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## BROADWAY MUSICALS: RECENT PRESERVATIONS OF MUSICALS ON THE CONCERT STAGE AND IN THE STUDIO

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**By James Fisher**

In 1985, RCA record producer Thomas Z. Shepard assembled an extraordinary cast of Broadway luminaries for two special performances of Stephen Sondheim's 1971 musical, *Follies*, which previously was represented in recordings by only an original cast album which eliminated, or significantly abbreviated, much of the score. Shepard's recording (RCA Red Seal, RCD2-7128) features virtually the entire score of the show, with snatches of dialogue, as recorded in concert before two enthusiastic audiences at Lincoln Center. In 1988, conductor John McGlinn's restored, complete (including a lengthy appendix of songs added to later versions of the show) studio recording (EMI, CDS 7 49108 2) of Jerome Kern's and Oscar Hammerstein's classic 1927 Broadway musical play, *Show Boat*, was released to widespread critical acclaim. The much-recorded *Show Boat* had never before been captured in its entirety, and previous versions featured so many interpolations, omissions, or "updated" orchestrations that the simple beauty of Kern's score was often obscured. The success of these two otherwise unrelated recordings contributed to a revival of a nearly lost art—the studio recording of Broadway musicals with a cast and orchestra assembled not for any particular production, but for the sole purpose of preserving the score. The unexpected and extraordinary commercial success of the *Follies* and *Show Boat* recordings renewed interest in studio revivals of musicals leading to a flood of revisits to earlier works of the musical stage, while inspiring experimentation with the ways in which these recordings may present most successfully the score.

Almost as long as musicals have been recorded in America, arguably since Richard Rodgers' and Oscar Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* was recorded with its original cast in 1943 (Decca, DL-8000; a recording so successful that a companion album [Decca, 23380/1], containing a few incidental songs from the score omitted from the first album, was released as well with similar success), musicals have been recorded in studio settings without the benefit of an inspiring production. Many of these recordings became notable successes. Richard Rodgers' and Lorenz Hart's *Pal Joey*, which had a modest run on the Broadway stage in 1940, was recorded by a studio cast in 1950 (Columbia, ML-54364), and its popularity led to a hit revival in 1952. It also won overdue recognition for *Pal Joey* as an innovative work of the musical stage.

During the 1950s, numerous musicals, particularly those from before the age of original cast recordings, were made into studio recordings. These, too, were popular, but in retrospect most fail to capture the spirit or to reproduce the letter of the original, in

part because little attention was paid to using original orchestrations, appropriate singers, or to making any serious attempt to tell the story with the songs. As such, numbers were dropped, star singers imposed their individual styles and arrangements of the songs, and other selections by the composer were freely interpolated. The best examples of this approach are *Babes in Arms* (Columbia, ML-4488) and *Girl Crazy* (ML-4475), recorded by the reigning queen of 1950s musicals, Mary Martin. Little of the plots or characters of these musicals comes through, mostly because Martin sings *all* of the songs, and because she employs her own easy, smooth sound, typical of 1950s popular music, but at odds with the style and tone of the originals. These recordings were popular, undoubtedly due to Martin's presence, but they provide the listener with little idea of the musicals from which they sprang.

The 1950s were a golden age of the original cast recording. Even comparatively unsuccessful Broadway musicals were captured with their original casts, and although quality varies distinctly, most preserve both the spirit and the letter of the show although too often musicals of this era were recorded on the first Sunday following the opening, when the performers' voices were tired. As the musical theater declined in the 1960s and 1970s, considerably fewer musicals were produced and occasionally a modestly successful musical failed to find a record label willing to preserve the show. The rise of rock music meant a larger volume of profit for record companies than any cast album could ever deliver, so companies became apathetic about adding new shows to their catalogue, despite the fact that some musicals on record were proving to be perennial sellers even after the show itself had long since expired. While operas and classical music are recorded in variant versions over the years, musical theater buffs have generally had to content themselves with the knowledge that even the finest of musicals would only be recorded once. Foreign cast recordings (particularly British) partially filled the gap, as did orchestral renderings of musical scores and the occasional generally unsatisfying studio recording. The dominant thinking behind studio recordings into the 1970s seemed to be that they would only have very limited appeal and that once an original cast recording had been produced, a studio recording, instead of recreating the show as it was originally heard, should instead present the score of the show in new arrangements and interpretations, even if distinctly at odds with the original.

Since about 1980 such thinking has begun to change. Critical respect for the musical theater has grown and as fewer musicals are produced and revived on Broadway the audience has sought out recordings of musicals with greater vigor. Perhaps more importantly, several conductors, record producers, and theatrical archivists have conspired to begin a new trend toward elegantly produced, faithfully reconstructed recordings of both classic and familiar musicals as well as lesser known works by the greatest composers and lyricists of the musical stage. Some of these recordings, like Shepard's *Follies* and McGlinn's *Show Boat*, have become instant classics, while others are somewhat less successful, but it seems that recording companies are becoming increasingly more willing to treat the musical theater as they have opera and classical music, as an infinitely viable form with new casts and new interpretations.

Examination of a sampling of these recordings is revealing. Shepard's 1985 *Follies* offers the musical in a live concert, with the excitement provided by an audience and a stellar one-time-only cast featuring Licia Albanese, Carol Burnett, Liz Callaway, Betty Comden, Barbara Cook, Adolph Green, André Gregory, George Hearn, Howard McGillin, Erie Mills, Liliame Montevercchi, Phyllis Newman, Mandy Patinkin, Daisy Prince, the late Lee Remick, Arthur Rubin, Elaine Stritch, and Jim Walton, with the New York

Philharmonic conducted by Paul Gemignani. During the 14 years since *Follies* was first produced on Broadway in 1971, it has engendered critical controversy and created a cult legend usually reserved for rock stars and movie icons. The debate over the significance of Sondheim's contributions to the musical theater has raged on unabated. While some critics have placed his finest musicals among such classics as *Show Boat*, *Oklahoma!*, *Of Thee I Sing*, and *Pal Joey*, regarding his work as the next logical step for the musical theater, others have derided his work as over-praised, cold, and pretentious. Sondheim's achievement undoubtedly falls somewhere between these two extremes, but even his detractors have ranked *Follies* high among his works.

The original Broadway production of *Follies* ran for over a year, but due to its large cast and costly production values it was a commercial failure. Although most critics admired Sondheim's score, James Goldman's downbeat libretto exploring the regrets and failings of a sketchily drawn group of former "Weisman Follies" performers meeting for a reunion in the crumbled ruins of their theater, led to mixed reviews. The ironic cynicism of Sondheim's lyrics and Goldman's libretto frankly exposed the frustrated yearnings of Sally Plummer for Ben Stone, the husband of her Follies-era roommate, Phyllis. The reunion of Sally and her husband Buddy with Ben and Phyllis unleashes a torrent of memories and recriminations as the characters encounter the ghostly images of their former selves haunting the theater.

The abbreviated original cast recording of *Follies* (Capitol, SO-761) infuriated the musical's fans when it was released in 1971. Sondheim's score was simply too long for two sides of a single record, and Capitol opted not to make it a two-record album. As such, many numbers had to be omitted, many others abbreviated, and virtually no dialogue was included to help clarify the shifts from past to present and from reality to fantasy that make up much of the uniqueness of *Follies*. Despite the shortened length, the original has memorable moments, including Alexis Smith's "Could I Leave You?," Ethel Shutta's "Broadway Baby," Dorothy Collins' "Losing My Mind," and the four principals' "Waiting for the Girls Upstairs," but the recording was a distinct disappointment. The critical dilemma in approaching Sondheim's more ambitious works is that he combines traditional musical comedy techniques and a film composer's sense of the emotional power of underscoring, with an at times intensely operatic scope. As such, his works do not fit comfortably into any immediately recognizable niche, and, like *Company*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Sunday in the Park With George*, and the recent *Assassins*, *Follies* offers few compromises. The title *Follies* has several meanings in understanding the musical, and, similarly, Sondheim's complex music and lyrics work on multiple levels, demanding much of audiences and performers.

Up until Shepard's 1985 concert recording of *Follies*, it was rare for a Broadway score to be recorded before a live audience. It still is, unfortunately, although the effect of this technique with *Follies* is electrifying in capturing the seemingly intangible immediacy and excitement of the live theatrical event. The overture, played to perfection by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, leads into an Irving Berlin-style pastiche, "Beautiful Girls," which movingly introduces the former "Weisman girls," now middle-aged to elderly, who parade on stage for their "first and last reunion." The powerful tenor of Arthur Rubin, playing Roscoe, major-domo of the Follies, establishes an extraordinary vocal standard that is remarkably matched throughout the recording.

One of the true joys of this *Follies* is the performance of Barbara Cook as Sally Plummer. She creates a searing portrait of a lonely and confused woman, and her renditions of "Don't Look at Me," "In Buddy's Eyes," and Sondheim's wrenching "Losing My Mind," dominate the recording. She joins George Hearn as Ben, Mandy Patinkin as

Buddy, and Lee Remick as Phyllis for the warmly nostalgic "Waiting for the Girls Upstairs." Hearn as the complex Ben gives a superb performance; at once both cynical and vulnerable, powerful and weak, and when he joins Cook for the achingly beautiful "Too Many Mornings," *Follies* reaches an intense emotional climax. Mandy Patinkin is also fine as the hapless Buddy. "The Right Girl," the score's weakest song, is powerfully performed by Patinkin, and his "Buddy's Blues" is a serio-comic gem in which he hilariously portrays comic versions of Sally and his mistress, as well as his own part. Lee Remick is a competent Phyllis, but on the recording she comes off blandly, lacking the diamond-hard sexiness of Alexis Smith in the original. Smith's bitter "Could I Leave You?," one of the few bright spots on the original cast recording, remains definitive. Among the supporting cast, Carol Burnett is surprisingly effective with Sondheim's hymn to survival, "I'm Still Here," easily eclipsing the memory of Yvonne DeCarlo's original; Elaine Stritch offers a hilariously hoarse and knowing "Broadway Baby," as well as a few pungent one-liners; Betty Comden and Adolph Green charmingly perform the previously unrecorded "Rain on the Roof"; and the haunting "One More Kiss" is performed memorably by opera great Licia Albanese and Erie Mills (the recent Capitol CD reissue of the original cast recording of *Follies* restores "One More Kiss," recorded but not previously released). The inclusion of a considerable bit of dialogue for bridging scenes and making comfortable transitions contributes much to the spontaneous quality of the recording.

Two other recent recordings have similarly captured live concert performances of musical theater scores. Composer/lyricist Jerry Herman's *Mack and Mabel*, a Broadway flop in 1974 despite a cast including Robert Preston, Bernadette Peters, and Lisa Kirk, was captured on a fine original cast album (ABC, ABCH-830) including all significant musical sequences. As such, the reason for the 1988 *Mack and Mabel* (First Night Records, 88561-8266-2), recorded live at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, is less obvious than with the *Follies* recording; although *Mack and Mabel* is among Herman's most effective scores. This recording is enjoyable, but extremely odd in its use of several performers in the key roles. Mack is played variously by George Hearn, Denis Quilley, and Stubby Kaye, with Paige O'Hara, Frances Ruffelle, Debbie Shapiro, and Georgia Brown performing Mabel's songs, all for little apparent reason. The recording also includes some quite unnecessary introductory remarks by Herman, who often begins singing a particular number at the piano before he is overtaken by one of the performers. This might be an interesting device with another show, but here these insertions are only an annoyance to the listener. As with *Follies*, the live presence of the audience adds considerably to creating a spontaneity and energy on the recording. The individual numbers generally are well-performed, but a recording featuring Hearn and Ruffelle in these roles (or a CD reissue of the original cast recording) would be more welcome in place of this oddity.

Cole Porter's musical *Nymph Errant*, produced in London in 1933, previously was available only in a few tracks by original stars Gertrude Lawrence and Elisabeth Welch. The new recording (EMI, CDC 7 54079 2), captured live at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane on May 21, 1989, features another all-star cast with Kay Ballard, Emile Belcourt, Larry Kert, the late Lisa Kirk, Andrea McArdle, Maureen McGovern, Liliane Montevecchi, Patrice Munsel, Alexis Smith, and, miraculously, original star Elisabeth Welch. Continuing the odd style established by the *Mack and Mabel* recording, no one singer plays a particular role, but performers are used, in most cases, for one number each. Again, the effect is a bit jarring for the listener, since no clear sense of plot or character comes through, but the additional variety is at least a small compensation. This

recording's pleasures include Smith's winsomely amusing rendering of "The Cocotte," Kirk's last recorded performance of the racy comic tune "The Physician," and Elisabeth Welch memorably recreating her big number "Solomon." These renditions and the enthusiasm of the audience compensate for some minor sound problems.

Live concert recordings are an interesting experiment and might be more profitably attempted with original Broadway casts. An English revival of *Oklahoma!* in 1980 was effectively preserved with a live audience (Stiff Records, OAK-1), but such recordings, other than private tapes traded by musical theater buffs, are not typical. More prevalent are studio recordings, best represented in recent years by John McGlinn's 1988 restoration of *Show Boat*. It is hard to imagine a better studio recording than this instant classic. McGlinn painstakingly preserved not only the entire score of *Show Boat*, but included virtually every piece of surviving music connected with the show, from some memorable numbers cut from the original production to interpolations from innumerable revivals and film versions. Few Broadway musicals have been as ambitious as *Show Boat*, and few have been as obscured through the years by cuts, changes, and diluted interpretations.

Mixing elements of melodrama, comedy, operetta, farce, high drama, and vaudeville, *Show Boat*, based on Edna Ferber's sweeping novel, covers the trials and tribulations of an extended theatrical family on a riverboat over more than 40 years. It focuses centrally on the relationship of river gambler Gaylord Ravenal and Magnolia, daughter of Captain Andy and Parthy Hawks, owners of the "floating theater" Cotton Blossom. Their passionate, troubled relationship is set against the ever-changing tide of life (and evolving American values) expressed by the score's towering moment, "Old Man River," sung by the wise deck hand, Joe. The song becomes a recurring motif, connecting the sweeping years examined at several climactic moments in the lives of the characters. In the first and most memorable half of the show, the youthful passions of Magnolia and Ravenal are set against the personal tragedy of Julie, star of Captain Andy's show boat. A mulatto passing for white, Julie is betrayed to the law of a small river town in a pivotal scene included in its entirety on the recording, which brings together and reveals the diverse natures of most of the major characters. Later, Magnolia and Ravenal are married, but after the birth of a daughter, Ravenal suffers significant financial reversals and leaves Magnolia, presuming she and their daughter will be better off with her parents. Years pass and Magnolia becomes a Broadway star (not realizing the self-sacrificing intercession of Julie at a turning point), retires after a triumphant career, and helps her daughter, Kim, to become an actress. In the touching final scene, an aged Captain Andy manipulates an emotional reunion for Magnolia, Ravenal, and Kim as the curtain falls to the distant echoes of "Old Man River."

From the ominous first note of the glorious overture through the last scene, *Show Boat* is an unmitigated joy. The lengthy recording includes virtually every note of music along with considerable portions of dialogue, allowing the listener an opportunity to truly experience the power of Kern's masterful score and the evocative simplicity of Hammerstein's lyrics and libretto. Present in the impressive score are such standards as "Old Man River," "Make Believe," "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," "You Are Love," "Why Do I Love You?," and borrowed period pieces like "After the Ball" and "Bill." Particularly revealing is the inclusion of a lengthy scene, mostly set to music, "Mis'ry's Comin' Aroun'," which foreshadows not only Julie's tragedy, but future unhappinesses to be faced by Magnolia and Ravenal. This piece was deleted after one performance during the Washington, D.C. tryout of the original production because of the show's extreme length, but in this restoration it turns out to be a key segment in bringing together musical

themes, strands of plot, and dimensions of character. Other rarely heard items include Ravenal's lilting "Till Good Luck Comes My Way," the light-hearted chorus number "I Would Like to Play a Lover's Part," and the buoyant "Queenie's Ballyhoo."

The appendix is equally fascinating, including scenes and songs either unused or ultimately dropped during tryouts for the 1927 production, a song added to the 1928 London production, and songs written especially for the 1936 film version and the 1946 Broadway revival. These pieces add emotional dimensions to most of the major characters, as in a deleted scene in a waterfront saloon that offers more background on Ravenal's life as a gambler; an "on stage" number, "Out There in an Orchard," for Julie; another romantic scene for Ravenal and Magnolia featuring the charming "Creole Love Song," apparently intended to be used in place of "You Are Love"; and "Ah Still Suits Me," a comic number for Joe and his wife Queenie in their old age.

The riches of *Show Boat* are presented in their original orchestrations, carefully restored and conducted by John McGlinn, and superbly performed by the London Sinfonietta and a perfectly chosen cast. Frederica von Stade is an able Magnolia, comfortably making the transition from naive teenager to a middle-aged woman. She is at her best in duets with the equally able Jerry Hadley as Ravenal. Teresa Stratas is a memorable Julie, strong in the dialogue scenes and delivering an unforgettable "Bill." Bruce Hubbard is a profoundly moving Joe, delivering the familiar "Old Man River" with power and dignity. Hubbard also teams nicely with Karla Burns' energetic Queenie for "Ah Still Suits Me" and several dialogue scenes. David Garrison and Paige O'Hara as perennial riverboat "second bananas" Frank and Ellie, Robert Nichols as Captain Andy, Nancy Kulp as Parthy, and silent film great Lillian Gish in the small speaking role of the Lady on the Levee also deliver first-rate performances. The quality of singing and the effective handling of dialogue scenes, transitions, and the excellent Ambrosian Chorus all come together to create a uniquely atmospheric recording.

The cast of opera singers in *Show Boat* adds considerably to the pleasures of the recording, but the use of singers from the opera stage has been a mixed blessing elsewhere. In 1985, Leonard Bernstein conducted a sumptuous recreation of his and Stephen Sondheim's *West Side Story* (Deutsche Grammophon, R 215404) with Kiri Te Kanawa, Jose Carreras, Tatiana Tryanos, and Marilyn Horne. The recording is splendidly packaged, but despite the huge talents involved and the inclusion of virtually every note of music, it is a pretentious and distressingly bloodless performance. If the effort to swell an important work of musical theater to operatic proportions weighs down the entire recording, the casting choices are even more damaging. Jose Carreras is disastrously cast as the all-American Tony and Kiri Te Kanawa's miscalculated, coldly delivered vocal effects offer no fresh insights into Sondheim's incisive lyrics. Thanks to fine choral work, the street gang songs come off successfully, especially "The Jet Song" and "Gee, Officer Krupke," but most of the rest falls flat, with Marilyn Horne's overblown "Somewhere" bordering on the ridiculous. As a group, the performers are too mature to suggest the energies and passions of the youthful characters of the story. This pompous recording is likely to send the listener back to the significantly better original cast recording (Columbia, JS 32603) which features Carol Lawrence, Larry Kert, and Chita Rivera. There is also a hard-to-find London cast recording (E/HMV 7EG-8429) and several studio recordings, as well as the film version (Columbia Records OS 2070), which is better heard than seen. Despite Bernstein's evocative music and Sondheim's superb lyrics, it is a show profoundly dependent on dance, so any *West Side Story* pales in a recording.

Te Kanawa has performed on a series of recordings of classic American musicals in the last few years, with the quality ranging from mediocre to disastrous. Unlike von Stade who has moved comfortably into the musical theater arena, Te Kanawa fails to make much of an impression. In two other studio recordings, as well as some collections of songs from composers ranging from Berlin to Sondheim, Te Kanawa seems at a loss to understand the idiom. In 1986, following the commercial success of the *West Side Story* recording, Te Kanawa took on the role of Nellie Forbush in the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic *South Pacific* (CBS, 42205), supported by the London Symphony Orchestra and Ambrosian Singers conducted by Jonathan Tunick, and a cast including Jose Carreras, Mandy Patinkin, and the late Sarah Vaughan.

Although *South Pacific* ranks among the classics of the musical theater, surprisingly few recordings of it exist, perhaps because the original production and subsequent recording (Columbia ML/OL-4180), featuring Ezio Pinza, as middle-aged French planter-in-exile Emile de Becque, and Mary Martin as the young Navy nurse, Nellie Forbush, is nearly definitive. The new, technically superior recording includes whole selections and dance music traditionally omitted, but there are few joys in this bland, mummified exercise.

Te Kanawa gives a competent performance as Nellie, but forced to reign in her powerful voice and accent, she sounds too restrained, too careful and completely lacking in the spontaneous and ecstatic quality Martin gave to her numbers. Te Kanawa comes off better in the more reflective numbers, but her performance sounds detached and distant. Worse yet, her few attempts to inject corny humor, as in "Honey Bun," are forced and uninspired. Carreras would seem a good choice as de Becque, a role created for an operatic performer, but he too seems detached, lacking the emotional intensity required to elevate his two most important numbers, "Some Enchanted Evening" and "This Nearly Was Mine." Legendary jazz artist Sarah Vaughan as Bloody Mary suffers equally from restraint, barely able to keep her formidable jazz-improvisation skills in check. She also misses the hearty and cynical humor of the comically odious Bloody Mary. The expected power that these performers could lend to most musical exercises turn out in this situation to be distinct liabilities. Only Broadway veteran Mandy Patinkin is able to register a solid performance. His mature and slightly nasal vocal quality is not helpful in the passionate "Younger Than Springtime," but he delivers a level of emotion and vibrancy in "You've Got to be Carefully Taught" that is missing from most of the other tracks. Despite the previously unrecorded sequences, including the lovely "Entr'Acte," the listener will undoubtedly turn quickly to the original recording, now available on CD, to relish the Pinza and Martin performances.

Te Kanawa's 1987 recording of Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady* (London Records, 421 200-1), with the London Symphony Orchestra and London Voices conducted by John Mauceri, and a cast including Jeremy Irons, John Gielgud, and Warren Mitchell, is fatally flawed. It is probably unfair to expect any other version of *My Fair Lady* to live up to the original cast, which was recorded twice (Broadway (Columbia, OL-5090) and London (Columbia OS-2015) in stereo) with original stars Rex Harrison as Henry Higgins, Julie Andrews as Eliza Doolittle, Stanley Holloway as Eliza's father, Alfred P. Doolittle, and Robert Coote as Colonel Pickering. These recordings remain available, as well as the film soundtrack (Columbia KOL-8000), the 1976 revival cast recording (Columbia, PS-34197) and numerous foreign versions.

Although some pleasures are to be found on the London Records recording of *My Fair Lady*, they are few and far between. Jeremy Irons is a competent Higgins, but his voice is unpleasantly nasal and his vocal range is narrow. He also lacks the necessary

lightness that makes the infuriating Higgins charming. Irons' strongest moments are in the tongue-twisting "A Hymn to Him" and the recitative portion of "You Did It," but he is simply too harsh and emotionally detached to recreate the wistful longing of "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face." The two supporting roles of Doolittle and Pickering are delightfully performed by Warren Mitchell and John Gielgud, respectively. Mitchell's raspy, energetic delivery of "With a Little Bit of Luck" and "Get Me to the Church on Time" are the recording's strongest tracks, perhaps because although they differ greatly from Holloway's memorable original they still manage to bring fresh delight to the listener. Gielgud lends considerable authority and whimsy to Pickering's few musical moments leaving the listener wishing that his character had more to do in the musical sequences. As the feisty Eliza, Te Kanawa is frighteningly inadequate. There is no discernable characterization, so Eliza's significant transition from a street urchin to a "lady" simply does not happen. Eliza's upbeat songs fall flat and her comically angry ones are listless. Although her vocal work is technically sound, Te Kanawa seems to be simply hitting the appropriate notes without any real conviction or connection to character. On one of the recording's most enjoyable tracks, "The Rain in Spain," she is able to join Irons and Gielgud in the infectious fun of the song, but, sadly, it is her only high point on the recording. The London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by John Mauceri, performs the score, particularly the rarely recorded "Embassy Waltz," with flair.

Virtually every significant American musical theater composer since World War I is represented among the current crop of studio recordings, as well as a sampling of overtures and oddities among their works (John McGlenn, for example, has conducted restored versions of Cole Porter (EMI, CDC 7 54300 2), Jerome Kern (EMI, CDC 7 49630 2), and George Gershwin (EMI, CDC-7 47977 2) overtures, including such previously unrecorded items as an interesting Porter ballet, "Within the Quota."). Among the earliest of these modern American composers, Jerome Kern is represented not only by the *Show Boat* reconstruction, but also a 1990 recording of a little-known 1924 Kern musical *Sitting Pretty*, conducted by McGlenn. It is another example of a valuable studio recording (New World Records, 80387-2) presenting a score by a major composer that will probably never be revived on a stage. Although it does not include the riches to be found in Kern's *Show Boat*, *Sitting Pretty* is a delightful score (including four numbers in the appendix) from an earlier and more innocent era in musical theater, representing Kern's sixth (and final) collaboration with lyricist P.G. Wodehouse and librettist Guy Bolton. As with virtually all of McGlenn's recordings, this one captures a vivid sense of the simplistic plot and characters (performed by a strong cast including Judy Blazer, Davis Gaines, Paige O'Hara, and Roberta Peters) while also featuring solid musicianship throughout.

Another early figure of the twentieth century musical theater is Irving Berlin, who unfortunately is represented thus far only by a new recording of his most familiar work, *Annie Get Your Gun*. This 1946 musical belongs indelibly to Ethel Merman, the Annie Oakley of the original production, as well as a highly successful 1966 revival. Her raucous performance is available on many recordings, including the original cast (Decca, DL-8001), the 1966 revival (RCA LSO-1124), and an English studio album from the early 1970s (London XPS-905). Other Annies can be found on the original London cast album (E/World Records, SH-393), a recording of a 1957 Mary Martin touring and television production of the show (Capitol, W-913), two film soundtracks, one featuring Judy Garland (Soundstage, 2302), originally scheduled to play the lead, and another featuring her replacement, Betty Hutton (MGM E-509), and several other studio versions as well as a recent English cast recording with Suzi Quatro in an energetic performance. The



ever-present John McGlinn has produced a complete recording of the score (EMI, CDC 7 54206 2), with a few snippets of dialogue, particularly the touching final scene of the first act, and an appendix including "An Old Fashioned Wedding," which Berlin added to the 1966 revival. Once again, the previously unrecorded music (mostly dance selections) is interesting, but adds little to the listener's overall appreciation of the score. Kim Criswell is a game Annie and Thomas Hampson makes a solid Frank Butler, but Merman's recorded performances remain essential.

Berlin's recent passing may hopefully inspire recordings of his lesser known works for the musical stage, as is now the case with the Gershwins. With the cooperation of the late Mrs. Ira Gershwin, a series of the musicals of George and Ira Gershwin are being preserved in lavish studio recordings. All of the Gershwin musicals were produced in the days before original cast recordings, so what few Gershwin show recordings were made come from early English casts, revivals, or studio recordings. In 1987, Mrs. Gershwin cooperated with a recording of two related Gershwin shows, both political satires, *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) and *Let 'Em Eat Cake* (1933). *Of Thee I Sing*, the first musical to win a Pulitzer Prize, had only been readily available in recordings of a pallid 1951 revival (Capitol, S-350) and a 1970s television version (Columbia, S-31763), which altered selections and offered updated arrangements. *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, the sequel to *Of Thee I Sing*, is virtually unavailable in recordings of any kind. Inspired by the 1984 discovery of the original orchestrations of the shows, this recording (CBS S2M 42522), like those of *Show Boat* and *Follies*, restores a musical theater classic. Since *Of Thee I Sing* is basically a comic operetta, virtually the entire show is captured, and the effect is generally a delight. Although the sequel, *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, was a flop in its original production, it, too, comes off superbly in this recording, despite some bland performances. The late Larry Kert simply lacks the expansiveness of personality to bring the fictional President John P. Wintergreen to life in either musical, and although Maureen McGovern, as Mary Turner, sings her role well, she misses any clear sense of character. The late Jack Gilford, as Vice-President Alexander Throttlebottom, and David Garrison and Paige O'Hara in secondary roles, seem more at home with the requirements of their roles. Both scores feature Gershwin standards: *Of Thee I Sing* includes "Love is Sweeping the Country" and "Who Cares?"; *Let 'Em Eat Cake* includes "Mine."

The success of the *Of Thee I Sing*/*Let 'Em Eat Cake* recording inspired an Elektra Nonesuch series, partially funded by Mrs. Gershwin, with the staggering goal of preserving all of the Gershwin musical shows. In 1990, *Girl Crazy*, conducted by John Mauceri and featuring an adept cast, was released in a sumptuous recording (Elektra Nonesuch, 9 79250-2) to considerable critical acclaim. Virtually every song in the score is an immediately recognizable standard, with "Bidin' My Time," "Embraceable You," "I Got Rhythm," and "But Not For Me" the gems. Set into a lightweight and forgettable libretto about a romance on a dude ranch, these *Girl Crazy* songs here are scrubbed clean of the innumerable elaborate popular arrangements that have obliterated their original sweetness and eloquence. The performers are uniformly excellent, with David Carroll, Judy Blazer, and Lorna Luft in the role that made Ethel Merman a star, standing out. Carroll and Blazer deliver a moving "Embraceable You," including its little known verse, and Luft thrillingly belts out "I Got Rhythm," and the lesser known "Sam and Delilah" and "Boy! What Love Has Done to Me!" Playing the part created by comedian Willie Howard, Frank Gorshin brings his considerable skills as an impersonator to bear in a delightful comic reprise of "But Not For Me" in which he works in quick parodies of Chevalier, Jolson, and Durante.

A lesser known Gershwin show, *Strike Up the Band*, offers scant resemblance to the Mickey Rooney-Judy Garland film of the same name (Rooney and Garland also brought a more faithfully recreated *Girl Crazy* to the screen); it is in the spirit of the Gershwins' *Of Thee I Sing* and *Let 'Em Eat Cake*. Perhaps the first American musical to feature an anti-war theme, it was not successful in two different versions in 1927 and 1930. This recording (Elektra Nonesuch, 9 79273-2), also conducted by Mauceri and based on the original 1927 version, includes the Gershwin classic "The Man I Love," along with a considerable bit of still-amusing satire. Particularly striking are the witty lyrics and the overall cohesion of the well-integrated score, making *Strike Up the Band* seem uncannily like an Americanized Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. As with *Girl Crazy*, the cast (including Brent Barrett, Don Chastain, Rebecca Luker, and Beth Fowler) is excellent, presenting a vivid sense of story and character.

Two Cole Porter shows have been given the lush studio treatment, although they are among his most familiar works. His most recorded score, for his 1934 musical *Anything Goes*, has been captured in a superb recording (EMI, CDC 7 49848 2) under the guidance of John McGlenn, with a cast featuring Kim Criswell, Cris Groenendaal, Jack Gilford, and Frederica von Stade. Variant versions of *Anything Goes* have been preserved on a number of recordings, including a Smithsonian Institution collection (Smithsonian, DPM1-0284) of tracks by original star Ethel Merman, Porter himself, and members of the cast of the original London production, a 1960s off-Broadway revival (Epic, FLM-13100 and its English counterpart E/Decca, SKL-5031), and American (RCA, 7769-1-RC) and foreign recordings inspired by a highly successful 1987 Broadway revival. Few of the recorded treatments, however, are complete and many, including the most recent revival, include interpolations from other Porter shows. Once again, McGlenn has rectified the situation with an accurate and lively recreation, including a lengthy appendix of dropped numbers that features the racy "Kate the Great." Hearing the original orchestrations and long missing songs and dance music is illuminating, since the score seems to have much more variety and dimension than the many brassier revivals have demonstrated. The original lyrics of "You're the Top," the sailors' chanty, "There'll Always Be a Lady Fair," the ingenue's lilting "What a Joy to Be Young," and Criswell's well-performed and amusing "Buddy Beware," along with snippets of dialogue, are particular treasures as are the more familiar "I Get a Kick Out of You," "All Through the Night," "Blow, Gabriel, Blow," and the title song.

The original Broadway cast of Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate*, including Alfred Drake, Patricia Morison, Harold Lang, and Lisa Kirk, twice recorded the score to Porter's embellishment of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*. First recorded in tandem with the original production in 1948 (Columbia, ML/OL-4140), the show was later recorded again in stereo in 1959 (Capitol, TAO-1267) when it was presented as a television spectacular. Other recordings of the show, including the MGM film soundtrack (MGM E-3077) and a highly successful recent Royal Shakespeare Company revival (First Night, CAST 10), are also available, but John McGlenn's well-produced new recording (EMI, CDS 7 54033 2) is a distinctive achievement in reconstructing what is undoubtedly Porter's finest musical. Josephine Barstow, Thomas Hampson, and Kim Criswell all offer delightful and fresh interpretations of the major roles under the baton of McGlenn. An appendix contains six fascinating songs omitted from the original score, including the riotous "What Does Your Servant Dream About?" and the insightful paean to the strength of women, "A Woman's Career." *Kiss Me, Kate* features an especially rich score, all of which is performed expertly by Barstow, Hampson, and Criswell along with the fine supporting cast. There is a fair amount of previously unrecorded dance music, reprises, and bits of dialogue, all of which add dimension to a most entertaining recording.

The enormous canon of Rodgers and Hart musicals have largely been ignored so far, with one exception. *Babes in Arms* has rarely been recorded, despite a score featuring an unusually large number of Rodgers and Hart standards. Memorable as the show that introduced a stage-full of talented unknowns including Alfred Drake, the Nicholas Brothers, Mitzi Green, and Ray Heatherton, and as perhaps the best Mickey Rooney-Judy Garland vehicle on film, *Babes in Arms* features a corny libretto about the children of vaudevillians putting on their own show. The libretto at least affords the opportunity for a varied score, and the show's strength is clearly its songs, including "Where or When," "Imagine," "The Lady is a Tramp," "My Funny Valentine," "Johnny One Note," and the title song. All are skillfully performed in this 1990 recording (New World Records, NW 386-2) by Judy Blazer, Gregg Edelman, Donna Kane, and Judy Kaye, with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra conducted by Evan Haile.

*Babes in Arms* was one of the last Rodgers and Hart musicals, but two studio recordings capture Rodgers' subsequent work with Oscar Hammerstein. The score for their 1945 musical drama *Carousel* includes such evergreens as "You'll Never Walk Alone," "If I Loved You," "June is Bustin' Out All Over," and the memorable "Carousel Waltz." Several fine recordings of *Carousel* already exist, but none of these offer the score in its entirety, and the original cast recording is technically archaic, nearly obscuring the fine original performances of Jan Clayton and John Raitt as the star-crossed New England lovers, Julie Jordan and Billy Bigelow. The new recording (MCA-6209), produced by Thomas Z. Shepard, offers state-of-the-art technical quality, the superb Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, a complete score, and a solid cast. It is undoubtedly Shepard's expertise that has made *Carousel* the best of the current crop of studio recordings.

Perhaps, too, the success of this recording is due to the presence of a musical theater veteran in the central role. Barbara Cook's voice may seem too mature for the central role of Julie Jordan, but her delivery, both in vocal technique and characterization, has a depth and resonance that could hardly be bettered. She is excellent in the recording's highlight, the evocative "If I Loved You" sequence, here restored to completeness including the intertwining dialogue. One of Cook's strengths is her ability to bring a fresh intelligence and simple eloquence to even the most familiar material. Samuel Ramey is somewhat less adept in the projection of a vivid characterization for Billy Bigelow, but he powerfully renders the overly familiar "Soliloquy." Ramey is most effective when partnered with Cook, and together they develop a chemistry rare in studio recordings. Sarah Brightman's Carrie Pipperridge is another strong performance, especially in her duet with Cook, "Mister Snow," and in the role of Nettie Fowler, Maureen Forester delivers titanic solos in "You'll Never Walk Alone" and "June is Bustin' Out All Over." It is a joy to hear the haunting "Carousel Waltz" played by an orchestra of the size and quality of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Producer Shepard and conductor Paul Gemignani wisely tone down the large orchestra for the score's more intimate moments, and the effect is close to perfection.

Perhaps the most superfluous of all recent studio treatments is a 1988 recording (Telarc, CD-80162) of Rodgers' and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*, following an original cast album (Columbia, KOL-5450), film soundtrack (RCA LSP-2277), and several foreign cast recordings. All of these amply capture the show's score. Telarc's version, featuring Frederica von Stade, includes all of the music written for the show, including two songs added to the film version. As Maria von Trapp, von Stade sings the score superbly, creating a strong sense of character, although she is a shade too mature to approximate Maria's youthful exuberance in the first half of the score. However, she

contributes an intelligence of interpretation and consistent energy. The supporting cast, particularly Eileen Farrell as the Mother Abbess, are also fine, and the recording offers a polished rendering of the score. As a whole, it is a bit stiff and overblown, perhaps because the participants approach the score with too much reverence, particularly missing the lightness of several numbers, especially "Maria" and the childrens' songs. Despite the inclusion of some dance music from the party scene and a few reprises rarely preserved, the recording fails to best the original cast recording.

Studio recordings of musicals from the 1950s through the 1970s are becoming as prevalent as those of earlier works. *Kismet* is among a handful of Broadway musicals particularly suited to the opera singer, since its demanding score is more like operetta than traditional musical comedy. Adapted by George Forrest and Robert Wright from themes by composer Alexander Borodin, *Kismet* is an unmitigated bit of nonsense ("a musical Arabian night") set in ancient Baghdad involving an evil Wazir and a clever poet in disguise. The lush score includes such enduring songs as "Stranger in Paradise," "And This is My Beloved," and "Baubles, Bangles, and Beads." The charm of the score may explain why *two* new studio recordings of this show have become available within a year. The first new recording (That's Entertainment, CDTER2 1170), released in 1990, featuring the Philharmonia Orchestra under the direction of John Owen Edwards and the Ambrosian Chorus, captures fine performances by Valerie Masterson, Donald Maxwell, David Rendall, Richard Van Allan, and Judy Kaye in the principal roles. Kaye is a particular standout, perhaps because she best understands the inflated aspects of the score and plot. The most recent recording (Sony Broadway, SK 46438), released in 1991, under the musical direction of Paul Gemignani, with Samuel Ramey, Jerry Hadley, Julia Migenes, and Mandy Patinkin, offers more pleasures. Ramey and Migenes are especially strong, and the performances throughout are first-rate. Ramey's powerful voice dominates, but Migenes offers a comically sexy *Lalume* that is the highlight of the recording. Both recordings also include music from a later adaptation of the show, *Timbuktu*.

The charming and tuneful score to Meredith Willson's *The Music Man* has only been available in the original cast (Capitol, W-990) and film soundtrack (Warner Brothers, B-1459) albums (both featuring original star, Robert Preston) and the English production (E/HMV CLP-1444) with Van Johnson. Although those recordings include all of the songs present here, with the exception of some incidental dance music, this recording (Telarc, CD-80276) offers a competent survey of this charming score. Unfortunately, the role of Harold Hill may be indelibly associated with Robert Preston's masterful interpretation. Timothy Noble is a solid Hill, but comes off a bit blandly to the listener familiar with Preston's performance. Kathleen Brett is a fine Marian, particularly strong on the introspective songs ("Goodnight, My Someone," "My White Knight"), and Doc Severinsen acquits himself well with the comic "Shipooi." The supporting cast is strong, and the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, under the direction of Erich Kunzel, is superb.

The 1991 recording (That's Entertainment, CDTER 1184) of the 1960 English musical adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Oliver!*, conducted by John Owen Edwards, is another pallid attempt at recording a musical that is well-represented in previous recordings, particularly the original London (E/Decca, LK-4359) and Broadway (RCA LOCD-2004) casts and the film soundtrack (Colgems, COSD-5501). There are a couple of previously unrecorded reprises and some dance music here not to be found elsewhere, but there is little distinction in the serviceable performances. Josephine Barstow seems strained in the role of Nancy, although her reprise of "As Long as He Needs Me" offers

an intensity otherwise missing in most of the other tracks. Stuart Kale as Mr. Bumble and Sheila Hancock as Widow Corney deliver the best performances, but they have relatively little to do. Julian Forsyth's Fagin offers no surprises for those familiar with Ron Moody's and Clive Revill's previous treatments, but Richard Van Allan's Bill Sykes is powerful, although, once again, the character only figures briefly in the musical sequences.

The reasoning behind the 1990 English studio recording (That's Entertainment, CDTER 1179) of Stephen Sondheim's 1973 musical *A Little Night Music* is difficult to fathom. The original Broadway (Columbia, KS-32265) and London (RCA LRL1-5090) cast recordings cover the same ground, with more inspired performances than will be found here. Sian Phillips, although not essentially a singer, is a solid choice as Desirée Armfeldt, and delivers the score's standout song, "Send in the Clowns" with flair. But Elisabeth Welch seems stiff and uncomfortable in the role of Madame Armfeldt. The supporting players are competent throughout, but overall this recording of Sondheim's all-waltz score pales beside both original cast recordings and only betters the muddled film soundtrack (Columbia, JS-35333) featuring Elizabeth Taylor and Len Cariou.

As recording companies and producers wrestle with the most effective ways of preserving the heritage of the musical theater (forthcoming studio recordings of *Man of La Mancha*, *Lady in the Dark*, and more Gershwin shows recently have been announced by various companies), they will hopefully consider which musicals are most worthy of such preservation. Although a new recording of any musical is always welcome, the greatest hope is that superfluous recordings of well-known shows will give way to greater attention focused on less familiar musicals, especially those from the era before original cast recordings. What about restorations of selected nineteenth century musicals, George M. Cohan, and more early Berlin, Kern, and Gershwin? Rodgers and Hart? Weill? The musical theater is a uniquely American creation, despite its roots in early European forms, and certainly contemporary musical theater artists and audiences have much to learn from these greats of the musical stage. These scores need to be preserved before it is too late, regardless of the particular techniques employed.