding the hero," and he said, "No, no, this is very serious. It's about revenge. This is a tragedy in the Greek sense." And I said, "Ooh, Wow! Now, if it's that--how in hell do you dramatize the rest of the people in the play?" I mean, in other words, not just Sweeney, I could work up sympathy for him. But how do I work up sympathy for Lovett? How do I laugh at Lovett? Nobody in her family has been raped and driven crazy and possibly murdered. And why do all the other people in the piece have such frequently venomous, revengeful feelings? What are they all revengeful about? And then of course, the obvious struck me, which is that there was a common bond that everyone in the play had, including Sweeney, which was that they were all victims of the class system. Additionally, there's a problem you have whenever you have a chorus, which is: how do they populate the stage? What do you say to an actor? See, in the old days, in the choruses you had the butcher, a baker and the candlestick maker, and you gave the butcher a line and you gave the baker a line and it was all puerile stuff, but it was acceptable, in terms of musical comedy; that one line of speech told us who that chorus member was. It's not acceptable now, we're more sophisticated than that! So you have a chorus and generally you don't delineate them individually but you want them to come on stage with some purpose beyond singing the words that were written for them and some behavioral thing that keeps them focused in the play. So that's when I got the notion (with Eugene, again) [here Prince refers to set designer Eugene Lee] of doing it in a factory, saying "All right! These people are all victims of the class system, they're all victims of that period in history when the Industrial Revolution took over, when they became machines or slaves to machines--and how will we show it? Well, let's do it all in an environment which is a factory. We won't say what's made in that factory--I couldn't care less! It won't be written

> by the authors into the script. We'll simply tell the whole story inside a factory, and separate it from the sun outside and the blue sky by dirty glass window panes (soup covered window panes). And then everyone will share an experience. And then I'll be able to talk to the chorus about their responsibilities to the evening. And then you'll be able to laugh at Lovett, because then you'll have in that societal spectrum showoffs, comics, etc. (a universal experience)." And once that happened, I got to feeling more comfortable with it.[1]

Although Prince had not been taken at first with Sweeney, Sondheim recalled that "as he started to work on it, he fell in love with it too. That's the way it should be in a collaboration. I think if we ever worked on something for any length of time and one of us wasn't enthusiastic, we would certainly stop. It hasn't happened yet."[2]

A major aim was to retain the spirit that had attracted Sondheim to the play originally. Since it would be necessary to give the book greater depth than the usual shallow melodrama, it was decided to treat the material seriously and not as camp. Sondheim explained:

> I wanted to make a melodrama but with a twentieth-century sensibility. Perhaps in a hundred years, or even in fifty years, audiences would hiss the villain and make fun of the play. I wouldn't mind if it acquired that patina, but I wanted it taken seriously by an audience today, the way the original Sweeney Todd was taken seriously in the nineteenth century.[3]

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]"Sondheim Takes a Stab at Grand Guignol."

[3]Gerould, Melodrama, p. 6.

Wanting to establish a serious mood from the beginning, the collaborators called the play a musical thriller, so that the audience would know in advance what they were coming to see. It didn't seem right to call it a musical comedy, since there were no chorus girls. To call it a musical melodrama might have suggested that they were making fun of the genre,

> with villains galloping across the stage, the heroine tied to the railroad tracks, and the audience cheering and clapping. Starting with the subtitle, "A Musical Thriller," and going on to the set and the music, we have made sure that by the end of the opening number the audience will know what they are in for.[1]

A second help in establishing a serious mood was the set. Sondheim said:

> One of the miracles of the set is that when the spectators first come into the theater and see it, they know that we're not kidding. Right away there is nothing about the set to suggest that a curtain is going to drop from the flies, plop on the floor, and disclose bats painted on it. Because of the solidity and scruffiness of the set, even if you wanted to do a spoof of melodrama, it would be impossible to get a laugh, except for the kind of laughs we get, which are character laughs. But for the make-fun-of-it laugh, the set is far too brooding a presence.[2]

Sondheim wanted to frighten the audience but not only by means of stage effects. He said, "The true terror of melodrama comes from its revelations about the frightening power of what is inside human beings. And if you write about kings and queens and are a great poet, you end up

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[1]Ibid., p. 7. [2]Ibid.

with a first-class tragedy; if you write about ordinary people and are an ordinary writer, you end up with a melodrama. That's exactly what this show is."[1]

When Sondheim and Prince first began to develop the show, they decided not to "soap-box" it. They both like didactic theatre but don't like "soap-boxing." Sondheim said,

> I try to do it by just inserting here and there throughout the lyrics words like "engine," basic images, not just inserting the words but using them as little motivating forces to make a slightly wispy connection with the industrial revolution. I was afraid if we made too much of a connection it would put too heavy a weight on the image or on the metaphor. I don't think it did.[2]

Sweeney Todd took four years of preparatory work before it was seen by audiences. Prince said,

> The first three years were about how in hell do you tell that story and how large do you want it to be? I worried to death for the longest time that, first of all, I was the wrong director for it, inasmuch as I couldn't see beyond Sherlock Holmes. I saw structure, real bricks and some turntables, and that's it. I kept protesting--not out of modesty, I assure you, but out of my real sense that I didn't feel comfortable here. Finally we were able to determine what the show was going to be, what its "motor" was going to be. That's how I always think of it, as the motor--it has a lot to do with the way the scenery is going to look, and how the people are going to move around in telling the story.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] "On Collaboration Between Authors and Directors," Dramatists Guild Quarterly, p. 16.

[3] Ibid., p. 19.

However, Prince confessed that he really didn't understand the Bond play until he was within a week of previewing. He had read it years earlier, when Sondheim had brought it to his attention, but except for Sondheim's assurances about the way it played, it seemed too terse. He couldn't visualize it for a very long time.

> I couldn't imagine how those scenes were played. Then we got the libretto and went to work, and occasionally went back to Bond, and he was very helpful. But originally, I did not understand that play. . . . I was very frightened of Sweeney Todd, I will have to tell you. I think that's a good sign now, a kind of key word. I shouldn't give this away, but whenever I say to myself, "Oh, God, is this pretentious," I am usually on pretty good grounds. It's when I am not frightened that I have to watch out, because maybe it's too easy.[1]

Sondheim began to work on Sweeney as an opera. Bond's text, however, was so filled with materials that he realized that it might turn out to be a nine-and-a-half-hour Ring cycle. Sondheim explained,

> It didn't seem worth that kind of time and attention. . . . So, I thought, I will do a little cutting and snipping--but it is plotted so well and so intricately that I got frightened. I bogged down, and at that point Hal came to my rescue. He suggested that it would help move it along if Hugh Wheeler would be willing to adapt it. . . . As we got to work on it, much of the second half of the piece started to change in shape and in tone and style. That was the result of the three of us sitting in a room and pounding away at what it should and shouldn't be.[2]

Prince has always felt that exchanging ideas is one of the most important things collaborators can do while putting

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[1]Ibid., p. 28. [2]Ibid., p. 23.

together a musical. He said, "It's accurate to report that at the core of so many creations of musicals, people do not sit in a room together. They do not talk, the operate independently and bring each other finished work."[1] When the show was about to open, Prince called Sweeney a "romance," a play of passion.

> It's not Grand Guignol and it's not a pastiche or period piece or camping for laughs. It's the most melodic and romantic score that Steve has ever written. The music is soaring, with a rich melodic line. A Little Night Music was slightly removed and contained. This is allowed to spill over. I hope that it will engulf the audience. . . . the show calls for big classical bravura acting. . . . the musical is not just about revenge, but about the incursion of the industrial age and its influence on souls, poetry and people.[2]

Prince moved the show more and more toward the romantic, partly as a balance for the gory material.

Hugh Wheeler worked on the adaptation of Christopher Bond's play, with Sondheim working with him on the score. Prince finds it crucial to read through and play through a show he is working on a number of times before he goes into rehearsal. Therefore, in March 1978, he arranged for the first of these readings on Sweeney. Sondheim had five songs and Wheeler had a first draft. They arranged for actors to read it. There was already a feeling of how the

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Mel Gussow, "Sweeney Todd," New York Times, 1 February 1979, p. C15.

story was being told and what they required. Todd returns to London after fifteen years in an Australian prison, where he had been sent on a trumped-up charge by the evil Judge Turpin, who desired Todd's wife. Bent on revenge, Todd comes back to London hoping to find the Judge and his equally evil Beadle. He learns that his wife has died, and soon joins forces with Mrs. Lovett, a vendor of meat pies. Together, they form a team, with Todd cutting the throats of his victims in the barber shop above the pie store, and Lovett turning his victims into pies. The secondary story involves the plight of Johanna, Todd's 16-year-old daughter who had become a ward of the Judge, and is about to be forced into an unwanted marriage to her lecherous benefactor. In addition, a young sailor who had saved Todd's life on the trip back from Australia, falls in love with Johanna.

Prince felt, after this first reading, that the piece was "a very serious, heavy, relentless, misanthropic business with no humor, none anywhere."[1] The reading warned them about a lack of variety in a thoroughly relentless show. Therefore, Sondheim began to write some comedy numbers. The original five songs were indeed (with the exception of Lovett's song) very grim. By the time the summer of 1978 arrived, Sondheim had the character Pirelli's material written and had started working on changes of

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[1]"On Collaboration Between Authors and Directors," Dramatists Guild Quarterly, p. 19.

texture and mood. They were all encouraged. By the fall of 1978, they had a third reading. Sondheim said:

> With these pre-rehearsal tryouts, by the time we went into rehearsal the show was in much better shape than most shows are because they don't take the trouble in advance to read it aloud. . . . that's why the shows we have done, whether they were successful or not, have had a minimal amount of changes between opening out of town and opening in New York.[1]

They used much time trying to establish the style and story of the show. Once they had decided how to tell the story, Prince said "It then takes about a year to create a show."[2] At Prince's insistence, Sweeney Todd became his first collaboration with Sondheim in which the score was virtually completed (except for the last ten minutes of the show) before the show went into rehearsals.

Prince and Sondheim differ in their personal metaphors about what the show means. To Sondheim, the story of Sweeney Todd deals with personal obsession; to Prince, it is about impotence, quite a different matter. Prince said,

> The reason that the ensemble is used the way it is, the unifying emotion for the entire company, is shared impotence. Now, obviously Sweeney's is the most dramatic, to justify all those murders. Obviously all those other people who don't see the sky except through filthy soot-covered glass would not justify mass murder, but in fact they all suffer from the same kind of impotence, which then creates rage, and rage is what is expressed most by Sweeney's behavior.[3]

Prince refers here to the Eugene Lee set in which the sky is never seen, making the show also about a hemmed-in

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[1]Ibid., p. 20. [2]Ibid., p. 18. [3]Ibid., p. 14

feeling, a rage. Sondheim said, "Christopher Bond emphasized the whole class structure and how Sweeney came out of that, which of course was never in any of the other versions. So Hal and I are not contradicting each other as much as it may seem. Shows are about different things. I think that in Company and Follies we did hit on a common metaphor."[1]

Sondheim discussed he and Prince having different views about Sweeney.

> I really did not relate it very much to the milieu. I did a little bit, perhaps, when I referred to the class structure, because Christopher Bond does that. But the sense of the city, which is in fact, a sense of the industrial revolution, machinery, steel, and all that, is very much Hal's approach to the material.[2]

Prince, as we have noted, in shows such as Sweeney Todd, Company, and Evita likes to relate his work to the society from which the work springs. These productions reflect this interest.

Sondheim held some backers' auditions for Sweeney. He had seven songs which he felt were "absolutely exemplary songs which covered all colo[illegible] of the show, except that I didn't have any choral piece. That's all that was necessary."[3] The capitalization was set at $900,000 for the

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[1]Ibid., p. 15.

[2]Gerould, Melodrama, p. 11.

[3]"On Collaboration Between Authors and Directors," Dramatists Guild Quarterly, p. 24.

production and 271 investors supplied the funds, a very large number at a time when institutional investors were common. From such investors, $100,000 was obtained from RCA Records, the largest investor, presumably in return for the cast album rights, and $36,000 from Raydell Publishing and Distributing Corporation, publishers of the show's souvenir book. Richard Barr and Charles Woodward, co-producers of Sweeney Todd, raised $225,000, or one-quarter of the $900,000 capitalization, through a display ad they bought in a March 1978 Arts and Leisure section of the New York Times. The ad cost $1,600 and resulted in over 1,500 mail inquiries, including some from overseas. A check for $1,800 was received by the producers six months after publication of the ad. The ad ran in the theatre pages of the Times, considered more effective placement than the financial or classified sections. Barr said he wouldn't use the approach for every show. An earlier newspaper approach to investors was made in 1973 by Prince, shortly after the Broadway premiere of A Little Night Music. The producer/director bought a Wall Street Journal display ad which did not seek backers for a specific show, but instead invited inquiries for future ventures and listed all his previous Broadway presentations. Prince received a substantial number of replies, some of which resulted in investment contributions for subsequent productions of Candide, Pacific Overtures, and Side by Side by Sondheim.

Sondheim felt that Prince and his librettist, Wheeler, stimulated and encouraged him during the creation of Sweeney, providing him with needed criticism, for him an absolute necessity. If Prince did not understand a line or if he thought something was clumsy, he did not hesitate to tell his composer. Sondheim explains that Prince never says, "That isn't pretty; he always asks, 'Is that pretty?' Sometimes I say no, and sometimes I say yes. I don't think I could not talk to people about my work. I need too much encouragement."[1]

Sondheim wanted the orchestra in Sweeney Todd to frighten people. He asked Jonathan Tunick, his arranger, to use an electronic instrument and an organ. He felt that the loud crashing organ sound would be both scary and have a Gothic quality. In addition, electronic sounds can unsettle a person. Sondheim said, "I kept saying, I want it to be unsettling, and I want it to be scary, and above all I want it to be very romantic, because it is a very romantic show."[2]

Howard Kissel pointed out in his review that the loud piercing whistle which interrupts the organ and cuts the air from time to time sounds like a shrill factory whistle. This sound has "the hard, pervasive sound of authority, of oppressive economic power. Apart from its metaphoric aptnesss, the whistle is a shrewd theatrical

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 25.

device, a way of jolting and chilling the audience."[1]

Len Cariou was cast very early for the role of Sweeney as was Angela Lansbury for Mrs. Lovett. Sondheim was very happy to write for actor/singers whose capabilities he knew. He said, "Sweeney Todd was easy to write the minute we had cast Angela Lansbury--it wasn't a matter of writing for Angela Lansbury, it was a matter of writing for Angela Lansbury as Mrs. Lovett. . . . with Cariou it was a matter of writing for Len as Sweeney, not just Sweeney and not just Len. That's the best kind of collaboration."[2] Lansbury called her character, Mrs. Lovett, an amoral bawd. "It's like a good old-fashioned bawdy Restoration comedy, or Feydeau. It's almost Gilbert and Sullivan. There's a musical give and take on stage and every possible kind of song. A lot of colorful people roar around. I never stop running upstairs and downstairs. We're playing the lowest comedy you can imagine in the highest comedy manner."[3] Cariou discussed his character's obsessive singlemindedness. "Sweeney is a man possessed by the fact of revenge. Once he gets the taste of blood, he rather likes it. He becomes his own victim. A huge role and big singing."[4]

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[1]Howard Kissel, "Theatre," Women's Wear Daily, 2 March 1979, p. 10.

[2]"On Collaboration Between Authors and Directors," Dramatists Guild Quarterly, p. 29.

[3]Gussow, "Sweeney Todd," p. C15.

[4]Ibid.

The actor also made it clear that the show contained much comedy with some "biting" lyrics. The style, he felt, was somewhat Brechtian.

Prince hired Eugene Lee to do the sets. Prince conceived the urban setting of a foundry for the show. Lee purchased $7,000 worth of parts from old foundries in Rhode Island, and spent $100,000 to have them shipped to New York. It took three weeks to erect the set on the stage of the Uris Theatre. Because the production was so technically complicated, with the cast of thirty swirling through trapdoors and down secret chutes, the show was not taken out of town to try out. Even before the company arrived at the Uris Theatre, it had rehearsed on the large stage of the ANTA (now Virginia) Theatre, rather than in a rehearsal hall. The ANTA was the temporary home of the Sweeney Todd company, with the cast working in a rough mock-up of the elaborate set.

An element that recurs in Lee's work is his non-traditional use of space. His work is "meticulous, technically sophisticated and highly conceptual--always evolving from ideas he and the director find implicit in the script or scenario. His interest in encompassing the audience within the scope of the design is an attempt to engage them on a psychological and emotional level."[1]

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[1]Arnold Aronson, "The Adventures of Eugene Lee," American Theatre 1, no. 8 (December 1984): 5.

Lee has the reputation of being difficult or non-communicative. Aronson said, "In fact he is shy."[1] Prince feels he is stubborn. However, his manner seems to stem from a "passionate, uncompromising sense of theatrical values--values that sometimes fly in the face of commercial norms. As a result, his best work has emerged out of his collaborations with directors Andre Gregory, Adrian Hall, Harold Prince, Michael Lindsay-Hogg and Lorne Michaels," said Aronson.[2]

When Lee and Prince had collaborated on Candide, Prince had approached the Lincoln Center board with a proposal for turning the Beaumont Theatre into a permanent environmental theatre. He and Lee had worked out a tentative plan for a changeable space that would accommodate 700-800 people. Nothing came of that proposal and so Lee's dream of doing Sweeney Todd in that space did not materialize. Aronson said:

> The mechanical barber's chair in which the victims' throats were graphically slit before they slid down a chute beneath the chair, was to be on a central stage in the midst of the audience. Sweeney Todd was eventualy done at the Uris Theatre (now the Gershwin), the biggest house on Broadway. The setting, which filled the entire stage and spilled out beyond the proscenium, was a Victorian foundry created in part from scrap metal and mechanical devices from old factories in Rhode Island. There was a peaked roof of grimy glass panes supported on steel trusses and rusted iron beams. Stairways and platforms filled the sides of the stage. The back wall was made of corrugated tin and rose to

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[1]Ibid., p. 6. [2]Ibid.

> reveal a painted drop of 19th-century London. There was also a catwalk-bridge suspended from a traveling girder and there were all sorts of moving parts that did little but create an atmosphere. Specific locales were delineated by scenic units on rolling wagons. Prince points out that while the superstructure of the set was huge, the show itself was very small and intimate--"the whole play took place on a module and a few stairs."[1]

Prince and Lee had agreed that the Sweeney Todd set should be a Victorian factory. It was the link between Sweeney Todd and all the others on stage. "What the industrial age had done," said Prince,

> not only to the quality of life of so many people in the ghetto just in practical terms, but to the peacefulness and harmony in people's lives--in the environment, the atmosphere. With the industrial age, people could not see the sky for the puke that was flying in the air above them. That's what we tried to do. The whole thing is encased in glass. No one sees the sun except through glass.[2]

The gigantic foundry to some extent overcame the cavernous atmosphere of the Uris Theatre as well as creating a sense of overwhelming and "assaulting" the audience. However, it remained a frontal and proscenium-enclosed production. Some critics felt that the suspension bridge moving in and out on the set was distracting. Rex Reed said, "A damned suspension bridge keeps clanging into place above the singers' heads in the middle of important songs. I prayed that the thing would disappear from the show completely. It never did."[3]

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[1]Ibid., p. 9. [2]Ibid.

[3]Rex Reed, "'Sweeney' Soars," New York Sunday News, 4 March 1979, p. L7.

Another complaint voiced by several critics concerned the central wagon unit, which housed both Lovett's pie shop and the barber shop. Harold Clurman felt that, since the wagon was the site of most of the action in the piece, the large foundry elements only confused and distracted from the major scenes played in the shops.[1] Jack Kroll felt differently. He said,

> Rolling free within this structure is an ingenious shanty on wheels in which most of the action takes place. The effect of this monstrously beautiful setting is to body forth the Industrial Revolution as a portentous, ambiguous edifice--part cathedral, part factory, part prison--that dwarfs and degrades the swarming denizens of the lower orders.[2]

Prince put the enormous factory set there because the theatre was enormous and he didn't want to look at it. He wanted to obliterate some of the theatre so he could focus on what was happening in the middle of it. Prince explained, "It's a very small production if you analyze it carefully. . . . And what was around it [the factory] was like a curtain would be or a false proscenium . . . something to confine your eyes to the story."[3]

Prince was never really comfortable or secure while directing the show. He worried that his contribution was not up to what Sondheim needed from his director. Throughout

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[1]Harold Clurman, theatre criticism class, Hunter College, New York, March 1979.

[2]Jack Kroll, "The Blood Runs Cold," Newsweek, 12 March 1979, p. 104.

[3]Prince interview.

the rehearsal period, Prince kept asking Sondheim to come in and look at what he had staged. When Sondheim and Wheeler did watch what he had done and told him that they liked it, he still didn't know quite why.[1] Prince recalled:

> Finally one day very near the end of the rehearsal period (we were working at the ANTA Theatre which is now the Virginia Theatre), I called in some people, some guests: Angela Lansbury's husband, my wife and so on, and we put the show together for them. At the end of it they were sobbing and absolutely unable to move and I said, "OK, that's good, that means they've been grabbed by it," but I myself always felt a little bit like I was flying blind. Subsequently, I've never been prouder of any work I've done and I was real pleased that Steve felt served by me and it's nice because mostly our career together has been a matter of his backing into projects that I have wished on him rather than the other way around.[2]

Prince usually senses, particularly during the early stages of rehearsal, songs that are eventually going to be cut. But, Sondheim says, "he always gives them a chance, which is one of the reasons I admire him."[3] The collaborators were aware that the first act of Sweeney Todd seemed too long, but they didn't want to make any cuts until it was playing correctly and was set on stage. They wanted to let the actors play the show for a few performances. Still, ten minutes of the first act needed to be cut. About 80% of the act is sung and so it was unlikely that the dialogue could be cut. Prince wanted to take a large chunk of the

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

[3]"On Collaboration Between Authors and Directors," Dramatists Guild Quarterly, p. 17.

Pirelli scene, but that would have meant playing the scene in dialogue rather than song. Sondheim said,

> The other place was the Judge's song (a flagellation song), which is a song that Hal had sensed from the beginning wasn't going to belong in the show; and indeed, the Judge's song is one of two songs in the first act that isn't in the straight line of the story. . . . The other is Mrs. Lovett's song, "Wait," in the middle of the act, but if she didn't have that it would be a great musical gap for her--and I am not talking about Angela Lansbury. I am talking about the character, Mrs. Lovett. Also, it sets up Sweeney's hesitation in killing the Judge.[1]

They found they could learn enough about the Judge with a couple of lines of dialogue interspersed throughout the rest of the act and that the song wasn't needed. Sondheim, however, missed the song even though he did not think the decision was wrong. The act now had a more appropriate length, playing smoothly and intelligently.

The creators of the show sympathized with the actor, Ed Lyndeck, who played the Judge and sang the number very well. They decided to include it for the recording of the show. Sondheim said,

> It's not the first time that people have included songs that have been cut out of shows. I thought it enriched the character and would be fun to hear and also would please Ed. And I also restored two little bits of the Pirelli sequence on the record that are not in the show, again that were cut for length but that I am fond of, and I thought, "Why not?"[2]

The collaborators argued for quite a while about the conclusion of Sweeney Todd. It had to do with tone. Once

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[1]Ibid., p. 18. [2]Ibid.

they had decided on the tone, they included a last-minute rescue, a humorous moment for Anthony and Johanna. It didn't quite work, but planning for all the themes, the musical themes, to collide in the end was decided early on. Sondheim determined to start each character out with a specific musical theme and to develop that character's music out of the theme. Sondheim said, "It's a handy compositional principle, and it seemed to me that it would pay off nicely at the end."[1]

Prince's love of reprising songs at the conclusion of his musicals was utilized in Sweeney Todd. Sondheim agreed. He had been working towards that end with all the little modules of music throughout the piece. Sondheim said, "And so I wrote the last twenty minutes of Sweeney Todd while we were in rehearsal. Even Hal wasn't upset that I lacked the last twenty minutes because it seemed inevitable, all the homework and all the groundwork had been done."[2]

The company performed two weeks of previews at the Uris. Prince said, "By and large, the show was secure. . . . People came in, I remember vividly, and apparently they stayed clear of me and Steve, because they were so dismayed for us. We thought the show was terrific. . . . Right from the first preview on, we thought, well we have to do

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[1]Ibid., p. 27. [2]Ibid.

this and this and this and this . . . and we did those things and it opened. And that's the end of that."[1]

Sondheim believes that this show may be the first musical ever that never had an orchestra call between the first preview and opening night. There was never enough new material going into the show to warrant any changes that they weren't able to dictate. Sondheim said, "I don't think that's ever happened in a musical. What that means is that the show--in spite of its being overlong and in spite of some clumsiness that we wanted to fix up--was the show that we were going to open with, so it opened in excellent shape, with less change, musically, than any other show."[2]

This way of working on a show, without taking it out of town for tryouts, was introduced to Prince from his work in opera where there is no time for tryouts. Prince said, "I dearly believe in Parkinson's Law. I think the more time we give ourselves, the more time we waste."[3]

After two weeks of previews, Sweeney Todd opened at the Uris Theatre on March 1, 1979. The reviewers were mainly ecstatic. Some compared it to Brecht's Threepenny Opera. Others pointed out similarities with Dickens, and

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]"On Collaboration Between Authors and Directors," Dramatists Guild Quarterly, p. 18.

[3]Ibid., p. 19.

some called it Breughelesque. Howard Kissel called it "not just a musical--it is total theater, a brilliant conception and a shattering experience."[1] Edwin Wilson said that "Portions of the musical hover between art and grand guignol, but other parts cross into the realm of a striking artistic achievement."[2] Later Wilson said, "Whether for the controversy of its subject matter or the artistry of its presentation, Sweeney Todd will be talked about for a long time to come."[3]

Richard Eder in the New York Times agreed that Sweeney was a "display of extraordinary talent." However, he felt that there was "a kind of confusion of purpose."[4] Eder thought there was an excessive amount of throat cuttings, which he felt were too bloody and seemed to be used to beat the audience. He went on to say:

> Mr. Sondheim's and Mr. Prince's artistic force makes the Grand Guignol subject matter work excessively well. That is, what needs a certain disbelief to be tolerable--we have to be able to laugh at the crudity of the characters and their actions--is given too much artistic power. The music, beautiful as it is, succeeds, in a sense, in making an intensity that is unacceptable. . . .

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[1]Kissel, "Theatre."

[2]Edwin Wilson, "Sondheim Writes a Musical to Talk About," Wall Street Journal, 6 March 1979, p. 21.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Richard Eder, "Introducing 'Sweeney Todd,'" New York Times, 2 March 1979, p. C3.

> Furthermore, the effort to fuse this Grand Guignol with a Brechtian style of sardonic social commentary doesn't work. There is, in fact, no serious social message in Sweeney; and at the end, when the cast lines up on the stage and points to us, singing that there are Sweeneys all about, the point is unproven. . . . These are defects; vital ones; but they are the failures of an extraordinary, fascinating, and often ravishingly lovely effort.[1]

In regard to the cast pointing their fingers out to the audience at the end of the show, Prince said,

> That was Steve. He wrote it with them doing that. I put it in but I always thought it wasn't exactly to the point. I don't think he [Sweeney] is sitting next to me in the theatre. I wouldn't like to sit next to him in the theatre--a guy who's going to slit my throat. I didn't feel legitimately that everywhere I looked there was a Sweeney. In fact, I don't think that's the part about Sweeney as a human being that you should remember (that he's vengeful). I think Sweeney is a victim as much as anyone else.[2]

Michael Feingold in the Village Voice cited the grandness and ingenuity of Prince's visual staging and called this "his most brilliant directing to date."[3] In the same paper, Feingold's colleague, Julius Novick, felt the show is about nihilism although it doesn't espouse it. He said, "Its emotionalism of operatic boldness is just what our theatre needs."[4]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Prince interview.

[3]Michael Feingold, "Sweeney Todd," Village Voice, 12 March 1979, p. 85.

[4]Julius Novick, "Sweeney Todd," Village Voice, 12 March 1979, p. 85.

Jack Kroll in Newsweek admired the show for its sheer ambition and size and for its tremendous achievements. He did, however, have reservations and said that the show "lashes at the jugular instead of touching the heart."[1] In addition, he was unhappy about the way the character Johanna was presented. He felt there was something equivocal about the way the role was written. He said, "Johanna is treated both tenderly as the endangered innocent and satirically as the Victorian virgin, her head positively infested with Shirley Temple curls."[2] Kroll did go on, however, to compliment the director's intelligent eclecticism and the power of his work. "Sweeney Todd must be seen by anyone who cares about the gifts and risks of Broadway at its best. In his staging, Harold Prince exhibits the broad tactics of a field marshal and the intimate strokes of a genre painter."[3]

Sondheim's score is considered closer to opera than anything he had done in the past, since the show's texture is almost all musical. Sondheim felt that the show had a creepy atmosphere, as in a thriller. When the show is comic, however, the music tends to be in the music-hall tradition and in the case of ballads, it is romantic. He explained about the show:

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[1]Kroll, "The Blood Runs Cold."

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

> It is highly plotted. You can't spend a lot of time saying "it's a lovely day today." I've used simple choral devices, trios and extended musical development. It has a feeling of a score as opposed to a collection of songs. The music is almost continuous, about 80% of the show. There are motifs to re-arouse audience feelings. There is even a musical clue in the score . . . a theme associated with someone."

(Sondheim kept the clue a mystery, noted Gussow.)[1]

The score ranges from the dark "Ballad of Sweeney Todd" to the lyrical love song, "Johanna," to the apocalyptic "City on Fire," with which, according to Kroll, "London erupts in a spurt of lunacy and gore."[2] A tender moment, musically, in the show is the "love song" the vengeful barber sings to his razor. Todd sings "Pretty Ladies" to distract the Judge as he prepares to cut his throat. The score possesses sardonic wit and humor. Mrs. Lovett has an introductory number, "The Worst Pies in London." Her show-stopping "A Little Priest" lists the people of varying professions--priest, poet, lawyer, squire and royal marine, all of whom become the filling for her meat pies. The latter song displays Sondheim's brilliant talent as a lyricist. Eder said of his work:

> Mr. Sondheim's lyrics can be endlessly inventive. There is a hugely amusing recitation of the attributes given by the different professions--priest, lawyer, and so on--to the pies they contribute

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[1]Gussow, "Sweeney Todd."

[2]Kroll, "The Blood Runs Cold."

> to. At other times the lyrics have a black, piercing poetry to them. His score is extraordinary.[1]

John Simon in New York said, "Harold Prince has evolved into an extremely able director of musicals, and any past reservations I may have had no longer apply."[2] Simon listed the shows problems. How to make the numerous throat slittings, if not less gory, at least less repetitious, remained a problem, as did the staging of the Bedlam scene where "the silhouette technique, not exploited imaginatively enough, ends up looking like a gratuitous intrusion. . . . All else is cogent and sturdily managed."[3]

The cast received fine notices, with Lansbury and Cariou singled out for their outstanding performances. It was Sondheim's score and Prince's staging, however, that were especially complimented.

Prince was delighted that the show turned out so well. His surprise was that it also did well at the box-office. He said in an interview with Dick Cavett:

> I said at one point to Sondheim that this show is going to be wonderful but no one is going to come to it. It's a miracle what's happened . . . and the thing that worried me in those days was that I thought that our collaboration which I treasure would be endangered. There is going to be a point

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[1]Eder, "Introducing 'Sweeney Todd.'"

[2]John Simon, "A Little Knife Music," New York, 19 March 1979, p. 74.

[3]Ibid.

> where people are going to cease to finance shows that we do together, because we're bad for each other--or they will _think_ that. _Sweeney_ has saved the day.[1]

About a year after the show opened, _Variety_ noted that actors in _Sweeney Todd_ who move scenery and props had won additional compensation for performing these duties--usually done by stagehands.[2]

Sweeney Todd won eight Tony Awards including one for the best musical of the season. It also received the Drama Critics' Circle Award for best musical. It opened in London the first week of July 1980 to mixed notices, not achieving the success that it had had in New York.

Prince (in 1983) discussed _Sweeney_ and its subject matter. He said:

> The show worked. It turned a lot of people off . . . because of the nature of the material. Too bad, that's the way it is. The trouble is that I just don't think there's any room on Broadway for that sort of show anymore. I think if Steve and I were doing _Sweeney Todd_ now, we could not do it on Broadway. We couldn't raise the money, there's no way. Nor could we do most of what we've done. You see, we've been experimenting on Broadway which is more than most people can say.[3]

Prince didn't mind if audiences were unable to perceive _Sweeney Todd_ as one outcome of the Industrial

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[1]Prince interview, _The Dick Cavett Show_, videotape.

[2]"Sweeney Todd," _Variety_, 19 March 1980, p. 1.

[3]Prince interview.

Revolution, the loss to people of soul and spirit and poetry. However, he could not have directed the show if that hadn't entered into his own perception of it. He is aware that many viewers see the show only as a "thriller." Sondheim feels that Prince changed the tone of Sweeney from what he had originally intended. Sondheim said that he wrote an intimate horror story and "Hal made it into an Epic, a social story. It was the only way he could interest himself in the piece. It wasn't what I intended but he had a whole other way of looking at it."[1]

In the fall of 1982, Sweeney Todd was presented in a televised version of the show produced by the Entertainment Channel on local cable outlets. It was a great success.

In October 1984, Sweeney Todd directed by Harold Prince opened in New York as part of the repertory of the New York City Opera, following the success there during the past few seasons of Candide. It was an immediate hit. Prince had doubled the chorus singers to 32 for this production and the original Broadway orchestra of 25 was expanded to 50. On Broadway the director had worked with actors who also sing; at the City Opera, he dealt with people who were singers first--principals like Rosalind Elias, Leigh Munro, Adair Lewis, Timothy Nolen and Cris Groenendaal. Bernard Holland, writing in the New York

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[1]Sondheim interview.

Times, said, "We are told, in other words, to expect a show in which music will take precedence."[1]

The success of Evita and Sweeney Todd had re-established Prince at the top, releasing him from the doldrums brought on by his recent failures. Soon, he was busily preparing his next production, Merrily We Roll Along, which he felt would once and for all prove that he and Sondheim could do something that was warm and likeable. He was unaware that he was about to embark on what would prove to be one of the most troublesome shows he had ever directed.

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[1]Bernard Holland, "A Broadway Hit at City Opera," New York Times, 7 October 1984, p. 21.

CHAPTER XV

TWO VALIANT ATTEMPTS: MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG AND A DOLL'S LIFE

Merrily We Roll Along

> There are particular things I need to hang on to. One is the visual. I never had a visual sense of what Merrily should look like, never could root it anywhere . . . and, of course, there was nothing larger than life about it. The show's realism confined me. Once we started previews, I tried to get rid of all that stuff, make it abstract. Too late.[1]

The idea to do a musical about young people first came from Prince's wife, Judy, who said to him, "Why don't you do a show about kids that reflects the two kids you have in your home, and what you see around you, because they're real smart, and they're curious and they have a vision of the world, and they have a vision of what we're doing wrong."[2] Judy Prince was referring to their two teenagers, Charlie and Daisy, who were 18 and 16 years old at the time. Prince thought his wife's idea was a good one

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[1] Prince, quoted in Jeremy Gerard, "Calendar," Los Angeles Times, 13 June 1982, p. 50.

[2] Judy Klemesrud, "Prince Wrestles with a New Show," New York Times, 15 November 1981, p. D5.

and he began thinking of what he might use as a vehicle for a musical about young people. His idea of combining his wife's suggestion of a show about kids with an early play by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart called Merrily We Roll Along came to him one day while shaving. Prince felt here was a proper framework for a cast of young people and for what he wanted to say about American life during the past, often disillusioning, 25 years.[1] The musicalized Merrily We Roll Along, a show about youth and their ideals, did in fact become Prince's next musical and ironically, his daughter Daisy, who had appeared in musicals at the Dalton School, would eventually be given the small role of the sexy starlet who becomes the third Mrs. Franklin Shepard.

The original Merrily We Roll Along was the 1934-35 drama by Kaufman and Hart about disillusionment among a group of theatrical artists. It told of a misguided playwright. Kaufman and Hart's theme is that youth should not surrender their idealism. At the beginning of his career, the playwright, Richard Niles, is determined to write "truly fine plays." Little by little he yields to the pressure of circumstance until he becomes a disagreeable man who writes successful sex fables for Broadway. The structure of the play moves backward in time, covering the years 1934 to

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[1]Merrily We Roll Along, record liner notes, by Robert Kimball, with composer's note by Stephen Sondheim, RCA Red Seal CBL1-4197.

1916. Each succeeding scene takes place at an earlier time than the preceding one, starting in the present and moving backward in time to the idealistic days of the protagonist's youth. The play opened on September 29, 1934 and starred Kenneth MacKenna as the playwright Richard Niles and Walter Abel as the painter Jonathan Crale. This second collaboration of Kaufman and Hart (the first play they did together was Once in a Lifetime) received good notices and was named one of the season's ten best plays. It had, however, a modest run of only 155 performances.

Prince had never seen the Kaufman and Hart version when it was on Broadway. However, he was familiar with the play (his late producing partner, Robert E. Griffith, had appeared in the original version). Prince remembered that the original piece ends with Polonius' advice in Hamlet: "This, above all, to thine own self be true," which, Prince said, "is putting it very clearly what I wanted to say."[1]

Prince called Sondheim to see if he was interested in doing the project with him. The composer agreed to do it right away, which was unusual since, as Prince explained, "He has rarely ever agreed to do anything so quickly."[2] Merrily would reunite Prince and Sondheim as collaborators for the first time since Sweeney Todd.

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[1] Klemesrud, "Prince Wrestles with a New Show."

[2] Ibid.

George Furth was asked to do the book. From the time Prince thought of doing the show until it went into rehearsal took almost four years. Many of the regular Prince collaborators were hired, such as Eugene Lee as set designer and Paul Gemignani as musical director. Ron Field, who had done such a fine job on Cabaret, was set as choreographer and Jonathan Tunick as orchestrator.

Prince would receive 10% of any profits earned by the show. The producer/director's 10% of the profits would be in addition to his share of profits as the show's general partner, customarily 50%. However, the show's offering circular disclosed that Marble Arch Productions, Inc., the legitimate and film production company headed by Lew Grade, Martin Starger and Robert Fryer, was orally committed to raise $1 million of the musical's $1.5 million capitalization. Marble Arch became co-producer of the musical along with Prince. As a general partner, Prince was responsible for raising $500,000, the usual 50% general partner's profit share presumably to be prorated with Marble Arch.[1]

In addition to the director's 10% of the profits for staging the show, Prince would earn a weekly director's royalty of 2% of the box-office receipts, rising to 3% after recoupment. In any subsequent productions of the show leased by the partnership, and not staged by Prince, the director would receive from 1% to 1½% of the receipts.

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[1]"Prince gets 10% of 'Merrily' Net; Co-Producing with Marble Arch," Variety, 15 April 1981, p. 85.

Moreover, in return for collaborating with librettist Furth and composer-lyricist Sondheim "on the structuring of the play," Prince would receive a 1% weekly author's royalty. This was the first time Prince had contracted to receive any monetary reward for functioning in his usual collaborative capacity.[1]

Prince retained the structure of the original Merrily for his musical. The theme was broadened to include the subject of friendship as well as the frustration of youthful ideals. He changed the time frame, going back 25 years from 1980 (rather than from 1934).

The musical version tells the story of Franklin Shepard, an attractive young man who wants to write music. Other young people are drawn to him: his talented high school classmate and good friend Charley Kringas, a lyricist, with whom he composes the graduation song and collaborates on three Broadway shows; the promising writer Mary Flynn, who falls in love with him, but becomes an alcoholic when she can't cope with her success; and an aspiring singer, Beth Spence, whom he marries. One by one he loses them.

The show takes place from 1980 to 1955, a period during which America became fragmented, "me-centered," and enamored of instant celebrity. Almost every scene unfolds in a public place. The cocktail parties; the courthouse

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[1]Ibid.

steps, with the omnipresent newscasters; the nightclub wedding; and, most dramatically, the studio where Frank and Charley's collaboration is torn asunder on national television. All are symbolic of our loss of privacy. An invitation to the 43-year-old Franklin Shepard to be the speaker at his high school's 1980 commencement--the 25th anniversary of his own graduation--triggers the action.[1]

Prince, known for "concept" musicals, was asked about the concept of this one.

> It's more like, What is success? . . . I wanted to show that success is not necessarily measured in bank deposits. It can be measured as well in personal satisfaction and in feeding internal things. Charley's O.K. He's lost his good friend, Franklin, so out of the three, one is fine, and he happens to be the one who's the most idealistic. I like Franklin a lot, but I'm sorry for him, because success is very seductive, particularly today, when there's no privacy. It's so difficult for people to be private. The show concerns itself very much with that. There's this instant celebrity and instant temptation and "Oh, I'll go to that party, what the hell" or I'll succumb to that once and then twice and then a third time, and eventually you lose track of the pleasure you got from doing the work. And I think that's very much what happened to Franklin. He starts to incorporate, instead of write music. . . . Mary's another case. There have been Marys forever. These are people so Simon pure, so really idealistic, that they can't cope with the real world, and they become alcoholic, or they become embittered, and nothing ever comes up to their standards.[2]

Prince assured everybody who cared to ask that, although the leading character, Franklin Shepard, is a

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[1] Merrily We Roll Along, record liner notes.

[2] Klemesrud, "Prince Wrestles with a New Show."

composer who becomes very successful at an early age, and although both Prince and Sondheim also became successful in the theatre at an early age, the characters were not modeled after the two collaborators. Prince explained:

> At no point did we say it's going to be about us. . . . But it certainly would have to be about our times, because these are our times, these 25 years are our 25 years. But I don't think for one minute either one of us is in jeopardy of giving up what we want to do to be incorporated, and I think we have a long enough record to prove that.[1]

Between his commitments to the many productions of Evita being presented all over the world, Prince flew into New York to cast Merrily. Lonny Price, Jim Weissenbach and Ann Morrison, all teenagers, were hired for the leading roles of Charley Kringas, Frank Shepard and Mary Flynn respectively. Price had done office work in Prince's production office while he was an acting student at Performing Arts High School. He had since received outstanding notices as well as winning a Theatre World Award for his role in the Off-Broadway play Class Enemy, and appeared in 4 Jews in a Room Bitching by William Finn, later known as March of the Falsettos. Price had only read the first half of the first scene when Prince told him it was "terrific" and to come to the Broadway Theatre (where Evita was playing) to take part in a reading of the Merrily script to see if "kids" could pull off that sort of sophisticated "bitchy" New York banter. Price read the role of Charley. The next

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[1]Ibid.

week they asked him to sing. That same night he was notified that he had won the role. Price said, "It was really a dream. . . . It was the best thing that ever happened to me. It was incredible."[1] Prince said of the actor who would play Charley, "Lonny is extraordinary--a quirky, wonderful, eccentric person."[2]

Weissenbach, a newcomer to New York, is the son of a long-lost classmate of Prince from the University of Pennsylvania. He had moved to New York from the midwest wanting a career as an actor. Prince said, "Jim's father wrote to me and asked me to meet him, so I invited him to the office one day."[3] Weissenbach was soon cast in the role of Franklin Shepard, his only previous credit being Barnaby in a summer theatre production of Hello, Dolly!.

Ann Morrison as Mary was also making her Broadway debut after appearing in a few regional shows and in an Off-Off-Broadway production of Dreamtime. Morrison was chosen because of her big voice which reminded Prince of Judy Garland. Additional featured roles in the musical went to basically untried, though talented, teenage youngsters.

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[1]Interview with Lonny Price, New York, 18 February 1982.

[2]Klemesrud, "Prince Wrestles with a New Show."

[3]Carol Lawson, "Broadway," New York Times, 7 November 1980, p. C2.

The casting was completed by May 1980, with rehearsals set to start in December 1980. Sondheim, however, had not finished the score by December and the show was postponed. Prince, too, had prior operatic commitments. Merrily was postponed until almost a year later: September 1, 1981.

Rehearsals began in a rehearsal studio on lower Broadway. On the first day, as usual, Prince spoke to his cast of 26 young people about the show. He showed them sketches of the costumes and a model of the set. He told them that Merrily was about "corruption, the anti-hero, friendship and the years between 1980 and 1955."[1] He explained why the original version of the story had had a relatively short run, that it didn't really work. The protagonist was an anti-hero who sold out for riches. In the 1930s, an anti-hero was not a sympathetic figure. In 1981, however, the anti-hero is "one of the boys."[2] Prince reassured his young cast that anyone who did not already smoke would not be asked to smoke onstage. He then asked them to read the script aloud for a run-through and said, "Move with speed. You think with speed . . . Don't be cautious . . . Don't let us slow you down. Audacity--I want to see that. No one here is even remotely in trouble with job security."[3]

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[1]John Corry, "Sondheim and Prince Team Up Again 'Merrily,'" New York Times, 3 September 1981, p. C17.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

I asked Lonny Price for his perceptions of Prince as a director. He said:

> He's not a method director. Prince is not as concerned with how you get there as long as you get there. There's just not the time frankly to do a lot of the kind of work you would do in a play in terms of exploring this and that. He stages very quickly and very well, immediately. I think we blocked the entire show in a week. We had the first reading on the first day of rehearsal and that was the last time we read it. The next day you start blocking from the first scene. And he's very quick and a lot of fun to work with because he's very energetic. The best thing about Hal Prince--and it's the most charming thing about him, and I'm very fond of what it is--is that he has this sort of 12-year-old enthusiasm--of a 12-year-old little boy--who has this big toy--and he's thrilled and excited and he can't wait to build it and put it on its feet and show it to people. I mean, he's just like a little boy with the best Christmas present in the world . . . and the energy and enthusiasm is so positive and so strong! It's an amazing force and it's totally infectious and it's swell, it's terrific. And very important, I think for doing anything. I think it kept our spirits up during a lot of the bad times on Merrily. You'd see his face and he'd be smiling and jumping around and you just said, "Well, he's happy, so I'm just not going to worry about it." He lets you do pretty much what you want with your character. Hal knows what he wants, he has a very specific idea of what's right and what's not right. When you're doing it wrong he'll try to explain what he wants from the scene. I had a lot of problems with my character and he would arrange meetings in which he would tell me what he thought I was doing wrong. He hardly ever did this in front of the cast which the actors appreciated. He was usually quiet about criticism. He's not the kind of a person who yells at you from the back of the theatre. He yells at the sets and he yells at the technical people a lot, but he doesn't much yell at the actors to embarrass them. He's not a "humiliating" kind of director, I don't think, and the nicest thing about it is that when he's telling you to do something (I mean, I can see it in other people, not so much

> in myself), he'll stop you and say, "No, what I want is so and so," and then you do it. His face would light up. You'd know exactly when you had pleased him and when you had not. There was no question about it. But pleasing him was like getting 100 on a math paper or something, 'cause he's real important and he gets excited. It's that boyish enthusiasm! After all these years it's just amazing that he hasn't lost it![1]

Prince decided not to take this show to Boston or New Haven to try out. He arranged instead for preview performances beginning October 8, 1981 at the Alvin Theatre in New York. This was becoming the practice for Broadway musical producers and directors. Prince had done it before with Sweeney Todd. Unfortunately, the creators of the show found themselves working out problems in the public eye. With Merrily, "every firing became a headline; every misstep prowled the street."[2] Prince justified the psychological risks with the economic realities. He said, "It's all economic. Even in the old days, we could lose $300,000 in a city. We were more isolated from rumor mongering, but we don't have to pay transportation and per diem here. . . . here we can play five weeks of previews and actually have a tiny profit. And shows get reviewed in the dailies and Variety on the road. So what's so isolated about that?"[3] Linda Winer in her Daily News article said, "Still,

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[1]Price interview.

[2]Linda Winer, "'Merrily' Comes Tardily," New York Daily News, 13 November 1981, p. 3.

[3]Ibid.

there is something courageous and naked about two of Broadway's most intelligent, uncompromising heavyweights exposing the creative agony in public."[1] Prince admitted that there were many more problems with Merrily than he had had since producing A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum. Ironically, before the previews, word around town was that the creators of the show were thrilled with it, and thought they had a big hit on their hands. Price said, "They all thought that Merrily was fine and spectacular. They had enormous faith in it, and it meant more than any show personally to Hal."[2]

What went wrong? When the musical began to preview it became clear that it was not working. Audiences were unhappy and hostile during the first two weeks of the preview engagement. They would often walk out after the first act. As Prince made changes, the audiences began to stay for the entire show. Prince was constantly asking his writers for new scenes and numbers, mainly to clarify the show's intent. Price said, "I have a box of rewrites on Merrily that--for each scene we did there were at least five or six versions of it, at least!"[3] It was not unusual for the cast to rehearse four new scenes all day to be put

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Price interview.

[3]Ibid.

in the show the same night. The opening number was revised by the composer at the director's request. There had been last-minute changes in other Prince-Sondheim shows but nothing like this. Before the first preview performance, Prince requested an entirely new set of costumes. The original costumes had been designed realistically to depict the many characters in the story. Many were beautiful, lavish and dramatic to fit the life styles of the people. However, with teenagers playing the roles, most of the costumes looked foolish and out of place. Sweatshirts for the cast were produced with names or titles such as "Charley," "ex-wife," "producer," and "best friend." Now, the addition of a feather boa or a headpiece would be sufficient to indicate how the character might have dressed.

Many of the original sets were discarded. Price said, "The original idea was for the whole set to look as if the kids had built a big tinker toy. That's why we had all those bleachers. Initially, the bleachers were the whole set. They were able to change into various configurations. They never worked right and they were ugly to boot. So little by little they kept throwing them out and they brought in the projections. They tried to pretty it up."[1] At first, a large collage of Life magazine cover photos depicting people and events of the 25 years covered in the show was used as a front curtain. Within a day or two after the first preview, the curtain was struck.

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[1]Ibid.

Two weeks before the first scheduled opening date (there were several postponements), one of the three leads, Jim Weissenbach, was replaced by Jim Walton, another member of the cast, because Walton was more extroverted. A few days later, Larry Fuller replaced Ron Field as choreographer because of "artistic differences." Price believes Field was wrong for what they were working for in Merrily. Field's movements didn't look as if kids were doing them. In addition, Price feels that with a Sondheim score, the intricate lyrics must be understood. Movement should be minimal during the songs because you want to hear those lyrics. "They're brilliant and they should be heard," said Price, "and Ron just wasn't right for the piece, as it worked out."[1] With Fuller, there continued to be much restaging of the dances and musical numbers.

Price lost his number, "Old Friends," in the Polo Lounge scene. Originally he had arranged for Mary to come, supposedly to befriend Frank, but really so that Frank and Charley might rekindle their relationship. The creators felt, however, that after years of being snubbed by Frank, Charley would not be that anxious to get back together again. Instead, Mary tricked him into getting there so that she could bring the two friends back together again. Price was sorry to lose the number since it had become Charley's theme song. He said, "It was very warm and sunny

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[1]Ibid.

and open and very lovely."[1] Many of the speaking roles were cut, as characters were eliminated, with many of the cast who originally had featured roles ending up as chorus. Yet the entire cast had a feeling of camaraderie and continued to be friends.

One number that was continuously changed was "Franklin Shepard, Inc." Much of it was cut but then put back in again. Price said that that song "got lyric changes, structural changes, and mostly staging changes."[2]

Prince said that this show had more changes of material (book, costumes and lines) of any he had done. He said:

> This is more than I'm used to, I'll tell you, and it hasn't been easy. . . . One of the biggest problems was that we were charmed by the "rawness" of the 26 youthful actors in the musical, all of whom are in their late teens or early 20's. I was charmed by the beginnings of their artistry, the roughness of their craft, their inexperience. I was charmed as hell by that, but we realized that other people were not as charmed, and that they wanted more polish. They were also very confused by 26 characters, and so much information . . . so we decided to take away some of the things that the 26 actors were contributing as a group and settle pretty much on the six major characters, for clarity. We did this after we realized that the audience was getting confused in the previews, and when an audience gets confused, it gets hostile.[3]

Prince eventually recognized that Merrily was forty minutes too long, and that its dramatic structure, moving

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid.

[3] Klemesrud, "Prince Wrestles with a New Show."

backward in time, made it difficult for the audience to follow. The director cut the show but he did not change the structure.

I asked Prince to discuss this unhappy period. He said:

> We were not in good shape. There was so much to be done. But even that we could cope with, and did a great deal in three weeks, very professionally. I think we turned it around from chaos to a show. The trouble is that the newspapers snapped at our heels from the first moment Liz Smith did a hundred million words (well she did the better part of a column) about people walking out on us, hating it, saying it was tacky, vulgar looking and ugly and blah, blah, blah, blah. [Here Prince refers to the Liz Smith article in the New York Daily News, October 18, 1981, p. 12, "Not So Merrily They Roll Out of the Theatre."] And then, that became a sort of signpost because she did it probably the day after we had our first public performance--then that was picked up and then you read everywhere what trouble we were in. Audiences started to storm out of the theatre (they were storming out anyway, it wasn't Liz Smith's fault that they were storming out). But then they read that they were storming out so if there was any chance of them staying, any point in there that they might have given us a break, they didn't. Yet we kept working. And the poor kids on the stage kept looking at the audience and watching it storm out of the theatre. Daisy [Prince's daughter] came home from work in the show one evening and said, "Well, the first eight rows were empty by the time we took our bows." Well, we kept working and we extended the opening of the show another three weeks. We kept working, we kept working. By the last two weeks, they were not leaving the theatre. They were not storming out. I had changed the scenery around totally and the costumes, and it was all coming together. It did come together. But I think given the professionals that we were, we did the most we could do. What was missing for me was clarity in the script and a "look." It never looked the way it should have because I never knew how it should look . . . and it's now two years later and I still don't

> know how it should look, and I know how shows should look, generally, so I count myself somewhat responsible for why it didn't work. Certainly insofar as I never got it to look right, never got the costumes right or the scenery right. And we did shorthand things on costumes to try to make something work for the audience--but we never got it right and that's my fault. The story that we told, I think we tried to do too many things again (as we had when we did Pacific Overtures maybe). We tried to tell a story in reverse action with kids, so we made it really difficult. We tried to tell it without giving the audience "handles." In other words, make up and costumes to go. The costumes would have seemed ludicrous on kids. If adults had played those parts, then as they went back in time and moved in their clothing from the '80s to the '50s you would have seen differences that you would have understood, you would have recognized from your own life span. We didn't do that. We put kids in them, so kids could never make those costumes "read" for an audience so that's why the costumes in essence didn't work! We threw out a whole set of costumes. That's all my fault. The book itself trying to tell so much so complicatedly is everyone's fault. No question. The fact that the show is played everywhere and works even as well as it does is a miracle--I think so much of that is because Steve's score is so extraordinary. I think his score is wonderful! He didn't know it at the time. He thought the score was too simple. When we first went into rehearsal he thought he was going to be the one who was going to let us down.[1]

Sondheim's score for Merrily is, in Sheldon Harnick's opinion, "the best of his career."[2] It is a score with more popular songs in it than the composer ordinarily writes. Frank Sinatra recorded "Good Thing Going" as a single before the show opened and Carly Simon recorded a

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[1]Prince interview.

[2]Harnick interview.

number from the show called "Not a Day Goes By" on an album. Although the show failed dismally, Stephen Holden, in the New York Times, wrote about the RCA Red Seal original cast album, saying;

> With its plethora of brash show tunes, Merrily We Roll Along is Mr. Sondheim's most conventional score since A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum. . . . on record, however, Merrily We Roll Along holds up so well that one is inclined to speculate that the judgment against it will eventually be reversed. . . . With its show business setting and the blaring orchestrations, Merrily might strike the casual listener as Mr. Sondheim's bow to the Broadway mainstream of A Chorus Line, 42nd Street, and Woman of the Year, etc. But on closer inspection, it is hardly a formula musical. . . . the recurrent choral refrain, "How Did You Get There from Here, Mr. Shepard?", spurs a real moral and artistic quest for the self's truest ideals. Is it possible to be a rich and famous songwriter and not lose one's youthful dreams? By taking us backward, instead of forward, Mr. Sondheim suggests that underneath all the trappings of success, the pure idealist in us is always there, waiting to be uncovered. Nobody, after all, begins life cynical and money-grubbing. One of the reasons that modern musical comedy has lost its artistic footing, Mr. Sondheim implies, is that it has become too concerned with show business razzmatazz and not enough with music of real quality.[1]

Sondheim explained that because the show is about friendship, the score focuses on the friendship of Frank, Mary and Charley, all their songs interconnecting through chunks of melody, rhythm and accompaniment. He explained:

> And since the story moves backwards in time, it presented an opportunity to invent verbal and

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[1]Stephen Holden, "Wit and Melody Enliven Two Musicals," New York Times, 11 April 1982, p. D25.

> musical motifs which could be modified over the course of the years, extended and developed, reprised, fragmented, and then presented to the audience in reverse; extensions first, reprises first, fragments first. For example, a release in one song would turn up later--as a refrain in another (e.g., "Rich and Happy"/"Our Time"), a melody would become an accompaniment ("Old Friends"/"Opening Doors"), a chorus would be reprised as an interlude ("Like It Was"/"Old Friends"), and so on, according to the relative importance of the characters' feelings at each point in their lives. Along with this would be the transformation of Frank's hit song from "The Hills of Tomorrow" through his development of it during "Opening Doors," which we actually witness, to its emergence as "Good Thing Going." In fact, if the score is listened to in reverse order--although it wasn't written that way--it develops traditionally.[1]

By the time the musical was ready to open, the cast's morale had improved considerably. Sondheim said, "It didn't become what it was until the last five previews. It turned out to be very good. We changed a lot."[2] Although the Prince-Sondheim musicals had often been labeled cold and cynical, with this show Prince was sure those adjectives would change to "heartfelt."[3] Prince said before the show opened, "I think it will be received in the spirit that is intended, with at least some people crying. I don't mean sobbing wildly. I just mean feeling--feeling for the kids and feeling for yourself and wanting to say to yourself, 'I did the best I can.'"[4]

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[1] Merrily We Roll Along, record liner notes, composer's note.

[2] Sondheim interview.

[3] Klemesrud, "Prince Wrestles with a New Show."

[4] Ibid.

Merrily We Roll Along opened on Broadway on November 16, 1981 to terrible reviews. Lonny Price called them "hateful, nasty and angry."[1] In the actor's opinion, the critics saw a vulnerable show--with no stars and no advance sale. It was an easy show to kill. "They went after Sondheim and Prince with an ax," said Price.[2]

Frank Rich wrote, "Sondheim has given this evening a half-dozen songs that are crushing and beautiful--that soar and linger and hurt. But the show that contains them is a shambles."[3] Rich went on to say that this new version of Merrily We Roll Along, although rewritten and updated, repeated the mistakes of the original drama, adding a few of its own. Rich said:

> Mr. Furth blunts the shock effect of the original play's structure by enclosing it within a conventional flashback, and, even so, he fails to solve its major dramatic failure. We never do learn why the characters reached the sad state they're in at the outset. While a busy story--often built around unconvincing, melodramatic twists--does tell us how the three friends fell apart, that's not enough.[4]

Rich called the principal players "appealing" and said that "Mr. Price, in the most sympathetic role, is a charming, Woody Allen-esque fellow who brings fire to the show's angriest song ("Franklin Shepard, Inc.") and a plaintive

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[1]Price interview. [2]Ibid.

[3]Frank Rich, "A New Sondheim 'Merrily We Roll Along,'" New York Times, 17 November 1981, p. 87.

[4]Ibid.

undersell to its most conventional ballad ("Good Thing Going").[1]

John Simon's review was negative, but he was alone among the critics in his dislike of Sondheim's score, writing, "If Sondheim has been erratic as a composer before, this is the first time that his lyrics, too, seem to drag their feet."[2] He was not enchanted with the large cast of young unknowns, saying that he could not find "a single winning combination of performance and presence" in the show.[3] Simon's major complaint, however, was with the creators.

> Back in 1934 Kaufman and Hart thought at first of calling their play All Our Yesterdays and that is pretty much what Sondheim, Furth, and Harold Prince, the director, have given us. There are plot, staging, design, music, and dance concepts from just about all their previous shows cluttering up the stage; rehashed, warmed-over, or half-baked. Thus we get the interweaving of two song numbers, progression by alternating fits and starts in book and score, present and former selves interacting (Follies), movable platforms of different levels (Company), closely packed human blocs dancing as viscous mass (from Prince's Evita, likewise choreographed by Larry Fuller), and reams of music and lyric writing that broken-wingedly take off from, or are takeoffs on, former Sondheim songs. No wonder audiences applaud bits of the overture as they ordinarily do only at revivals. They are welcoming back old Sondheim melodies even if they sound older and leaner after a long absence of invention.[4]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]John Simon, "Save Me from the Waltz," New York magazine, 30 November 1981, p. 87.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

T. E. Kalem in Time magazine wanted to understand why the protagonist, Franklin, an unappealing hero, was false to his wife, his best friend, and his creative gift. Kalem said, "Outside of the cliche lure of Hollywood's big bucks, George Furth's brittle, bitchy book never offers a plausible clue."[1] Of Fuller's choreography, Kalem said it was mostly of the "hop, skip and jump variety."[2] Sondheim's score didn't impress him, since he, like Simon, heard repeated "fragmented strains from Pacific Overtures, A Little Night Music, Company and Follies. On the other hand, he thought the ballad, "Not a Day Goes By," "beautifully captures the bittersweet mystery of love, and the single smash number of the musical, "Good Thing Going," has the stamp of permanence about it."[3] Kalem summed up what for him was the major problem.

> Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim seem to have been born middle-aged. Rue, disenchantment, a kind of middle-aged tristesse recur in their collaborations. In the most brilliant of them, Company and Follies, melancholia about marriage and success was imminent but airborne; in Merrily We Roll Along it falls with the thud of a foregone conclusion.[4]

Douglas Watt in the Daily News called Merrily a "dud."[5] He believed that some of the cast were quite

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[1]T. E. Kalem, "Rue Tristesse," Time, 30 November 1981, p. 90.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid. [4]Ibid.

[5]Douglas Watt, "'Merrily' Hits Every Bump on the Road," New York Daily News, 17 November 1981, p. 45.

promising, particularly "the ferret-like Price and the chunky Morrison, who delivers a song as staight as an arrow."[1] He felt that Sondheim's inspiration was "at a remarkably low ebb this time out. . . . the score is for the most part pallid, but then what on earth could a writer of Sondheim's attainments do with such a book, one in which Furth delivers hotsy-totsy observations on the order of "She's going to hell in a handcart"?[2] Watt felt that the production looked as though it cost "all of $28. . . . Eugene Lee's flexible, skeletal stage setting is mainly made up of pipes, ladders, and stops on a revolving central unit."[3] Although Watt dismissed the musical, he said "Harold Prince has directed the book as inventively as possible."[4]

In a follow-up article in the New York Times a month after the show closed, Frank Rich called the Merrily production a structural calamity. He reminded his readers that telling a story backward can work and cited as an example the successful Betrayal by Harold Pinter. With this piece, however, the collaborators fail to dig into the psychological roots of the characters as Pinter had done or to explain the motivations of their actions. "If there is no explanation for their [the characters'] discontent, their unhappiness can't be moving--it quickly curdles into

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[1]Ibid., p. 47. [2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid. [4]Ibid.

frivolous bratty and off-putting self-indulgence."[1] Rich suggested other problems with Merrily: the cast, which seemed too large and hectic, and a "big and ugly set."[2] Rich did feel that the one aspect of the show that was rewarding was Sondheim's score.[3]

The one unqualified positive review was written by Clive Barnes in the New York Post, who suggested that his readers forget the negative things they had heard about the musical and see it for themselves. He said, "The word of mouth on the latest Stephen Sondheim musical, Merrily We Roll Along, was so bad that all the words seemed dirty and the mouth was twisted in a permanent sneer. Unquestionably the show was beset with trouble, but in my opinion it has equally unquestionably triumphed--at least it should as long as people distinguish between what they are actually seeing on stage and what they heard about the show during previews."[4] Barnes said that "irony is very much the name of the game for the book and the score."[5] The one problem for Barnes was that the cast, as they receded 25 years in time, never aged. He said, "If Prince was to blame for

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[1]Frank Rich, "Should We Expect Magic to Happen when a Theater's Lights Darken?", New York Times, 10 December 1981, p. C21.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

[4]Clive Barnes, "'Rolling Along' Quite Nicely, Thank You," New York Post, 17 November 1981, p. 22R.

[5]Ibid.

this--and presumably he was--the rest of his work is credit all the way. . . . Prince keeps the show whirling like confetti in the wind, stopping only for dramatic points and major songs which are punched in with authoritative zest."[1]

Prince was devastated by the failure of the show. It closed two weeks and sixteen performances after its long delayed opening. Prince talked of his deep feelings about Merrily and the youngsters in the cast. He said:

> I have been seriously damaged by the failure of that show emotionally (and I want to say it so those words don't sound self-pitying). But there was something about the message of that show--about "hope." You see, the reason they were kids playing adults was I thought by the end of the show you would realize they had not made those mistakes, that they were still at the threshold of their lives and that they could now learn from the lessons that their elders had taught them in the course of the evening and need never make the mistakes that their elders had made. And I thought if kids play it, they'll be emulating our mistakes, but they won't have made them themselves. And psychologically you will have said to yourselves, well, they're starting fresh, and now let's tell their story and it won't be a story of misused privileges, priorities gone wrong, identified wrong, and so on. So to me it was a very hopeful play and a very upsetting play. I also had two kids the same age--I suppose there's no play I've ever been involved with that I more wanted to succeed and of course no more upsetting and traumatic failure--and then there were all those kids. And no matter what you say, I know it was better for them to have worked with all of us--better for them to have had this show--better for them to have had a Broadway play dedicated to them, but it failed, and it was traumatic for them. And the pain they went through!! I suppose I'll never forget it--I feel awful about it![2]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Prince interview.

Sondheim believed that Merrily had turned out to be a very good show even though it had only come together during the last five previews. He talked about all the changes that had been made during the try-out period. "We made an attempt to simplify the production which turned out to be impossible because the production was just too heavy and complex and unattractive. The production was unattractive--visually. Hal kept trying to simplify it--but we couldn't simplify it enough. The writing was fine, the show is fine, there is very little in it that I would rewrite. I think the show is swell."[1] Lyricist Lee Adams said that "Sondheim told me that Merrily should have been done small."[2]

Ten hours after Merrily closed, the cast album was recorded. Although the show was a "flop" in Broadway jargon, Prince had claimed even before this show that "flop" is an expression he doesn't mind using. He explained that one-third of everything he'd done had been a flop and that if Merrily proved to be a failure he would do what he always does the morning after an opening night. "I call a meeting in my office to talk about my next show. It's something George Abbott taught me. The meeting is already set, and I've found it's the very best thing you can do."[3]

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[1] Sondheim interview.

[2] Adams interview.

[3] Klemesrud, "Prince Wrestles with a New Show."

A Doll's Life

The day after Merrily We Roll Along closed, Prince had his usual "morning after" meeting. The next show on his agenda was the musical A Doll's Life. The idea for this show began with Betty Comden and Adolph Green, who wrote the book and lyrics. The story was to be about Nora Helmer, the heroine of Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House, and begin after she left her husband, Torvald, and their three children. The writers would examine the next four years of Nora's life, observing her working for pay, attaining power, having love affairs and concluding with her next major decision about her life.

The musical reflected both Comden's and Green's experiences, including their four-decade partnership. Each had been married and had had children. Comden's husband had been a very enlightened man who was interested in his wife's career and encouraged her collaboration with Green. Comden was aware, however, that not all women have this kind of healthy relationship with their mates. This concern and sympathetic interest in the subject led to the idea of continuing Nora's story.

Comden and Green presented Prince with the proposed project about two years before it reached the stage. Prince liked the premise and encouraged them to start writing. Prince explained why he was stimulated by the idea. "I like shows that are about something, I particularly like

them if they are political and yet, at the same time entertaining. A Doll's Life touches on an important issue; it was an important issue 100 years ago and it's still an issue. Can you really imagine what it was like for Nora to walk out of that door in Norway in 1879?"[1] Prince felt there was a danger that the piece could easily become a theoretical lesson in "knee-jerk feminism."[2] The last thing he wanted was a staged lecture.

> It isn't about a woman's rights any more than A Doll's House was. . . . Ibsen didn't intend that. He intended it to be about people standing on their own feet--in this case, not only Nora but her husband as well. Nora's story forces you to examine the issues. You hear that she can't operate her own business, that she can't have her own bank account, that she has no legal rights. Some of these things have changed, others not at all. What I like about A Doll's Life is that we don't have to force those issues on the audience--the mere fact that the story is being told causes those issues to be raised.[3]

A Doll's Life meant a return to the Scandinavian setting of A Little Night Music--and to romance, but not empty romance. He warned Comden and Green that "Good ideas tend, in the theatre, to be great disappointments."[4] Realistic musicals do not generally excite Prince. On the

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[1]Hal Hinson, "Director Hal Prince Builds a Musical 'Doll's Life,'" Los Angeles Herald Examiner, 10 June 1982, p. B1.

[2]Ibid., p. B6. [3]Ibid.

[4]Jeremy Gerard, "Hal Prince and Poetry of Abstraction," Los Angeles Times, 13 June 1982, p. 50.

contrary, he is more interested in non-realistic materials.[1] After working on the script of A Doll's Life for two years with the writers, Prince told Gerard that the idea remained compelling, but the "show lacked the poetry that abstraction brings."[2] The script was finally completed under Prince's editorship, with Prince helping to release it from its realistic constraints. Therefore, Gerard said, "much of what happens in A Doll's Life is the product of Prince's imagination."[3] Prince conceived the idea of setting the story within the context of a modern-day rehearsal of an Ibsen play.

Prince's visual concept for the piece followed a trip to Norway. He found Norway hard, masculine, and exciting. He visited several museums to see the work of Edvard Munch. Prince felt Munch's colors were severe and swirling, "the colors of crisis."[4] The painter Munch and Ibsen shared obsessive relationships with women. Prince said, "The thing about Munch and Ibsen is there's that incredible love of women, but it has a dark side, as in Munch's "Vampires," in which a woman sucks at her husband's neck, or "The Dance of Life," in which the stages of a woman's life are dramatically depicted. The Munch figures inform Tim O'Brien's and Tazeena Firth's lavish settings

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

[4]Jeremy Gerard, "Will Ibsen's 'Doll' Come to Life on the Musical Stage?", New York Times, 19 September 1982, p. 8H.

and provide another, more severe level from which the audience is able to look in on Nora's 'education.'"[1] The symbolic use in A Doll's Life of a group of women shown at different stages of life was patterned after Munch's "The Dance of Life."

Prince also wanted this musical to reflect the problems of men as well as women. Prince said, "I do think it's very key to the piece, from my own point of view, that it is about men as well, how we are forced to be good little soldiers, protectors, father figures. Yet it carries with it the need for a whole lot of accuracy about what women think, which I would not be aware of. So my wife's been a sort of sounding board."[2]

Prince suggested Larry Grossman to do the score for A Doll's Life. The composer's previously produced shows were Goodtime Charley, Snoopy, and the best known of the three, the 1970 Minnie's Boys, which lasted only 76 performances, but Prince had greatly admired the score. He said, "I like Grossman's work very much, very much."[3] Yet Grossman's work wasn't very familiar to Comden and Green. Teaming them required Prince's "time and diplomacy," said Jeremy Gerard in a New York Times article.[4] Grossman is

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

[3]Prince interview.

[4]Gerard, "Will Ibsen's 'Doll' Come to Life on the Musical Stage?", p. 30H.

quoted as saying, "Hal said something really helpful that I kept in the back of my mind. . . . He told me, 'Just remember, there are no rules.'"[1] The result was a score that the composer described as having "a certain unorthodox quality. I had to use a whole different set of tools for this, it stretched me."[2]

Prince was to direct the musical as well as co-produce. The Shubert Organization declined to invest in A Doll's Life, and James Nederlander, president of the Nederlander Theatrical Corporation, became the show's major investor, contributing $1 million of the $3 million capitalization. Nederlander said, "With Hal Prince, you're talking about one of the theatre's greatest talents--it's like going with Babe Ruth on the baseball field. I never read the script--I went with him and Comden and Green."[3] The show's other producers were Sidney L. Shenker, Warner Theatre Productions, Joseph Harris, Robert Fryer of the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles, Mary Lea Johnson, and Martin Richards of the Producer Circle Company.

Once again, Larry Fuller was asked to choreograph; Timothy O'Brien and Tazeena Firth were hired to do set designs; Florence Klotz to do costumes; and Ken Billington to do the lighting.

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

[3]Michiko Kakutani, "Why a $4 Million Musical Lasted Only Four Days," New York Times, 27 September 1982, p. C11.

Prince signed the 29-year-old Betsy Joslyn to star. She had first been in the chorus of Sweeney Todd on Broadway, eventually taking over the role of the ingenue Johanna early in 1980, and continuing the role on tour. Her credits included playing the Girl in The Fantasticks for three years Off-Broadway, some television work and appearances with the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera. Joslyn was chosen by Prince after hearing about 200 women audition for the part of Nora in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. The call was for someone in her late '20s with a fine soprano voice plus the ability to belt. Joslyn said after getting the role, "It's a gigantic role. I think I leave the stage just once to change costume. It's the first really big thing I've done and it's very exciting for me."[1] Prince did not wish his Nora to be a sophisticated woman. He had seen the two movie versions of the play, one with Jane Fonda and the other with Claire Bloom. He thought they played the role

> with the knowledge that in 100 years' time, there would be a women's movement which would embrace the character of Nora as an early champion. They play Nora as a modern woman, the product of a century of change. You cannot play it that way and set the action in 1879. . . . Nora's decision (to begin life anew) was a frightening and anxiety-ridden one, and I think a little crazy. She's having a mini-nervous breakdown when she slams that door. It's not "Kramer vs. Kramer."[2]

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[1]Eleanor Blau, "Prince Stars Unknown in Musical 'A Doll's Life,'" New York Times, 23 February 1982, p. C9.

[2]Hinson, "Director Hal Prince Builds a Musical 'Doll's Life,'" p. B6.

George Hearn was signed to play Nora's husband, Torvald, and the lawyer Johan Blecker. He had last been on Broadway in the national tour of Sweeney Todd. He had many Broadway and Off-Broadway credits and has since won a Tony Award for his role in La Cage aux Folles. Giorgio Tozzi, who had last been seen on Broadway as the star of the revival of The Most Happy Fella in 1979, was signed to play the role of Eric Didrickson.

After two years of preparation, the production began rehearsing in a compound of studios on lower Broadway on April 19, 1982. As usual with Prince, more than half the work of mounting A Doll's Life occurred before the company came together for the first time. They rehearsed eight hours a day, six days a week.

The musical follows Nora's journey into the male-oriented society of 1879. She educates herself, learns who she is, and observes that "men as well as women, are shaped by traditions that have so long prevailed in the world into which they are born."[1]

The musical opens at a rehearsal of the last moments of the Ibsen play.

> The Actor/Director points out to the actress playing Nora that she must put herself in the place of a woman in 1879 knowing only what she could have known then. After she slams the door, there is a burst of music, strange lighting, and four dance

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[1] A Doll's Life, record liner notes, Original Cast Records 1982, OC 8241.

> figures enter; a man and three phases of a woman's life: young, in her prime and old. These appear from time to time during the show.[1]

The door disappears and Nora is transported back to 1879. She sings of her desire to learn about the world and to change her "doll-like" existence. The actors play different roles throughout the musical and work like a Greek chorus, commenting on Nora's actions. Nora's experiences include her meeting with the violinist Otto on a train. She is desperate, flirting and lying to obtain money for her fare. Arriving in Christiania, she gets a menial job in a cafe. At the Cafe Europe, Nora, now a scullery maid, witnesses a group of four, well-dressed men celebrating New Year's Eve. Three of them enter her life--Dr. Berg Gustafson, Eric Didrickson, a wealthy owner of both a shipping and fish business, and Johan Blecker, a lawyer and "an enlightened man for his or any time."[2]

Nora is fired when she refuses a proposition by the cafe owner. Otto, the young violinist who had been working in the cafe, waits for her outside. He is sympathetic and Nora goes to his room where he tells her he has composed an epic Norwegian folklore opera called, Loki and Baldur ("a second rate pastiche obviously slated for oblivion").[3] Nora remains with Otto, who finds her a job backstage at the opera house. With Johan Blecker's help, Nora auditions for Otto's opera, but her lover gives her only 5 out of the 50

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

kroner he receives as an advance. He begins calling her "silly little goose" and Nora realizes that she must leave and learn to depend more on her own resources.

In order to support herself, Nora takes a job in a fish cannery while continuing to read and educate herself. While attempting to help the workers in the cannery to improve their conditions, Nora goes to prison until Johan has her set free. Eventually she lives with Eric Didrickson (the cannery owner, shipping magnate, and millionaire roué). Through observing Didrickson, Nora learns about money, power and the art of becoming a tycoon. She also gets him to change the working conditions in the cannery. When Eric takes another mistress, Jacqueline Le Beau, Nora leaves. Again she is "alone in the limbo of the city but this time she has the independence that money can give, and she can act like a man."[1] She and Jacqueline start a perfume business. Soon Nora and Johan begin to keep company but when he is ready to propose marriage, Nora starts to yearn for her children and entertains thoughts of renewing her life with Torvald.

As the musical concludes, Nora may either return to Johan or to Torvald. Nora and Torvald are sitting together at a table in the final moments of the show, with a "we must talk" look about them. Thus, the musical, like the Ibsen play, ends without a note of finality about Nora's

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[1]Ibid.

future life. Prince did not want to resolve the conflicts inherent in the material definitively. He said, "We cannot put too simplistic an end on it. . . . Obviously, because Nora has learned so much, we must have a happy ending--she has earned her happiness. She has suffered through the guilt of abandoning her children. She has gone out into the world and learned about money, power, sex, about law and philosophy. She's a very different person."[1]

The decision about the ending was made during the rehearsal period. First, Nora returned to her husband. Then she stayed with her new lover, Johan. Finally, they settled on the ambiguous ending. During the rehearsals, Giorgio Tozzi was replaced with Edmund Lyndeck. Prince explained: "Oh! He couldn't handle it. He's the nicest man alive, but he couldn't sing it and he couldn't act it. I thought he was wonderful in Most Happy Fella but it was a different ballgame. That's another case in point--you hire stars sort of blindly, you don't audition them, if you'd auditioned him you wouldn't have hired him. It's as simple as that and too bad."[2]

Descriptions of Prince, how he looks, acts and rehearses, are often the subject of articles about him. He is described, for this show, as directing on his feet,

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[1]Hinson, "Director Hal Prince Builds a Musical 'Doll's Life,'" p. B6.

[2]Prince interview.

pacing the bare wood floor of the rehearsal studio, while massaging his forehead as if looking for inspiration, a veritable perpetual-motion machine, never at rest. His typical outfit might be a tan pullover sweater in lieu of a jacket, matching slacks and a dark blue shirt and sometimes, no socks. He is noted as slender, gray-bearded, balding, with his glasses perched on his head. Though in his mid-50s, he has slightly protruding front teeth that give him a youthful look. During rehearsals, says Hal Hinson, he "moves gracefully, without agitation or haste, and though he is clearly winging it, his reactions are sharp and instinctive, evincing little indecision. If one approach doesn't play well, the next one--or the one after that--will."[1] During rehearsals his eyes dart constantly, missing little. Jeremy Gerard says, "He can be openly affectionate with the people he's working with, and equally brusque, expecting egos to be as sturdy as his when often they are not. A Prince rehearsal looks a lot like filmwork, the way scenes are repeated over and over until they're right and then "set."[2] George Hearn admitted during rehearsals of A Doll's Life that he had previously done very little acting the way Prince directs. He said, "It's sort of choreographed. Hal has, it seems to me, an inner

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[1]Hinson, "Director Hal Prince Builds a Musical 'Doll's Life,'" p. B1.

[2]Gerard, "Hal Prince and the Poetry of Abstraction."

film of what he wants to see. It's not my favorite way to work as an actor, because it doesn't start from within and work out. . . . The gratification with Prince is working with someone so bright, so fast, and so generous. He's going like wildfire all the time. It's exciting to be around that mind."[1]

There are times during rehearsals, however, when Prince may feel that he is not working well. At such moments, he says, "I'm sorry," and turns the rehearsal over to associates Ruth Mitchell and Paul Gemignani.[2] Most times, he clearly conveys to his cast what he is aiming for.

> The rehearsal process is one of synthesizing, from live actors and real objects, a replication of the picture of the show Hal Prince has in his head. . . . At the run-throughs, Prince watches intently. He is, at times, his actors' greatest fan, laughing at the jokes, impatient when outside noise breaks their concentration. . . . Reflecting on nearly six weeks of rehearsal, he proudly notes: "I have not wasted five minutes of rehearsal time on something I didn't believe in."[3]

There are recognizable directorial elements in A Doll's Life. These are the constantly busy background action, a "continuing legacy of his mentor George Abbott--and the use of distinct actors in lieu of a bland chorus."[4] Additionally, the movement appears less like formal dance, but flows naturally. Prince explained: "I don't believe in choruses. I don't gravitate toward shows with a lot of

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid. [3]Ibid. [4]Ibid.

choreography. It puts the control out of my hands, and I mean, I might as well be responsible."[1] It was noted during rehearsals of A Doll's Life how Prince maintains control. Gerard reported that Fuller was working on some movement comprising graceful swirling and sweeping gestures in accord with the romantic theme. After several hours, Prince came in to watch and it was "obvious to an observer," said Gerard, "that the movement didn't work for him. Mr. Prince then described to Fuller what he wanted. Returning to work after the break, Fuller told the dancers, 'We'll just keep doing it till we get what he's got in his head.'"[2]

Audiences invited to the final New York run-throughs were enthusiastic, and the company prepared to go to Los Angeles, where the show was to try out for ten weeks. Much rehearsal time was spent with Paul Gemignani, sharpening the choral work to the point where its "tonalities are characteristically those of a Hal Prince musical."[3] In Los Angeles, on June 15, 1982, after a week of technical rehearsals and four previews, the musical opened at the Ahmanson Theatre. The local reviews were mostly negative. Dan Sullivan in the Los Angeles Times said that the musical was in keeping with Comden and Green's view of things

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Gerard, "Will Ibsen's 'Doll' Come to Life on the Musical Stage?", p. 30H.

[3]Ibid.

and "is a mild-mannered satire in an operetta framework."[1] He went on to say that the show proves how wise Ibsen was not to pursue Nora out into the world after she slammed that famous door.

> The question mark at the end of A Doll's House may be one of the reasons the play still intrigues us. What actually happened to Nora isn't as interesting to contemplate as the myriad of things that might have happened. In general, Prince's staging gives signals of Importance that the text keeps revoking. One instance is the cannery sequence, which looks as dark and baleful as a scene from Sweeney Todd, with a clank-your-chains chant from composer Larry Grossman. Then Nora's co-workers start bitching, and it's as harmless as The Pajama Game. The depth of the writing won't support the show's visual superstructure.[2]

Rick Talcove in the Los Angeles Daily News was unhappy with Grossman's score. He wrote that the songs meant to be big numbers, such as "Stay with Me, Nora," "You Interest Me," "Learn to Be Lonely," "Rare Wines," "No More Mornings," "There She Is," and "Power," were basically showcases for the expert voices singing them. He said, "But the songs--lacking emotion, wit and variety--merely come and go. You feel as though A Doll's Life is non-stop recitative. The show wants to be pseudo-operatic, but fails to bridge the difference between its high aspirations and considerably lower realization."[3] Talcove went on to

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[1]Dan Sullivan, "'A Doll's Life': In This Case, It's Not All Bliss," Los Angeles Times, 17 June 1982, pt. vi, p.9.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Rick Talcove, "'A Doll's Life' Makes a Dead Musical," Los Angeles Daily News, 17 June 1982, sec. v, p. 4.

discuss Prince in his role as director of the musical. He said that even the dullest musicals have been known to be saved by an inventive director, and there is "no director more inventive than Harold Prince. As always, Prince's work is efficient, graceful and pleasing to the eye."[1] In spite of these compliments, Talcove went on to say that he thought this show was the most unoriginal work of Prince's career.

> You might say that A Doll's Life is directorially speaking, Prince's "Remembrance of Things Past." The show abounds in staging techniques that have been used earlier--and to greater advantage--in previous Prince musicals. From A Little Night Music we have scenery with peering nude figures, an impromptu banquet and no choreography. From Sweeney Todd, there is the imposing bridge, a disruptive chorus, slamming door finale and no choreography. From Evita, we see two dancers dancing a tango in counterpoint to the main action and a heroine who sleeps around to attain success. Obviously, all directors have basic tricks they use to propel a show into action. But A Doll's Life which rehearsed seven weeks in New York, has somehow been refined to the point where it exists as being pretty but utterly passionless. On this occasion, Prince's staging technique cannot overcome the basic lackluster material he is working with.[2]

Talcove summed up his review by suggesting that the musical had been put together by individuals who "have temporarily embraced their creative egos at the expense of their experienced sense of audience needs." Yet he went on to say that "This lush show must be seen by anyone who has any interest in the direction musical theater is heading."[3]

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid., p. 1. [3]Ibid., p. 4.

Although the local reviews in Los Angeles were negative, the company was bolstered by a favorable review in Daily Variety: "The show as it now stands is a breath-taking visual treat with a sensible book and score. With improvements it might become one of the great tuners of all time."[1]

There was plenty of time to make changes, since the musical was booked into the Ahmanson for twelve weeks. For the next five weeks, Prince and his company worked on relatively minor changes. They clarified ambiguities, condensed a prologue-like opening, moved a song and generally tightened the musical. This done, they decided that the cast members now needed time to settle into their roles. Dan Sullivan returned to see what had been done three weeks into the run. "It's a clearer, quicker, lighter show now than it was opening night, more like its frothy TV commercial," he said.[2] Still, he felt many problems remained with the production. Sullivan suggested that another step be added to the try-out process. The director/producer might do

> an initial small scale workshop production, not done at a regional theater, but in a space rented or even owned by the producer. Michael Bennett

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[1]Bill Edwards, "A Doll's Life," Daily Variety, 17 June 1982, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Dan Sullivan, "'A Doll's Life' Changes for the Better, Los Angeles Times, 18 July 1982, p. 51.

> now does this with his shows. It's not cheap, but the benefits would seem to be worth it--the chance to see how a piece works before an audience without pressure to please the critics and sell a subscription season; the chance to make major conceptual changes without wrecking the design budget, most important, the chance to decide the thing isn't going to work before committing millions of dollars to it.[1]

Prince said that A Doll's House was too big a show to profit from a workshop production, although a show like Company might. In addition, the director believed that the long rehearsal period in New York had revealed what he needed to know about the material.[2]

Sylvie Drake in the Los Angeles Times also pointed out what others had noted, namely, the degree of repetitiveness from earlier shows. She said,

> At the moment Tazeena Firth and Timothy O'Brien have designed sets that are often reminiscent of their work in Evita. Choreographer Larry Fuller has blatantly stolen from himself. The Grand Cafe scene in Act II has movement that is lifted directly from the scenes in Evita, where the chorus of aristocrats moves sideways and en bloc. Even his neurotically frenzied Edvard Munch ballroom dancers are a derivation of his Evita tango dancers.[3]

Business was poor in Los Angeles in spite of the fact that tickets had been presold as part of the Civic Light Opera subscription series. The weekly box-office revenues averaged about $113,000, with a potential

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[1]Ibid. [2]Ibid.

[3]Sylvie Drake, "'Doll's Life': Questioning the Answers," Los Angeles Times, 18 July 1982, p. 51.

of $316,328, resulting in a loss of some $100,000 a week. Prince felt that a vacation would give him a fresh perspective and left for his home in Majorca. Everyone asked how he could leave a show in trouble but the director said, "the truth is I think we did our work in those first five weeks."[1]

By the end of the 10-week run in Los Angeles, the show had incurred an additional $1 million in costs. The money was raised by the producers without much difficulty. Nederlander advanced $300,000 more, noting that if "Hal had enough faith to put a lot of extra money in himself, and if he had enough faith to back the show, I had to back him, too."[2] Prince had reportedly pledged $350,000 of the needed million and also made certain guarantees against future losses.

When the director returned from Majorca along with the show's writers after a 5-week hiatus, they felt that things looked fine. Eager to avoid extra expenses, Prince cut the California run by two weeks and on September 8, began previews in New York. The reaction of preview audiences was sympathetic but when A Doll's Life opened on September 23, 1982 at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, the reviews were terrible.

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[1]Kakutani, "Why a $4 Million Musical Lasted Only Four Days."

[2]Ibid.

Frank Rich in the New York Times described the musical as a well-intentioned show "that collapses in its prologue and then skids into a toboggan slide from which there is no return."[1] Douglas Watt in the Daily News found the effect of the sets too ominous. He thought Joslyn a poor choice for Nora. She could handle her songs well, but was devoid of charm. Hearn, he felt, was somewhat better in a thankless role. Watt continued:

> Nothing is right about this show; not the capriciously unwinding Comden-Green book, not the Larry Grossman score, not even Harold Prince's staging, which seems obtrusive and heavy-handed. Of course, the whole thing was obviously a lost cause to begin with, and it's no wonder that all these people, as well as the cast, appear hopelessly adrift all the long evening.[2]

To Clive Barnes, A Doll's Life remained the dream of a musical unfulfilled. He said:

> The show itself lacks involvement. The book and lyrics miss the weight of Ibsen. The music sounds written to order. It invites comparison with Stephen Sondheim's A Little Night Music and falls short. . . . Except in its look and performance, the show itself never flies with the concept. And even the performances waver dangerously in some no man's land between the Broadway musical and the classic theater.[3]

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[1]Frank Rich, "'A Doll's Life,'" New York Times, 24 September 1982, NYPL Clipping Folder.

[2]Douglas Watt, "'A Doll's' Lifelessness," New York Daily News, 24 September 1982, p. 3.

[3]Clive Barnes, "Paper 'Doll's Life' Doesn't Cut It," New York Post, 24 September 1982, p. 110.

John Simon didn't like the show but he credited Prince with "one clever idea (again involving doors!).[1] He described the scene where "an opera is seen from the vestibule of a set of boxes, and whenever a loge door opens for a few seconds, the ludicrous operatic dumb play becomes, yet more ludicrously, audible."[2]

The almost unanimously poor reviews shocked the company. The day after the show opened, a closing notice was posted. The show would close following the Sunday matinee after a total of five performances. It left the collaborators dazed and unable to perceive what went wrong. Was it poor judgment, a poor idea, unwarranted optimism or just bad luck? Some felt that a workshop production might have been of help, others argued that more effort in California might have turned the show around. There were questions about the quality of the book and the music. A few insisted that the staging and the casting of an unknown Nora was at fault. "Still others contended," said Michiko Kakutani in a New York Times article,

> that no one could have saved the show, that the idea was simply a bad one from the start. How, they asked, could one hope to base a musical on Ibsen and the issue of feminism? And yet, similar questions might have been asked of earlier Prince efforts: certainly shows based on an Argentine dictator and a murderous barber must have

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[1]John Simon, "The Door Story," New York magazine, 4 October 1982, p. 91.

[2]Ibid.

seemed equally incongruous--that is until Evita and Sweeney Todd went on to become hits.[1]

Prince was asked to explain what he felt happened with A Doll's Life.

> I know there are things wrong with A Doll's Life. Maybe we should have scratched deeper. But we scratched deeper than people know or recognized. I was accused of repeating myself (as a critic said to another critic who said to a friend, off the record, "I guess everybody was just tired of him doing his 'thing'"). Well, I tried to analyze what my "thing" was and I think we're caught between two things (every artist has to be). There is something that is me--that is me expressing myself--and I've worked years to find it. An awful lot of people out there are not expressing themselves, but expressing a craft--smoothly and slickly and professionally--but not expressing themselves. However, I don't want to repeat myself. I don't want to rip off myself any more than I particularly want people to rip me off. So whatever that is, I think that probably what got people more than anything else was that bloody structure upstage--that thing that looked like the thing in Evita. I find that puerile as hell of them and I wish it hadn't been there. And you know, I didn't recognize it until we were in the theatre and I suddenly said, "Hey! Wait a minute that does look rather like the bridge in Evita but I'm not using it the same way and I didn't mean to do that," and if I'd known enough to excise it, if I'd known it was going to be held against me all night long, I would have excised it. Still, I'm real proud of the work. You know nothing is perfect. I know now what's wrong with some of it. I think it's going to have a life. I think it should have a life. And mostly I think what was wrong was there are certain issues that nobody wants to deal with and one of them is that one. It's like ERA. You can keep the heat on and keep the heat on and the minute you let the heat off everybody wants to go back to the status quo and that play is about women! It's about the inequity of being one and it's 100 years old when that play takes place. And I could not see that a hell of a lot had

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[1]Kakutani, "Why a $4 Million Musical Lasted Only Four Days."

> changed and I cared a lot about that and I still do. And I think some of that score is extraordinary. And so I think the play will have a life and it'll get done. Next time it gets done in Europe, it'll be a success because the Europeans will deal with it. If that show were opening now, this time, now I think it would be a success, and I think it would give a bit more meaning to this season. It's the end of the same season now, that was the first show of the year. Because they've seen what came in all season. If you can open a show in the spring you're always way ahead. And if you open a show in the fall (i.e., West Side Story which opened on the 26th of September), the reviews were generally speaking not all that good. Evita opened in the fall and won the Critics' Circle Award in the spring. However, had it opened in the fall and not run--then where would it have been? But it ran on long enough for everyone to have looked at the rest of the season. I think if A Doll's Life had had a decent enough advance to run (audiences loved it), if it had continued to run by this spring, it would maybe be running the next two years. I think audiences were behind it and critics would have taken a look at it in relation to everything else around and it would have come out much more positively. . . . I worked on that show a lot but it wasn't all that dramatic. In other words, again, the process of working is, I mean you just never know how much you're going to have to do and the fact that I did practically nothing on Evita is the unique case. On almost every show I've done quite a lot. I did almost nothing on Evita. Between the first preview performance in London and opening night nine days later, there were so few changes, it's ridiculous. But that's just luck![1]

Prince didn't dwell for long on the fact that he had just had his second consecutive failure. He took a day off and then began to work with Hugh Wheeler on a new version of Candide to be added to the repertoire of the New York City Opera. George Hearn, when asked how he felt about the quick closing of A Doll's Life, seemed to echo Prince's own

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[1]Prince interview.

credo. Hearn observed, "All of us in the theatre live with that rhythm and danger of failing. It's tiring but it's also worth a gamble because it's exciting, and it's not just about having a job or a career, but it's about ideas and values. In the end, it's what we live for."[1]

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[1]Kakutani, "Why a $4 Million Musical Lasted Only Four Days."

CHAPTER XVI

CONCLUSION

Dick Cavett asked Harold Prince: "What's important for success in the theatre?" Prince answered:

> Knowing your craft well, and luck . . . being in the right place at the right time.[1]

> He's the best director of musicals around by far. He has a sense of what the entire evening is about. He has a sense of the function of music in a show . . . knows what a musical number is about. He has a more acute ear than most producers. He takes it seriously and is more daring, imaginative and endlessly creative. He likes to take chances. He has a sense of dignity of the musical theatre and thinks it's the highest form of theatre and I happen to agree with him. . . . He's not condescending about musical theatre. He's an ideal collaborator. It's like collaborating with a writer . . . what spills out of Hal's mouth at a meeting could fill 67 songs and 87 scenes.[2]

Harold Prince has been innovative, creative and daring both as producer and director. He has earned his reputation as a producer's producer and a director's director.

During his three decades of producing he has been willing to take chances on shows considered risky in commercial theatre. New Girl in Town is a musical adapted

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[1]Prince interview, The Dick Cavett Show, videotape.

[2]Sondheim interview, The South Bank Show, videotape.

from a serious Eugene O'Neill play, Anna Christie. West Side Story deals with violence erupting from racial tensions and The Pajama Game revolves around a labor dispute. He both produced and directed Sweeney Todd, about the legendary barber who slits his customers' throats; Pacific Overtures, about the Westernization of Japan; and Cabaret, which concerns the rise of Naziism in Germany. Prince, with his topics and themes, unusual for Broadway, inspired other producers and directors to move away from the cliché-ridden musical.

Not all the shows he produced were successful, either commercially or artistically, but this did not deter him. Over a thirty-year period he has tried to produce innovative shows that challenged audiences while entertaining them.

As a producer, Prince sought out new talent and gave this talent an opportunity to work on Broadway. He brought together composers and lyricists such as Kander and Ebb for Flora, the Red Menace and Bock and Harnick for Fiorello!, even after their unsuccessful debut with The Body Beautiful. With A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Prince provided Stephen Sondheim with the first show in which he could create both the music and lyrics.

Boris Aronson was an established set designer, but it was Prince who gave Aronson more freedom than he had been given by any other producer, in such groundbreaking

musicals as Cabaret, Company and Follies. Here the sets became important elements in the communicating of themes.

Few producers would have cast Merrily We Roll Along with three leads who had never appeared on Broadway, or Jill Haworth, a little-known English movie actress as the lead in Cabaret. Prince has employed stars like Zero Mostel and Angela Lansbury, but he has not produced shows as mere vehicles. While other producers attempted to insure the success of a show by using a well-known name, Prince carefully avoided casting anyone but the one he believed suited the role best.

Prince is serious about Broadway. He doesn't consider the Broadway musical as only a means of making money. Many producers pander to an audience's taste and are willing to do anything to win the audience's approval. Prince, on the other hand, attempts to produce meaningful theatrical experiences, hoping that the show will be both an artistic and commercial success. He is sometimes ahead of his time--a problem that artists have faced throughout history. One such example is Prince's production of Pacific Overtures, a failure on Broadway in 1976. It was revived Off-Broadway in the fall of 1983, using most of Prince's ideas and staging.

It is possible that Merrily We Roll Along, which failed in 1981 in spite of an excellent Sondheim score, will be revived years from now and be successful. The original

production was not accepted by either critics or audiences. This has happened with other musicals which have tried to break new ground on Broadway. Rodgers and Hart's Pal Joey (1940) was the first musical to present a "heel" as the hero on Broadway. Revived twelve years later by Jule Styne, it was a smash hit. Porgy and Bess, too, was not a success in its initial 1935 Broadway presentation, running only 124 performances. George Gershwin, who died two years later, died believing that his musical was a failure. Samuel G. Freedman, in a recent article in the New York Times, explained that there were two formidable obstacles the production faced. These were "making a snobbish intelligentsia accept his [Gershwin's] fusion of popular and classical music, and making the then-segregated opera world accept a serious work about black Americans."[1] Gershwin did not live to see his folk-opera become an international success in the '40s. Now, fifty years after its initial production, Porgy and Bess is being performed at the Metropolitan Opera. Some of Prince's musicals (Candide and Sweeney Todd) have also been successfully revived in opera houses.

A final elusive element or facet of Prince's success as a producer is the atmosphere he creates among the artistic contributors to his productions. Over and over again,

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[1]Samuel G. Freedman, "After 50 Years, 'Porgy' Comes to the Met as a Certified Classic," New York Times, 3 February 1985, sec. 2, p. 1.

designers, actors, choreographers, songwriters and librettists have stated that Harold Prince's enthusiasm and encouragement led to the success of a production. The psychological reinforcement that Prince lends to a production team often makes the difference between success and failure. Stephen Sondheim said that Prince's positive attitude and enthusiasm during the creation of Forum was the main reason that the production was kept alive. When difficulties paralyzed the collaborators' creative efforts, it was Prince who managed to move it along to its ultimate success. Sondheim said:

> His [Prince's] energy and enthusiasm are enormous and the driving force often--particularly when other people are getting discouraged. As a producer, I remember, on Forum, when we were all out of town, any other producer I think, would have closed the show because we were getting such poor audience reaction. But not Hal. Even George Abbott wanted to close the show and Hal wouldn't do it. We brought Jerry Robbins in to restage some numbers and he saved it. No, Hal's enthusiasm is boundless even when he's privately discouraged. And he has a wonderful sense of family . . . a sense of responsibility to all the people in and around the show. He feels if he is going to be the captain of the ship he must be responsible to them. Therefore, he does not do what a number of other directors do, which is to indulge himself in tantrums or even in gloom, except at home. The only person who knows how upset he is or gloomy he gets is his wife. Occasionally me, simply because we're old friends. But rarely does he show anything except positive vibes, and that positive energy is (I wouldn't say it's unique in Hal) but there's more of it in Hal than anybody I've ever worked with.[1]

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[1]Sondheim interview.

This quality of Prince's described by his production colleagues as "enthusiasm" makes him a creative catalyst. Just as a catalyst makes a chemical solution unite and work, Prince as producer brings out the best in his creative team.

The same quality also works for Prince as a director. The Broadway musical is a collaborative effort. The production team must work together, and to the same artistic end. As a director, Prince guides the direction the production is to take and helps to create an atmosphere in which writer, composer, designer, etc. blend their talents into one united concept.

He has worked mainly with the same group of theatre artists--e.g., writers George Furth and Hugh Wheeler, composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim, and songwriting teams Kander and Ebb and Bock and Harnick. These are the artists who worked with him during the '60s and '70s. The team also included designers Boris Aronson and Eugene Lee and costume designers Franne Lee and Florence Klotz, and two lighting directors, Tharon Musser and Ken Billington. Jonathan Tunick was the main orchestrator and Paul Gemingnani was often Prince's musical director. Patricia Birch replaced Michael Bennett as choreographer. Ron Field and Larry Fuller have also done musical staging for the director. Prince, in a television interview with Beverly Sills, described his working relationship with Ken Billington: "Once you establish a good working relationship,

we're ruthless with each other, but we don't fight."[1]

Lisa Aronson said of these collaborators, "they were all strong people and an unusually gifted bunch and Hal was like the chief cook."[2] He challenged people and then played the role of editor. Mrs. Aronson said of Prince's crew, "They're wonderful--all of them . . . tough--but all pros."[3] Prince surrounded himself with a group of gifted and strong theatre artists, but he was the "unquestioned leader," said Ruth Mitchell.[4]

Prince is a perfectionist. In early shows with Aronson, the designer provided his director with scale models. Later, Prince would accept incomplete sketches. Mrs. Aronson explained that "Prince obviously began to understand the direction Aronson was going in without having to see full models."[5]

Because Prince excels in helping people to work well together, his colleagues have freedom to create their best. He differs from Jerome Robbins in this respect. Robbins can be difficult with collaborators. Mrs. Aronson said Robbins' method of working "in some respects curtails the

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[1]"Beverly Sills Interviews Harold Prince," videotape, 21 November 1976, PBS, Channel 13, New York.

[2]Lisa Aronson interview.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Mitchell interview.

[5]Lisa Aronson interview.

degree of creativity."[1] Pat Birch agrees that Prince is not "restrictive."[2] He may ask for something specific from a collaborator, but if he comes back with something different and it works, it is accepted. Prince enjoys being surprised by his collaborators' ideas.

Prince doesn't like "yes men." Lisa Aronson explained that her husband was a man who spoke his mind. Pat Birch said, "I'm not always an agree-er. And I think Hal likes that. I'm not a 'yes person.'"[3]

Prince and Sondheim, as well as the others, use metaphors for shows. They realize that a show may be about more than one thing and that different metaphors are not necessarily contradictory. A metaphor gives Prince a "handle" for his show. He gets images and ideas from paintings. For Cabaret he studied George Grosz's German expressionist work; for A Little Night Music he was inspired by Magritte's paintings. For Company he relied on Francis Bacon's work and for A Doll's Life he looked at the paintings of Edvard Munch. Pat Birch said:

> I think Hal is, number one, a conceptualist. He gets an image . . . a visual image. He works very much from visual images--paintings. He's one of the greatest concept men around.[4]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Birch interview.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

Sondheim agrees that Prince uses a visual approach to a show. He said:

> I don't think he can get a grasp on a show just from reading a script unless he gets a visual take. If he has a visual take then it makes him want to go ahead on a show whether it's a completed script or something that's merely an idea that he brings to a writer.[1]

Prince and Sondheim have few conflicts at work. They trust each other and don't like to fight. They are both involved in the decision-making process, but if one of them is adamant about some issue, the other usually backs off. Sondheim summed up their working arrangement: "I think we see the large things exactly alike, and the tiny things exactly alike, and it's only in the middle ground that we have disagreements, which is where, to use a favorite word of Hal's, the abrasion comes in and where new creative ferment starts."[2]

Sondheim was asked to elaborate on what he meant. He said that when working on a show with Prince, they both usually agree on the goal and even on details, such as "that girl moves too quickly" or "that cue is too soon." "However," said Sondheim, "as for the effect of a scene or what the approach should be--that's the kind of thing we disagree on . . . what the song should accomplish, etc.

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[1]Sondheim interview.

[2]"On Collaboration Between Authors and Directors," Dramatists Guild Quarterly, p. 16.

. . . But don't make the mistake that it's just me and Hal--it's also a librettist."[1]

Prince doesn't accentuate dance in his musicals. He views shows differently from director/choreographers. Prince explains why there is less dancing in his musicals:

> I don't like mindless dancing. I like integrated musicals more. It seems a choreographer will lean too heavily on dance and not enough on character.[2]

In an interview with Martin Gottfried, Prince discussed his collaboration with choreographers.

> I talk with the choreographer about the whole thing, about the concept for the musical and what the whole thing will be. Individually, one might talk about the idea for a number. I certainly operate as an editor, as the final word. I must. I say this is good--that isn't. On the other hand, I can't move people's feet. I've staged a lot of numbers in the musicals I do, but I don't know about dancing. And anything that requires dancing, forget it! I'm a klutz and I know it. But I certainly have a sense of what I know is right in the overall concept of a musical. I'm not trying to be modest. It's just that the choreographers who have worked with me have contributed brilliantly and originally. They don't just follow orders.[3]

Prince maintains that his shows have comparatively few traumatic episodes during rehearsals because the groundwork has been accomplished months before rehearsals begin.

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[1]Sondheim interview.

[2]Prince interview, "Beverly Sills Interviews Harold Prince," videotape.

[3]"A Conversation with Martin Gottfried," Women's Wear Daily, 17 April 1973, p. 7.

The major collaborators have been pounding away at what the show should or shouldn't be--how the story will be told, how the scenery will look, and how the people will move. Prince calls the latter the "motor" of the show, often affecting the composer's work. The songwriter gets ideas about the rhythms and sounds that can color his music. Prince feels that during this process each collaborator should be involved with the "total." This is not easy if each artist goes off on his own. The chance to meet together often, to toss ideas around, and to come up with mutually satisfying solutions makes for a unified production. If one person has a vision, he can try to convince his collaborators to support that vision. When rehearsals begin, the major decisions have been made and things progress fairly smoothly.

Once rehearsals begin, Prince believes, you need someone who can make firm decisions. He is convinced that the more time one has for rehearsals, the more time is wasted.

A second reason for the smooth rehearsal period is Prince's habit of reading and playing through the show in the months before rehearsals. He thinks that this practice is crucial. Sometimes actors do the reading, and at other times Prince does the parts himself. The songs are also played and sung. The collaborators try to identify signals that may reveal a lack of variety or a relentless

heaviness in the show. By listening to the piece over and over again, they spot problems and try to remedy them before the short rehearsal period begins.

Sondheim explains that elements in each of his collaborations with Prince have varied. With Company, the composer suffered a block at one point while attempting to write the score. Prince made Sondheim look at a huge replica of the set. Prompted by his visualization, Sondheim's writing began to flow once again. A similar block with Follies was released when Prince made the cast don their Florence Klotz costumes, and had Sondheim view them. Again he went home and created some of his best work for the show. Sondheim describes the experience as freeing; he can "spin off from this."[1]

Prince believes that good actors not only add greatly to a production, but are also collaborators. Important is whether an actor wants to serve the entire project or merely to serve himself. This is mainly why Prince has been hesitant to hire stars, but there are other reasons as well. He has learned that he can often make his own stars. The possible sacrificing of some of the box-office receipts is offset by other benefits. He saves the star's salary, and avoids the star's demands, creative and otherwise. The

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[1]Sondheim interview, "Brendan Gill Interviews Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim," videotape.

presence of a star often perverts the material of a show. It may alter the conception of the role, and in turn, the creative vision of the piece.

Rehearsals on a Prince show consist of one read-through in which most often he explains the concept. From then on, it is down to the staging. The atmosphere is informal and light. Notes are given informally and publicly unless a special problem arises with an actor which may require privacy. Because so much of the show has been worked out beforehand and appears to have penetrated his subconscious, Prince feels secure enough to let it appear as if the show is unfolding inspirationally--to have fun with it and to keep it flexible enough to modify at any given moment. He likens the director to an editor who is there to bring out the best in people and to serve the text. Visitors are permitted during rehearsals and advice is welcome. However, Prince is selective in his use of suggestions, holding off any major changes until the cast is secure and able to adjust.

When he is involved in his role as director, he relies heavily on the trusted members of his staff for the producing chores. Prince gave complete responsibility to Howard Haines, his general manager, to arrange for the renovation of the Broadway Theatre prior to the run of Candide (1974), and to Ruth Mitchell, his associate producer, for many other production chores. He recognizes

that he cannot do disciplined work as a director and, at the same time, worry about all the production details.

Unlike some Broadway directors, Prince is very kind to his casts. "He treats everyone equally--from stars to chorus," said Kurt Peterson, who played in Follies.[1] Prince said, "The one thing I've been careful not to do, and I think it causes more trouble than anything else in the theatre, is to get on the telephone and talk to, say, one actor about another. If I've got anything to say, I say it to the whole company."[2]

Alexis Smith loved working with Prince on Follies. She said, "He knows exactly what he wants. There's no uncertainty and time-wasting."[3] Lonny Price, who worked with Prince in Merrily We Roll Along (1980), said that Prince's enthusiasm rubs off on everyone.[4]

John McMartin remembers that early in his career he auditioned for a Griffith-Prince show and was amazed that afterwards he received a written reply from Prince. McMartin said, "He is one of the few producer/directors who ever wrote a letter after he had auditioned me saying 'Thank you, you're just not right for this show, but perhaps

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[1]Louis Botto, "Prince and His Follies," Look, 18 May 1971, p. 38.

[2]Buckley, "Prince vs. Prince," p. 3.

[3]Botto, "Prince and His Follies," p. 38.

[4]Price interview.

we'll be able to use you in some future project.' I've never forgotten that."[1] Charlotte Moore remembers auditioning for Prince and Sondheim and other collaborators for one of their shows. She was terrified about having to sing (she is basically an actress) and collapsed to the floor weeping. After a momentary silence in the darkened theatre, Prince raced to the stage and knelt down, putting his arms around her and consoling her. He managed to calm a very frightened auditioner and she, too, has never forgotten.[2]

Prince has a concise answer for questions about how he directs musicals. He says that it is necessary to learn the craft. He believes in the apprenticeship system since that is the way he learned. He respects technique and has no patience with self-indulgence or unpreparedness. Describing himself as a director, Prince says he is honest and not a theorist. "I'm interested in round characters, natural movement and in avoiding business and lines that bring the cheap, easy laugh."[3] Many of Prince's theories are practical and pragmatic. "For one thing," he says, "you never have meetings at night, when everyone is crazy. At night, everything in your brain turns to so much

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[1]McMartin interview.

[2]Interview with Charlotte Moore, New York, 10 June 1982.

[3]Buckley, "Prince vs. Prince," p. 3.

spaghetti. It's a simple lesson, but so few people get to learn it."[1]

"Prince has often played an important role in the shaping of the librettos of his shows," said Howard Haines.[2] He sharpens and focuses the shape of a book and has a great sense of what to cut out if it appears to be extraneous to the piece or is what is generally considered "filler."[3] Prince, when asked to discuss the shows in which he had the most influence on the book, said:

> The most common one, because I've read about it so much, is Company because I'm the one who thought it should be a musical and I think George and Steve thought I was nuts . . . and it's a terrific musical and its structure works well. It was just an idea--just an impulse . . . but it worked. I certainly had a lot of input on Pacific Overtures and I had input on Follies. That's an interesting one because Follies was brought to me as The Girls Upstairs and it was then a very realistic musical. It was my notion to splinter time and to bring the young people on (the young alter egos) of leading characters. And then the whole thing got abstracted with the whole Proustian thing. So I think I had a formidable impact there. There wasn't so much on Sweeney. But a director's job varies entirely in relation to the need. I don't want to be an author unless I have to be an author. Sometimes it's a good idea. It's all about filling the needs of your collaborators. I only give actors a line reading when it's necessary. It's obvious Angela Lansbury is not going to need a line reading.[4]

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[1]Corry, "Harold Prince: Craft is the Key," p. 1.

[2]Interview with Howard Haines, New York, 10 January 1982.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Prince interview.

Since Prince has repeatedly expressed his debt to Meyerhold and Piscator as influences on his directing style, it is important to note that both Russian and German directors appear to be influential only in retrospect. Although he had become aware of certain facets of Meyerhold's work when he visited the Taganka Theatre, Prince didn't really know much about Meyerhold's particular style until people began to compare their work. Dos Passos had written an article saying he'd seen an extraordinary thing that a man named Meyerhold had done in a historical play in Moscow in the '20s. It seems that the Russian director had amalgamated many theatrical styles, such as French farce, English drawing room, American musical comedy, Italian opera, etc. Ironically, that was Prince's original intention with Pacific Overtures. The concept was contained in his opening speech to the cast on the first day of rehearsals. At the time, Prince was unaware of Meyerhold's earlier attempts.

> I didn't know about the Dos Passos article until Pacific Overtures had already opened. So, there's some kind of symbiotic thing I feel about theatre that he [Meyerhold] obviously felt about theatre. Josh Logan, after seeing something of mine, called me and said, "Years ago, I apprenticed to Stanislavsky in Moscow and I was living there for about a year. There was this Meyerhold man and I saw his work and I saw it in rehearsal. I saw what he was doing and I've just seen your work and that's what you're doing, only your stuff is all working and I never saw a production of his totally and completely happen." So I was wildly complimented.[1]

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[1]Ibid.

Professor Mel Gordon of New York University, a Russophile and scholar on the directors of the Russian theatre, also visited Prince and asked if anybody had earlier suggested the connection between his work and Meyerhold's. Prince explained that by now he had read Meyerhold and seen photographs.[1]

> I did five people rocking in Evita. I did not not know that he [Meyerhold] had done six men in rocking chairs in this revue De. It's very strange stuff. Then I looked at his [Gordon's] photographs of Meyerhold's production of The Inspector General and it's so dramatic. Then, when I did Evita in London, apparently Piscator's widow was still alive (which I didn't know--I never met her--I subsequently have). She sent me a message through somebody saying that her husband's work was alive and well. I thought, I must do something, so I bought a Piscator book and I bought a book on Russian theatre and I've got a whole lot of stuff which now of course, I've looked into and I can see what they're talking about. But you must believe me, I had not seen Piscator.[2]

Meyerhold's production of The Inspector General used tableaus of many people in a very small confined space, which was accomplished by putting a small space into a larger space--i.e., a stage within a stage. Prince did the same in Evita during the "Rainbow Tour." The entire company was placed onto the little vaudeville stage with newspapers, all posed, with the rest of the stage devoid of people. Prince said:

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[1]Interview with Mel Gordon, New York, 9 June 1983.

[2]Prince interview.

> That Meyerhold knew about (I mean he knew about everything as far as I'm concerned) but he knew about that . . . knew how eccentric and exciting it was--and an abstract thing to confine all those people to a tiny area.[1]

After his shows open, director Prince visits them at least once a month to make sure that they have not become sloppy or lost pace. He will never come to a performance unannounced. This, he feels, is unfair to the actors. When he was a producer, he complained about directors who didn't come back to help keep a show retain freshness. He will call additional rehearsals or redirect a part of the show if he finds it necessary. Stage managers as a rule, he finds, want to keep the show exactly the way it was set up. Prince feels you can't keep a long-running show fresh in this way. "When it's stale," he says, "You should say, 'Let's do it another way.' Going left instead of right can free you again. Making everyone adjust to the change freshens it all up."[2]

Mel Gussow describes Prince's attitude after a show opens. Prince was quoted as saying, "I'm not interested in thinking about what I did. I spend a good ten minutes on why it failed and five minutes on why it succeeded."[3]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Prince interview, "Beverly Sills Interviews Harold Prince," videotape.

[3]Mel Gussow, "Harold Prince," Newsweek, 2 December 1968, p. 105.

Gussow went on to say that usually he [Prince] counts the receipts and then goes on to the next project.[1]

Most meaningful of all, Prince has gradually changed the look, style and spirit of much of the American Musical Theatre since he began directing. He has continued to experiment with both form and theme. When Rodgers and Hammerstein failed in a similar attempt with Allegro, they returned to the safer world of realism. Prince's shows have utilized such varied forms as pop art (Superman), surrealism (Follies), expressionism (Cabaret), symbolism (Evita), grand guignol (Sweeney Todd), and environmental theatre (Candide). In Follies, Prince fragmented time. For most of his shows he has created visual pictures on the stage, an element that helps to project the theme of the musical. Realistic sets and painted drops have given way to abstract constructs and black velours. His theme-oriented and episodically structured shows, such as Company, have become an alternative to the romantic and lineally constructed plots of musicals. He has also utilized cinematic techniques on stage. As a result, directors now may have a wider choice of stage techniques to test on somewhat more sophisticated audiences.

Michael Bennett, whose musicals have generally been popular with both critics and audiences, worked closely with Prince on two shows and has been influenced by Prince's

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[1]Ibid.

work. Frank Rich believes that Bennett's A Chorus Line borrows from Follies.[1] Bennett's Dreamgirls also consists of many elements in which Prince's influence can be noted. Bennett, in his musical, utilizes a group of revolving light towers to define his space. He uses no dialogue scenes or realistic sets. There are no dance numbers and Robin Wagner's set includes mobile, abstract units consisting of aluminum towers and bridges. Rich explains that these abstract set pieces "keep coming together and falling apart to create explosive variations on a theme. Bennett used his special brand of cinematic stage effects (montage, dissolve, wipe), which seems to be Bennett acknowledging his historical debt to Prince."[2]

In a follow-up review of Dreamgirls, Rich adds that "the sets are so abstract and austere that they recall the heyday of Russian constructivism."[3] In the same review Rich says, "Forever defying the notion that a proscenium arch is to be used as a symmetrical picture frame, Mr. Bennett eventually turns Robin Wagner's set of mobile chrome towers and bridges into a labyrinthine prison, with hellish Tharon Musser lighting to match."[4] There is then

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[1]Frank Rich, "What Ails Today's Musicals?", New York Times, 14 November 1982, sec. 2, pp. 1, 23.

[2]Frank Rich, "Dreamgirls," New York Times, 21 December 1981, p. C11.

[3]Frank Rich, "'Dreamgirls' Cast and Text Changes," New York Times, 23 September 1983, p. C3.

[4]Ibid.

an apparent link between the abstract sets in Dreamgirls to earlier Prince shows, including Company, with its large chrome and glass construct, and on which Bennett worked as choreographer.

Bennett also returns regularly to his shows, not allowing his productions to become either sloppy or stale. Like Prince, he keeps them fresh by changing the staging.

Rich feels that one thing wrong with musicals now is that there is an endless regurgitation of Broadway's past.[1] He goes on to explain:

> In Nine like nearly every musical on Broadway, we find the other major form of deja vu in the current musical theater: the incessant recycling of directorial ideas. Mr. Tune [here Rich refers to director Tommy Tune, who worked as an actor/dancer in Baker Street with Prince] has come up with many original sequences for this show, but nonetheless the most Felliniesque pageant he offers, the "Casanova" opera parody, is strongly reminiscent of the surreal (and brilliant) "Loveland" sequence of Mr. Prince's 1971 Follies. (In both shows a monochromatic set is suddenly filled with color, as a gaudy show-within-the-show drops down to resolve the story's emotional conflicts through fantasy.)[2]

There were other elements in Tune's Nine which show Prince's influence on the young director. The musical has an episodic structure similar to Company, with an abstract constructivist set that is mostly a collection of large cubes.

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[1]Rich, "What Ails Today's Musicals?", p. 25.

[2]Ibid.

Trevor Nunn, the English director, has also displayed in his work what appears to be a Prince influence. Rich said, "In Cats Nunn harks back to Prince's 1973 Candide just as his staging of Nicholas Nickleby owed something to both Candide and Sweeney Todd."[1] In a London review of Nunn's production of Lloyd Webber's musical, Starlight Express, Rich described the sets thusly: "The principal feature of the on-stage set is a huge steel suspension bridge that dangles like a chandelier from the heavens."[2]

Rich is sorry that Prince's innovative stage techniques have now become merely imitative in others' hands. What were once exciting elements appear hackneyed today. Prince "did so much to destroy the cliches of musical staging that existed on Broadway when he began his career."[3]

Rich believes that he might feel better about the state of the musical theatre if a new West Side Story or Fiddler or Company were waiting in the wings.

> It might be easier to tolerate an onslaught of video-arcade extravaganzas. . . . What also gives one some hope for the musical is that Mr. Prince and Mr. Tune, like Mr. Bennett do try to work with new performers and new writers in their shows. . . . This is essential, because, without the push of superstar directors producers are unlikely to gamble four million dollar budgets on the young, untried talents who might help recharge the writing of musicals.[4]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Frank Rich, "London's 'Starlight Express,'" New York Times, 25 July 1984, p. C17.

[3]Rich, "What Ails Today's Musicals?", p. 25.

[4]Ibid.

The cost of major musicals by now has escalated to about $5 million and Prince thinks that this may not only force him to close his thirty-year-old production office, but may portend the end of the large Broadway musical. The enormous capitalization needed to produce a new musical is resulting in fewer and fewer new productions. Mike Jensen on the Today show reported that the moderately successful musical is squeezed out, with only blockbusters remaining. Sixty percent of a show's budget goes to pay salaries, with these salaries continuously escalating over the years. Unless a show sells out, it is hard for it to meet its operating budget. To make matters worse, attendance is down at most shows. Although the discounted ticket helps, musicals often have to close within days of their opening.[1]

Prince feels that Broadway is too risky under these circumstances. He is now entertaining thoughts (as he did after Pacific Overtures failed) of closing his office and doing his directorial work elsewhere. Because such enormous sums are needed to produce musicals, there is an artistic price paid by the creators. Asked if his artistic freedom has ever been curtailed, Prince answered, "If you were an investor putting one and a half million dollars into something, wouldn't you want your suggestions taken seriously?"[2]

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[1]Mike Jensen, Today, videotape, 18 January 1985, NBC-TV.

[2]Interview with Harold Prince at photo session, New York, 20 January 1985.

Prince recalled what happened when he was directing Merrily We Roll Along as an example of how artistic aims are affected by economic factors. Having difficulty trying to visualize the show, he called in his staff and told them that he wanted to try something out on them.

> I said I cannot visualize this show, I don't know what to do with it. If I had my druthers I would do it on a bare stage with no costumes whatsoever. "So do it," they all said, "do it the way you want to do it." And I said, "Yes, but people are paying 35 dollars to see a Broadway musical. And if they come into the theatre and there's nothing there, they're going to resent spending the money." The reply I got from the staff was, "You must do what you must do." Howard [Haines] particularly said, "You must do it if that's what you see." And I didn't have the guts. Which means that the cost of things is beginning to influence my thinking creatively and clearly influences what's on the stage on Broadway right now. If you've got to pay 50 dollars and you want to see a lot of "glitz" and if you're going to pay 50 dollars you want an event--not a show, not a play--an event! And of course in giving the people who demand the events what they want, you eliminate probably the spine of the theatre audience because that audience is simply not there anymore. And not just because they can't afford it; they're not there period. They're going other places. And if you go Off-Broadway, you're liable to see more interesting stuff.[1]

Prince summed up his feelings about the state of producing on Broadway today.

> It's just too much money to deal with. I had patronage all those years. That's what it really amounts to. I had it on Broadway. I raised $250,000 via one letter in the mail and everyone put $1,000 in and they were unquestionably as proud of the failures as they were of the successes. They knew what I didn't know, which is it was all

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[1]Prince interview.

about creativity. And for a thousand bucks they had a run on something called Follies or Cabaret. When it turned out to make money--and it frequently did--they were thrilled. And when it didn't they were more interested in the attempt that was made. So I had sponsorship and it was the best kind because nobody interfered. There were so many of them [150 investors] that nobody asked to read a script, nobody asked me to have a drink with them at Gallagher's after the preview to find out how they would fix the show. Now a show costs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 million dollars and anyone who's going to put up that kind of money has a right to sit at Gallagher's and tell you how to fix your show. They may not have the credentials, but they certainly have the right. Anyhow, I don't know that I'd know how to raise 5 million dollars. It would take a lot of flying to Houston, Texas to do it. I don't know that I'd want those kind of relationships and I think I'm lucky to be able to work--the offers come in, and to be able to work for other people . . . It's not as good. I'd still rather be producing and directing for myself, because I do know a lot about producing. So ideally I would be very happy to direct and have my office general manage a show. But just the sheer finding of all that money--that's a killer! And it also clearly, permanently compromises the quality of the art you're trying to make. It sounds pretentious, but it's just damned true. If you have to talk about returning 6 million dollars to people you can't hardly experiment. And so the experimentation is going to have to happen elsewhere, and then when somebody wants to take it to Broadway, they'll take it to Broadway. The simple truth is that historically artists have died in garrets somewhere, have died without ever knowing that their work was good. Even Gershwin didn't know that Porgy and Bess would survive. So the fact that we've had 20 years where we've gotten some enthusiasm from an audience, where we've made enough money to live well, it's extraordinary! I'm real lucky to have been born when I was born, but I think times are changing, no, they're not changing, they've changed. And it's not the same as it was when I entered the business. And it's not the same business that George Abbott entered. And so let's say it's had 50 to 70 years to be done in a certain way. Well now it'll have to find a new way to be done.[1]

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[1]Ibid.

Prince may change his mind again, as he did once before, and retain his Broadway office. It is sad, however, to think that a man of Prince's talents and artistic integrity, who brought so much to Broadway, may now be forced to do his shows elsewhere. Other artists of the musical theatre (e.g., Michael Bennett) are already planning to have their next projects tested Off-Off-Broadway--like Sondheim's recent piece, Sunday in the Park with George, which started its life as an Off-Off-Broadway workshop.

The fact that Prince, who has influenced the course of the Broadway musical so much, is thinking of turning elsewhere is a signal that he intends to remain true to his own principles. He will not compromise his goal of a substantive and innovative musical theatre and his artistic voice will no doubt remain strong wherever he chooses to do his work.

ADDENDA ON PRINCE

> I think there's a real relationship between courage and fear. It certainly figures in my life. . . . I can't speak for everybody--but I'm certainly aware that most often when somebody says "I don't know how you do it" . . . maybe the simple fact of going to opening nights of your own more than once every five years, having to do it three and four times a year. It saved my neck because I was so depressed by what happened with A Doll's Life and two weeks later Candide opened [at the opera]. That was very helpful and a month after that Madama Butterfly opened in Chicago and I was as proud of that as anything I've ever done. So that was very important. Now I've got Turandot this spring. So in a fiscal year I will have done four things. I think there's a real relationship between the fear I have of flying and the amount of flying I do. It's called "get on the horse again" and "courage." Some of that I learned from George [Abbott]. No question.[1]

After A Doll's Life closed, Prince was terribly depressed, but he soon found himself busy with other commitments. He began by directing Turandot at the Vienna Staatsoper. It should be noted that this dissertation deals mainly with Prince's Broadway career, but over the years he has also been involved with directing operas both nationally and internationally. Other than Candide and Sweeney Todd, he had also staged Madama Butterfly, Ashmedai, and Silverlake for the New York City Opera. He staged La Fanciula del West for the Lyric Opera of Chicago as well as the San Francisco Opera, and Willie Stark and Candide

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[1]Prince interview.

for the Houston Grand Opera. Prince's approach to staging operas is basically the same as in the theatre. The process doesn't change much, including the way in which he casts the performers. Since he can't read music, he directs from a script. He listens carefully to the score, relying somewhat on instinct. Willie Stark could have been staged realistically, but he wanted to make things larger than life, and treated it like a Greek drama with stairs and pillars on the set. Prince, in answer to Beverly Sills' question as to why he appears to be fascinated with opera, said,

> I'm fascinated with musical theatre and I love to work there. I equate it with opera. The quality of the acting, people doing ensemble work is just as specific. There are no compromises. Operas are directed the same as Broadway shows. All are dictated by the material, the truth of things. The part I like to stress is the ensemble because they move from one opera to another with such skill. . . . You don't expect your money back in opera. A sometimes offensive burden is that you need one and a half million to do a Broadway musical. You therefore feel you have to do something special.[1]

Prince told Glenn Loney that it was opera that brought him to theatre and not the other way around. He said, "When I was a little kid, my grandmother had a box at the old Met. Every Tuesday night, when I was around six to nine years old, there I was, sitting in the opera box with my grandmother."[2]

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[1]Prince interview, "Beverly Sills Interviews Harold Prince," videotape.

[2]Glenn Loney, "Prince of the Golden West," Opera News, October 1978, p. 36.

The only problem Prince has in directing operas is how to deal with the multitudes of chorus members. "By the time I'm through all I have is too many people for the stage. How do you make stage pictures with all those people?"[1] Instead of keeping them all on the stage, Prince often has some sing off stage. He compares this to the nineteen chorus members he used in Sweeney. He broke the chorus into small groups and yet the stage seemed to be filled with people.[2]

In addition to his work in the American Musical Theatre and producing and/or directing plays and operas, Prince also has directed two movies. Something for Everyone, produced by John Flaxman in 1970, opened at the Paris Theatre in New York. It starred Angela Lansbury and Michael York, and was based on Harry Kessring's novel "The Cook," a comic parable written like a contemporary fairy tale. John Kander did the background music and Hugh Wheeler wrote the screenplay. The film was not successful but over the years has developed its own cult. Vincent Canby in the New York Times wrote the following when the film first opened:

> As a movie director, Prince is no Rene Clair, but he keeps a decent distance from the rather bizarre events, never bearing down too heavily, too closely with his camera. The visual style is largely that of the costumes and scenery (Bavaria, Salzburg) which are, correctly, so

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[1] Prince interview.

[2] Ibid.

> beautiful that they seem to have little relation to an identifiable reality.[1]

A Little Night Music gave Prince the opportunity to direct the film version of his own successful stage musical. Filmed in Vienna with Elizabeth Taylor, Hermione Gingold, Diana Rigg, Len Cariou and Laurence Guittard, it received such terrible reviews and word of mouth that it was virtually shelved soon after its release. Sondheim, when asked why Prince did not have the same good fortune with his film directing as he had with his stage work, said, "I don't think movies are Hal's medium. I don't think that's where his heart is. I think he likes the stage . . . that's what he's about."[2]

Prince was also involved for a time with the Off-Broadway Phoenix Theatre. In 1969, a triumvirate of artistic directors--Stephen Porter, Harold Prince and Michael Montel--took over the Phoenix Theatre Company, in existence since 1953. (It ended its thirty years of producing plays in 1982.) When Prince became involved with the company it was beginning to crumble. Years earlier, in the fall of 1961, T. Edward Hambleton had asked Prince to direct a production of Thornton Wilder's The Matchmaker. The show was to have a five-week tour under the sponsorship of the New York State Council on the Arts, and opening at the

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[1]Vincent Canby, "Screen: A Comic Parable," New York Times, 23 July 1970, p. 25.

[2]Sondheim interview.

Vassar College Theatre. Prince accepted the assignment, his first professional directing project. The play starred Sylvia Sidney and it gave Prince the credibility and confidence he needed to proceed with this new aspect of his theatrical career.

Later, Prince directed O'Neill's The Great God Brown during the 1972-1973 season. Prince said, "Our reviews were better than the size of our audiences and every week was a losing week."[1] The next season (1973-1974) Prince directed Duerrenmatt's The Visit--expressionistically. He had visited Duerrenmatt in Switzerland where the playwright encouraged the director to do an audacious, primitive, vulgar version of his play. Prince said:

> I asked Ed Burbridge, the designer, for three flat panels, maybe eight feet high and five feet across, to be used throughout the evening. Made of shiny vinyl, in the first act they would be black, in the second blood red, and in the third white. These panels would be moved around the stage by the actors to represent trees, to enclose a room, to make a path. Burbridge surprised me with three periactoids, triangular-shaped units, eight feet tall, three feet six inches across, on casters, that could be turned easily by any one member of the company. He added a circular iron staircase on top of which was a black tufted-leather banquette, the balcony of the Golden Apostle Inn, and he designed a drop with the name of the town, Gullen, made of bits of broken glass. The triangles were covered in wood, glass, and ceramic for the first two acts, and in the third act, mirror. . . . The production was so spare I used Clara Zachanassian's baggage to serve as furniture. . . . I had never seen a Bauhaus theatre production, but the Phoenix

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[1]Prince, Contradictions, p. 185.

> budget encouraged such a concept, and it produced unexpected advantages. The Brook production had eliminated certain sequences because they were too cumbersome. One, in particular, an automobile ride through the village and surrounding forest, became my favorite scene in the play. Seated on a pile of luggage, Schill and his family were propelled around the stage on a baggage cart through a forest of slowly turning mirrored triangles.[1]

Edwin Wilson objected to some of Prince's use of symbols in his staging of The Visit. He said, "The play has enough symbols of its own without compounding them."[2] Wilson did feel, however, that the "macabre fascination of the play shines through, and the production has many strong points."[3]

T. E. Kalem in Time magazine said about Prince's direction of The Visit: "Always fastidiously attentive to detail, Harold Prince has directed in the mode of stylized Expressionism, which helps mask gaping implausibilities in the writing."[4]

Prince also directed Love for Love, the Restoration comedy by William Congreve, for the Phoenix Repertory Company in the fall of 1974. The bawdy farce which explores

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[1]Ibid., p. 187.

[2]Edwin Wilson, "Alternating Fun and Blood Lust," Wall Street Journal, 10 December 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 164.

[3]Ibid.

[4]T. E. Kalem, "Salome's Revenge," Time, 10 December 1973, NYPL Critics' Reviews, vol. 34, p. 164.

the tangled paths of love featured Marybeth Hurt, John McMartin, Charlotte Moore and Glenn Close.

In 1983, after Prince returned to New York from his opera assignments in Europe, he went into rehearsals with Joanna Glass' play Play Memory. Glass had had two of her plays appear Off-Broadway. They were Artichoke and Canadian Gothic. She had been represented on Broadway with To Grandmother's House We Go. Play Memory is a slice-of-life drama about a family man's alcoholic self-destruction. Set in the wintry outpost of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in the period from 1939 to 1968, the play deals with the man's betrayal by his employee-friends and his deteriorating relationship with his wife and daughter. The play, starring Donald Moffatt, Jo Henderson and Valerie Mahaffey, opened at Princeton's McCarter Theatre in October 1983, running for three weeks. It was presented in association with the Annenberg Center, University of Pennsylvania. The local Princeton critic, Phil Cornell, in the Courier-News, said that "As for noted Broadway director Hal Prince, his work on Play Memory is a remarkable reflection of a consummate talent. Prince unfolds these scenes with blocking and a natural flow and power that are wonders to behold."[1] On the other hand, Cornell thought that the play had serious

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[1]Phil Cornell, "Passive 'Play Memory' Is Damaged by What It Leaves Out," Princeton Courier-News, 15 October 1983, p. B7.

structual problems, only blunt exposition, and ambiguous characterizations.[1] Mel Gussow reviewed the show in Princeton for the New York Times.

> The production has been skillfully directed by Mr. Prince. . . . The evening is shadowed by its antecedents, especially Death of a Salesman and Da, both of which centered on strong-willed fathers with far richer dramatic results. In Play Memory the potential exists for an evocative play about a daughter coming to terms with her childhood, but the memory would benefit from further distillation.[2]

In spite of the mixed reviews, Alexander H. Cohen and Hildy Parks (Mrs. Cohen) decided to present Play Memory on Broadway. It opened at the Longacre Theatre on April 26, 1984 with the same actors in the leading roles. Frank Rich didn't like the piece, writing that "Play Memory is full of memories, but it can scarcely be called a play. . . . Miss Glass can't transform her sincerely felt material into drama. Though tragic events unfold with clocklike regularity in Play Memory, we feel nothing."[3] Rich also found fault with Prince's work. "Though Mr. Prince almost always imparts a high gloss to his productions, this one is raggedly paced on a rickety set."[4] Play Memory closed quickly.

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Mel Gussow, "'Play Memory' Mines a Family Album," New York Times, 22 October 1983, p. 9.

[3]Frank Rich, "Play Memory," New York Times, 27 April 1984, p. C3.

[4]Ibid.

Prince, called by Carol Lawson in the New York Times "the Henry Kissinger of theatrical directors,"[1] because of his shuttling from one big project to another, was about to open yet another play he had directed less than two weeks after Play Memory opened.

Arthur Kopit's new play, End of the World with Symposium to Follow, was scheduled to have a four-week out-of-town tryout in Washington, D.C. and then open in New York on May 6, 1984 at the Music Box Theatre. The play, which starred Linda Hunt, Barnard Hughes and John Shea, is an autobiographical story of a playwright's attempt to write a drama about the nuclear-arms debate. Kopit's play was the first serious new American play of the 1983-1984 season, one of the very few in recent years produced directly for Broadway. It had not originated Off-Broadway or at a not-for-profit regional theatre.[2] This kind of a serious play was a risky Broadway project. It posed the question: Could a play that searches out the moral and spiritual underpinnings of the nuclear-arms debate engage a Broadway audience? The more cautious approach called for holding off the Broadway production until the play had proven itself under less pressured circumstances. Yet, the author,

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[1]Carol Lawson, "Broadway," New York Times, 9 March 1984, p. C2.

[2]Don Shewey, "Arthur Kopit: A Life on Broadway," New York Times, 29 April 1984, magazine sec., p. 88.

Arthur Kopit, the director, Harold Prince, and the producers, the Kennedy Center and Michael Frazier, were willing to take a chance. Kopit's feelings about his play and about theatre in general seem to parallel Prince's own philosophy and may have been why Prince willingly took on this assignment. Kopit said:

> When you ask an audience to pay money and sit in a theater, you've got to do more than just delight them. Television can do that. Movies and musicals can get by just with glitz, dancing, entertainment, sheer technical excellence. In the theater, you must feel and think also. It has to do with why theater has always existed in civilization. Theater matters.[1]

Frank Rich didn't like the play.

> Mr. Kopit alights on a red-hot subject--the specter of nuclear holocaust--and bungles it so completely that he might as well be writing about toadstools instead of mushroom clouds. . . . One must assume that End of the World is merely an aberration in the career of a talented writer whose distinguished credits include Indians and Wings. One might also say that Mr. Kopit deserves brownie points simply for thinking about the unthinkable at a time when many playwrights look obsessively inward. . . . The director is Harold Prince, who keeps things moving as sleekly as possible on a stage decorated with atmospheric projections by Clarke Dunham and Lisa Podgur.[2]

End of the World closed after a short run, and Prince was soon preparing Diamonds, which opened in December of 1984, presented by Stephen G. Martin, Harold Defelice, Louis W. Scheeder and Kenneth John Productions,

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Frank Rich, "New Kopit Play," New York Times, 7 May 1984, p. C15.

Inc. in association with Frank Basile. The difference, however, is that this project, a revue, opened at an Off-Broadway theatre, Circle in the Square Downtown. The unifying theme of the revue was baseball. Sketches were by such Broadway heavyweights as John Lahr, Ralph Allen, John Weidman, Roy Blount, Jr., Richard Camp, Sean Kelly and Alan Zweibel, with music composed by Cy Coleman, Larry Grossman, John Kander, Gerard Alessandrini and others, and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Fred Ebb and others. Here was Harold Prince, directing a show about baseball, the same Prince who, early in his career, had co-produced Damn Yankees, "the all-time champ of baseball musicals."[1]

The show received mixed reviews. Frank Rich liked only the setting. He said, "A more impressive move is Mr. Prince's choice of Mr. Straige's environmental set. Although neither the staging nor lighting fully capitalizes on the designer's work, the arena-shaped house has been transformed into a happy jumble of verisimilitude and whimsy--complete with a playing field, floating clouds and vintage Coca-Cola billboards."[2] With very few exceptions, Rich was not impressed with either the songs or the sketches. Clive Barnes was completely negative about the

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[1]Frank Rich, "'Diamonds,' A Revue about Baseball," New York Times, 17 December 1984, p. C12.

[2]Ibid.

show. He begged Prince to "say it ain't so, say you had nothing to do with that director named Harold Prince associated with a show called Diamonds."[1]

However, there were some positive reviews, Douglas Watt calling the show a "winning affair," and writing, "Let's call Diamonds a Little League homer and let it go at that."[2] As this is written, the show is still running after five months.

Prince is currently in rehearsal, directing a new Broadway musical called Grind, for an opening in April 1985. He feels that this show is different in some ways from any other show he's attempted, excepting Cabaret. Prince was referring to the fact that there were some elements in Cabaret (e.g., chorus girls in sexy stockings and garters) which have overt commercial appeal. Grind deals with a mixed racial love affair set in a Chicago burlesque house in 1933, with opportunity to mix serious and "commercially" humorous elements. Prince said, "Of course it would have to have had these serious underpinnings or I probably wouldn't have become interested in doing it."[3] The serious side of this show deals with the kind of violence inherent

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[1]Clive Barnes, "And It's 1, 2, 3, and You're Out--," New York Post, 17 December 1984, p. 61.

[2]Douglas Watt, "Holy Cow! A Baseball Show that Scores," New York Daily News, 17 December 1984, p. 45.

[3]Prince interview (photo session).

in today's society. Grind has a book by Fay Kanin and music and lyrics by Larry Grossman and Ellen Fitzhugh. It stars Ben Vereen, Leilani Jones, Timothy Nolen and Stubby Kaye. Prince believes in the show and hopes that it will be a success.

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