

“GOLDEN CHANCES”: THE GOLDEN AGE OF AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE
A Cabaret

Conceived by Arushi Grover

Lighting Design by Valentine Pesola

Musical Direction and Accompaniment by Richard Biever

Starring Madeline Biever, Jacob Malizio, Flynn Nolen, and Arushi Grover

Pennsylvania State University

Sunday, February 20, 2022

“GOLDEN CHANCES”: THE GOLDEN AGE OF AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE

Set List

Oklahoma! (1943)

“Oh, What a Beautiful Morning”

“People Will Say We’re In Love”

Carousel (1945)

“If I Loved You” (& “the Bench Scene”)

The Music Man (1957)

“My White Knight”

My Fair Lady (1956)

“I Could Have Danced All Night”

Kiss Me, Kate (1948)

“So In Love”

West Side Story (1957)

“Tonight”

The Sound of Music (1959)

“Sixteen Going on Seventeen”

“Edelweiss”

Camelot (1960)

“If Ever I Would Leave You”

“The Lusty Month of May”

Carousel (1945)

“You’ll Never Walk Alone (Reprise)”

“GOLDEN CHANCES”: THE GOLDEN AGE OF AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE

A blank stage with a few stools. A piano and bench sit to the side.

During the pre-show, the pianist, RICH, enters and takes a seat at the piano bench. At the end of the pre-show, the house lights dim.

CURLY enters.

#1 – “OH, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL MORNING” (*Curly*)

ARUSHI enters.

ARUSHI. Good evening, and welcome to “*Golden Chances*,” our cabaret on the Golden Age of American musical theatre. My name is Arushi Grover, and I am the dramaturg for director Jennifer Delac’s upcoming production of *Brigadoon*, the 1947 musical by lyricist Alan Jay Lerner and composer Frederick Loewe, with Penn State Centre Stage. Tonight, we gather to celebrate the music of Golden Age musicals such as *Brigadoon*, the age of the creation of the first narrative musical plays that lasted from roughly the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s. Specifically, we are here to explore the love song, and its development over the Golden Age. Love that is romantic love, familial love, lust, love for nature, for the community, for the known past, for one’s homeland.

Our first song of the evening is “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning,” the triumphant opening number to composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II’s 1943 musical, *Oklahoma!* The sunrise a “golden haze” on a bountiful frontier of the Oklahoma territory around 1907, the song is a love song to the landscape and a beloved prologue to the musical’s setting and to a new form of musical drama. *Oklahoma!* marked a change in the narrative musical form, the first “integrated musical” that combined story, music, and dance, with music directly interwoven into the libretto to tell and advance the story.

While ARUSHI speaks, LAUREY enters and joins CURLY.

#2 – “PEOPLE WILL SAY WE’RE IN LOVE” (*Curly and Laurey*)

ARUSHI. In *Oklahoma!*, a spunky woman, Laurey, is courted by two different men, the brash cowboy Curly, and the somber farmhand, Jud. And in “People Will Say We’re In Love,” the two lovers, Laurey and Curly, keep a playful distance with each, protestations that only serve to draw them closer together. Hammerstein expressed in 1949 that the two characters are clearly in love but not yet ready to admit it. His solution was a song of negative imperatives—“Don’t throw bouquets at me, hold my hand too much, etc., lest people think we’re in love.” It is an “almost love song.”

While ARUSHI speaks, JULIE and BILLY enter.

#3 – “IF I LOVED YOU” and the “BENCH SCENE” from *Carousel* (*Julie and Billy*)

ARUSHI. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s second collaboration, *Carousel*, furthers the integration of musical theatre and the development of the conditional love song with a scene that depicts a courting that drifts from dialogue into singing. “If I Loved You,” and the larger scene, lovingly referred to as the “Bench Scene” from *Carousel*, opens with a conditional “if” in its opening line, followed up with spoken interjection—“But you don’t”—which opens up a space for their coming together. What composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim called “probably the single most important moment in the revolution of contemporary musicals,” the full “Bench Scene” is roughly twelve minutes of continuous music, a tapestry with prose dialogue, underscoring, declamation, operatic arioso, and aria. But whereas, “People Will Say We’re In Love” is grounded in an imperative “you,” “If I Loved You” is rooted into the “I” mode, speaking at each other, rather than to—it is contemplative and agencial.

While ARUSHI speaks, MARIAN enters.

#4 – “MY WHITE KNIGHT” (*Marian*)

ARUSHI. In “My White Knight,” from the 1957 musical, *The Music Man*, by Meredith Wilson, Marian the librarian, describes her ideal man. A reader of tales and stories, Marian’s aspirations remain grounded and modest, just as she hopes her beau to be. It is the juxtaposition in the fairytale-description of her “white knight,” with the straightforward description of their traits that speaks to Marian’s honest and earnest aspirations in love. The irony is, Marian ends up with an absolute crook, the fraud, Harold Hill, and yet, life’s music was not heard as vibrant, “till there was [him].”

While ARUSHI speaks, ELIZA enters.

#5 – “I COULD HAVE DANCED ALL NIGHT” (*Eliza*)

ARUSHI. In Lerner and Loewe’s 1956 musical, *My Fair Lady*, an English gentleman, Professor Higgins, tries to turn a scruffy Cockney flower seller, Eliza Doolittle, into a lady. After she recites an exercise perfectly in an upper-class English style and after an impromptu dance with her tutor, Eliza is too excited and exhilarated to go to sleep. The effusive expression in this almost-love song skirts a conditional declaration; Eliza manages to express her love without saying the word, “love,” in an outpouring of euphoric, jubilant emotion. Lerner thought there was such repetition in the song, because Eliza had only just learned how to speak “proper” English.

While ARUSHI delivers her spiel, LILLI enters.

#6 – “SO IN LOVE” (*Lilli*)

ARUSHI. Cole Porter’s 1948 musical, *Kiss Me, Kate*, depicts a divorced couple playing the leads in a musical adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, often described as a battle of the sexes in the background of Shakespeare’s battle of the sexes. We make a transition from chaste courtings to a mature romance, an unrequited love that used to be requited by a couple that used to be together. Being reacquainted with her ex-husband, Lilli rhapsodizes, singing with a tragic resignation, as she clings to the memory of a past love. With striking vulnerability, with “stars fill[ing] the sky,” under a “night mysterious,” she sings alone, with an ever-climbing, fervent melody. She turns the “So” in describing “to a great extent”, “So in love,” to indifferent causation and steadfast ardor, “So taunt me and hurt me / Deceive me, desert me.”

While ARUSHI speaks, TONY enters.

#7 – “MARIA” (*Tony*)

ARUSHI. An adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the 1957 musical, *West Side Story*, with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and music by Leonard Bernstein, updates the conflict between feuding families to two 1950s street gangs, the Sharks and the Jets, in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Having met and fallen in love at first sight with Maria at a dance, Tony sings this song after learning the name of the girl he met. Bernstein famously uses tritones, an interval of an augmented fourth or diminished fifth, an unnatural, jarring sound also known as the devil’s interval—

RICH plays the first two notes of the melody of title of the song, “Ma-ri-[a],” a tritone.

ARUSHI. To communicate conflict in the early songs in *West Side Story*, but in this love song, he resolves the tritone—

RICH repeats the first two notes of the melody of the title of the song, “Ma-ri-[a],” a tritone.

ARUSHI. To a perfect fifth.

RICH plays the final note of the melody of the title of the song, “[Ma-ri]-a,” resolving to a perfect fifth.
While ARUSHI speaks, LIESL and ROLF enter.

#8 – “SIXTEEN GOING ON SEVENTEEN” (*Liesl and Rolf*)

ARUSHI. In Rodgers and Hammerstein’s 1959 musical, *The Sound of Music*, Maria is deemed unsuitable for convent life, so she is sent to be a governess for the seven children of the stern,

widowed naval officer, Captain Von Trapp, in Austria. Liesl, one of the children, meets with Rolf, as Hitler's Nazi government is now emerging in Germany. The song "Sixteen Going on Seventeen" conveys the irony of the more mature of the couple saying that they will depend on the other for guidance. Rolf may be trying to earnestly boast about his experience and maturity, but Liesl's simple repetition of his own statements is tongue-in-cheek-enough to prove that they don't agree with them. Another one of the "almost love songs" of the composer and lyricist, the song provides the two youths, Liesl and Rolf, with a moment of lightness and naïvete.

While ARUSHI speaks, CAPTAIN VON TRAPP enters.

#9 – “EDELWEISS” (*Captain Von Trapp*)

ARUSHI. Also in *The Sound of Music*, Captain Von Trapp sings the song, "Edelweiss" about the titular small white flower that is a symbol of Austria, as his homeland is annexed by Nazi Germany. An expression of Austrian patriotism and a goodbye to his beloved homeland, the simple and powerful song expresses loyalty and love for the character's nation.

While ARUSHI speaks, LANCELOT enters.

#10 – “IF EVER I WOULD LEAVE YOU” (*Lancelot*)

ARUSHI. Lerner and Loewe's 1960 musical, *Camelot*, depicts a love triangle, with the married Guenevere and Arthur, and the knight, Lancelot, who falls in love with Guenevere. Lancelot and Guenevere court each other in secret. Lerner took a long time to write this song, "If Ever I Would Leave You," because it came at a difficult point in his personal life. This song, "If Ever I Would Leave You," uses the sensual language of the seasons and weather to express Lancelot's passion for the Queen of Camelot.

While ARUSHI speaks, GUENEVERE enters.

#11 – “THE LUSTY MONTH OF MAY” (*Guenevere*)

ARUSHI. Earlier in the story in *Camelot*, Guenevere and Lancelot's affair is foreshadowed in this joyous song that celebrates spring and spectacle and pleasure. Guenevere uses sweet, sweet antithesis: "everyone goes blissfully astray," "divine mistakes," "lighthearted" and "libelous." Guenevere sings of breaking vows, and Lancelot shows up only minutes later, threatening the marriage of the King and Queen of Camelot.

While ARUSHI speaks, ARTHUR enters.

ARUSHI. Before our final song of the evening, I'd like to thank those who made this evening possible. Thank you to Richard Biever, our music director and accompanist and Valentine Pesola, our brilliant lighting designer. Thank you to our wonderful cast: Madeline, Flynn, and Jacob. Thank you to Jeanmarie Higgins and Ronda Craig. Thank you to Frederick Miller, whose own cabaret inspired this evening. And thank you to the composers and lyricists of the Golden Age, who have given us such amazing music to love and cherish.

#13 – “YOU’LL NEVER WALK ALONE” (*Ensemble*)

The ENSEMBLE takes a bow. RICH takes a bow. Lights dim.

END OF CABARET

SOURCES

- Carter, Tim. *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel*. New York City, Oxford UP, 2017.
- "Cole Porter: So In Love." *Just a Song*, 30 May 2009,
justasong2.blogspot.com/2009/05/cole-porter-so-in-love_30.html.
- Fergus, Kerry Auer. "A Hymn to Her: Exploring the Relationships of 'My Fair Lady.'" *From Score to Stage*, 8 Aug. 2018,
www.fromscoretostage.com/post/2018/08/08/a-hymn-to-her-exploring-the-relationships-of-my-fair-lady.
- . "West Side Story: The Tritone and the 7th." *From Score to Stage*, 17 May 2017,
www.fromscoretostage.com/post/2017/05/17/west-side-story-the-tritone-and-the-7th.
- Gummert, Jay. "MY FAIR LADY: Almost—but not quite—A love story." *Lyric Opera of Chicago* 28 May 2020, www.lyricopera.org/lyric-lately/my-fair-lady-almost-but-not-quite-a-love-story/.
- Hoffman, Warren. *The Great White Way: Race and the Broadway Musical*. 2nd ed., New Brunswick, Rutgers UP, 2020.
- Lerner, Alan Jay. *The Complete Lyrics of Alan Jay Lerner*. Edited by Dominic McHugh, New York City, Oxford UP, 2018.
- Maslon, Laurence. "The Blossom and the Wind: The 'Bench Scene.'" *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, rodgersandhammerstein.com/carousel-the-blossom-and-the-wind-the-bench-scene/.
- McHugh, Dominic. "Composing the Score for a Musical about Music." *The Big Parade: Meredith Willson's Musicals from the Music Man to 1491*, 2021.