

Nick Zegarec's

THE

Hollywood

ART

*Still in love
with Rodgers & Hammerstein*



by Nick Zegarac



The word 'prolific' seems at once both fittingly appropriate, yet grossly inadequate in summarizing the masterworks of Rodgers and Hammerstein. Although both men were well established in their respective crafts by the time they collaborated on their seminal work, **Oklahoma!**, arguably it remains their greatest contribution to the American theater. In the decades that followed, Rodgers and Hammerstein became synonymous with provocative musical theater. In fact, in reflecting on their careers today, it seems impossible to mention one without immediately conjuring to mind the other.

It has often been said that good musical partnerships are very much like the ideal marriage. Certainly, that seems to have been the case for both Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, whose symbiotic union generated a creative flurry of stage successes into the most socially aware trend-setting tapestry of American stage classics – and later, of course, in films.



Throughout this tenure, Hammerstein would wax affectionately to the press how he toiled for weeks on a lyric, only to have Rodgers sit as his piano and perfectly realize his words in musical notes in a mere few hours or days. In point of fact, it is rumored that Rodgers wrote 'June is Bustin' Out All Over' for **Carousel** in the time it took his wife and daughter to attend a Saturday matinee.

Rodgers always protested the insinuation that the musical portion of their songs came easily to him, citing that by the time he actually sat in front of his piano to tickle the ivories, several months of intense discussion about character design and motivation between he and Hammerstein had facilitated a good solid template in understanding and anticipating mood, tempo and pacing of the musical moment.





"I think the moment of creation should be a spontaneous one," Rodgers would clarify years later in an interview, "But I have to do an awful lot of thinking for an awful lot of time before I actually do a few notes."

Together, Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote a staggering nine musical shows (five; *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I* and *The Sound of Music* considered legendary today and instant classics when they first debuted on Broadway)— a tally made even more impressive when one stops to consider that from 1943 to 1959 they produced one new hit musical for the stage every other season and, in between, managed to pen a memorable film score for the 1945 remake of **State Fair**. They also create a musical for television; **Cinderella** starring, then relative unknown, Julie Andrews. Cumulatively, these efforts earned the duo 35 Tony Awards, 15 Academy Awards and a pair of Pulitzers – along with a host of Grammy and Emmy Awards; a formidable tally in accolades by any stretch of critical assessment.

Savvy businessmen as well as syncopated creative colleagues, from the onset Rodgers and Hammerstein were attuned to the need for complete creative control; a legacy achieved only after they became their own producers and established their own music publishing apparatus, responsible for producing their own, as well as other hit shows.

The impact that Oscar Hammerstein's lyrics had on Richard Rodgers composition cannot be underestimated. For just as Rodgers collaborations with composer Lorenzo Hart (1895-1943) had yielded a particular light touch of frothy favorites; exemplified by a quick pleasant tempo and melodic lilt with overtones of pop culture for their time, so did Rodgers musical contribution to Hammerstein's lyrics illustrate a distinct, almost polar opposite mantle of quality, best exemplified by the duo's tackling of more weighty social issues.





After Hammerstein's death from cancer in 1960, Rodgers attempted to 'link up' with other major talents, but these associations proved less than stellar, despite such luminaries as Stephen Sondheim and Alan Jay Lerner as his partners. Simply stated; the post-Hammerstein works by Rodgers lacked that spark of effervescence and ingenuity that so completely invigorated all of their shows together. In hindsight, they also attest to the importance of both kismet and chemistry in the musical theater. Hence, theirs' can truly be said to have been a 50/50 partnership of equals: Rodgers and Hammerstein – organic in fruition, dramatic on stage, the longevity of which it is unlikely to be surpassed any time soon.



THEIR VOICES RAISED IN SONG

Born on June 28, 1902 in New York, Richard Charles Rodgers (whose real family name - 'Rojazinsky' - was Americanized by his father in the 1880s), began his prolific career writing variety and charity shows along side Lorenzo Hart while the two were still students at Columbia University. In 1919, the team of Rodgers and Hart had their big break with '*Any Old Place With You*' a song purchased and inserted into the 1919 Broadway musical, *A Lonely Romeo*.

Though popular, the team struggled for the next few years to find their niche, finally launched with their hit single '*Manhattan*'. The song debuted in **The Garrick Gaities** (1925). At the height of their popularity, Rodgers and Hart were writing four shows a year – an output not lost on the fledgling motion picture business, and by 1930 the two men made the move to Hollywood. Though their tenure proved superficially successful, Rodgers did not care for the constant meddling of producers and studio heads which, in later years, he would reflect upon as both stifling and crippling to his creative energies.

A scant five years later, Rodgers and Hart left films for Broadway impresario Billy Rose circus spectacular, **Jumbo** (1935) contributing the sublime, *My Romance*, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, and *Little Girl Blue*. It was the beginning of another unprecedented run on Broadway. Each new show seemed to top its predecessor, and between 1936 and 1943 the music of Rodgers and Hart was beloved across the country. In 1943, their 25 year association came to a sudden and tragic end when Lorenzo Hart became ill and died, leaving Rodgers momentarily without a partner for future collaborations. The stalemate would not last very long.



Throughout this same tenure, Oscar Greeley Clendenning Hammerstein II (foreshortened to Oscar Hammerstein) had managed a minor artistic coup by revitalizing, Americanizing and re-popularizing the stage operetta on Broadway. Affixing his rising star to already established composers in the stage firmament; Rudolf Friml, Sigmund Romberg and Vincent Youman, Hammerstein aggressively pursued and made stunning contributions to a series of hit revivals including **The Desert Song**, **New Moon** and **Rose-Marie** (all eventually turned into major motions pictures).

More popular with Hollywood contemporaries, Hammerstein's best known collaboration from this vintage was with Jerome Kern for **Show Boat** (1927) – a milestone in American theater and a show that hinted at Hammerstein's own social conscience that was to find full flourish afterward in the R&H shows. A self professed cockeyed optimist, Hammerstein's lyrics were all about extolling the strengths and attributes of mankind – a belief in humanity he carried faithfully over into his new partnership with Richard Rodgers.

THE PLAY IS THE THING

– the stage works of Rodgers & Hammerstein

The first of many seminal works to emerge from Rodgers and Hammerstein; **Oklahoma!** had its Broadway debut on March 31, 1943. With its instantly recognizable score, stirring choreography by Agnes De Mille and effortless integration of music and plot, the play was an instant critical and financial success, disembarking from the conventional Broadway show format and shattering both audiences' and the critics' preconceived notions and expectations about what musical theater could be.

Based on Lynn Riggs's, *Green Grows the Lilac*, (and original titled by R&H as *Away We Go! Oklahoma!*), the play's most notable departure from then standard musicals was its first act finale – a lavish dream sequence stemming from the lead female protagonist's longing for clarity in her romantic choices.

In Hollywood, **Oklahoma!**'s overwhelming success did not go unnoticed. 20th Century-Fox studio mogul, Darryl F. Zanuck had for some time been contemplating a musical remake of one of his studio's biggest moneymakers from the 1930s; **State Fair** (1933). The novel by Philip Stong had translated into a winning melodrama for Will Rogers and then, Fox ingénue Janet Gaynor. The remake would add a lush score to the folksy ornamentation that was the film's coup de grace.

Though Rodgers and Hammerstein had not yet been established as a team, on the strength of **Oklahoma!** alone Zanuck felt strongly about employing them to write the score for his new film.





(Top left: Darryl F. Zanuck – studio portrait. Clockwise: the many faces of State Fair. Jeanne Crain as Margie Frake lip-syncing to Louanne Hogan's recording of 'It Might As Well Be Spring.' Initially, Hammerstein had begun writing a ballad about having Spring fever. Having nearly completed his lyric, he was horrified to learn that virtually all state fairs take place in the Fall – hence, 'It Might As Well Be...'.)

Top right: An emotional Charles Winninger as Abel Frake, having just learned his prize boar, Blue Boy has take the blue ribbon. Right: Dana Andrews and Jeanne Crain indulge in a verse of 'It's A Grand Night For Singing' against a blue screen backdrop. Right below: the judges three make their final decision on Mrs. Frake's mince meat. The unintentional over application of alcohol to the recipe became a running gag that ultimately won Ma Frake first prize. Below: Louanne Hogan – a 24 year old contract singer. Her successful dubbing of Crain's vocals paved the way for a lucrative career as Crain's voice in several other musical outings.)



With their previous less than stellar experiences in Hollywood behind them, neither Rodgers nor Hammerstein were particularly keen on returning to film work. However, after screening the 1933 **State Fair** in New York, both felt that the story and its endearing characters warranted a second glance. A deal was struck whereby the duo could remain in New York while they wrote the score. Zanuck agreed.

Jeanne Crain, who had initially been discovered by Orson Welles while in preparation on **The Magnificent Ambersons** (1942), had since become a Fox contract player with modest success in non-musical offerings. Zanuck cast Crain in a non-speaking role in **The Gang's All Here** (1943) and then, as the lead protagonist in a poor cousin horse-racing drama to MGM's **National Velvet** entitled **Home in Indiana** (1944) – a huge hit. As **State Fair's** central protagonist, Margie Frake, the casting of Crain presented an initial quandary in that the actress could not sing a note. Singer, Louanne Hogan was hired to dub Crain's vocals – a move that proved so successful, Crain went on to have a lucrative 'singing' career at Fox with Hogan dubbing virtually all of her vocals in subsequent ventures.



The rest of the cast was rounded out by a stellar compendium of popular talents. Pop radio crooner, Dick Haymes was given the plumb role of Margie's astute brother Wayne; veteran Fox contract player Dana Andrews (who actually had come to Hollywood in the early years to sing opera) was cast as Margie's romantic interest, newspaper hound Pat Gilbert. The studio knew nothing of either Andrews' ambitions or his talent. Zanuck hired an extra to dub Andrews' vocals instead. For his part, Andrews kept his abilities a secret from the front office, ignobly opting to provide the extra with a steady paycheck instead.







(Previous page, top left to right: the fair in *State Fair* in full swing; Vivian Blaine and Dick Hayme's consider that 'It's A Grand Night For Singing'; later retiring to her rented room to sing the memorable 'Isn't It Kind'a Fun?')

Center: the luminous Vivian Blaine. Her husky vocal of 'That's For Me' is even more remarkable when one stops to consider that she played the thin and whiny voiced Adelaide Adams in both the stage and screen versions of *Guys and Dolls*.

Bottom left to right: filming with director Walter Lang on the massive set for *Blue Boy's* victory; shooting 'Isn't It Kind'a Fun'; the climactic romantic embrace between Jeanne Craine and Dana Andrews with Lang seated in foreground.



This page top: "...the corn is as high as an elephant's eye," so sings Gordon MacRae as Curly in the Cinemascope version of *Oklahoma!* Produced independently, Michael Todd shot the film twice – once in Fox's patented widescreen process and once in his own Todd A-O. Top right: Shirley Jones and Gordon MacRae – the film was her debut and she made the most of it.

Center: stills from two production numbers – "Many A New Day" and "The Farmer and the Cowman."

Vivian Blaine – then seen as a successor to Fox's most popular leading lady, Alice Faye – assumed the role of Emily Edwards; a big band singer who breaks Wayne's heart. The character of Emily in Stong's novel has no last name. Curiously enough, for each film version her last name has changed; in 1931 as Emily Joyce; Emily Edwards (1945); Emily Porter in the 1962 remake and finally, Emily Arden in 1995's stage incarnation.

In writing the lyrics for the songs in **State Fair**, Oscar Hammerstein was briefly befuddled by his choice of love ballad for Margie. Initially, Hammerstein had desired to write a lyric about a girl suffering from Spring fever, hence her inability to



(Above: a lot of surreys with the fringe on top head to a barn-raising at sunset in Oklahoma! Left: two scenes from Liliom, the French movie starring Charles Boyer as an unrepentant and physically abusive carnival barker. After getting a demure wallflower pregnant and then realizing he is quite unable to care for either his wife or their child, Liliom kills himself. He is sent to a bizarre limbo between heaven and hell and given the opportunity to return to earth and make right his mistakes. Unfortunately, he does neither, opting instead to go to hell upon his return to limbo.)

enjoy or even relate to the things and people she once cherished and found so amusing in her life. The concept was solid, except that Hammerstein was quick to discover that state fairs are held only during the autumn months.

With a bit of imagination in tow, Hammerstein revisited his initial concept with a slight alteration; the result – the Oscar-winning classic ‘It Might As Well Be Spring.’ *“I wrote it all out first,”* Hammerstein would muse affectionately years later, *“It took me several weeks. Then I gave it to him (Rodgers) and two hours later he called me up and said, ‘I’ve got it.’ I could have thrown a brick through the phone.”*

But perhaps Hammerstein’s most astonishing contribution to **State Fair** was ‘All I Owe I Owe loway’ – a breezy compendium of all that rural America is and has to offer (and transformed into a lavish production number in the film), made all the more miraculous when one stops to consider that Hammerstein had been raised – and remained – a city boy at heart. When **State Fair** was released, it proved a very popular hit. Though some critics were quick to misjudge the score as not living up to the standards of Broadway’s **Oklahoma!** most were laudatory with their praise for Rodgers and Hammerstein’s first filmic contribution.

With all the folksy charm of both Broadway’s **Oklahoma!** and Fox’s **State Fair** under their creative belts, one might have

expected a continuation into more of the same for their next effort. Instead, the duo turned to a dark fantasy by Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnar. **Liliom** was the story of an abusive lover who, after failing to secure happiness and security for his wife and young child, unrepentantly commits suicide. He is afforded one opportunity to return to earth and make peace, but badly ruins this chance at redemption and is exiled into purgatory instead.

Initially, Hammerstein had brought the property to Rodgers attention. He was met with less than overwhelming enthusiasm for the project which Rodgers considered oddly perverse and gruesomely tragic. His opinion of Molnar's work was bolstered after screening the 1934 European film starring Charles Boyer.

Furthermore, Rodgers was quick to remind his partner that fantasy rarely translated well to the stage. Nevertheless, Rodgers did begin the creative process by loosely suggesting to Hammerstein that the mood of the piece might be lightened with a change of locale from Budapest, in the original, to Maine for their version.

With a name change to **Carousel**, the protagonist of Rodgers and Hammerstein's show – renamed Billie Bigalow – would not be an unredeemable reprobate, but a tragic figure who, in his desire to secure a future for his family, makes a grievous decision that inadvertently costs him his life. He time travels to earth, makes a mends for his past indiscretions and returns to heaven, secure in the knowledge that his family will be able to weather life's storms without him.

In essence, **Carousel** is a morality tale, it's note of optimism and hope at the end not as clearly defined as the anticipated conventional 'happy ending' but rather instilling a premise both genuine and human. Encapsulating the vast rawness and passionately emotional arch of **Liliom**, **Carousel** infused a sense of the miraculous in the everyday, and even more ironically, within the tragic.

This was mainly Hammerstein's contribution to the project – inspired by his faith that, as the librettist commented years later, "...we should all have in ourselves and one another...illuminated in these words (from the most poignant and best remembered song in the score) – *when you walk through a storm, hold your head up high and don't be afraid of the dark. At the end of the storm is a golden sky and the sweet silver song of the Lord. Walk on through the wind. Walk on through the rain, though your dreams be tossed and blown. Walk on with hope in your heart and you'll never walk alone.*"





Turns of the Carousel – Top: Billy Bigalow (Gordon MacRae in a role intended for Frank Sinatra) first takes notice of Julie Jordan (Shirley Jones) and her precocious girlfriend, Carrie Pipperidge (Barbara Ruick). Middle: Carousel operator, Mrs. Mullin (Audrey Christie) admonishes the girls for taking a ‘special interest’ in her barker. In heaven, Billy relays his tale to the Star Keeper (Gene Lockhart).

Middle: Julie’s cousin Nettie (Claramae Turner) invites sailors to her outdoor venue with ‘June Is Bustin Out All Over,’ while Billie’s fair-weather friend, Jigger Craigin (Cameron Mitchell) advises Billy to help him in a planned stick up later that night.

Bottom: the plan awry – Billy dies of a stab wound in Julie’s arms. He returns to earth with the Star Keeper’s blessings to instill a sense of pride in his daughter, Louise (Susan Luckey). Luckey’s performance is one of the most astute and heartrending in the film – an outstanding achievement done mostly through large hurtful eyes that, regrettably, did not even garner a Best Supporting Actress Oscar nomination.



Above: the mysterious Bali H'ai beckons in South Pacific. The island was actually a matte painting photographed on glass and then photographed through heavily diffused color filters. Director Joshua Logan's heavy-handed usage of these color filters created a rather garish nightmare out of many of the scenes in the film. Despite receiving a near universal lambasting from the critics, the public flocked to see the film, making it one of the all time money makers of the decade.

Left: Bloody Mary (Juanita Hall) beckons the CB's to buy her wares on the beach. Middle: French planter Emile DeBecque (Rossano Brazzi) encourages nurse, Nellie Forbush (Mitzi Gaynor) to indulge in 'Some Enchanted Evening' – the show's most memorable song. Bottom: their tattered romances seemingly in ruins, Lt. Joe Cable (John Kerr) and Nellie contemplate where they go from here. In a decisive moment, Joe decides to take on a dangerous spy mission with Emile for the U.S. government that ends tragically. Nellie realizes that her love for Emile is stronger than her inherent racism towards miscegenation with the Polynesians.



Reportedly, upon debuting **Carousel** on Broadway, Molnar was complimentary to Rodgers and Hammerstein tampering with his material, confiding to the latter that he wished he had thought of their ending as his own. Years later, Rodgers concurred with Molnar's assessment. "*Oscar never wrote more meaningful or more moving lyrics and to me, my score is more satisfying than any I've ever written...it affects me deeply every time I see it performed.*"



Though not the overwhelming critical or financial success that **Oklahoma!** had been, **Carousel** nevertheless did respectable business. Unfortunately, it would be followed by one of Rodgers and Hammerstein's most forgettable stage efforts; **Allegro** – a meandering, speculative piece with socially conscious underpinnings about the folly of big business and married to a rather convivial story involving everyman, Joseph Taylor – a doctor who, upon discovering that his wife is having an affair, departs the big city for a life of humanitarian work and more meaningful romance with his nurse, Emily West. Premiering at the Majestic Theater on October 10,

1947, **Allegro** ran for a disappointing 315 performances – disregarded by audiences and maligned by the critics.

If many were quick to contemplate the future of Rodgers and Hammerstein then, their snap analyses were laid to rest with the debut of the duo's next iconic effort; **South Pacific** (1949). James Michener's frank, yet somewhat romanticized recanting of war stories in *Tales of the South Pacific* had first been considered box office poison by Hollywood studios; an opinion that inadvertently placed the novel on the open market where theater director Joshua Logan first discovered it. Unable to shake the notion that the novel would make a great play, Logan passed it on to Rodgers and Hammerstein, both of whom found the social and political statements made by Michener in line with their moral consciousness.

Crafting themes of racial prejudice and moral ambiguity around the characters of an American nurse, Nellie Forbush (Mary Martin) whose love for French plantation owner, Emile DeBecque (Ezio Pinza) are brought into question after she discovers he has Polynesian children from a previous marriage, the play proved to be Rodgers and Hammerstein most socially aware and emotionally charged stage work to date – a critique of the perceived American superiority made humble by the realization that 'people are just people – no matter where or how far one may travel.'

What made the Broadway premiere of **South Pacific** particularly satisfying for Rodgers and Hammerstein was that it was their first independent stage venture as solo producers. Instantly heralded by critics as another masterwork from the team, **South Pacific** reinstated and re-enforced the popular opinion that when it came to Broadway musicals – there was little to compete with the progressive outspokenness of Rodgers and Hammerstein. For their next project, the duo would be matched by two enigmatic talents as formidable in poise, polish and stature as themselves; one a veteran actress; the other, a virtual unknown actor on the cusp of his own immortality.

Below: the stifling heat of the tropics was matched by some truly inclement downpours that delayed principle photography and even threatened to cancel the entire shoot. Nevertheless, Logan and his crew were successful at completing the film, shot entirely on location. **Left:** Rossano Brazzi and Mitzi Gaynor indulge in some traditional native customs. Nellie entertains the troops with 'Honey Bun.' Bloody Mary temps Joe Gable with her daughter, Liat's (France Nuyen) beauty.



AN AUDIENCE WITH A KING

In 1946, 20th Century-Fox debuted the film, **Anna and the King of Siam**; a fictionalized recanting of the real life exploits of a British governess, Anna Leonowens and her burgeoning romance with a volatile potentate, while acting as tutor to his many children. The film was based loosely on Anna's published diaries and a novel written 50 years later by Margaret Landon. Enthralled by the film was one of the most legendary and luminous leading ladies; Gertrude Lawrence.

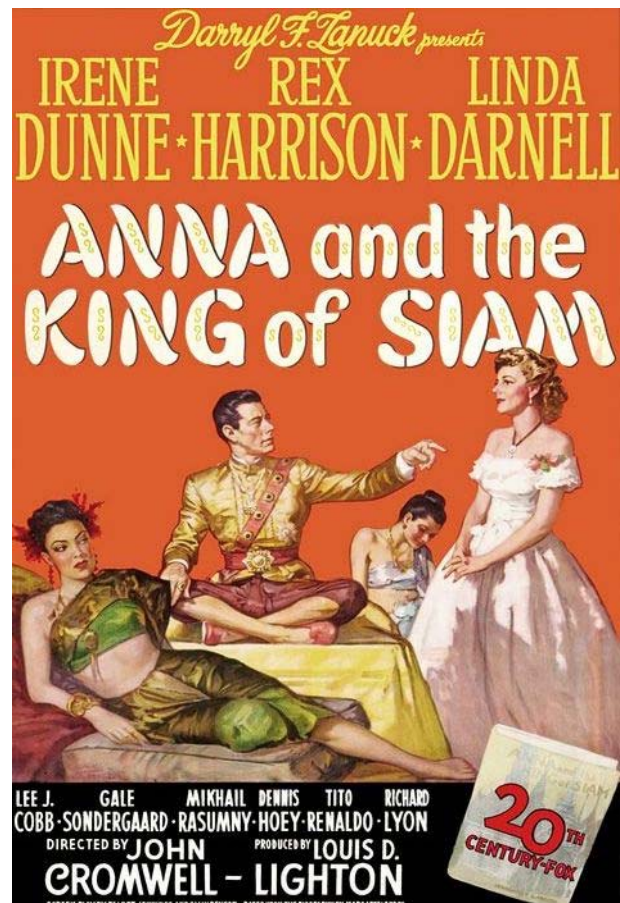
In 1946, Lawrence was an ensconced and intercontinental sensation and stage star of the first magnitude whose recent success in **Lady in the Dark** embodied the height of chic sophistication. She was also almost as famous for her after hours carousing and over-the-top lifestyle as she was for her stage efforts. Purchasing the rights to produce it for the stage from Fox – and out of her own pocket, no less - Lawrence approached Rodgers and Hammerstein. The team immediately recognized the story's potential and embarked upon developing the project for the stage; their only one of their plays written exclusively for a specific star.

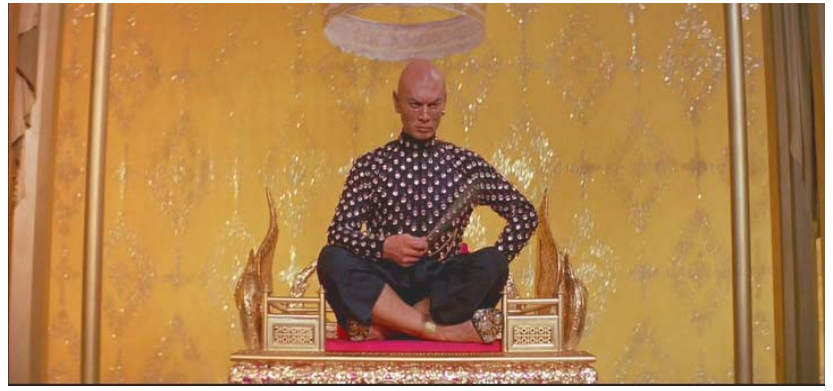
As the legend goes; Rodgers and Hammerstein began **The King and I** in earnest, only to discover much to their chagrin that they knew of no actor who could play the male protagonist on par with the overpowering presence of Gertrude Lawrence. It was at this impasse that long time friend and occasional collaborator, Mary Martin came to their rescue. Martin had worked with a little know actor named Yul Brynner in **Lute Song**.

It was Martin who arranged for Rodgers and Hammerstein to audition several actors for the part of the king with Brynner being the stand out. Emerging from behind a stage curtain, Brynner sat cross-legged before R&H with a guitar in hand. He then gave his instrument a mighty whack while letting out a primal yelp. Instantly, he convinced the duo he was the embodiment of their fictional Siamese ruler. Echoing R&H's enthusiasm, costume designer, Irene Shariff convinced Brynner – who seemed to radiate a savage sexuality – to shave his head completely bald. The results were startling, sensual and instantly iconic.

While the first half of the play belonged primarily to Gertrude Lawrence – and her sparring with the king - the last act was undoubtedly a tour de force in support of a secondary flawed romance featuring slave girl, Tuptim's galvanic ballet recreation of Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Right: Rodgers & Hammerstein proudly stand out front on Broadway's opening night of **The King & I**. Center: Yul Brynner was a virtual unknown and in a subordinate role to Gertrude Lawrence's galvanic Anna when the show debuted. By the time the film went into production, he was the undisputed star of the piece. Bottom: original poster art for **Anna & The King of Siam** – the first film to immortalize Anna's Siamese adventures on celluloid. The independent and determined Lawrence, who had seen the movie and instantly became convinced she should play Anna on the stage, virtually monopolized Rodgers and Hammerstein until they consented to rework the part for her. It was a gamble that paid off handsomely for all concerned.





Initial reactions to new worlds: top left: Anna (Deborah Kerr) meets the Kralahome (Martin Benson) who wishes to know impertinent information about Anna's late husband before taking her to the King's palace. Top right: The King (Yul Brynner) looks authoritatively upon his new 'gift' from Burma – the princess Tuptim. Above: "One day I shall let you meet the rest," the King tells Anna in reference to children from wives not in favor with the King.

Rodgers and Hammerstein were somewhat perplexed during tryouts when they arrived for a rehearsal of the ballet, only to discover that choreographer Jerome Robbins had been trying rather awkwardly to maintain authentic Oriental dance steps. It was only after Rodgers confided in Robbins that authenticity is a commodity best left in the eyes of the beholder that Robbins agreed to toss out virtually everything that the company had rehearsed up until that point and restage the number from scratch.

After tryouts in New Haven and Boston, **The King and I** premiered on Broadway on March 29th, 1951. It was an immediate and overwhelming success – winning Tony Awards for Best Musical, Actress (Lawrence), Featured Actor (Brynner), Costume and Scenic Design. However, after playing Broadway for a year and 1,246 performances Gertrude Lawrence suddenly fell ill.

She finished a performance during the Wednesday matinee in September 1952 and checked herself into the hospital for what she believed was going to be a brief rest and recuperation from jaundice. Instead, doctors informed the actress that she was fatally stricken with liver cancer. That Saturday, Sept. 6, Lawrence died of her ailment. She was only 54 years old, leaving Brynner and her understudy to take **The King and I** on the road.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

– filmic reincarnations and *The Sound of Music*

It is interesting to note that, with the exception of **State Fair** (1945), Rodgers and Hammerstein chose to abstain from allowing any of their Broadway smash hits to be transformed into movies until the mid-1950s; a decade marred by a decline in the studio system; the loss to television of the movies' exclusivity as mass cultural entertainment decimating theater cut to less than half of what it had been during WWII.

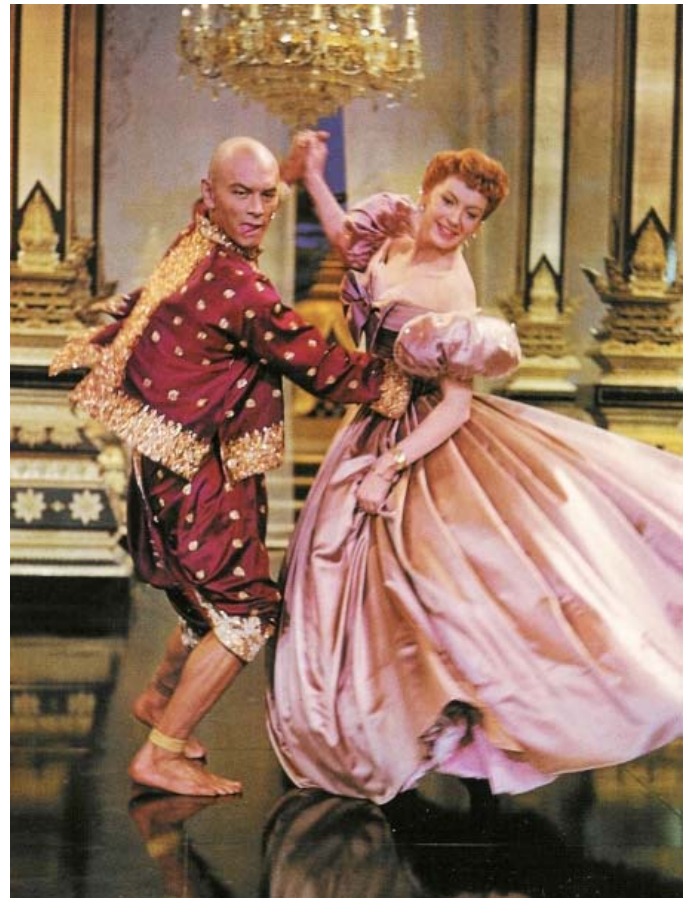
In hindsight, Rodgers and Hammerstein's apprehension toward the movies likely had more to do with the fact that both men were in a constant state of preoccupation on their next theatrical endeavor, rather than stemming from any lingering resentment over their early years of working in film.

Their hiatus away from Hollywood also allowed the movies to 'catch up' to a place where arguably live theater had been all along. Burgeoning technologies in widescreen processes and stereophonic sound afforded the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals a lushness and expansive canvas to explore their vast and superior themes of culture clash.

As it had been on stage, **Oklahoma!** became the first certified Rodgers and Hammerstein classic to make its way to the big screen. In **Oklahoma!**'s case, the venture was expedited to an even bigger canvas by master showman, Michael Todd and his newly patented Todd A-O widescreen process, meant to rival Fox's Cinemascope. For Todd, the appeal of having a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical as Todd A-O's debut was a stroke of genius and a marketing dream. For Rodgers and Hammerstein, the overall appeal lay more in Todd A-O's promise of improved image and sound quality – hence, optimal presentation.

Unfortunately for all, the early Todd A-O process came with its own litany of side effects – the most obvious being that its larger format 70mm film stock precluded widespread theatrical engagements and mass distribution, since most movie houses were not equipped to show Todd A-O. As a result, Fox studio chief Darryl F. Zanuck ordered into production a Cinemascope version of **Oklahoma!** shot concurrently with Todd's version - necessitating that each scene be photographed twice using a two camera set up.

Top: Professional dancer, turned choreographer, Yuriko performs a segment from Tuptim's ballet 'The Small House of Uncle Thomas.' **Middle:** Anna and the King at the start of their gala for visiting foreign dignitaries. **Middle:** Tuptim narrates her ballet for the honored guests. **Bottom:** 'Shall We Dance?' – a memorable scene in which the King and Anna realize a mutual physical attraction to each other and celebrate the discovery with a gregarious spin around the dance floor.





Arguably, R&H's most forgettable screen musical – *Flower Drum Song* (1958); a curiosity even on the stage since in many ways it does not adhere to the more socially conscious works that had become the team's standard fare. The central romance is more screwball comedy than melodramatic and the ending is one of permissible happiness with minor revisions. Top left: Linda Low (Nancy Kwan) gives guests of Sammy Fong's Celestial Gardens nightclub an eye and earful with Fan Tan Fannie. Top right: Newly arrived illegal immigrant, Mei Li (Miyoshi Umeki) encourages San Franciscans to observe the One Hundred Million Miracles that happen every day. Bottom left: Linda and dancers street entertain in a spirited jaunt on Grand Avenue. Bottom right: all's well that ends well as Linda weds her lover, Sammy Fong (Jack Soo) and Mei Li marries Wang Ta (James Shigeta).

For his part, director Fred Zinnemann brought nothing fresh or vitalizing to his execution of the dance sequences – made more stacy in Todd A-O, but ironically less obvious in Cinemascope. Despite these drawbacks, Todd road showed *Oklahoma!* at the Rivoli Theater in 1955 to rousing acclaim with the Cinemascope version debuting to equally strong reviews and box office simultaneously. With a cast that included Gordon MacRae, Gloria Grahame, Eddie Albert and Rod Steiger and introduced Shirley Jones, ***Oklahoma!*** translated to the big screen with much of its majesty and magic in tact.

Immediately following the film's success, Zanuck rushed into a big screen production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's ***Carousel***. As insurance, the film reunited ***Oklahoma!***'s stars Gordon MacRae and Shirley Jones as the ill fated lovers, but opted instead to shoot the production in Fox's newly advanced Cinemascope 55. Ironically, the film process resembled Todd A-O in its initial photographing, but was then reduction printed to standard 35mm anamorphic Cinemascope, thereby mirroring standard Cinemascope in its limitations. As it had proved to be on the stage, the filmic version of ***Carousel*** was not as successful as ***Oklahoma!***, though it did do respectable box office.

During these heady times in filmic activity, leading up to and including the filming of ***The King and I*** (1955) Rodgers and Hammerstein were also involved in two commercial flops on the stage; ***Me and Juliet*** (1953) and ***Pipe Dream*** (1955). As a result, it was mutually decided that after so much successful collaboration, Rodgers and Hammerstein would take a brief hiatus from working together.

While Rodgers continued to be intimately involved in the handling of ***The King and I***'s filmic incarnation, Hammerstein worked independently on a film of his 1943 stage show, ***Carmen Jones*** – an all-black version of Bizet's immortal opera – ***Carmen***. Directed by Otto Preminger who was – at the time – having an interracial affair with its' star, Dorothy Dandridge, ***Carmen Jones*** proved a powerful springboard for Dandridge's brief career in films.

On the whole and as a film, ***The King and I*** fared far better; the beneficiary of personal supervision from Darryl F. Zanuck. Indeed, the play had always been Zanuck's favorite and he carried that affinity over to the daunting task of

transposing it to a film. Ernest Lehman was assigned the task of restructuring the play's content – dropping several songs along the way even after they had already been filmed. The one song that Lehman was adamantly opposed to excising was Yul Brynner's 'Is A Puzzlement.' Zanuck had initially ordered the film to be made without its inclusion, despite strenuous objections from both Lehman and Brynner. Upon surveying the completed film, Zanuck relented in his assessment, ordered cast and crew back to work to film the number, and thus it remains in the film to this day.

Zanuck further ordered a lavish outdoor set of the palace and its gardens and fountains to be built on the Fox back lot where he ordered re-shoots of Tuptim and Lontar's romantic pas deux 'We Kissed in A Shadow.' All these alterations met with Rodgers and Hammerstein's approval and immensely benefited the story. But it was Yul Brynner's central performance which captivated audiences and earned him the Academy Award as Best Actor of the year.

By 1958 Rodgers and Hammerstein were in full collaboration again. They had produced a popularized version of the **Cinderella** story on television and were sharing a modest success on the stage with **Flower Drum Song** (1958) – a minor effort about romantic love in San Francisco's Asian American community that Universal Pictures would later transform into a glossy, but decidedly vapid film in 1961.

However, for the moment, the project that was consuming most of the duos time and energies was the stage adaptation of a story that would forever become synonymous with their names; **The Sound of Music**. The Von Trapp Family Singers had already been the subject of two German produced films; **Die Trapp Familie** (1956) and **Die Trapp Familie in Amerika** (1958) when stage director Vincent J. Donahue recommended it as a stage vehicle for Rodgers and Hammerstein alumni, Mary Martin. Perhaps because the duo were also involved in the filmic production of **South Pacific** at this same juncture in their careers, the immediate possibilities inherent in retelling the Von Trapp saga were not apparent to either Rodgers or Hammerstein. However, Martin could – and would – be very persuasive. Her enthusiasm for the project grew to the point where both men agreed on **The Sound of Music** as their next major stage vehicle.

Premiering at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre on Nov. 16th 1959, and running a then record 1,443 performances, **The Sound of Music** on Broadway became the show to beat - breaking all previous records set and held by Rodgers and Hammerstein. Martin took home the Tony for Best Actress. Tragically, during rehearsals, Oscar Hammerstein was diagnosed with terminal stomach cancer. His relentless pursuit of excellence and his commitment to the theater outweighed this tragedy. His last lyric became the poignant anthem of the show – Edelweiss. On August 23, 1960 Hammerstein died at the age of 65 without ever realizing the even greater heights his last collaborative effort was destined for on the big screen.

Right top: Rodgers & Hammerstein with Irving Berlin during rehearsals on *Me and Juliet*. Middle: the Fox back lot under construction for exteriors of the King's palace. Bottom: Carlos Rivera and Rita Moreno share a tender 'kiss in the shadows.'



THE EVER GREEN HILLS OF AUSTRIA

In April of 1964, director Robert Wise and a company of 60 people descended on Salzburg Austria, intent on capturing Rodgers and Hammerstein's final stage work on celluloid for posterity. By then the socio-political and artistic landscape of Hollywood had been so dramatically altered from the onset of government Consent Decrees and the advent of television that many in the industry were pondering the longevity of film making as a commercially viable enterprise.

Indeed, nowhere more than at 20th Century-Fox was this crunch and conflict between the old studio system and the era of the new independent producer felt more dramatically. Fox had hemorrhaged funds on the Elizabeth Taylor/Richard Burton epic, *Cleopatra* (1963) – a film which, despite overwhelming box office response, miserably failed to recoup its production costs upon its initial release. Hence, for all intensive purposes, subsequent film production at the studio had been indefinitely suspended and most of the studio's staff laid off.

Ever conscious of the fact that Fox was expecting a mega-hit, on time and under budget, director Wise worked as quickly as he could on the preparation and shooting of **The Sound of Music**. He was hampered in this pursuit by Austria's temperamental climate which seemed to include thunder and rain showers two out of every three days. In fact, when it came time to photograph Julie Andrews emblematic turn high atop the Alps, Wise discovered that the only way for cast and crew to scale the mountain to the secluded spot was by ox-driven carriage.

Still the happiest sound in all the world: Top – Julie Andrews belts out the title track against the idyllic backdrop of the Alps. Middle: Mother Abbess (Ilene Wood) consults other nuns about Maria's habits. Middle: Maria teaches the children not to fear thunderstorms with 'My Favorite Things.'

In the play, the song had been a duet between Maria and Mother Abbess. In his reconstruction of events, screenwriter Ernest Lehman wisely put the emphasis of the song on the Maria's relationship with the Von Trapp children. Bottom: teaching everyone to 'Do-Re-Mi'.





Above: original poster art for the film extolled the exuberance of its cast, most notably, Julie Andrews pert and plucky Fraulein Maria. Right: a more reserved and introspective Andrews poses for this production still. Is she carefully convalescing over her burgeoning romance with the Captain or merely scheming to get her hands on those damn drapes? Middle: Director Robert Wise poses with his two most cooperative costars – a pair of wooden marionettes used in *The Lonely Goatherd* sequence. Bottom: Wise and Andrews discuss rehearsals as the film's producer, Saul Chaplin looks on in admiration.

Andrews was to discover another difficulty once the location had been reached. Every time the helicopter carrying the camera swooped in close enough for a shot, the downdraft generated from its propellers was sufficient enough to knock her senseless into the brush. Furthermore, the farm owner whose land Wise was shooting on, had had a sudden

change of heart mid-way through photography – demanding more money, then poking holes in the man-made stream that had been built by the crew in an effort to sabotage their schedule when his demands were not met.

Nightly, cast and crew would unite at one of the local hotels or cozy pubs and beer gardens, soaking in the lush centuries-old atmosphere of old Vienna and indulging in its rich liqueurs and pastries. At one point, actor Christopher Plummer had to have several of his costumes altered to account for the extra girth he had accumulated around his waist line.

Despite almost daily telegrams from his home base encouraging a more rapid shoot, Wise eventually realized there was no way he was going to be able to complete the film on time and under budget. Still, what he had captured around town up until that point – the Mirabell Gardens, the exterior of Nonnberg Abbey, Winkler’s Terrace, the lush greenery and mountain exteriors of Saltzkammergut and the Mozart footbridge - proved an intoxicating blend of locations that, were later seamlessly married to sets built back at 20th Century Fox.

Screen writer Ernest Lehman’s revisions to the original show restructured much of the action into a more coherent film narrative; tempering the play’s treacle and sweetness, expanding the role of the Captain and jettisoned several of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s lesser songs, but also adding the only songs for which Richard Rodgers wrote both melody and lyric – ‘Something Good’ and ‘I Have Confidence.’

Production designer Boris Levin recreated the interior of Nonnberg Abbey right down to its cobblestone courtyard, a feat of design that many believed was actual location photography, though production records clearly indicate no access to the abbey’s interiors had been given to Wise and his film crew.

When **The Sound of Music** had its world premiere on March 2, 1965, few at 20th Century-Fox could have hoped for a more successful debut. Despite only slightly above average grosses on its opening weekend, word of mouth and renewed ticket sales caused the film’s weekly intake to steadily swell during the Spring and Summer months – a virtually unheard of phenomenon. In the final analysis, **The Sound of Music** became the studio’s most popular film of the decade and eventually, the highest grossing motion picture in its history. Today, it remains one of the most beloved film musical of all time.

Behind the scenes and clearly having a wonderful time. Right: filming a portion of ‘Do Re Mi’ on Mozart’s footbridge. Far right: Robert Wise on a boom. Bottom left: a grip entertains pint size Kym Karath between takes. Bottom center: Wise prepares the children for a shot during ‘My Favorite Things.’ Bottom center: Wise and his principle cast are all smiles for this photo taken at the outdoor theater. From left to right – Wise, Julie Andrews, Christopher Plummer, Richard Hayden and Peggy Wood.



CODA AND FAREWELLS

“What’s wrong with sweetness and light? They’ve been around for a long time?”

– Richard Rodgers

In 1962, 20th Century-Fox dusted off **State Fair** for yet another remake. Richard Rodgers was invited to write six new songs to embellish the contributions he and Hammerstein had shared in the 1945 film. A shift in locale from Iowa to Texas necessitated dropping ‘All I Owe I Owe loway’ – one of the earlier film’s best offerings; replacing it with the largely forgettable ‘It’s The Little Things in Texas.’ Tragically, the homespun quality that had made the 45’ film such a precocious and plucky excursion was wholly absent from this recycled endeavor and it failed miserably to catch on at the box office.

Indeed, by 1962 musicals in general were fast becoming a relic from the old studio days. Though many a yesteryear Broadway show continued with great frequency to become a ‘new’ big budget musical film offering (and more than a handful would also go on to win accolades and Oscars), by 1969 it was clear that this latest cycle fueling interest in the genre – the essential optimism that had driven Oscar Hammerstein’s librettos for all of their Broadway shows and had made Rodgers and Hammerstein trademarked celebrities in their own time - had given way to a more cynical repertoire of film makers and changing audience expectations.

“I believe that not all of life is good,” Hammerstein once relayed in an interview shortly before his death, ***“but so much of it is. My inclination is to emphasize that side of life...and it’s natural. It’s not something I’ve developed.”***

The Rodgers and Hammerstein catalogue is a unique legacy steeped in that philosophy of goodness and light. It continues to radiate appeal and resonate within the inherent greatness in high artistic achievement. That Richard Rodgers attempts at subsequent musical collaborations following Hammerstein’s death failed to reach such heights held during his association with Hammerstein is perhaps a forgivable footnote – for he and Oscar did give themselves an impossible act to follow.

But in the final analysis, theirs’ was a legacy in song immeasurably blessed by a willingness to believe that art and life should – and might – run high-minded parallel courses. Perhaps, it is that expectation of idealism in all things that continues to resonate with audiences today. We are forever blessed with the masterworks – endlessly revisited on the stage and revived both on the big and small screens.

When Richard Rodgers died on Dec. 30th, 1979 he put a period to what more great ideas and melodies lay within his highly developed sense of style. But he did not leave us barren of the moments, the memories and the lifetime of exemplary works that will continue to captivate, enthrall and encourage young minds for as long as musicals and that intangible magical quality that they spawn endure.

