

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: “WHO EXPECTS A MIRACLE TO HAPPEN EVERY DAY?”:  
REDISCOVERING *ME AND JULIET* AND *PIPE DREAM*,  
THE FORGOTTEN MUSICALS OF RODGERS AND  
HAMMERSTEIN

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*Me and Juliet* (1953) and *Pipe Dream* (1955) diverged considerably from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s influential and commercially successful 1940s musical plays. *Me and Juliet* was the team’s first musical comedy and had an original book by Hammerstein. *Pipe Dream* was based on a John Steinbeck novel and featured bums and prostitutes.

This paper documents the history of *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream*, using correspondence, early drafts of scripts, interviews with cast members, and secondary sources. I analyze the effectiveness of plot, music, and lyrics, while considering factors in each show’s production that may have led to their respective failures. To better understand reception, emphasis is placed upon each show’s relationship to the political and cultural landscape of 1950s America.

Re-examining these musicals helps document the complete history of the Rodgers and Hammerstein collaboration and provides valuable insights regarding the duo’s social values and personal philosophies of musical theatre.

**“WHO EXPECTS A MIRACLE TO HAPPEN EVERY DAY?”:  
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THE FORGOTTEN MUSICALS OF RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN**

by

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To Grandma Bonnie, for *The Sound of Music*

To my parents, for *Joseph*

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The story is lovely and gay—But it just isn't my kind of play.

-Oscar Hammerstein, *Me and Juliet*

From now on I will know what not to do.

-Oscar Hammerstein, *Pipe Dream*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1953, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II presented *Me and Juliet*, a new musical featuring a young and enthusiastic cast, a huge set, a jazzy score, and a proven director. The show followed a decade of smash hits for the collaborators, including *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*. Critics raved and audiences scrambled for tickets to *Me and Juliet*'s out-of-town tryouts; the show seemed a guaranteed success. But according to Isabel Bigley Barnett, who played Jeanie during that first—and only—major commercial production of the musical, “as soon as we opened in New York, we knew we were in trouble.”<sup>1</sup>

Two years later, Rodgers and Hammerstein completed a show that in many ways is the antithesis to the innocent fun of *Me and Juliet*. *Pipe Dream* is set in a slum and stars sundry characters of ill repute, including bums, drifters, and prostitutes. It was an even greater failure than *Me and Juliet* despite the greatest advance ticket sale of any show in Broadway history to that time.<sup>2</sup>

The arts are an important indication of cultural values and trends, but during the first half of the twentieth century, the Broadway musical perhaps defined the tastes of the average American as well as or better than any other artistic medium. Musicals and the society in which they were created demonstrate an inherently reflexive relationship. Popular trends and historical context are reflected in the creators' effort to create an appealing product. This is most obvious in conventional “diversionary” musical comedies of the 1950s that rely heavily upon a large chorus, extensive choreography, and

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<sup>1</sup> Isabel Bigley Barnett, telephone interview by author, 3 November 2003, tape recording.

<sup>2</sup> Ethan Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 173; Stephen Citron, *The Wordsmiths: Oscar Hammerstein 2<sup>nd</sup> and Alan Jay Lerner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 259.



a watered-down book. Musicals may also echo the social and political views of their authors. In the 1950s, more serious messages in musical plays challenged traditional convictions. Then and now, most would agree that the best musicals contain qualities of each: entertainment value like that of the “diversionary” musicals, and the social commentary of their more serious counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein understood this intricate balance as well as anyone. Today their musicals are generally marketed as family-friendly, saccharine-laced goodness, but it was not always so. The murder of Curly in *Oklahoma!* initially shocked audiences.<sup>4</sup> *South Pacific* was highly controversial at its opening for its portrayal of interracial relationships.<sup>5</sup> The key to success for Rodgers and Hammerstein was their balance of socio-political commentary and sublime songwriting.

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<sup>3</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein’s first self-described “musical play,” *Oklahoma!* (1943), was an attempt to integrate the various components (drama, music, dance, etc.) of a musical more closely. They aimed to bring a more affecting, coordinated, and relevant musical theatre experience to audiences. This type of musical was modeled, in part, upon Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein’s successful musical *Show Boat* (1927). However, the predominant genre of this era had different aims. Known as the musical comedy, this type of musical typically relied on unsophisticated humor, extensive dance, and songs often unconcerned with and unrelated to the action occurring on stage. These designations will be used consistently throughout this thesis and the reader should not assume them to be synonymous, despite a lack of standardization within the music and theatre communities that often leads to great confusion and misrepresentation. For more on basic forms of musical theatre during this time, see Chapters Five and Seven of William A. Everett and Paul R. Laird, *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> A 1998 London staging emphasized the seriousness and depth of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* This more somber take includes a truly disturbing portrayal of Jud, heightening the dramaticism of the character’s death; the revival was lauded by critics and audiences alike, and is available on DVD. See *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Oklahoma!*, Image Entertainment, 1999/2003, DVD.

<sup>5</sup> For a sampling of review from *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific*, see Steven Suskin, *Opening Night on Broadway: A Critical Quotebook of the Golden Era of the Musical Theatre* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990).

Many authors give the basic facts about *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* and move on to discuss Rodgers and Hammerstein's more successful productions.<sup>6</sup> However, according to John Bush Jones's social history of the American musical, an effective study of musical theatre "examines musicals both *in* history and *as* history."<sup>7</sup> *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* allow us to investigate a forgotten chapter of the Rodgers and Hammerstein collaboration.<sup>8</sup> From the two shows, we can also learn about musical theatre as a social institution during the 1950s. By recognizing the social and political messages—or lack thereof—we may explain why audiences ultimately rejected these two shows, at least in part.

This study will provide historical information about *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* by tracing the creators' initial artistic visions, followed by a history of each show's production, performance, and reception. To better understand the role of the musical and Rodgers and Hammerstein's philosophy of musical theatre, it is imperative to consider the state of musical theatre and important cultural trends of the 1950s. Each show, when placed amidst the social framework of the 1950s, reveals telling information regarding musical theatre trends and Broadway's portrayal of American culture and values. The social and musical significance of the two musicals will be revealed through

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<sup>6</sup> In an effort to shed light upon neglected aspects of Richard Rodgers' work, a recent book, Geoffrey Block, *Richard Rodgers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), still omits both *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream*.

<sup>7</sup> John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Though often considered a "flop," the musical *Allegro* (1947) will not be considered in this study. *Allegro* made a profit in its Broadway run, had a U.S. tour, and has been the subject of study by other scholars. In an attempt to breathe new life into *Allegro*, the Signature Theatre (Arlington, VA) presented the show with a revised book and musical arrangements in early 2004. See Kenneth Jones, "Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Allegro* Revived and Revised in DC Staging Starting Jan. 6," *Playbill Online*, <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/83618.html>, accessed 9 April 2004. Some critics view *Allegro* as the first "concept musical," a type of show cultivated by Stephen Sondheim in the 1970s. Interestingly, *Allegro* was the first musical with which Sondheim worked professionally, serving as a stage assistant while still a teenager.

analysis of musical, lyrical, and textual examples, and compared to contemporaneous works and other Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Although the scores and their effectiveness are considered, they are not the primary emphasis of this paper. Here, I argue that *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* failed for reasons other than purely musical ones.

## The State of Musical Theatre and 1950s Social Trends

The United States was changing rapidly during the 1950s. Millions flocked to the suburbs and the very definition of community was being reassessed by individuals often separated from extended family. The baby boom and advances in technology revolutionized the ways in which families interacted. Millions of women who worked during the war returned home to automatic washing machines and a myriad of other appliances intended to make life more efficient.<sup>10</sup>

Politics and mass media skewed conservative, with Dwight Eisenhower in the White House and television shows like *Father Knows Best* defining the “average” American family. However, there was growing discontent among liberals and progressives troubled by McCarthyism and the continued denial of basic civil rights to many Americans. An important dichotomy of political and social thought was developing. The burgeoning middle class, glorified in David Potter’s social history *People of Plenty*, stood in contrast to those challenging the status quo—“Beatniks” who read new periodicals like *Dissent* and *Liberation*.<sup>11</sup>

Below the surface, social agitation had already begun. Historian David Halberstam points to the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) as being the first split between the older, more stable nation that defined the beginning of the decade and the “new, fast-paced, tumultuous America” that replaced it.<sup>12</sup>

W.T. Lhamon Jr.’s study of 1950s culture characterizes the social dichotomy of the fifties as being “deliberation” versus “speed.” Lhamon writes, “In each such nexus,

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<sup>10</sup> Major events relating to politics, entertainment, culture, and industry of the time in question are represented in the Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> Eugenia Kaledin, *Daily Life in the United States, 1940-1959: Shifting Worlds*, Daily Life Through History Series (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 150.

<sup>12</sup> David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 456.

both strands crossed and recrossed to knot together an apparently rickety web,” citing the works of artists as varied as Thelonius Monk, Chuck Berry, and Jack Kerouac as joining opposite forces “into the prevailing form of deliberate speed.”<sup>13</sup>

Andrew Jamison and Ron Eyeran write that 1960s liberals did not simply “burst on the scene as if from nowhere”: the 1950s provided an important foundation for the 1960s social revolution. Though the media portrayed a decade of patriotism and family values, opposition to the McCarthy hearings and the beginnings of the civil rights movement was apparent. Riots, protest marches, and acts of civil disobedience demonstrated an active social opposition.<sup>14</sup>

The theatre’s role in the lives of average Americans was forced to change as television became the dominant form of entertainment. Broadway struggled to find new, younger theatergoers. The advent of the LP in the 1950s won millions of new fans for Broadway musicals as many cast recordings were made available for the first time. The original cast recording of Lerner and Loewe’s *My Fair Lady* (1956), for example, remained on the charts not for weeks or months, but *years*.<sup>15</sup> Producers soon realized that television could be used to promote the theatre, and variety shows and specials featuring stars of the musical stage brought Broadway to families who had never before seen a professional production or traveled to New York.

Despite these efforts, musical theatre was seen as a sort of “middle culture,” and struggled for identity. Broadway productions were of no interest to high-art theatre

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<sup>13</sup> W.T. Lhamon, Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), ix.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Jamison and Ron Eyeran, *Seeds of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xi.

<sup>15</sup> Stacy Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 8.

critics, but still differed from popular music or television programming. Rodgers and Hammerstein had raised the American musical stage to new levels of artistic and dramatic integrity in the 1940s, but culture seemed to be changing faster.

In the years leading up to *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream*, non-Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals generally lacked heavy social or political messages, partly in response to viewer reaction; most audiences appeared content with shows deficient of moral or intellectual challenges. The first big hits of the decade—and shows against which *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* would be judged—were musical comedies.

The first smash was *Call Me Madam* (1950), written primarily as an Ethel Merman star-vehicle. Other major musical comedy successes during the first half of the decade include *Guys and Dolls* (1951) by Frank Loesser and Leonard Bernstein's *Wonderful Town* (1953).<sup>16</sup> Cole Porter's *Can-Can* opened to mixed reviews in 1953, but became the biggest hit of the year.<sup>17</sup> *Me and Juliet* bowed on 28 May, the last show of the season.<sup>18</sup> In 1954, audiences laughed along with *The Pajama Game* and Mary Martin wowed audiences as *Peter Pan*. *Pipe Dream* arrived in 1955, but was overshadowed in the spring by the premieres of *My Fair Lady* and Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella*. A notable exception to these musical comedies was a revival of Kurt Weill's *The*

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<sup>16</sup> Despite their relatively superficial content, even diversionary musical comedies had evolved since the 1930s. There was a growing relevance between plot and song, and the entire musical comedy form was unifying plot, music, and staging. Chorus lines, for example, were replaced by plot-induced ballet sequences, much a result of those pioneered in early Rodgers and Hart (*On Your Toes*) and Rodgers and Hammerstein (*Oklahoma!*). *Guys and Dolls* also featured the young actress Isabel Bigley as Sarah.

<sup>17</sup> Though not often revived, *Can-Can* ran for 892 performances and spawned at least five Porter standards. For reviews, see Suskin, *Opening Night on Broadway*, 126.

<sup>18</sup> Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Theatre, A Chronicle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 640.

*Threepenny Opera* in 1953.<sup>19</sup> It ran for years, but had no considerable influence until John Kander and Fred Ebb embraced the style in *Cabaret* and *Chicago*.<sup>20</sup>

Though their overall tone had been lighthearted before, Rodgers and Hammerstein had always been very deliberate about challenging social conventions in their work. While *Me and Juliet* was in rehearsal, Hammerstein advised his young protégé, Stephen Sondheim,

I know that the smallest kind of story can be made to be earth-shaking if the characters are examined closely enough, and if the choice of incident is ingenious enough, and if the narrative of the incident is told with enough depth and human observation.<sup>21</sup>

He went on to say that Sondheim's project (the first original musical by the young composer) lacked these traits. Unfortunately, so did Hammerstein's *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream*, his two least successful collaborations with Richard Rodgers. Reflecting Hammerstein's indictment of Sondheim's writing, it would seem that the two shows in question do not contain the "depth" of character so necessary to successful musicals. The two shows failed to communicate a social or political philosophy. As will be discussed later, *Me and Juliet* is completely without a message and *Pipe Dream*'s social discourse was severely compromised in its adaptation and production.

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<sup>19</sup> The revival featured a new translation by Marc Blitzstein and has since become the standard English version of the work.

<sup>20</sup> Bordman, *Musical Theatre Chronicle*, 644.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Hugh Fordin, *Getting to Know Him: A Biography of Oscar Hammerstein II* (New York: The Ungar Publishing Co., 1977), 306; Sondheim's musical was the fourth and final project in a series assigned by Hammerstein years earlier—it was never produced.

## McCarthyism and Politics in the 1950s

The changing political landscape may explain Hammerstein's gentler commentary in *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream*. *South Pacific* (1949) received scrutiny for its commentary regarding relationships between different races and ethnic groups. In particular, the song "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught" was subject to widespread criticism, judged by some to be too controversial or downright inappropriate for the musical stage.<sup>22</sup> Sung by Lieutenant Cable, the song is preceded by a lyric saying racism is "not born in you! It happens *after* you're born..." The song begins:

You've got to be carefully taught to hate and fear,  
You've got to be taught from year to year,  
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear—  
You've got to be carefully taught

You've got to be carefully taught to be afraid  
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,  
And people whose skin is a different shade—  
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be carefully taught before it's too late—  
Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate—  
You've got to be carefully taught!  
You've got to be carefully taught!<sup>23</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein risked the entire *South Pacific* venture in light of legislative challenges to its decency or supposed Communist agenda. While on a tour of the South, lawmakers in Georgia introduced a bill outlawing entertainment containing "an underlying philosophy inspired by Moscow."<sup>24</sup> One legislator said that "a song

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<sup>22</sup> Andrea Most, "'You've Got to Be Carefully Taught': The Politics of Race in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*" *Theater Journal* 52, no. 3 (October 2000), 306.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *South Pacific: A Musical Play* (New York: Random House, 1949), 136-137.

<sup>24</sup> Most, "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," 307.



justifying interracial marriage was implicitly a threat to the American way of life.”<sup>25</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein defended their work strongly. James Michener, upon whose stories *South Pacific* was based, recalled, “The authors replied stubbornly that this number represented why they had wanted to do this play, and that even if it meant the failure of the production, it was going to stay in.”<sup>26</sup>

Both Rodgers and Hammerstein were active in political organizations, and “Oscar seemed to have a passion for being on committees,” wrote *Me and Juliet* director George Abbott in his memoirs.<sup>27</sup> Hugh Fordin’s biography of Hammerstein discusses at length Hammerstein’s political affiliations, including his membership in the World Federalist movement and the Writers’ Board for World Government, as well as social advocacy groups like the adoption agency Welcome House. Hammerstein was very open about his convictions and wrote often about his views. Speeches and published articles reveal his liberal opinions, which are also documented in many unpublished essays found in his papers at the Library of Congress. Articles like “Progress” laud racial integration. Another essay entitled “High Time” (1952) proved so controversial that it was rejected by a number of periodicals—including *Reader’s Digest*, *Harper’s*, and *Cosmopolitan*. The lengthy “High Time” essay criticized U.S. foreign policy towards the Soviet Union and advocated a new world government.<sup>28</sup> Hammerstein was accused of associating with communists, did not shy from hiring accused performers, and was close friends with

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> George Abbott, *Mister Abbott* (New York: Random House, 1963), 246; Abbott writes that Rodgers instilled in him enough political conviction to organize a major rally for Adlai Stevenson in 1952. See Abbott, *Mister Abbott*, 240-43.

<sup>28</sup> Essay entitled “Progress,” Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Box 34.

blacklisted actor and writer Hy Kraft.<sup>29</sup> Hammerstein and Rodgers were also under close scrutiny as many equated Judaism with communism.<sup>30</sup>

Hammerstein's opinions had repercussions. When his passport expired in 1953, Hammerstein was required to complete a form declaring that he was not and never had been a Communist. He then received a temporary six-month passport, during which time he was required to file a statement of his political beliefs. Hammerstein resisted, but because he and Rodgers produced musicals in London, he was eventually convinced of its necessity owing to his frequent trips overseas. Hammerstein wrote a twenty-nine-page document answering charges regarding his association with the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League and contributions to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The statement also discussed his relationship with Paul Robeson and his opposition to blacklisting.<sup>31</sup>

Robeson, who had gained fame in Hammerstein and Kern's *Show Boat* (1927), was suspected of being a communist and blacklisted for being uncooperative when called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). In a later interview, Hammerstein said,

Paul Robeson was in *Show Boat* and sang 'Ol Man River,' and I knew Paul very well... I wonder how I would feel if I were the son of a minister—if I had been a Phi Beta Kappa man at Rutgers, an all-American tackle, a tall, handsome man, singer and actor and athlete, and could not live in the same hotel with the other members

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<sup>29</sup> Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 313.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of Jews and Communism, see Most, "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," 176. A number of recent publications have focused upon the role of Jews in the American musical: see Jill Yvonne Gold Wright, "Creating America on Stage: How Jewish Composers and Lyricists Pioneered American Musical Theatre," Ph.D. diss., Claremont University, 2003; and an expanded study by Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 312.

of my theatrical troupe. I would be good and sore and I don't know what I might do.<sup>32</sup>

Jones credits Hammerstein for “never sacrificing entertainment value to his social advocacy.”<sup>33</sup> However, while cause cannot be proven, the height of McCarthyism and the production of the less controversial *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* do correlate.<sup>34</sup> The inquiry into Hammerstein’s political affiliations and the indictment of many of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s friends and colleagues occurred at or right before the premiere of the shows in question. Thus, to understand the genesis of *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream*, it is imperative that readers consider this and the many other social issues of the 1950s when discussing *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* and the decisions made by Rodgers and Hammerstein regarding their content.

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<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Block, ed., *The Richard Rodgers Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 185.

<sup>33</sup> Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves*, 160.

<sup>34</sup> Hammerstein’s passport was rescinded in 1953, the year of *Me and Juliet*’s debut; work on *Pipe Dream* (1955) began soon after. Friends and associates of Rodgers and Hammerstein were under scrutiny beginning around 1947.

## *ME AND JULIET*

### Origins

Rodgers and Hammerstein eschewed convention in their most successful musicals. As many writers have noted, *Oklahoma!* integrated music, drama, and dance to a degree never seen before. Each subsequent collaboration between composer Rodgers and author/lyricist Hammerstein challenged audiences' expectations of staging and content. *Me and Juliet* was more traditional and billed as a musical comedy rather than a musical play; it also fell back on one of the oldest clichés in the theatre: a show-within-a-show or "backstage" musical.

Some composers found great success with backstage productions (a typically light formula), particularly Cole Porter and his musical *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948). Rodgers's most lasting accomplishment in the form is *Babes in Arms* (1937). Hammerstein wrote a number of backstage shows, including *Music in the Air* (1932); *Showboat* could be considered of the genre, though its serious themes and critical popularity often separate it from such categorization.<sup>35</sup> The impetus behind *Me and Juliet* came from Rodgers, who had long wanted to produce a show about the Great White Way. Hammerstein accepted a proposal for a musical based on this concept with some reluctance.<sup>36</sup> In part, Hammerstein owed Rodgers a favor. Hammerstein had convinced the composer a few

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<sup>35</sup> Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 150; despite their previous experience, Rodgers and Hammerstein had never tried such a show together.

<sup>36</sup> Though Rodgers claimed on numerous occasions that the decision to create *Me and Juliet* was made with Hammerstein, it is generally accepted that Rodgers convinced Hammerstein, who was somewhat unenthusiastic. See Bert Fink, "Me and Juliet," "That's the Way it Happens": Notes on *Me and Juliet*," The Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, 1998, <<http://www3.rnh.com/RHStein/Theatre/showslevel3/juliet/notes.html>>, accessed 22 September 2003.

years earlier to write the score to a completely original book musical. What came to be known as *Allegro* (1947) was received by critics as innovative but flawed.<sup>37</sup>

*Me and Juliet* was not without its own innovations, though it reverted to a more traditional concept of musical theatre. Technically the show was very advanced, and what it lacked in depth it attempted to make up for in spectacle. Critics, having come to expect great things from Rodgers and Hammerstein, dismissed the musical not so much for being bad, but for simply being mediocre.<sup>38</sup>

How exactly did *Me and Juliet* differ from the formulas of their past successes? Why have contemporary audiences forgotten this musical? To answer these questions, the components of successful musical comedy must be discussed, particularly the role of star power. Audience expectations also played an important role in the reception of *Me and Juliet*. Technical complexity and innovative staging effects were important components of *Me and Juliet*; these effects and their consequences will be considered. Interviews with original cast members provide eyewitness accounts of *Me and Juliet*'s evolution, and give insights to dramatico-musical elements and their effectiveness. Understanding the strengths or weaknesses of each of these components will shed light on *Me and Juliet*'s reception and legacy.

## Background

*Me and Juliet* takes place during the run of a successful show in various parts of a theatre—dressing rooms, the lobby, rehearsal stages, a light bridge, the orchestra pit, and an alley behind the theatre. The show-within-a-show, also titled *Me and Juliet*, stars

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<sup>37</sup> Representative reviews can be found in Suskin, *Opening Night on Broadway*, 42-47.

<sup>38</sup> For a sampling of *Me and Juliet* reviews, see Suskin, *Opening Night on Broadway*, 426-429. A more detailed discussion of individual reviews will be highlighted later.

famous literary heroes and heroines: Juliet, Don Juan, and Carmen, alongside an everyman named “Me.” The main characters include the chorus singer Jeanie (Isabel Bigley), and Larry, the assistant stage manager (played by Bill Hayes).<sup>39</sup> A nasty love triangle develops when Jeanie’s ex-boyfriend, Bob, a lighting technician, becomes jealous of the couple who have been secretly married. Seeing an off-stage kiss between Jeanie and Larry, the burly, evil Bob attempts to drop a sandbag on the couple from the light bridge. In the second act, Bob picks a fight with Larry, who is by nature the shy, intellectual type.<sup>40</sup> But Larry fights back, and Bob is knocked out when he tumbles against a radiator. Happiness ensues.

Rodgers wanted the show-within-a-show to be a success.<sup>41</sup> *Me and Juliet* contains no chorus girl stepping into the leading role or financial backers pulling their support at the last minute. Rodgers and Hammerstein wanted to avoid the show-must-go-on theme; they instead wanted to use the show-within-the-show to act as “a framework for a love story.”<sup>42</sup> Meryl Secrest calls the plot “more like a one-act opera by Mascagni than what they said they intended.”<sup>43</sup> Abbott wrote in his memoirs that he also found the script “melodramatic” and “sentimental.”<sup>44</sup>

*Me and Juliet* was not a financial windfall for Rodgers and Hammerstein but it did recoup its investment after about six months. The entire investment for the musical,

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<sup>39</sup> Hayes is familiar to contemporary audiences as Doug Williams in *Days of Our Lives*; in 1953, he was familiar to audiences as a regular on the television variety program *Your Show of Shows*.

<sup>40</sup> The bully character appears in a number of Hammerstein’s earlier musicals, including *Oklahoma!* (Jud), *Carousel* (Billy), and *The King and I* (King). See Citron, *The Wordsmiths*, 251.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Rodgers, *Musical Stages: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1975), 281.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Meryl Secrest, *Somewhere For Me: A Biography of Richard Rodgers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 317.

<sup>44</sup> Abbott, *Mister Abbott*, 243.

\$350,000, was provided by RCA Records in exchange for half the profits and the rights to the cast recording.<sup>45</sup> Unlike every other previous Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *Me and Juliet* and its enormous cast of seventy-two made its out-of-town bow in Cleveland at the Hanna Theatre. Their usual venue, The Shubert in New Haven, was too small for the massive sets and lacked an orchestra pit, central to the show's plot.<sup>46</sup> From Cleveland, the production traveled, as usual, to Boston's Shubert, and on to New York, where it officially opened on 28 May 1953 at the Majestic. After 358 performances, the cast began a supposed national tour, though the production ended after an eight-week stint in Chicago.<sup>47</sup>

### Musical Comedy

When a revival of the Rodgers and Hart musical *Pal Joey* opened at the Broadhurst Theatre in January 1952, critics raved. Twelve years earlier, the reaction of audiences had been decidedly less enthusiastic, despite the legendary Broadway actress Vivienne Segal appearing opposite popular hooper Gene Kelly. According to Rodgers, the suggestive *Pal Joey* was offensive to the average theatergoer in 1940. In a 1952 *New York Times* article, Rodgers used *Pal Joey* as an example of theatergoers' broadening tastes:

I submit that its success today, with an equally superb production, is due to the fact that the musical theatre has made sufficient strides in its concept of entertainment to be able to treat subject matter that offended certain portions of the public and the press.... This advance in thinking was

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<sup>45</sup> Fink, "Pipe Dream," essay accompanying *Pipe Dream: Original Broadway Cast Recording*, 1955/1993, RCA Victor, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Ironically, New Haven is mentioned in the opening song of *Me and Juliet*: "You're a girl from Chicago / on the road with a show / Not a soul in New Haven / You can say you know."

<sup>47</sup> Bill Hayes, telephone interview with author, 19 November 2003, tape recording.

due, I believe, to such shows as *Carousel* and *South Pacific*. The horizon was broadened considerably by musical plays of this type and today the theatergoer buys his musical comedy ticket with no preconceptions.<sup>48</sup>

Rodgers's words were written in reply to an editorial criticizing serious, "artistic" musicals. The Fred Lounsberry article asked producers to offer more musical comedies that simply entertained "without further obligation." Lounsberry accused Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Allegro*, as "justifying itself almost exclusively on its social-artistic weight" and, as a result, being "terrible."<sup>49</sup>

Though Rodgers and Hammerstein believed strongly in challenging audiences, it was difficult to argue with Lounsberry. Musical comedies were still extremely popular, and *Pal Joey*, though somewhat racy, was enjoying great success. It has been suggested that *Pal Joey*'s warm reception motivated Rodgers and Hammerstein to complete their first musical comedy, *Me and Juliet*.<sup>50</sup> However, in a 1969 oral history interview, Rodgers claimed the decision to write *Me and Juliet* had nothing to do with *Pal Joey*. According to Rodgers, he and Hammerstein had talked often of writing a backstage musical; he also contradicts the assertion that *Me and Juliet* was primarily Rodgers's idea:

Both Oscar and I, like everyone else in the theatre, were intrigued with the theatre itself, and it was something we felt we knew a little bit about. A very romantic place to work, to live, and we got the idea for the show and did it.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Rodgers, "In Defense of Sense: 'Serious' Musicals Suit Public, Composer Says." *New York Times*, 29 June 1952, II-1.

<sup>49</sup> Fred Lounsberry, "Down with sense: more fun and less 'art' urged for musicals," *New York Times*, 22 June 1952, II-1.

<sup>50</sup> Fink, "Me and Juliet."

<sup>51</sup> Richard Rodgers, Interview by Kenneth Leish, 1969, Oral History Research Center, Columbia University, New York, 330.



In the minds of Rodgers and Hammerstein, reverting to an older style actually provided the duo with another way of challenging the expectations of audiences.

Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote in a 1953 *Theatre Arts* article that all individuals require “a change of pace” and that writing a show like *Me and Juliet* allowed the two to express “something of which we are inordinately fond” and to remain “fresh.”<sup>52</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein decided to use previously untested technical innovations to challenge audiences instead of their typical character and plot devices. Furthermore, the musical comedy style would allow both Rodgers and Hammerstein to create a book, score, and lyrics which, in their conventionality, stood in contrast to their previous efforts. They had exhausted a wide variety of dramatic styles—folk play (*Oklahoma!*), pseudo-opera (*Carousel*), and what is considered by some to be the first concept musical (*Allegro*).<sup>53</sup> The collaborators were headed “in a new-old direction” which audiences ultimately rejected.<sup>54</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein misjudged the role established stars have in ensuring the success of musical comedies. A good example is *Call Me Madam*, which made up for mediocre drama by drawing audiences to see stars such as Ethel Merman.<sup>55</sup> Rodgers

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<sup>52</sup> Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, “All the Theatre’s A Stage,” *Theatre Arts* 37 (September 1953), 29.

<sup>53</sup> Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 95.

<sup>54</sup> Citron, *The Wordsmiths*, 251; Overcoming audience expectation of musicals whose stories were epic in scope, though, proved difficult for Rodgers and Hammerstein and, as we have seen from recent history, continues to be a difficult hurdle to overcome. Returning to musical comedy after a string of socially-conscious successes was equally unsuccessful for Stephen Sondheim. The relatively light-hearted *Bounce* (2003) was dismissed by critics and audiences during trials in Chicago and Washington, D.C., and is the only show in composer’s career not to have played in New York.

<sup>55</sup> Ethan Mordden, *Coming Up Roses: The Broadway Musical in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 77. The trend continues to this day—many contemporary critics have argued that without a star like Bernadette Peters, revivals of classic musicals such as *Annie Get Your Gun* or *Gypsy* would likely have failed. For example, the multi-million dollar

and Hammerstein often had specific stars in mind, as well. *The King and I* was written in part as a vehicle for Gertrude Lawrence. For *Me and Juliet*, though, Rodgers and Hammerstein hired a young and relatively unknown cast and failed to effectively market actors which would have been familiar to Broadway audiences. For example, Isabel Bigley, though starring in only her second Broadway musical, had recently played the role of Sarah in *Guys and Dolls* to wide acclaim. Instead of promoting their leads, Rodgers and Hammerstein decided their names alone would appear above the title of *Me and Juliet* [Fig. 1]. Unlike *The King and I*, “they were going to be the stars,” recalls Bigley.<sup>56</sup> According to director Abbott, Rodgers and Hammerstein “craved publicity,” a trait which proved to be a weakness with *Me and Juliet*.<sup>57</sup>

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remounting of *Into the Woods* did not attract major stars and stumbled in 2002 and a revival of *Wonderful Town* (2003) cancelled performances when its star, Donna Murphy, fell ill.

<sup>56</sup> Bigley interview, 3 November 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Abbott, *Mister Abbott*, 246; Rodgers and Hammerstein were notorious for writing newspaper and magazine articles in an effort to keep their names in the public spotlight.

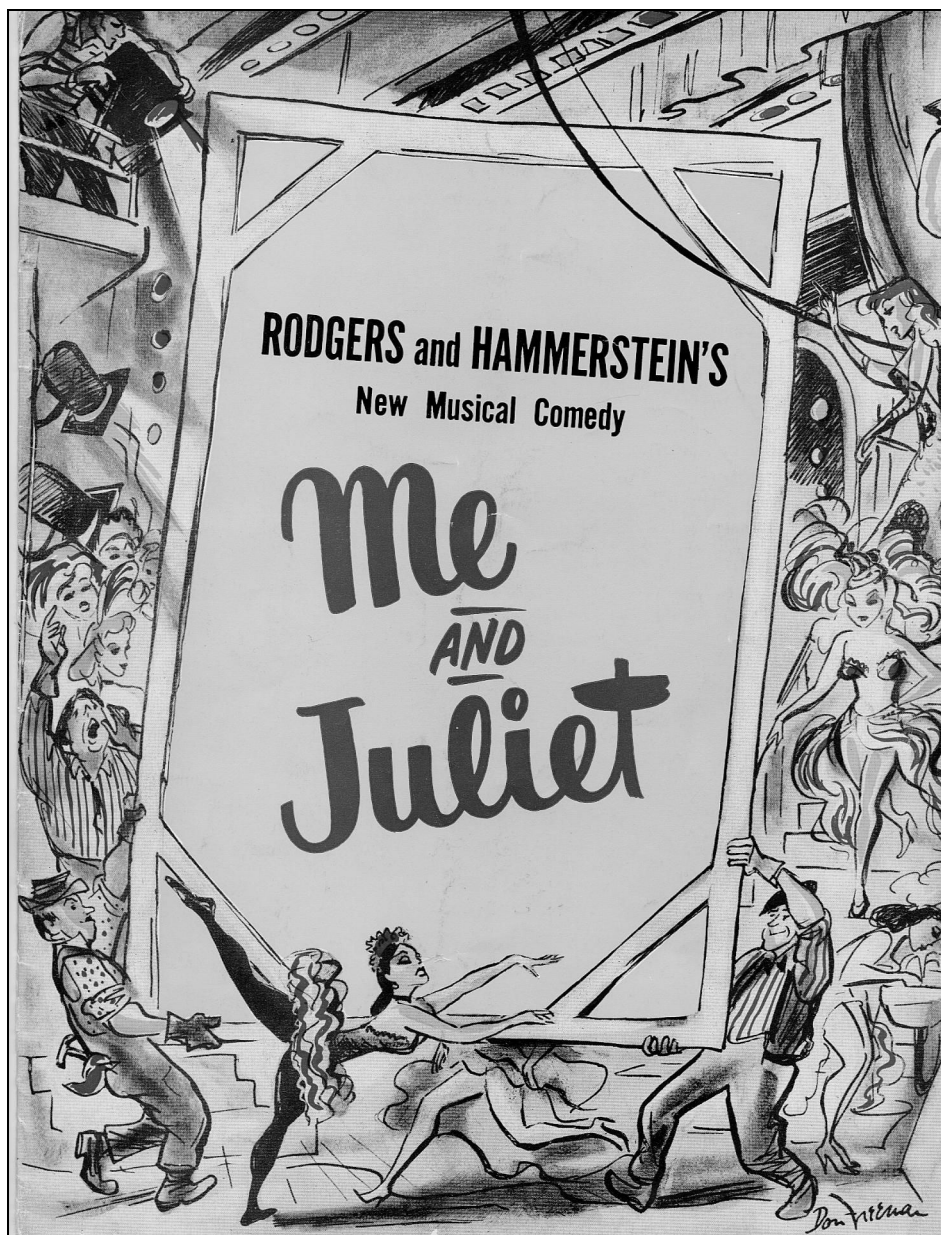


Fig. 1. *Me and Juliet*'s billing failed to mention lead actors, featuring only the names of Rodgers and Hammerstein. [Souvenir program from author's collection]

### Dramatic Content

*Me and Juliet* lacks the social commentary of Rodgers and Hammerstein's earlier musicals, though the musical does occasionally bring to light the antagonistic but necessary relationship between Broadway producers and their audiences. In the songs

“The Big Black Giant” and “Intermission Talk,” Rodgers and Hammerstein seem to provide commentary regarding the death of the theatre and the cynicism of Broadway audiences. Had these ideas been developed further, the musical might have been more successful, however, they do not play a significant role in the rest of *Me and Juliet*.

*Me and Juliet*’s song “Intermission Talk” characterizes audiences as cynical and unpredictable. Hammerstein’s words contain an oft repeated lyric stating, “the theatre is dying, the theatre is dead.” The song portrays audiences as suspicious and somewhat impressionable.<sup>58</sup> However, the singers eventually proclaim, “...year after year / There is something to cheer— / The theatre is living! / The theatre is living!”<sup>59</sup> This sentiment is reiterated by Hammerstein in a 1956 interview for *Seventeen* magazine in which he declares, “the theatre has never been so alive.”<sup>60</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s mystification with unpredictable audiences expressed in “The Big Black Giant” is timeless in its relevance and likely the most interesting song in *Me and Juliet*:

A big black giant  
Who looks and listens  
With thousands of eyes and ears,  
A big black mass  
Of love and pity  
And troubles and hopes and fears;  
And every night  
The mixture’s different,

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<sup>58</sup> Isabel Bigley says Hammerstein’s message about the theatre is appropriate today. “I think about especially today...and I think that was his message.” Bigley interview, 3 November 2003; Whether the theatre is really dying or not is a point of contention, but the steeply rising production costs (and consequently, the cost of admission) and abundance of revivals cluttering Broadway theatres have led to cries of “declining” musical standards and the commercialization of Broadway houses and the shows within.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Me and Juliet* (New York: Random House, 1953), 111-112.

<sup>60</sup> Article titled “Do Come Into the Theatre,” Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, Box 33.

Although it may look the same.  
To feel his way  
With every mixture  
Is part of the actor's game.  
One night it's a laughing giant  
Another night a weeping giant.<sup>61</sup>

Hammerstein alludes to his previous musicals as attempts to challenge and change the viewer for the better:

Every night you fight the giant,  
And maybe, if you win,  
You send him out a better giant  
Than he was when he came in.<sup>62</sup>

These topics may well have been amplified if the show-within-the-show was not a pre-ordained success. Without some sort of struggle among the actors or producers to draw an audience, the messages in these two songs become irrelevant. Bill Hayes rejects the notion that Rodgers and Hammerstein intended to make a statement with the lyric "the theatre is dying." Instead, he believes the song serves simply to make light fun of the theatre and should not be taken too seriously. Whereas *South Pacific* had a clear message about tolerance and *Carousel* a beautiful philosophy about repentance, Hayes says that *Me and Juliet* simply "didn't have a social message."<sup>63</sup> The lack of a clearly articulated social or political commentary is intrinsically related to *Me and Juliet*'s superficial and disjointed plot. Previously, Rodgers and Hammerstein had used social statements as a means of developing narrative, inducing suspense, and eventually, finding resolution between diametrically opposed ideas or individuals.

Because of the show-within-a-show storyline, a large portion of the musical is filled with superfluous action and music, further reducing the dramatic continuity of the

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<sup>61</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Me and Juliet*, 62.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

musical. Of the twelve songs in the show, five are “production numbers” sung by the Juliet, Don Juan, Carmen, and Me characters. The other seven songs serve as character pieces.

Early in *Me and Juliet*, Jeanie presents her character in the song “A Very Special Day,” though its lyrics are arguably weak for Hammerstein.

I wake up each morning with a feeling in my heart  
That today will be a very special day  
I keep right on clinging to that feeling in my heart  
Till the winds of evening blow my dream away  
Later on at bedtime when my world has come apart  
And I'm in my far from fancy negligee  
With a piece of toast to munch  
And a nice hot cup of tea  
I begin to have a hunch  
That tomorrow's going to be  
A very special day.<sup>64</sup>

With its use of non-descript adjectives such as “special,” the song fails to develop Jeanie’s character early in the show. The song is also dull in its pleasantness: there is no mention of relationships, performance anxiety, or other factors that might otherwise motivate listeners to invest their interest in Jeanie’s character.

Bob is given two solos. “Keep it Gay” is intended to make his character, the bully, more likable, but communicates little of his character. His other song, “It Feels Good,” is meant to reveal his alcoholism. “It Feels Good” comes very late in the show, however, and the words are so trite as to appear almost facetious. The song emphasizes nonspecific, monosyllabic words like “good” and “smart,” contains fragmented sentences, and excessively repeats awkward words like “weasel” and “gong.” Furthermore, the character appears the same at the end of the same as at the beginning, undergoing no change or growth during the presentation of the song.

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<sup>64</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Me and Juliet*, 7-8

It feels good  
 To feel high,  
 High above a world of weasels and their lousy weasel talk.  
 A good drink, and you fly  
 Over all the things that frighten all the little jerks who walk.  
 You feel smart—  
 Not smart like smarty pants,  
 But smart like finding out the truth!  
 Like someone bangs a gong,  
     And that gong is a signal that the road's all clear,  
     With no one and nothing in the world to fear!  
     The limit for you is the sky  
     And you are a hell of a guy!  
     And if you feel like breaking up a certain place,  
     Or if you feel like pushing in a certain face,  
     You are the bozo who can!  
 You are a hell of a man!  
 Not a weasel,  
 Not a louse,  
 Not a chicken,  
 Not a mouse,  
     But a man!<sup>65</sup>

Bob's song is meant to function like *Carousel's* "Soliloquy." *Carousel's* "Soliloquy," however, achieves its effect much more successfully. It is placed at a dramatically significant point in the story: just before the conclusion of the first act, Billy learns that his wife is pregnant, and is forced to face the challenges of raising a child. When he realizes he doesn't have the financial means necessary to support his family, Billy makes a crucial decision that will ultimately cost him his life and give renewed significance to the second act. Though also sung by a man with little education, "Soliloquy" contains coherent sentences. Over the course of the song, only the conclusion of which is quoted here, the audience witnesses a profound growth in his character as he resolves to give his daughter a better life than his own. The depth of

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<sup>65</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Me and Juliet*, 120-121.

character achieved in his song is remarkable, particularly when combined with Rodgers's climactic music.

My little girl!  
My little girl!  
I got to get ready before she comes!  
I got to make certain that she  
Won't be dragged up in slums  
With a lot o' bums—  
Like me!  
She's got to be sheltered and fed, and dressed  
In the best money can buy!  
I never knew how to get money,  
But, I'll try—  
By God! I'll try!  
I'll go out and make it  
Or steal it  
Or take it  
Or die!<sup>66</sup>

In the minds of many critics, and at least two actors, the dialogue is flat for musical comedy. Says Bigley, "I didn't think anything was funny, I thought everything was...very heavy handed, there was never a light side."<sup>67</sup> Says Bill Hayes, "It was not [funny]... it's not a play with jokes."<sup>68</sup> Hammerstein struggled to write one-liners; after a string of more serious productions with Rodgers, Hammerstein was out of practice writing light scenes and lyrics. Thus, *Me and Juliet* fails to measure up to other musical comedies of the time: consider *Finian's Rainbow* (1947), loaded with cynical political jokes, or *Guys and Dolls*, replete with Damon Runyon's wisecracking gamblers.

Hayes remembers one scene eliciting laughs from the audience that were altogether the wrong kind—the laughter of nervousness. When Joe is knocked out near

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<sup>66</sup> Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Carousel: A Musical Play* (New York: Knopf, 1946), 98-99.

<sup>67</sup> Bigley interview, 3 November 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.



the end of the musical, the audience laughed. Says Hayes, “Abbott tried different stagings and different reactions and they laughed every time.”<sup>69</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein failed to unify *Me and Juliet* with a through-running social commentary and created characters that were shallow. Neither could the play rely on comic relief, as a result of Hammerstein’s relatively clumsy book.

### **Technical Innovations**

Technical innovations were a redeeming feature on the whole, but one in particular flopped miserably. Rodgers and Hammerstein wanted to begin the performance without an overture, but this concept was eliminated before the New York premiere. As seen in tryouts in Cleveland, the audience entered the auditorium with the curtain already open showing a “backstage” scene. The performance began with actors wandering onstage, making idle chatter, gathering around a piano, and beginning warm-ups.<sup>70</sup> The concept was simple, remembers Hayes: “everyone was made up and in costume but they were playing actors and the actors were showing up to play their show.” This led directly into the show’s first number, also cut, “Wake Up Little Theatre.”<sup>71</sup>

Hayes recalls:

The audience did not realize that the play had started. They didn’t pay any attention, they talked, they read their Playbills, they got up and walked around. They just never figured it out. And finally, after a couple of weeks of this, Dick finally said to Oscar and George Abbott, ‘maybe they have to have an overture.’ So they said to Don Walker, ‘write us an overture,’ so he wrote an overture and then

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Undated script, Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, Box 12.

<sup>71</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003; undated script, Oscar Hammerstein Collection, Box 12.

started the same scene they had before, only now the audience knew the show had started. They were ready.<sup>72</sup>

Today, the effect seems commonplace, but most theatergoers in 1953 had never encountered it and did not understand that the play had begun. It is also important to consider Rodgers and Hammerstein's choice to capitulate to audiences. Though seemingly a somewhat small detail, it demonstrates Rodgers and Hammerstein's relative lack of conviction about *Me and Juliet*. Unlike the duo's staunch defense of *South Pacific*, there seems to have been no moral or philosophical attachment to the technique attempted in *Me and Juliet*.

A second innovation was detailed by Hammerstein in a 1953 *New York Times* article.<sup>73</sup> In *Me and Juliet*'s fourth scene, Bob is talking to a fellow stagehand from the light bridge high above the actors. The scene progresses and Bob begins to sing the song "Keep it Gay." Suddenly the lights flash off and come back on, with a cast of dancers performing below. After some time, the lights go out again and back up a few seconds later. This time the actors are in a post-performance rehearsal. Three separate scenes and a time lapse all take place within a single song. Hammerstein's *Times* article credits Jo Mielziner, *Me and Juliet*'s lighting and set designer, and Bob Alton for choreographing the movement of two sets of dancers. According to Hammerstein, credit should also be given to the writer "as the prime generator of the other creative talents in a production, the wellspring of all the entertainment values which eventually decorate it and frequently outshine it."<sup>74</sup> While this may be the voice of the publicity-seeking Hammerstein suggested earlier, he does make clear that "credit must be claimed by the author because

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<sup>72</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Oscar Hammerstein II, "Musical Keystone: An Expert Writes About the Importance of the Book in Stage Productions," *New York Times*, 2 August 1953, X1.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

he asked for the effect” in the first place. To Hammerstein, the book was not just about the words, but also *ideas*—an entire artistic concept.<sup>75</sup>

Meilziner also realized a third vision crucial to Hammerstein’s original book. The script demanded a set design that allowed audiences to see action both on- and off-stage during performances of the show-within-the-show. The sets Meilziner designed permitted the proscenium of the show-within-the-show to be moved about ten feet to the side revealing activity backstage.<sup>76</sup> The size of the proscenium, along with the light bridge (which was an actual functioning light bridge) was great, and not only disallowed the New Haven premiere, but also necessitated the reinforcement of each of the stages on which *Me and Juliet* was performed.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the technical innovations, the fundamental content of *Me and Juliet* failed to attract audiences. In a larger context, the successful technical strides accomplished by *Me and Juliet* demonstrate the very spirit of the 1950s, the burgeoning economy, and the ever-growing presence of technology in the lives of Americans. But the achievements of *Me and Juliet* are arguably cosmetic, much like the media’s portrayal of post-war America’s greater social condition.

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<sup>75</sup> This effect was not achieved again until *Dreamgirls* (1981); see Mordden, *Coming Up Roses*, 150.

<sup>76</sup> Also not achieved until *La Cage aux Folles* (1983); see Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 150.

<sup>77</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003; according to Hayes, one of the major considerations in not continuing the national tour was the obtrusively large sets: the scenery filled seven rail cars and weighed 85 tons.

## Rehearsals and Revisions

Initially, there were few indications that anything was the matter with *Me and Juliet*. “We thought we had a hit,” said Isabel Bigley.<sup>78</sup> Bill Hayes concurs: “everybody thought it had a good chance. I don’t think there was a feeling of ‘this is small potatoes.’” According to Hayes, the cast knew it was a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical and “they were thrilled to be in it.”<sup>79</sup>

Both Bigley and Hayes recall their interactions with Rodgers and Hammerstein as pleasant. While they were first learning the show, both men were actively involved with the rehearsals, though Rodgers and Hammerstein approached the actors differently. “Oscar was not one to communicate with people,” remembers Bigley. “He never spoke to you from the auditorium, he was always very gracious and polite and [would] come up and talk to you... but he didn’t do that very much... he had very little contact with the performers...”<sup>80</sup> Bigley recalls Hammerstein showing very little visible enthusiasm, and “if he said ‘that was good,’ that was the ultimate.” Most often he would simply say nothing, however. According to Bigley, “you’d go to him and say ‘is that what you wanted?’ and he would say ‘well, yes, that sounded perfect, I thought you knew that.’”

Hammerstein was more hands off because many of his responsibilities had been turned over to Abbott, recalls Hayes. Hammerstein the author demonstrated great trust in the director when he proclaimed to the cast on the first day of rehearsals: “Now this is my

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<sup>78</sup> Bigley interview, 3 November 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

<sup>80</sup> Bigley interview, 3 November 2003.

script the way I've written it, but from this moment on, this show is in the hands of its director, George Abbott, and any changes he makes [are] fine with me."<sup>81</sup>

If Hammerstein disagreed with a directing decision by Abbott, he was very cordial in his treatment of the situation. Occasionally problems arose during the more serious sections of the play, as Abbott was mostly experienced with farcical musical comedy of the 1930s and 40s. Hayes remembers "when it came to real meaty, between you and me, I love you scenes, serious scenes, I thought he was—at sea." Hammerstein, well acquainted with this type of dialogue, would make a note of any discrepancies and wait until there was a break in the rehearsal. According to Hayes, Hammerstein would then approach the actor saying, "'think of it this way' and he would direct without directing...and make it understandable to the actor."<sup>82</sup> Rodgers, on the other hand, was very active in the rehearsal process. "Dick would come up and say, 'Oh boy, that was wonderful!'" recalls Bigley.<sup>83</sup> According to Hayes, Rodgers would constantly be suggesting changes—a different key to better accommodate the singer, editing the end of a song, or changing a few notes.<sup>84</sup>

*Me and Juliet* opened in Cleveland to enthusiastic reviews.<sup>85</sup> William McDermott, writing in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, declared it "a huge Cleveland success and I suspect that it will be equally big" on Broadway.<sup>86</sup> The reviews praised the

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<sup>81</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003; George Abbott writes of Rodgers and Hammerstein's rehearsal techniques during *Me and Juliet*, see Abbott, *Mister Abbott*, 245.

<sup>82</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Bigley interview, 3 November 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

<sup>85</sup> Several reviews from Cleveland's premiere appear in the Hammerstein Collection, scrapbook entitled "Me and Juliet."

<sup>86</sup> William F. McDermott, "'Me and Juliet' Holds Over for the Second Week, and Looks Good," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 26 April 1953, 42D.

technical aspects of the show and complimented top-rate performances. McDermott did note some problems with the book. In particular, he felt the show got off to a slow start.<sup>87</sup>

Critics chastised Rodgers and Hammerstein for the suggestive song “Meat and Potatoes,” performed by Joan McCracken. According to Lisa Jo Sagolla’s biography of McCracken, the dancer initially complained about the number filled with sexual innuendo. Though not explicitly containing anything “dirty,” there were lines like “I don’t want salad, give me meat and potatoes.”<sup>88</sup> The musical accompaniment was suggestive of a striptease, and McCracken was asked to provide pelvic gyrations while wearing a revealing costume. According to Hayes, “the way it came off was too sexy for audiences at that time—too risqué. They figured that was a raunchy song.”<sup>89</sup> The phrase “Meat and Potatoes” was synonymous with male genitalia and, says Hayes, “it was 1953 and it was considered...a dirty song.”<sup>90</sup> The 1960s freed musical theatre from all expectations: “After you’ve seen [*Hair*’s] ‘Fellatio,’” the song would have paled in comparison, recalls Hayes.<sup>91</sup> But Omar Ranney, writing for the *Cleveland Press*, wouldn’t experience a musical like *Hair* for another fifteen years. Ranney described the song as “an overly-suggestive number which Joan McCracken sings while she is engaged in some supposedly artful pawing of her male dance partner,” and suggested that Rodgers and Hammerstein should “move this number over to the Roxy.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Readers should remember that it was the “no-overture” opening that McDermott viewed.

<sup>88</sup> Lisa Jo Sagolla, *The Girl Who Fell Down: A Biography of Joan McCracken* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 208-09.

<sup>89</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Clipping of Omar Ranney, “‘Me and Juliet’ Lacks Spark of Rodgers-Hammerstein Hits,” *Cleveland Press*, 21 April 1953, Hammerstein Collection, scrapbook entitled “Me and Juliet.”

Rodgers and Hammerstein relented. They replaced “Meat and Potatoes” with a new and much milder song titled, “We Deserve Each Other.” The concept of compromising values for commercial success was a constant dilemma for Rodgers and Hammerstein. Today, “controversial” shows often draw an audience, but in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, controversy typically led to failure. While “Meat and Potatoes” was not the political statement of “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” it shows the collaborators’ lack of resolve in the face of criticism. Ethan Mordden writes that *Me and Juliet* was received as commonplace because “it would seem that at some point Rodgers and Hammerstein backed away from going too far with their own naturalism.”<sup>93</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein’s artistic compromise in replacing “Meat and Potatoes” foreshadowed the similar concessions to social pressure that would plague *Pipe Dream* two years later.

The *Me and Juliet* production team continued to make changes as the musical moved on to Boston. According to Isabel Bigley, the biggest trouble with the book was its length:

What happened was it was too long. So they kept cutting and cutting and cutting but they never pieced things together. And they didn’t quite know how. And that’s when the tension started.<sup>94</sup>

Based in part on audience reaction, Rodgers and Hammerstein would make edits and test them with the cast the next morning. According to Hayes, the process became difficult as the production team introduced different versions of play: Version A, Version B, etc.

That was quite a test for the cast. You’d rehearse version A and play Version A one night and they’d say, “Rehearsal at ten in the morning,” and you’d come in and you’d do Version

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<sup>93</sup> Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 153.

<sup>94</sup> Bigley interview, 3 November 2003.

B. And if they could rehearse it well enough, then it goes in that night, or if not, then you're doing Version A at night and you're memorizing and learning different staging of Version B. Sometimes it went to Version C and Version D.<sup>95</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein brought in others to help make needed changes to *Me and Juliet*, to no avail. They asked Jerome Robbins to take over directorial duties and re-choreograph some dances, but he turned down the offer, saying it would completely destroy Robert Alton emotionally.<sup>96</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein also brought in friend and director Joshua Logan. The call for assistance, says Hayes, indicated that they realized “it was not their greatest work.”<sup>97</sup> With Rodgers and Hammerstein furiously cutting sections to make the show move more quickly, Bigley reports “the show fell apart.” With the show in pieces, Bigley adds, “they didn’t know what to do with it, they couldn’t make any other changes.”<sup>98</sup> Even accounting for an actress’s inevitable disappointment with a failed show, Bigley’s response is representative of those affiliated with the musical. James Hammerstein, Oscar’s son, was brought in as an assistant stage manager in Boston. Conversations with his father were tense, as they discussed the need for changes to *Me and Juliet*’s book.<sup>99</sup>

Because of the many revisions and long rehearsals, cast morale dropped. “Everybody was unhappy, everyone knew that things weren’t gelling,” recalls Bigley. Rodgers and Hammerstein were “fighting amongst themselves” as they watched

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<sup>95</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

<sup>96</sup> Mordden, *Coming Up Roses*, 154.

<sup>97</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

<sup>98</sup> Bigley interview, 3 November 2003.

<sup>99</sup> Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 310.



rehearsals from the audience. She, too, understood that “they all knew that it wasn’t going to be the hit that we expected, but we didn’t know that at the beginning.”<sup>100</sup>

Abbott and Alton were not living up Rodgers and Hammerstein’s expectations. The cast, too, was frustrated with their leadership. Joan McCracken, a significant dancing talent, grew upset with Alton’s style;<sup>101</sup> the choreographer was near the end of his career (he retired the following year) and had spent most of the previous decade in Hollywood, choreographing for film. Bigley remembers Ray Walston fighting with director Abbott; the actors were not happy “because they could sense something was wrong and they couldn’t seem to get an answer or direction from Abbott.”<sup>102</sup>

As cast morale tumbled, evidence of the discontent made its way into performances. Regarding the relationship between Jeanie and Larry, Hayes said, “I doubt that the audience ever believed we were deeply in love.”<sup>103</sup> As opening night approached, Hammerstein indicated uneasiness about the show: “It is a change of pace for us and in some quarters we may be criticized because it is not as high-falutin’ as our more recent efforts.”<sup>104</sup>

### **New York Reception**

*Me and Juliet* had healthy advance sales and opened in New York on Thursday, 28 May 1953. The reviews Friday morning were not all-out pans; Hayes recalls the notices as “pleasant.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Bigley interview, 3 November 2003.

<sup>101</sup> Sagolla, *The Girl Who Fell Down*, 218.

<sup>102</sup> Bigley interview, 3 November 2003.

<sup>103</sup> Cited in Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*, 321.

<sup>104</sup> Letter to John Van Druten, cited in *ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

Brooks Atkinson, with a penchant for old-fashioned musical comedies, was mixed in his assessment. His review in the *Times* indicated confusion, saying “when Mr. Rodgers and Mr. Hammerstein make up their minds what they are writing about, ‘Me and Juliet’ which opened at the Majestic last evening, may turn out to be an enjoyable show.” He called the book “cumbersome,” though he enjoyed the individual performances and Alton’s dances.<sup>106</sup>

Walter Kerr, critic for the *Herald Tribune*, extolled Mielziner’s work: “Mechanically, the show is pure magic.” He also praised the performers. But when it came to substance Kerr said the show fell short. He felt the book was fragmented, calling it, “. . . a dizzying collection of independently attractive fragments, so eager to embrace everything that half its treasures slip through its outstretched arms.” Kerr also said “Rodgers and Hammerstein have come perilously close to writing a show-without-a-show.”<sup>107</sup> John Chapman’s review in the *Daily News* called *Me and Juliet* “dullish” and said the book and music were “incapable of competing with the remarkable scenic plot.”<sup>108</sup>

Audiences were also impressed with the innovative technical elements, and it was at this point that Rodgers accepted defeat. “Whatever flickering optimism any one of us may have had about *Me and Juliet* was quickly doused when we heard people raving

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<sup>106</sup> Brooks Atkinson, “‘Me and Juliet’ Is a Valentine to the Theatre by Rodgers and Hammerstein,” *New York Times*, 29 May 1953, 17.

<sup>107</sup> Walter F. Kerr, “Me and Juliet,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 29 May 1953, 16.

<sup>108</sup> Clipping of John Chapman, “‘Me and Juliet’ a Large, Lavish, and Dullish Tribute to Show Biz,” *New York Daily News*, 29 May 1953, located in the Hammerstein Collection, scrapbook entitled “Me and Juliet.”

about the sets, without a word being said about the rest of the show,” Rodgers wrote in his autobiography.<sup>109</sup>

Following the Broadway premiere, Rodgers and Hammerstein made few changes to *Me and Juliet*. Says Bigley, “The feeling was ‘well it’s a Rodgers and Hammerstein, it will run for a year...’”<sup>110</sup> In part, the assessment was correct. Hayes remembers “we never played to empty houses.”<sup>111</sup> Six months into *Me and Juliet*’s run, Rodgers wrote Hammerstein (who was in London supervising another production), indicating that all their New York shows were “still doing beautifully.”<sup>112</sup> Though not an assured hit, *Me and Juliet* ran for over ten months and turned a small profit.

### **Analysis of Music and Lyrics**

The only song from *Me and Juliet* to make a lasting impression was “No Other Love.”<sup>113</sup> The song was not original to *Me and Juliet*, however. It originated as a theme for an episode of Rodgers’s soundtrack to the television series *Victory at Sea*. “The motif attracted a considerable amount of interest as soon as it was heard, and I felt sure that I could find a place for it in a Broadway score.”<sup>114</sup>

Analyzing *Me and Juliet*’s songs puts any critic in a conundrum. While nearly all historians agree the score is one of Rodgers’s weakest, it is more difficult to assess why

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<sup>109</sup> Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 283.

<sup>110</sup> Bigley interview, 3 November 2003.

<sup>111</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

<sup>112</sup> Letter, Richard Rodgers to Oscar Hammerstein, 29 September 1953, Richard Rodgers Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for Performing Arts, Box 2, Folder 23.

<sup>113</sup> A popular version sung by Perry Como was released the following year. The cast recording went out of print after only a few years and the music faded into obscurity. Re-released fifty years after the show’s premiere, a CD version won some new fans but has since gone out of print.

<sup>114</sup> Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 281.

and how this came to be. On one hand, the music can be interpreted, in the words of Stephen Citron, as “downright banal.”<sup>115</sup> Citron cites embarrassing lines on the order of “Like a snake who meets a mongoose, / That young lady was a gone goose,” or sophomoric ones like “I’m your pigeon / Through with roaming / I am homing / To marriage type love and you.”<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, the lyrics above are part of “Marriage Type Love,” a song from the show-within-the-show, which according to Bill Hayes was purposefully bad. In an effort to make a farce of the show being performed within *Me and Juliet*, Hammerstein wrote corny lyrics and bad rhymes while Rodgers parodied musicals by writing dramatic, uncomfortably high choral parts [Ex. 1].<sup>117</sup> Says Hayes, “It was a rare person who understood they were trying to spoof the show-within-the-show.”

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<sup>115</sup> Citron, *The Wordsmiths*, 251.

<sup>116</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Me and Juliet*, 34.

<sup>117</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

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(L)  
GIRLS: (*humming*)

pay - off! —————

BOYS:

Hm ————— pi - geon

hm ————— roam - ing ————— hm ————— hom - ing ————— To

Through ————— with roam - ing, ————— I ————— am hom - ing ————— To

(M)

mar - riage type love ————— mar - riage type love —————

mar - riage type love ————— and ————— you. —————

*ff* *attacca*

Ex. 1. "Marriage Type Love"

Today it is impossible to ascertain the lyricist's intent, but the wild disparity of the interpretations presented here demonstrates Hammerstein's failure to clearly elucidate his purpose. Furthermore, when also considering the uninspired lyrics to the character songs "A Very Special Day" and "It Feels Good," presented earlier, it can be seen that Hammerstein failed to separate his songs them into two clearly defined bodies of sarcastic and sincere pieces. Rather than constructing a sophisticated juxtaposition of "good" and "bad" songs, the entire score contains cumbersome and uninspired lyrics throughout. Consider the song "It's Me." Critics praise the melody, but its lyrical content was nearly as transparent as the words written for "Marriage Type Love." For example:

My picture hangs in Sardi's  
For all the world to see.  
I sit beneath my picture there  
And no one looks at me.  
I sometimes wear dark glasses,  
Concealing who I am,  
Then all at once I take them off—  
And no one gives a damn!  
But when I start to play a part, I play the part okay;  
No longer am I no one when I'm someone in a play.<sup>118</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein do reveal a sense of sophisticated wit by spoofing themselves in *Me and Juliet*. A reference to *South Pacific*'s "Some Enchanted Evening" is included in the song "You Never Had it So Good," which was cut from the show during rehearsals:

I'll sew, I'll bake,  
I'll try to make your evenings all enchanted.  
My honeycake,  
I'm yours to take, but don't take me for granted.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Me and Juliet*, 87.

<sup>119</sup> Undated script, Oscar Hammerstein Collection, Library of Congress, Box 12.

In “Intermission Talk,” a theatergoer also sings a line referring to *The King and I*:

My love for my husband grew thinner  
The first time I looked at Yul Brynner,  
And back in my bed on Long Island  
I kept dreaming for Brynner in Thailand.<sup>120</sup>

Rodgers’ increased use of chromaticism and more rhythmically-driven melodies in songs like “That’s the Way it Happens” [Ex. 2] were more reminiscent of the Rodgers and Hart’s musical comedy style. Much more conventional in form (usually 32-bar ABA), these tunes fed audiences’ expectation that this more frivolous song form was likewise associated with the dewy-eyed sentiment of 1930s musical comedy.<sup>121</sup>

The image displays a musical score for the song "That's the Way it Happens" from the musical *Me and Juliet*. It consists of two systems of music. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the lyrics: "says he knows a bis-tro where they give you a break With French fried po-ta-toes and a". The second system continues with the lyrics: "T bone steak! You are shy and un-cer-tain, But he". The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *p* (bouncy). The score is written in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

Ex. 2. A more jazzy musical style reminiscent of Rodgers’s collaboration with Lorenz Hart is seen in *Me and Juliet*’s “That’s the Way it Happens.”

<sup>120</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Me and Juliet*, 110.

<sup>121</sup> See Milton Kaye, “Richard Rodgers: a comparative melody analysis of his songs with Hart and Hammerstein lyrics,” Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1969; Rodgers also commented that he enjoyed *Me and Juliet* as an opportunity to “get some dance music out of my system.” See Rodgers and Hammerstein, “All The Theatre’s A Stage.”

Often, both the words and music are inappropriate, as can be seen in Bob's soliloquy, "It Feels Good" [Ex. 3]. Bob's alcoholic rant concludes with the (purposefully) repetitious and meaningless display of drunken machismo ("You are a hell of a man! / Not a weasel, / Not a louse, / Not a chicken, / Not a mouse, / But a man!"). Rodgers, however, scores a bright, happy accompaniment rather than the expressive dissonance epitomized in the similar "Soliloquy" from *Carousel*.

The image shows a musical score for the song "It Feels Good". It consists of three systems of music. The first system is marked with a circled 'F' and contains the lyrics: "You feel smart, Not smart like smar - ty pants, But". The second system continues the lyrics: "smart like find - ing out the truth! Like some - one bangs a". The third system is marked "Allegro - quasi agitato" and includes the lyrics "gong." and "And that". The piano accompaniment features a gong sound effect, dynamic markings such as *mf*, *sfz*, and *p*, and specific hand assignments for the right hand (*R.H.*) and left hand (*L.H.*). The score is written in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat.

Ex. 3. "It Feels Good"



The composer intended the tunes to be fresh and new, reminiscent of popular music of the time. Despite his aim, the melodies created by Rodgers are conventional and seemed to belong to a previous era. Two songs from *Me and Juliet* found their way into in the revised and extended stage version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *State Fair* (1996), evidence of a bland musical style bearing little connection to the dramatic content of the musical.<sup>122</sup> The lighter musical style was not well received; reviewers hinted at the music's mediocrity though avoiding direct criticism.<sup>123</sup>

Rodgers failed to allow the story or characters to inspire the songs (think of the bucolic imagery which flashes immediately to mind with the phrase "chicks and ducks and geese better scurry..." from *Oklahoma!*'s "Surrey With the Fringe on Top"). Rodgers indulged himself (and a trend popular in 1953) in *Me and Juliet*, writing a number of Latin-influenced numbers that contained no connection to the plot or characters. The most famous, "No Other Love," is a tango, which Rodgers wanted sung exactly, as if he were more concerned about the form than the emotional content:

Dick Rodgers wanted his songs sung exactly the way he wrote them, he didn't want any deviation. If you started to phrase the slightest bit, he would come backstage and give musical notes. "You go play it in a nightclub, sing it anyway you want, but here in my show, this show, you do it exactly the way it is on paper."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> "That's the Way it Happens" and "You Never Had It So Good," (which was cut) were incorporated into the 1996 Broadway revival of *State Fair*, used as dance band pieces. Two songs from *Pipe Dream* were also taken: "The Man I Used to Be" and "The Next Time it Happens." A Broadway revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Flower Drum Song* in 2002 also interpolated *Pipe Dream*'s "The Next Time it Happens."

<sup>123</sup> For a sampling of reviews, see Suskin, *Opening Night on Broadway*, 426-429.

<sup>124</sup> Hayes interview, 19 November 2003.

The unremarkable tunes invented by Rodgers for *Me and Juliet* failed to capture the essence of the production. The music, combined with the dull lyrics of Hammerstein, together make up a score that is arguably forgettable.

### Legacy

There have been no significant revivals of *Me and Juliet* in the fifty years since its premiere. According to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, a simple 2002 staging at Manhattan's York Theatre is the only production of note in at least twenty-five years.<sup>125</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein were unsuccessful because they took both the show's content and the audience reaction for granted. Omar Ranney understood this on *Me and Juliet*'s very first night in Cleveland. He called it short on "heart," the one thing which it should have had more than anything, considering the intent of the musical.<sup>126</sup> Audiences were confused by a nebulous show-within-a-show which served no purpose, lacking even the sparkle of innovative choreography. Though embracing the can-do attitude of the 1950s through spectacular scenic effects, the musical did not connect with the cultural landscape of the era. A hallmark of previous Rodgers and Hammerstein successes was the musical as social allegory, but political commentary was absent in *Me and Juliet*. The music was mediocre and the lyrics clumsy at best. But as stated in the song "Intermission Talk," "the show still goes on, the theatre's not gone,"<sup>127</sup> and Rodgers and Hammerstein soon began working earnestly on a show which would stand in stark contrast to *Me and Juliet*: 1955's *Pipe Dream*.

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<sup>125</sup> "Buried Treasures." *Happy Talk: News of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization* 9, no. 3 (Summer 2002), <http://www.rnh.com/news/spring2002/buried.htm>, accessed 13 March 2003. According to conversations with several individuals in attendance, the performances were well attended and response was positive.

<sup>126</sup> Ranney, "Me and Juliet Lacks Spark."

<sup>127</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Me and Juliet*, 109.

## *PIPE DREAM*

### **Background**

When the curtain rose on 30 November 1955, *Pipe Dream* had already secured more than \$1.2 million, the greatest advance ticket sale of any Broadway show to that time. Audiences were drawn not only by the names Rodgers and Hammerstein but also those of John Steinbeck, who wrote the book on which the musical was based, and Helen Traubel, former Wagnerian soprano of the Metropolitan Opera, starring in one of the lead roles.

Conventional wisdom held that the fate of this new musical was almost pre-destined: there was no possible way that it could fail. But it did fail, and fail miserably by the gold-medal standard of Rodgers & Hammerstein. *Pipe Dream* ran only until the end of the season, and was the only Rodgers and Hammerstein musical that had no life beyond Broadway.<sup>128</sup>

The show ran for 246 performances, though *Pipe Dream* was even less successful than the number of performances might imply: over seventy of the nights were sold to groups, or theater “parties” associated with large businesses or organizations.<sup>129</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein had never allowed parties to buy entire performances but made an exception with *Pipe Dream*. As Traubel remembered in her autobiography, “That meant

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<sup>128</sup> *Pipe Dream* was one of only two Rodgers and Hammerstein shows not produced in London. The other was *Me and Juliet*, but even it had the aforementioned eight-week afterlife in Chicago.

<sup>129</sup> Ken Mendelbaum. *Not Since “Carrie”: Forty Years of Broadway Musical Flops* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 97. Previous Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals far outstripped *Pipe Dream* without selling to parties, namely *Oklahoma!* ( 2,212 performances), *South Pacific* (1,925), *The King and I* (1,246), and *Carousel* (890). Rodgers and Hammerstein discuss their views on the subject of parties in Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, “The Theatre and Theatre Parties,” *New York Times*, 10 February 1946, 45.

the show would have a long run—win, lose, or draw.”<sup>130</sup> *Pipe Dream* lingered for seven months, entertaining full houses on weekends or party nights, but playing to a virtually empty theatre on the remaining evenings. Even more ironic, Rodgers and Hammerstein had always made it a policy never to invest in their own shows. For *Pipe Dream*, however, Rodgers and Hammerstein put up the cost of the entire production themselves and “lost a fortune.”<sup>131</sup> According to Traubel, the show was “a failure in every sense.”<sup>132</sup>

How could such a successful team miss the target so egregiously? *Pipe Dream* seems to have been fraught with problems from its earliest stages, and has not had a major revival in the forty-seven years since its debut.<sup>133</sup> *Pipe Dream* stands apart from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s more successful shows in its source and subject matter. The way in which they adapted the literary source to the Broadway stage differed from the norm, resulting in a highly atypical final product. Making matters worse, Rodgers battled cancer during the *Pipe Dream* production period.

To better understand *Pipe Dream*’s evolution and the reasons for its failure, I will examine its score, lyrics, and dialogue. I will emphasize songs and scenes that demonstrate Rodgers and Hammerstein’s intended social commentary, how this commentary was adapted from the original book by Steinbeck, and how these values related to American society of the 1950s.

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<sup>130</sup> Helen Traubel, *St. Louis Woman* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 257.

<sup>131</sup> Ethan Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 173.

<sup>132</sup> Traubel, *St. Louis Woman*, 257.

<sup>133</sup> *Pipe Dream* was staged by South Shore Music Circus, Cohasset, MA, 15-20 July 1957. See Stanley Green, ed. *Rodgers and Hammerstein Fact Book: A Record of Their Works Together and with Other Collaborators* (New York: The Lynn Farnol Group, 1980), 611. 2002 was the centennial of both Rodgers’s and Steinbeck’s birth and saw two minor productions. Hofstra University featured *Pipe Dream* as part of John Steinbeck conference. In San Francisco, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street Moon presented *Pipe Dream* as the second of five Rodgers musicals, from 22 May-9 June. Currently, rights for the show are restricted. See “Buried Treasures,” Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization.

## Origins and Form

John Steinbeck's first post-war novel, *Cannery Row* (1945), was met with mixed reviews. Set in a slum of Monterey, it was a darkly comic book filled with bums, prostitutes, and the working poor. There is no central plot per se. Steinbeck instead chooses to highlight the many personal philosophies, both hilarious and profound, of the various characters. Critics were struck by the author's shift away from the socially significant plots of works like *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.<sup>134</sup> *Cannery Row* is the voice of a less serious Steinbeck, but it is by no means light.

*Sweet Thursday*, published in 1954, also takes place in Monterey's Cannery Row, and features a number of the same characters. Critics derided this novel, with the *New York Times Book Review* saying that it sounded like the "working script of a musical comedy, on the order of, say, *Pal Joey*."<sup>135</sup> Steinbeck responded: "Some of the critics are so concerned for my literary position that they can't read a book of mine without worrying where it will fit in my place in history. Who gives a damn?"<sup>136</sup>

Steinbeck did in fact write the book with the express purpose of turning it into a musical. But the book is not simply "sentimental mishmash,"<sup>137</sup> as one reviewer wrote. *Sweet Thursday* is a loosely structured novel consisting of dialogue-heavy scenes tied together with colorful, Steinbeckian narration. Unlike its prequel, *Sweet Thursday* has a straightforward plot that frames the more important discussions of character. Though not as gloomy as previous works like *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck's novel nonetheless

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<sup>134</sup> Richard Astro, "John Steinbeck," *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 9: American Novelists, 1910-1945*, ed. James J. Martine (Detroit: Gale, 1981), 43-68. Also available online <http://www.galenet.com/servlet/LitRC>, accessed 13 October 2003.

<sup>135</sup> Cited in Citron, *The Wordsmiths*, 256.

<sup>136</sup> Cited in Frederick Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music: The Story of Rodgers and Hammerstein* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2002), 230.

<sup>137</sup> Astro, "John Steinbeck."

included characters and a setting alien to musical theatre of the day. Few—if any—proven Broadway musicals had dealt with the type of characters and plotlines central to Steinbeck's oeuvre.

In *Sweet Thursday*, a young vagrant girl by the name of Suzy lands in Monterey and is taken in by Fauna, the proprietor of the Bear Flag Café, a house of prostitution. Unlike the cruel madam in Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, though, Fauna has a heart of gold. Doc, the marine biologist who was at the center of the action in *Cannery Row*, is re-introduced to Steinbeck's readers. Doc's friends are almost all unemployed and spend their time lounging at the Palace Flophouse and attempting to locate Doc a wife. Sparks soon fly between Doc and Suzy, but the two have difficulty admitting their feelings to each other. The motherly Fauna steps in a number of times to help the relationship along. After a fight with Doc, an insecure Suzy moves into an abandoned boiler or "pipe," from which the musical's title comes, to prove she doesn't need a husband. With the intervention of Fauna and Doc's friends, the two admit their feelings to each other and agree to get married. As the book concludes, Doc accepts a job as a university researcher and the two leave Monterey together.

The idea for turning Steinbeck's vision of Monterey into a musical first came from Ernie Martin, who had produced *Guys and Dolls* and other Broadway shows with Cy Feuer. Martin suggested to his partner that they develop a musical based on the characters in *Cannery Row*, as he was fascinated by the colorful characters and locale.<sup>138</sup> Martin immediately thought of Loesser as a candidate for writing the songs, but committed to finishing *The Most Happy Fella*, Loesser passed up the offer. Despite this

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<sup>138</sup> Myrna Katz Frommer and Harry Frommer, *It Happened on Broadway: An Oral History of the Great White Way* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1998), 112.

setback, Feuer and Martin pitched their idea to Steinbeck. The novelist offered to write a book based on *Cannery Row* that would be more adaptable to the stage, and to give the dramatic rights for the work to Feuer and Martin.<sup>139</sup> When someone suggested Rodgers and Hammerstein, Feuer approached them and said

Look, you've been in the sweetness and light business. You're always writing shows with little girls running around the stage with bows on their asses. We're in the gritty business. Why don't you come down to our level? Get into this. It has John's literary stamp on it.<sup>140</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein decided to accept the project. The two always produced their own shows, so they bought the rights to *Sweet Thursday* from Feuer and Martin, offering them a percentage of the show's earnings. Feuer recalls thinking, "Terrific, we're rich."<sup>141</sup> Instead, *Pipe Dream* was the only Rodgers and Hammerstein show never to make a profit.

Rodgers and Hammerstein were good friends with Steinbeck.<sup>142</sup> They had produced his play *Burning Bright*, which was directed by Steinbeck's wife, Elaine.<sup>143</sup> Elaine had also been a stage manager for Rodgers and Hammerstein during their original production of *Oklahoma!* Perhaps because of this relationship, the two accepted the book without their typical judicious consideration. Rodgers contended that this was not the case, saying that he and Hammerstein were simply "enchanted" by the writing and the characters.<sup>144</sup> While Rodgers and Hammerstein had written shows dealing with everyone from cowboys to the King of Siam, they had never dealt with the earthy, hard-edged

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> As an indication of the friendship between the parties, Hammerstein and his wife attended the Steinbeck wedding in 1950.

<sup>143</sup> Rodgers interview with Kenneth Leish, 338.

<sup>144</sup> Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 285.

characters that made *Sweet Thursday* so distinctive; the bordellos and bums of *Pipe Dream* certainly stand in stark contrast to the innocent fun of *State Fair* and the young hoofers in *Me and Juliet*.

Steinbeck knew the colorful setting of Monterey well: Cannery Row was a place where he had once lived and worked. Doc was based on a real man, a friend of Steinbeck's by the name of Ed Ricketts. Steinbeck describes the locale:

In Monterey, California, there is a street named Ocean View Avenue but called Cannery Row. A number of years ago it was a colorful street lined with sardine canneries, Chinese hotels and restaurants. It was enlivened with honky-tonks and pleasure domes interspersed with weed-grown vacant lots strewn with timbers and rusted pipes and boilers cast out by the canneries.<sup>145</sup>

However, according to Rodgers and Hammerstein biographer Stanley Green, the denizens of Cannery Row "were strangers" to Rodgers and Hammerstein, "no matter how much they admired Steinbeck's book."<sup>146</sup> Arguably, Rodgers and Hammerstein had succeeded in the past by "venerating the middle class," whereas the downtrodden characters in *Sweet Thursday* were, according to Rodgers, individuals "we haven't met before in our work."<sup>147</sup>

Hammerstein's misunderstanding of the local dialect, for example, finds its way into the *Pipe Dream* script. Robert Morsberger, in the *Steinbeck Quarterly*, laments Hammerstein's universal dialect, a type of language indiscriminately applied to New

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<sup>145</sup> John Steinbeck, "Dreams Piped From Cannery Row." *New York Times*, 27 November 1955, 1-3.

<sup>146</sup> Stanley Green, *The Rodgers and Hammerstein Story* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1963), 149.

<sup>147</sup> Bruce Kirle, "Reconciliation, Resolution, and the Political Role of *Oklahoma!* in American Consciousness," *Theatre Journal* 55 (2003), 253.



Englanders (*Carousel*), Okies, and those in Cannery Row. For example, Steinbeck's "fella" is replaced by the less convincing "feller" in the musical adaptation.<sup>148</sup>

Additionally, the very style in which the book was written proved difficult for Hammerstein. Though Steinbeck wrote with the theatre in mind, *Sweet Thursday* was more of "a mood piece...based on how life feels" and not contingent on action, writes Broadway historian Ethan Mordden.<sup>149</sup> Although some Steinbeck works have been successfully adapted as plays or operas, Mordden points out that *Sweet Thursday* is the "impish fantasist Steinbeck, a spinner of antic parables of the colorfully humdrum life of Monterey, the Steinbeck of *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*."<sup>150</sup> In *Sweet Thursday*, Steinbeck describes Cannery Row as "a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream."<sup>151</sup> Long paragraphs of narration are strung together to describe the characters, their mood, and the setting. Chapters begin with lines like, "Some days are born ugly"<sup>152</sup> or "Of all our murky inventions, guilt is at once the most devious, the most comic, the most painful."<sup>153</sup>

Throughout the novel Doc struggles, caught up in the miniscule details of day-to-day existence, always yearning for more satisfaction from life; he watches the world pass him by. His feelings are not—and in many ways cannot be—described in dialogue with other characters. For example, Steinbeck writes the following:

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<sup>148</sup> Robert Morsberger, "Not so Sweet Thursday," *The Steinbeck Quarterly* 21 (Summer-Fall 1988), 93.

<sup>149</sup> Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 169.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*; MGM's 1942 film of *Tortilla Flat* is phony even for its day, and the same studio's 1982 try at *Cannery Row* (using, like *Pipe Dream*, the *Sweet Thursday* plot line) failed. See Mordden, *Coming Up Roses*, 177.

<sup>151</sup> John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row* (New York, Coronet, 1945), 1.

<sup>152</sup> Steinbeck, *Sweet Thursday*, 75.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

Doc was changing in spite of himself, in spite of the prayers of his friends, in spite of his own knowledge. And why not? Men do change, and change comes like a little wind that ruffles the curtains at dawn, and it comes like the stealthy perfume of wildflowers hidden in the grass. Change may be announced by a small ache, so that you think you're catching cold. Or you may feel a faint disgust for something you loved yesterday.

Where does discontent start? You are warm enough, but you shiver. You are fed, yet hunger gnaws you. You have been loved, but your yearning wanders in new fields. And to prod all these there's time, the bastard time. The end of life is now not so terribly far away – you can see it the way you see the finish line when you come into the stretch—and your mind says, “Have I worked enough? Have I eaten enough? Have I loved enough?” All of these, of course, are the foundation of man's greatest curse, and perhaps his greatest glory.<sup>154</sup>

Being seduced by writing like this “was where we made our big mistake,” said Rodgers in later years.<sup>155</sup> *Sweet Thursday* is often darkly comic. The characters speak with a cynicism that was unfamiliar to Rodgers and Hammerstein.

The duo struggled to find in the static plotlines ways to entertain audiences expecting chorus lines and blatant humor. In Hammerstein's libretti, the characters typically become entangled in a situation and eventually work their way out. But this pattern is at odds with Steinbeck's unmotivated characters. Says Mordden, “these are people who refuse to fit into anything as methodical as a musical comedy, and the show turns them into puppets dangling on Rodgers and Hammerstein's strings.”<sup>156</sup> There were bound to be troubles in adapting the book because there was no way to make *Sweet Thursday* fit into a highly organized form like other Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 15-17.

<sup>155</sup> Rodgers interview with Kenneth Leish, 339.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Mordden, *Coming Up Roses*, 138.

The standard Rodgers and Hammerstein form always included a happy ending. Stacy Wolf suggests that successful Broadway musicals of the time conveyed a confident spirit that was embraced by 1950s audiences who were encouraged by economic expansion and increasing buying power.<sup>158</sup> *Pipe Dream* lacks this air of optimism, and even the “happy” ending is reached through acceptance rather than choice.

The book also lacks a sub-plot or major conflict. Fauna and the Flophouse bums merely serve as “symbiotic lovers” working to bring Doc and Suzy together.<sup>159</sup> Because they have no story of their own, the supporting characters seem distant.<sup>160</sup> Fauna falls directly into place as “The Advisor,” a female character appearing in most Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals.<sup>161</sup> Like Mother Superior singing “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” in *The Sound of Music*, this character type works well in a supporting role, encouraging the lead character on to greatness. *Pipe Dream*’s Fauna is onstage far more than her *Sound of Music* counterpart, however, and her role as advice-giver and truth-teller is one-dimensional.<sup>162</sup> Ted Chapin writes, “...if we’re being asked to follow the story of a

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<sup>158</sup> Wolf 13.

<sup>159</sup> Richard J. Kislak, “Nine Musical Plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein: A Critical Study in Content and Form,” Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1970, 128.

<sup>160</sup> Mandelbaum, *Not Since “Carrie”*, 99.

<sup>161</sup> The Advisor is Aunt Eller in *Oklahoma*, Nettie in *Carousel*, Bloody Mary in *South Pacific*, Lady Thiang in *The King and I*, Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella*, and Mother Superior in *The Sound of Music*.

<sup>162</sup> Richard M. Goldstein. “‘I Enjoy Being a Girl’: Women in the Plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein.” *Popular Music and Society* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1989), 3; Stephen Citron suggests that Rodgers and Hammerstein were often influenced by their wives and wrote musicals that glorified mothers and wholesome women. These “matriarchal” musicals stand in contrast to male-dominated shows epitomized by musicals like *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Brigadoon*. Interestingly, the *Pipe Dream* book was dedicated to the wives of Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Steinbeck, “for their tireless supervision.” See Citron, *The Wordsmiths*, 254.

person who assists everyone else, how ultimately satisfying can that character, and the show, be to an audience?”<sup>163</sup>

Although Hammerstein began planning the libretto more than two years before the 1955 premiere, he and Rodgers were also busy with other projects at this time.<sup>164</sup> For much of 1953, Hammerstein was in London producing *The King & I*; at the same time, he organized potential scenes and song titles for *Pipe Dream*. The actual writing of dialogue and lyrics began in January, 1954, but Rodgers and Hammerstein were also involved with the film version of *Oklahoma!*<sup>165</sup> As executive producers of the movie, Rodgers and Hammerstein spent a considerable part of the year in California and Arizona. Consequently, when *Sweet Thursday* was published in the fall of 1954, Hammerstein had only completed about half of the first act.<sup>166</sup>

Later, Hammerstein said, “I must acknowledge indebtedness to John’s original book. In many cases I lifted scenes bodily from *Sweet Thursday* and manipulated, rather than adapted, them for the stage.”<sup>167</sup> This comment contrasts with the prodigious effort Hammerstein put forth in adapting his previous works.<sup>168</sup>

Hammerstein relied heavily upon Steinbeck’s novel perhaps because of time constraints or to preserve Steinbeck’s masterful use of language. Taking for granted the

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<sup>163</sup> Ted Chapin. “By Your Pupils You’ll Be Taught.” *Happy Talk: News of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization*, 7, no. 3 (Summer 2000). Available online: <http://www.rnh.com/news/Summer2000/pupils.htm>, accessed 2 February 2004.

<sup>164</sup> Hammerstein would receive drafts of each chapter from Steinbeck before the novel was published. For more, see Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 230.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> William G. Hyland, *Richard Rodgers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 229.

<sup>167</sup> Cited in *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Oklahoma!*, for example, adapted from Lynn Rigg’s play *Green Grow the Lilacs*, varies from the source in some very important aspects. In fact, the very nature of *Oklahoma!*, the antagonistic forces of the farmers and ranchers, is not addressed in Rigg’s play. The secondary relationship between Ado Annie (farmer’s daughter) and Will Parker (cowboy) not only enhances this contrast but also provides comic relief. See Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves*, 143-144.

author's literary position, Hammerstein may not have assessed critically the viability of the dialogue for the musical stage. Rodgers noted his partner's procrastination with the *Pipe Dream* script and lyrics in a letter he wrote to his wife in August 1954.<sup>169</sup> The show was essentially on hold because Rodgers wanted lyrics before he began to compose.

It was evident from the outset that Rodgers and Hammerstein were consciously trying to strike out in a new direction. The duo articulated their desire for change in a *New York Herald-Tribune* article on the eve of *Pipe Dream*'s New York premiere: "there is an instinctive drive on the part of all living things to change."<sup>170</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein did not want to repeat past formulas simply because they had been successful. Creating *Pipe Dream* was an opportunity to go beyond what was expected because, as Rodgers and Hammerstein said, "the rule of thumb of 'expectability' is just about impossible for us to follow."<sup>171</sup>

First, it was decided that conventional choreography would be "too stylized for Monterey's mañana feeling," and the two engaged the assistance of Boris Runanin for "musical staging."<sup>172</sup> Second, Rodgers and Hammerstein selected Harold Clurman to direct. Clurman was an experienced director of Broadway plays, but had little musical theatre experience. The show was intended to feature the story, its characters, and the musical score, rather than spectacular musical theatre devices.<sup>173</sup> Dealing with the simple

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<sup>169</sup> Rodgers wrote, "Oscar hasn't given me any new material in a number of weeks." Letter, Richard Rodgers to Dorothy Rodgers, 26 August 1954, Richard Rodgers Papers, Box 4, folder 23.

<sup>170</sup> Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. "Pipe Dream: Authors try change of pace in each of their musicals," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 27 November 1955, 4-1.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-2.

<sup>172</sup> Mordden, *Coming Up Roses*, 138.

<sup>173</sup> Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 173.

people of *Sweet Thursday*, it was important to write in a clear, simple, and straightforward way.<sup>174</sup> Said Rodgers:

Having seen the new musicals now playing on Broadway, I came up with a deep conviction that this one of ours should be scaled down to such a fine point that the audience will be forced to concentrate on subtleties rather than size. . . . Part of this formula is the certainty that we don't need a formal dancing or singing group. The people on our stage had better be characters.<sup>175</sup>

Unfortunately, it seems that Rodgers and Hammerstein played it safe with *Pipe Dream*. Despite their efforts, the final product takes only small, calculated risks. To avoid offending the audience, Rodgers and Hammerstein cleaned up the roles of Fauna and Suzy—a madam and her prostitute—rather than using them to their full dramatic potential. Rodgers and Hammerstein themselves were not comfortable with the subject matter. Early in the project, Rodgers wrote to Hammerstein saying that he was concerned about whether the story would be appropriate, questioning “whether we can get away with a factual house of prostitution and make one of the leading characters a working prostitute...”<sup>176</sup>

The material prompted Broadway producer Billy Rose to quip: “You know why Oscar shouldn't have written that? The guy had never been in a whorehouse in his life!”<sup>177</sup> Rodgers later said, “We were well aware that it was something of a mood piece with little real conflict, and that we weren't as well acquainted as we might have been with bums, drifters, and happy houses of prostitution.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Hyland, *Richard Rodgers*, 228.

<sup>175</sup> Letter, 26 August 1954, Richard Rodgers Papers.

<sup>176</sup> Cited in Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 323.

<sup>177</sup> Cited in *ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 287.

Rodgers and Hammerstein had found success in the past by combining fantasy and reality. Shows like *Oklahoma*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I* were set in historic or exotic locales but addressed concerns relevant to contemporaneous audiences. *Pipe Dream* may have been a little too real, or hit too close to home for fans of Rodgers and Hammerstein who would rather have escaped to 19<sup>th</sup>-century New England or Siam.

### **The Rehearsal Period**

Rehearsals for *Pipe Dream* began in September, 1955. Problems began immediately: Rodgers was hospitalized on the day of the first scheduled read-through. Only a week earlier, the composer had been diagnosed with jaw cancer.<sup>179</sup> Determined to beat the disease and keep *Pipe Dream* on schedule, Rodgers attended the morning session of the first rehearsal to play through the newly-completed score before heading to the hospital.<sup>180</sup>

The surgery was successful, but Rodgers remained hospitalized for nearly two weeks. The composer must have been entertained by a satirical letter from Steinbeck describing the state of rehearsals:

You will be glad to know that Elaine is doing a really adequate job in your place in Piece Pipe. She has changed some of the songs around and rewritten a few lyrics and I am sure you will approve. She had to fire three actors but she replaced them with her friends—good, ambitious kids who could learn probably. Also, she has changed the ending. It takes place in a submarine putting out into the sunset with the anthem “Atoms Away, My Lads, Atoms

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<sup>179</sup> Rodgers was something of a hypochondriac, always complaining of upset stomachs and body aches, and he viewed cancer with an “irrational fear...amounting to a phobia.” Rodgers dreaded the disease in part because both of his parents had battled cancer, and his father lost his life to it. See Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*, 329.

<sup>180</sup> The composer had finished the score only the weekend before; see Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 286.

Away.” But just rest easy. Everything is being done that can be done.<sup>181</sup>

Though not as outrageous as the letter, there were problems in the *Pipe Dream* rehearsals. Clurman was officially at the helm, but Hammerstein helped out significantly. The lyricist often stepped in for Clurman, who had never directed a musical. To further complicate matters, Hammerstein appeared indecisive without his partner’s firmer hand, with whom he “spoke in one voice on every creative decision that was made.”<sup>182</sup>

Ten days after surgery, Rodgers attended a rehearsal of *Pipe Dream*, saying, “I loved every minute of it.” Two days later, he left Memorial Hospital and returned to rehearsals, though his presence was symbolic at best.<sup>183</sup>

For all his determination, Rodgers’ return to rehearsals did not end *Pipe Dream*’s woes. Traubel said her dissatisfaction with the show was difficult to voice. “It was impossible to bring up such minor matters as a song or two against a man who had shown his guts in such a fashion.”<sup>184</sup>

Traubel was experiencing *Pipe Dream*’s troubles firsthand. The diva soon grew displeased with her music, and conversely, Rodgers and Hammerstein grew dissatisfied

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<sup>181</sup> Letter, 27 September 1955, Richard Rodgers Papers.

<sup>182</sup> Bert Fink, “Pipe Dream,” 11.

<sup>183</sup> The composer found it “tremendously stimulating” to be “surrounded by healthy young people.” Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 286-287; Rodgers, still weak, was forced to watch rehearsals from a wheelchair. With little control over his jaw, Rodgers’ speech was slurred, and those working with him struggled to understand him. See Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 233; Rodgers remembers these difficulties in his autobiography: “For the first month or so I had handicaps but no visible scars. I couldn’t eat properly or speak well, because my tongue hadn’t yet learned how to behave. For a while, too, my left arm was quite stiff and I was afraid I’d never be able to play the piano again. But I insisted on going to New Haven and Boston for the *Pipe Dream* tryouts.... Since then, I have had no physical trouble that could be related in any way to the operation.” Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 287.

<sup>184</sup> Traubel, *St. Louis Woman*, 259.



with her voice. To Rodgers and Hammerstein, Traubel's vocal strength seemed greatly diminished from when they first met her in a New York night club.<sup>185</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein likely hoped Traubel would make *Pipe Dream* successful in the same way Ezio Pinza, another singer at the Met, had done for *South Pacific*.<sup>186</sup> However, soon after rehearsals began, Rodgers and Hammerstein began to rethink their decision. Traubel was uncomfortable singing Rodgers and Hammerstein's showtunes; her voice, she felt, was ill-suited for the specialized style of songs and the emphasis on lyrics required in Fauna's role.<sup>187</sup>

Traubel's voice did not project well in the theatre.<sup>188</sup> The singer bemoaned the fact that all her songs were "down songs."<sup>189</sup> Critics complained that Traubel's voice had not been given a chance to shine.<sup>190</sup> It was suggested that the singer be replaced, but Hammerstein was always one to avoid controversy. In the midst of contract negotiations less than two months into the show's run, Hammerstein wrote to Rodgers, "I'd rather

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<sup>185</sup> Traubel recalls this first encounter with the famous Broadway men: "When I had sung my first big New York night-club date at the Copacabana, Hammerstein's bearlike bulk had come backstage. He was, as always, a wonderful guy. He wagged a finger at me and said, 'You realize, young lady, you are headed straight for Broadway, don't you?'" A few weeks later, Rodgers heard her sing in Las Vegas. After hearing this second performance, he offered her the role without a formal audition and she accepted. See Traubel, *St. Louis Woman*, 256-257.

<sup>186</sup> Traubel had been dismissed from her duties at the Met after beginning to sing in New York night clubs in the early 1950s. According to Met officials, Traubel was diminishing herself and the opera company's reputation by appearing in such places. See Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 172.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>188</sup> Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 326; Rodgers and Hammerstein eventually conceded to amplifying her voice. The use of microphones on a Broadway stage was still relatively rare, but Rodgers admitted in his oral history that amplification was used as early as 1947's *Allegro*.

<sup>189</sup> Traubel, *St. Louis Woman*, 259.

<sup>190</sup> Traubel said her voice "was suited to certain ways of singing," and the press agreed. One Boston critic said that "the vast vocal resources of Miss Traubel did not find satisfactory employment" and *Variety* wrote that "she never gets a chance to bounce any notes off the far wall of the theater and stampede an audience" like she had when she sang Wagner. See Traubel, *St. Louis Woman*, 258-260.

omit Fauna's songs or get someone else to sing them. It is a little embarrassing."<sup>191</sup>

Despite this, Hammerstein did nothing to remove Traubel from the cast. Rodgers later said that hiring Traubel was "a big mistake" and that her "voice had gone, to a great extent..."<sup>192</sup>

Today we have only the cast album to judge Traubel's vocal strength. The recording presents a strong performance, though little can be inferred about on-stage presentation based on the product of a recording studio. Furthermore, the cast album was recorded less than a week after the show's New York premiere and gives us little evidence of how the star's voice may have deteriorated throughout the run of the show.<sup>193</sup> Therefore, Traubel's voice may not have been as severely disabled as some authors have claimed.<sup>194</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein also were unhappy with Traubel as an actress.<sup>195</sup> This judgement is corroborated by several authors and the singer herself, who said "I have never claimed to be much of an actress anyway."<sup>196</sup> Traubel's acting may have been unconvincing because Rodgers and Hammerstein kept changing her character. Instead of a rough-around-the-edges madam, Traubel ended up playing a character resembling a social worker. The edits being made to her character were indicative of changes as a

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<sup>191</sup> Letter, Oscar Hammerstein to Richard Rodgers, 13 January 1956, Richard Rodgers Papers.

<sup>192</sup> Rodgers interview with Kenneth Leish, 340.

<sup>193</sup> In a recent *Opera News* article, Traubel's performance on the *Pipe Dream* recording is characterized as strong though "in a miserable belt-induced predicament," suggesting that Rodgers' music didn't allow Traubel to use her true vocal abilities. The article also points out that Traubel was "still potent" in a 1960 NBC airing of *The Mikado*. See Conrad L. Osborne, "American Valkyrie," *Opera News* (April 2003), 41.

<sup>194</sup> Many critics stated that the music didn't suit her style, but no reviews of *Pipe Dream* criticize Traubel's actual vocal ability.

<sup>195</sup> Rodgers interview with Kenneth Leish, 340.

<sup>196</sup> Traubel, *St. Louis Woman*, 258; This, too, can be debated; Ethan Mordden points out that Traubel's Hollywood debut, *Deep in My Heart*, filmed just before the production of *Pipe Dream*, reveals "a very engaging performer." See Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 174.

whole within the show. Rodgers and Hammerstein were “cleaning up” the Steinbeck story to make it more palatable to a Broadway audience. As more revisions were made to the script, Traubel found it more difficult to identify with her character. In an attempt to elucidate character, the singer set up a meeting with Steinbeck. The author explained Fauna’s character in detail (as she appeared in *Sweet Thursday*), describing “memories, posture, voice, clothes, gestures, anecdotes,” and more.<sup>197</sup> Regarding Traubel’s character, Steinbeck preferred Hammerstein’s adaptation before changes were made. “I loved the original scenes that had her such a human being – salty, tough, and forthright...”<sup>198</sup>

The diva became ill a few months into the show and did not perform for a number of weeks.<sup>199</sup> Traubel dramatically recalled her sickness as perhaps being “a psychosomatic ailment from feeling sad and wretched about my role.”<sup>200</sup>

### Adaptation and Revisions

Doc and Suzy are the central characters in *Pipe Dream*. On Broadway, Doc was played by William Johnson, an actor and singer who had succeeded Alfred Drake in *Kismet*.<sup>201</sup> Opposite Johnson, Judy Tyler played the role of Suzy. Tyler was well known

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<sup>197</sup> John Steinbeck, *A Life in Letters*. Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, ed. (London: Heinemann, 1975), 514.

<sup>198</sup> Cited in Traubel, *St. Louis Woman*, 257.

<sup>199</sup> Traubel was eventually released from her role, and during the final month of the production, Fauna was played by Nancy Andrews.

<sup>200</sup> Traubel, *St. Louis Woman*, 258.

<sup>201</sup> When the rights for *Sweet Thursday* still belonged to Feuer and Martin, the role was offered to Henry Fonda. The actor, who had never sung before, began taking voice lessons. The lessons proved to be of no help, however, and after twelve months, Fonda is quoted as saying he still “couldn’t sing for shit.” By this time, the rights had been sold to Rodgers, whom is cited as saying, “I’m not gonna have Henry Fonda singing my music, for Chrissake.” See Frommer, *It Happened on Broadway*, 113.

as a cast member of the Howdy Doody television show, on which she was Princess Summer-Fall-Winter-Spring.<sup>202</sup>

Throughout the rehearsals and out-of-town tryouts, Johnson and Tyler, along with Traubel, endured many changes to *Pipe Dream*.<sup>203</sup> Songs were added and dropped, lines edited, and scenes rearranged. Instead of improving the show, the adjustments only seemed to complicate matters. While earlier Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals underscore timely and controversial social messages, *Pipe Dream*'s revisions softened the show's grittiness. Hammerstein actually made Steinbeck's book *less* socially relevant by marginalizing the very relationship challenging conventional wisdom, that of Doc and Suzy. Furthermore, the lowly characters meant to represent America's poorest citizens are converted into mere caricatures, cartoon characters that are difficult to take seriously.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's most successful shows asked audiences to question issues as diverse as physical abuse (*Carousel*) and slavery (*The King and I*).<sup>204</sup> In *Oklahoma!*, Rodgers and Hammerstein even introduced foreign relations. The relationship between farmers and cowboys in *Oklahoma!* resonated with audiences who debated isolationist and interventionist attitudes toward World War II, writes Bruce Kirle. On the domestic front, *Oklahoma!* "provided reconciliation and resolution by retaining a vision of rural America that appealed to conservatives and populists, while

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<sup>202</sup> Mandelbaum, *Not Since "Carrie"*, 97; Originally, Rodgers and Hammerstein wanted the up-and-coming actress Julie Andrews to play the part, but she was otherwise committed. Rodgers and Hammerstein eventually got their chance to work with Andrews when she starred in their 1959 television production of *Cinderella*, and again in the film version of *The Sound of Music*. See Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*, 334.

<sup>203</sup> According to Bert Fink, more than any previous Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. See Fink, "Pipe Dream," 11.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

inserting a New Deal message that even grassroots America could be a model of assimilation and tolerance.”<sup>205</sup>

*Carousel* and *South Pacific* both rely heavily upon sexuality, as does Hammerstein’s script for *Carmen Jones*. Hammerstein said the following in a letter to Logan, who had directed of the original production of *South Pacific*:

You know something I’ve decided... there’s only one thing important enough to write a story about, and that’s sex. I’ve discovered that it’s under almost every good story, and unless it’s there you shouldn’t write the story. It’s not worth it.<sup>206</sup>

Each of the productions named above handled controversial issues implicitly.<sup>207</sup> In *Pipe Dream*, however, the roles of Fauna and her prostitutes are explicitly sexual. Despite his notoriety as a womanizer, Rodgers once said, “We write family shows.”<sup>208</sup> Hammerstein, described as being “Victorian” in his views toward the topic, felt that the theatre was “a very moral place”<sup>209</sup> and for Hammerstein, who adapted the book into a stage libretto, it was impossible to faithfully adapt Steinbeck’s words “without violating his own deeply-felt sense of propriety” and negatively affecting the show’s outcome.<sup>210</sup>

A look at the early drafts of the *Pipe Dream* script in the Oscar Hammerstein Papers at the Library of Congress reveal how much Steinbeck’s character changed through the production and rehearsal period. As Hammerstein revised, he blurred Suzy’s

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<sup>205</sup> Kirle, “Reconciliation,” 251-52.

<sup>206</sup> Cited in Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 329; Logan was called in to help make revisions during the Boston try-outs of *Pipe Dream*.

<sup>207</sup> Fink, “Pipe Dream,” 10.

<sup>208</sup> Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 168. The composer is known to have had numerous affairs. Even his daughter, Mary Guettel Rodgers, states in her oral history that as Rodgers’s wife Dorothy aged, “the chorus girls got younger.” See Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*, 266. ; Rodgers’ past collaborations with Lorenz Hart had also included shows like the suggestive *Pal Joey*, but he maintained that the Rodgers and Hammerstein collaboration was different.

<sup>209</sup> Citron, *The Wordsmiths*, 259.

<sup>210</sup> Fink, “Pipe Dream,” 10.

role considerably. Her status as a prostitute was not only made ambiguous, but essentially eliminated. Steinbeck complained that they turned his “tough, dirty road kid” into an “off-duty visiting nurse.”<sup>211</sup> Suzy’s streetwise character was obvious in early drafts of Hammerstein’s adaptation. For example, when Millicent Henderson enters and sees Suzy for the first time, he says, “What time does the floor show start?” Suzy’s tough attitude is seen in her reply, “Who’s the tramp in the mink coat?” When asked her name, Hammerstein initially had Suzy reply, “What’s it to you?” but as performed on opening night, she simply states her name. Other lines indicating Suzy’s toughness are crossed out with Hammerstein’s pencil in the same draft.<sup>212</sup>

Hammerstein’s published book failed to mention Suzy’s criminal record for vagrancy, though early drafts of the *Pipe Dream* script indicate an understanding of Suzy’s character as suggested in *Sweet Thursday*. For example, in a 29 December 1953 draft, when asked if she had ever done time, Suzy answers, “Once. Thirty days—vagrancy,” as in Steinbeck’s novel.<sup>213</sup> But the line was cut in future revisions. Also cut was the song “Nobody’s Fool,” found in a script dated 13 September 1954. The song shows Suzy as the feisty, earthy character suggested by the novel. The lyrics of the song demonstrate Suzy’s character as one with attitude and conviction; the song also makes more clear Suzy’s lifestyle choices:

I am nobody’s fool,  
Nobody’s fooling me.  
My feet are on the ground where they’re supposed to be,  
And all that I believe is what my eyes can see –  
Nobody’s fool am I.  
I’m not just out of school,  
I’ve been around enough

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<sup>211</sup> Cited in Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 126.

<sup>212</sup> Script dated 29 December 1953, Oscar Hammerstein Collection, Box 17.

<sup>213</sup> Undated script, Oscar Hammerstein Collection, Box 17.

To know that love is just a game of blind man's buff [sic],  
So put that in your pipe or write it on your cuff –  
Nobody's fool am I.<sup>214</sup>

Hammerstein also eliminated dialogue regarding Suzy's decision to work for Fauna. In Steinbeck's original, Fauna invites Suzy to stay at the Bear Flag Café, making her responsibilities clear: "There's some dames born for this business. Some are too lazy to work and some hate men. Don't hardly none of them enjoy what they're doing."<sup>215</sup> Fauna then asks Suzy: "Ever worked a house?" When Suzy says no, the madam replies that the job "ain't as bad as the street."<sup>216</sup> In an early draft of *Pipe Dream*, Fauna asks Suzy, "Can you give off with a smile?" Suzy does not reply; stage directions indicate she simply "grins."<sup>217</sup> In the final *Pipe Dream* script however, Suzy doesn't get a chance to answer. Fauna steps in as a sort of Mother Theresa figure stating, "I'm taking her in with me."<sup>218</sup> Consequently, Suzy's role in the brothel is unclear. Steinbeck objected strenuously to this change, saying, "It's either a whore house, or it isn't." Likewise, "Suzy either took a job there, or she didn't."<sup>219</sup> Hammerstein's ambiguity toward Suzy's character made her distant and uninteresting.

The transformation of Suzy and Doc is at the heart of *Sweet Thursday*. Rodgers and Hammerstein struggled with how to represent the feelings of a prostitute juggling her job responsibilities with those of a serious relationship.<sup>220</sup> When Suzy's internal conflict is eliminated, her relationship with Doc lacks drama. In a memo to Rodgers and

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Steinbeck, *Sweet Thursday*, 33.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Script dated 29 December 1953, Oscar Hammerstein Collection, Box 17.

<sup>218</sup> Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Pipe Dream* (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), 37.

<sup>219</sup> Cited in Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 326.

<sup>220</sup> Hyland, *Richard Rodgers*, 229.

Hammerstein, Steinbeck wrote that the relationship between Doc and Suzy degenerates to simply “two immature people who are piqued at each other.”<sup>221</sup> When Doc skirts around the issue of Suzy’s job at the Café, his reasons for rejecting Suzy seem trivial and superficial. For Suzy, incentive for change and redemption was not a motivating factor because she was never portrayed as anything more than down-on-her-luck. In *Sweet Thursday*, Doc rejects Suzy because she is a prostitute. Said Steinbeck, “I think if you will finally bring the theme of this play into the open, but wide open, you will have solved its great weakness and have raised it to a high level.” Doing so, says the novelist, would remove any doubt that the show “side-steps, hesitates, mish-mashes and never faces its theme.”<sup>222</sup>

Steinbeck was happy at first with the adaptation of his novel. As late as September 1955, the author wrote that “it’s a good show. Fine score and book and wonderful direction and cast.”<sup>223</sup> But as the musical began to develop, he saw his gritty Monterey being sterilized. During rehearsals, the writer sent Rodgers and Hammerstein a series of long memos with his concerns, urging the duo to remain faithful to the original book. Small complaints grew into larger objections as Rodgers and Hammerstein cut entire sections of the book from the working script.<sup>224</sup> Steinbeck wrote to his wife that the day they changed the working title from Bear Flag Café (as suggested by Steinbeck) to *Pipe Dream*, “my heart fell.” As Steinbeck saw it, Rodgers and Hammerstein “didn’t believe” in *Sweet Thursday* anymore.<sup>225</sup> If the whorehouse was no longer at the center of the musical both in name and spirit, the integrity of the entire production was being

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<sup>221</sup> Cited in Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 327.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Steinbeck, *A Life in Letters*, 511.

<sup>224</sup> Fordin, *Getting to Know Him*, 326.

<sup>225</sup> Cited in Fink, “Pipe Dream,” 10.



compromised. One of his most passionate letters was written to Hammerstein in late September. Steinbeck feared the show was “in grave danger of mediocrity”:

There are many very excellent things in *Pipe Dream*. If I do not dwell on them it is because you hear them everywhere and this letter purports to be a working document and not either a criticism or a flattery. I do not think this is a time to spare feelings nor to mince words.... Norton [Eliot Norton, Boston critic] used the word *conventional* to describe his uneasiness. I have heard others describe the same thing as sweetness, loss of toughness, lack of definition, whatever people say when they feel they are being let down. And believe me, Oscar, this is the way audiences feel. What emerges now is an old fashioned love story. And that is not good enough to people who have looked forward to this show based on you and me and Dick. When *Oklahoma* came out it violated every conventional rule of Musical Comedy. You were out on a limb. They loved it and were for you. South Pacific made a great jump. And even more you were ordered to go ahead. But Oscar, time has moved. You can't stand still. That's the price you have to pay for being Rodgers and Hammerstein.

The only thing this story has, besides some curious characters, is the almost tragic situation that a man of high mind and background and culture takes to his breast an ignorant, ill-tempered little hooker who isn't even very good at that. He has to take her, knowing that a great part of it is going to be misery, and she has to take him knowing she will have to live the loneliness of not even knowing what he is talking about if the subject gets above the belt, and yet each of them knows that the worse hell is the penalty of separation.

I think we are in danger, not of failure but of pale and half-assed success which to be would be worse than failure.<sup>226</sup>

Certainly Hammerstein saw potential with *Sweet Thursday*, especially the relationship between Suzy and Doc. The two were the “star-crossed lovers” seen in so many of Rodgers and Hammerstein's collaborations. Both characters are out to prove they don't need anybody until they discover true love. In *Pipe Dream*, though, the plot isn't just a “boy-meets-girl” and “happily ever after” story. Rodgers and Hammerstein

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<sup>226</sup> Letter, John Steinbeck to Oscar Hammerstein, [October 1955], Oscar Hammerstein Collection; this letter has been reprinted in Steinbeck, *A Life in Letters*, 516-517.

wanted Doc and Suzy's relationship to demonstrate love as a "socially redemptive force."<sup>227</sup> True love proves its power over alcoholism and prostitution, giving the characters a truer version of happiness. In some ways their relationship represents the American Dream, a sort of "upward social mobility"<sup>228</sup> demonstrating that positive results can come from hard work. Headstrong Suzy states that "I'm doin' it all myself."<sup>229</sup>

Tender moments of heartfelt passion between the two characters are limited, though. In the song, "All at Once You Know," Doc sings a lyric which demonstrates an unexpected realization of love: "You wonder where / Your heart can go— / Then all at once you know." When Doc realizes that marriage may be his "salvation" from unhappiness, he expresses his desire to wed Suzy in the song, "Will You Marry Me?"<sup>230</sup>

Will you marry me?  
All I own I want you to share.  
This is not to be  
Any light, summer-night love affair  
Like a ship at sea,  
Vainly I looked for a shore.  
Suzy you'll marry me?  
And I will look no more!<sup>231</sup>

"Will You Marry Me?" is sung as the members of Cannery Row hold a masquerade in which all the guests dress up as characters from the fairy tale Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. The Snow White scene climaxes in a truly dramatic moment, with Doc laughing out loud at the appearance of Suzy—dressed as virginal Snow White.

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<sup>227</sup> Kislán, "Nine Musical Plays," 127.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>229</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Pipe Dream*, 145.

<sup>230</sup> Kislán, "Nine Musical Plays," 128.

<sup>231</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Pipe Dream*, 124.

The setting may leave something to be desired, but Steinbeck's writing is engaging and brings to a head the inner conflicts of Doc and Suzy and the emotional chasm that still lies between them. In Steinbeck's original, Doc mocks Suzy and her pure self-representation, but Rodgers and Hammerstein's song does not directly address this important and highly dramatic aspect of their relationship; omitting Doc's attitude of ridicule leaves the scene without the energizing friction so necessary to Doc and Suzy's relationship. Instead, the character remains aloof (singing stock lyrics such as "Like a ship at sea / vainly I looked for shore"), without lines or songs that express his true character

The difficulty in presenting the relationship between Doc and Suzy stemmed from the fact that in Steinbeck's original the two characters struggle to accept themselves rather than each other. In most Rodgers and Hammerstein productions, the main characters work to overcome barriers to their relationship. With tolerance and acceptance of others as central themes to most Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, the relationships become metaphors for racial and ethnic equality. In *Pipe Dream*, however, Suzy cannot express her feelings toward Doc because she is overcome by her past and the belief that she will not be accepted. Because she feels incomplete and inadequate, Suzy envisions herself as an outsider as she sings her character song, "Everybody's Got a Home But Me." This longing is similar to that of Maria in *The Sound of Music*. The title song "functions more as an 'I want' song than as an 'I am' proclamation."<sup>233</sup> Says Andrea Most, "other characters introduce what Maria *is*, as she cannot explain what she is by

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<sup>232</sup> This awkwardness was noted in a 1 December 1955 letter from Joshua Logan to Oscar Hammerstein II. See Oscar Hammerstein Collection, Library of Congress, Box 17.

<sup>233</sup> Most, "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," 3.

herself, only what she wants...a character full of desire.”<sup>234</sup> Likewise, Fauna attempts to encourage the young drifter through the song “Suzy is a Good Thing.” Suzy’s dependence upon Fauna perpetuates her characterization as needy and void of self-worth.

Sanitizing Suzy’s character and blurring the relationship between her and Doc may have come, in part, as a result of outside pressure. At the height of McCarthyism, there was great scrutiny by the government of literary and musical output that might be considered pro-communist. Steinbeck, almost always making a social statement through his works, had been accused of being a sympathizer to communism since the release of *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939.<sup>235</sup> The less serious Steinbeck of *Sweet Thursday* may have been “playing it safe” after appearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee.<sup>236</sup> The biggest compromise came on the part of Hammerstein, however. The revocation of Hammerstein’s passport occurred while *Pipe Dream* was in production. While there is no conclusive evidence that either man consciously made changes to avoid conflict with government authorities, Steinbeck and Hammerstein were certainly aware of HUAC’s presence.

### Reception

Buzz for *Pipe Dream* was great among fans, as indicated by the large advance ticket sales. Correspondence shows that industry insiders, too, anticipated the new show. Joshua Logan wrote to Rodgers in the summer of 1955 saying “the rumors are rife that *Pipe Dream* is wonderful.”<sup>237</sup> Rodgers humbly replied that “nobody has heard any of it

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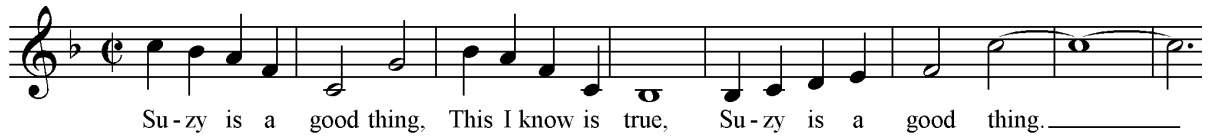
<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Astro, “John Steinbeck.”

<sup>236</sup> Citron, *The Wordsmiths*, 255.

<sup>237</sup> Letter, 29 June 1955, Richard Rodgers Papers, Box 3, folder 23.





Ex. 5. “Suzy is a Good Thing”

New York critics were not as friendly as their out-of-town counterparts. The most positive review came from Brooks Atkinson in the *Times*. *Pipe Dream*, he wrote, was a “pleasant, lazy romance” with a “beautiful” score and “effortless” lyrics. Atkinson lauded Rodgers and Hammerstein for “being professional writers and men of taste.” However, he wrote that Rodgers and Hammerstein were obviously not comfortable with the characters and he also called the bordello setting “a useful substitute for originality.”<sup>242</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musical was derided by most critics for being out of touch and lacking energy.<sup>243</sup> Walter Kerr, in the *Herald-Tribune*, wrote that “the frolicsome moments are rare,” and John Chapman in the *Daily Mirror* said “perhaps Hammerstein and Rodgers are too gentlemanly” for Steinbeck’s world. Wolcott Gibbs, writing for the *New Yorker*, commented that *Pipe Dream*, like *Allegro*, marked another situation in which “an unfortunate book kept an otherwise meritorious [sic] show from ever getting off the ground.”<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Brooks Atkinson. “*Pipe Dream* is based on Steinbeck Novel” (review), *New York Times*, 1 December 1955, 44.

<sup>243</sup> One of the few positive reviews called *Pipe Dream*, “the work of theatre men who know their business.” For this and other reviews, see Stanley Green, ed., *Rodgers and Hammerstein Fact Book: A Record of Their Works Together and with Other Collaborators* (New York: The Lynn Farnol Group, Inc.), 1980, 609.

<sup>244</sup> Reviews cited in Green, *Fact Book*, 609-10.

It wasn't just newspaper critics who were displeased with *Pipe Dream*. Logan wrote a three-paged, typed letter to Hammerstein after seeing the production. He made numerous suggestions including specific cuts to clarify the action on stage. In conclusion, Logan wrote:

...whatever you do, it is worth it because this can be one of your greatest successes and there is absolutely no reason why a small amount of work cannot bring it fully realized to every audience that sees it. Even if you do nothing, it is a wonderful piece of work; unfortunately, it seems a little like what they call in Hollywood a rough cut, which means, as you remember, a cut where there is too much footage but you want to see all your scenes and then decide later how to get it down to length.<sup>245</sup>

The harsh critical and popular reception of *Pipe Dream* is evidence of a strong horizon of expectations from the audiences. Numerous authors have suggested that if *Pipe Dream* had been written by anyone other than Rodgers and Hammerstein, it would likely have been successful. "We had simply gone too far away from what was expected [from us]," said Rodgers. He regretted staging *Pipe Dream* because "we shouldn't have been dealing with prostitutes and tramps."<sup>246</sup> However, Rodgers was also disappointed that the public didn't "accept the show on its own terms," but insisted upon comparing it to "that indefinable thing called the Rodgers & Hammerstein image."<sup>247</sup> Audiences, expecting "the serious, the monumental, and deeply moving," were taken aback by *Pipe Dream*.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Letter, Josh Logan to Oscar Hammerstein II, 1 December 1955, Oscar Hammerstein Collection.

<sup>246</sup> Rodgers interview with Kenneth Leish, 339.

<sup>247</sup> Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 287.

<sup>248</sup> Mandelbaum, *Not Since "Carrie"*, 99.

Even after the critical memos and the poor reviews, it appears the longstanding relationship between Steinbeck and Rodgers and Hammerstein was not strained.<sup>249</sup> On the night of the premiere, Steinbeck wrote a brief note of gratitude to Rodgers, saying of their collaboration that he “enjoyed every minute of it.”<sup>250</sup> Perhaps influenced by the opening night glamour, these words appear to contradict his earlier memos. The following night, too, Steinbeck remained positive about the collaboration; after the performance, he went backstage to meet a remarkably enthusiastic cast. At dinner afterwards, Mordden recounts:

The management sent champagne to their table, and to Steinbeck it just didn't feel like being the father of a big Broadway bomb. It felt like being the father of a wonderful musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

So he turned to Elaine and said, “Isn't the theatre marvelous?”<sup>251</sup>

Perhaps Steinbeck's truest feelings are found in a letter to Elia Kazan less than a week later. “Well, thank God that is over,” he wrote. Steinbeck laments the fact that his character suggestions were never implemented into the show. According to Steinbeck, the reviews “were just” and Rodgers Hammerstein only “thought they could get away with it.”<sup>252</sup>

Rodgers and Hammerstein's failure to take the advice of collaborators, particularly Steinbeck, played a prominent role in *Pipe Dream*'s lackluster reception. Rodgers and Hammerstein were caught between a desire to renew themselves, but still remain true to

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<sup>249</sup> Though nothing came of it, there was even talk of Rodgers and Hammerstein collaborating with Steinbeck on a musical *Of Mice and Men*. See letter, 16 August 1955, Richard Rodgers Papers, Box 4, folder 23.

<sup>250</sup> Letter, 30 November 1955, Richard Rodgers Papers.

<sup>251</sup> Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 177.

<sup>252</sup> Steinbeck, *A Life in Letters*, 518.



their image. Critics recognized this compromise of *Pipe Dream*'s libretto and their judgment likely influenced the show's brief run.

### **Analysis of Music and Lyrics**

Although critics like Durgin thought the music was bland, a closer look suggests otherwise.<sup>253</sup> Rodgers' overture presents a medley of pleasing melodies, but the songs are virtually unknown today. In addition to attractive tunes, *Pipe Dream*'s score also goes far toward capturing the spirit of Steinbeck's setting through careful choices of key, mode, and meter. While *Pipe Dream*'s score is not exceptional, it is more inspired than *Me and Juliet*. Below, a number of songs are studied for their musical interest and effectiveness in characterizing the tone and content of the book.

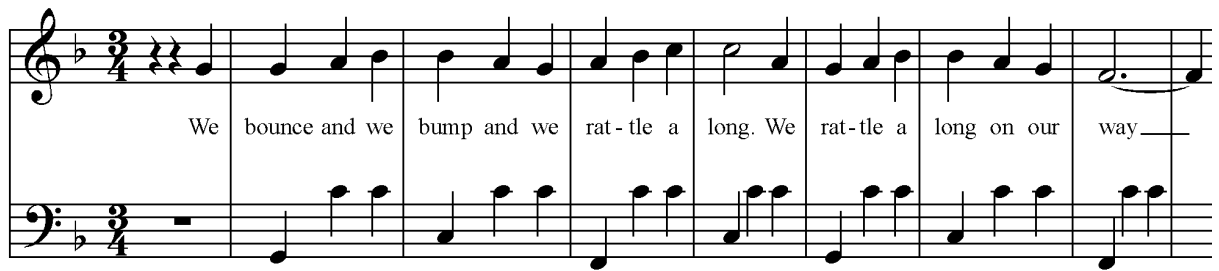
"A Lopsided Bus" [Ex. 6] is a literary metaphor representing the imbalance between rich and poor. Rodgers attempts to portray this metaphor musically. He depicts the rough and tumble nature of life at the lowest ends of the socio-economic scale, as viewed by the show's downtrodden characters. The themes explored in the lyrics of "A Lopsided Bus" are central to the story of *Pipe Dream*. It is necessary to introduce the poor—but generally optimistic—people of Cannery Row early in the show.

Rodgers sets the song in a fast triple meter; at the marked tempo, it falls into a 6/8 feel, and the listener can imagine the riders of the bus rocking back and forth. The melody moves very simply stepwise up and down in three note motives, resembling the up-and-down, but monotonous, life where "Ev'ry year it's a hassle for us / To get from June to May."<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> See Durgin, "Pipe Dream."

<sup>254</sup> Green, *Rodgers and Hammerstein Story*, 150.



Ex. 6. "A Lopsided Bus"

"A Lopsided Bus" suggests that money for the sake of money "is an unpleasant and unnecessary standard."<sup>255</sup> Steinbeck was once a member of such a community and his portrayal of Cannery Row were highly autobiographical as he explained in the *New York Times* just before the show's Broadway bow:

In our group of denizens, we had no envy for the rich. We didn't know any rich. We thought everyone lived the way we lived, if we thought of it at all... Our pleasures were not simple just because they were inexpensive. They required great thought and planning... We had to improvise or do without. And I do not remember that we felt depressed or downtrodden. It wasn't that we were lazy or wouldn't take a job. There were no jobs. It was jobs that disintegrated us as a group.

Nowadays, with jobs and money available, such people as we were are called bums, because in good times people do not remember bad times... We would laugh at the situations, but we could not possibly think the story was about us. And if we told you that it was about us, we would deny it because that is not the way we remembered it. This is inevitable.<sup>256</sup>

Suzy is introduced through the ballad "Everybody's Got a Home but Me" [Ex. 7].

Rodgers colors the introduction with an effective musical line that embodies the movement described in the lyrics: a driving eighth note pattern conveys the motion of Suzy's trip from San Francisco to Monterey.

<sup>255</sup> Kislán, "Nine Musical Plays," 133; Ironically, Rodgers and Hammerstein were two of the most shrewd capitalists in the business.

<sup>256</sup> Steinbeck, "Dreams Piped From Cannery Row," 1-3.



Ex. 7. "Everybody's Got a Home But Me"

The words to Suzy's ballad are truly sincere and are some of Hammerstein's most touching lyrics. Hammerstein describes a girl with "a hidden desire for security."<sup>257</sup> This was a favorite theme of Hammerstein's, who believed that "people are interested in yearning for home."<sup>258</sup> Suzy's solo typifies this craving through the following lyrics:

I rode by a house  
 Where the moon was on the porch  
 And a girl was on her feller's knee,  
     And I said to myself  
     As I rode by myself,  
     Everybody's got a home but me.

I am free  
 And I'm happy to be free,  
 To be free in the way I want to be,

But once in a while,  
 When the road is kinda dark  
 And the end is kinda hard to see,  
     I look up and I cry  
     To a cloud goin' by  
     Won't there ever be a home for me, somewhere?  
     Everybody's got a home but me.<sup>259</sup>

"The Happiest House on the Block" is written as an operetta-style waltz [Ex. 8].

While Citron says it is "sometimes...pretentious, perhaps uncomfortable,"<sup>260</sup> the song is

<sup>257</sup> Green, *Rodgers and Hammerstein Story*, 151.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Pipe Dream*, 33.

an entertaining tongue-in-cheek ode to the bordello. The song’s lyrics may not be true to the Steinbeck story or serve the purpose of character development, but the song is successful and witty musical theatre pastiche. Hammerstein’s lyrics in “Happiest House” are playful and clever: “The happiest house on the block / Is quietly sleeping all day, / But after eleven / Our little blue heaven / Is friendly and foolish and gay.”<sup>261</sup>

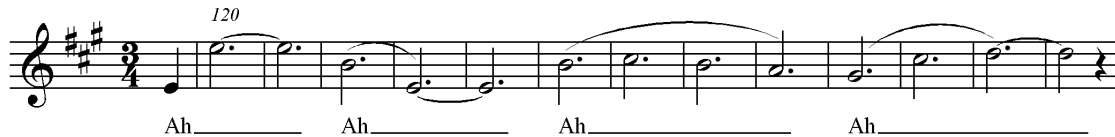
Additionally, a textless descant line is introduced during the final verse, allowing Traubel a rare moment to sing without the challenges of interpreting Hammerstein’s lyrics [Ex. 9]. The song, therefore, is more effective than some of her other pieces, and audiences were surely entertained by such lines as, “Our parlor is cheery / There’s rest for the weary, / The weary who don’t want to rest.”<sup>262</sup>

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song "The Happiest House on the Block". Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (bass clef). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with the vocal line starting on a whole note G4. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords. The second system continues the piece, showing a melodic line in the vocal part that rises to a higher register, ending with a descant line.

Ex. 8. “The Happiest House on the Block”

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<sup>260</sup> Citron, *The Wordsmiths*, 257.  
<sup>261</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Pipe Dream*, 102-03; Hammerstein’s playful nature is also revealed in the words to the song, written in the meter and rhyme scheme of a limerick.  
<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 103; Traubel’s descant is still relatively low for her voice, rising only to an E within the staff.



Ex. 9. Traubel's descant in "Happiest House"

Songs more true to Steinbeck are the seemingly contradictory "All Kinds of People" and "The Tide Pool." The former is an anthem-like ode embracing "all kinds of people and things."<sup>263</sup> The topic of this song is characteristic to Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, but not explored as deeply as in, say, *South Pacific*. For that show, Hammerstein based his book on two stories from James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*, but edited them to suit his views regarding ethnic discrimination and interracial marriage. As John Bush Jones points out, Hammerstein's antagonist in *South Pacific* isn't any one person, but the "ingrained prejudice and racial bias within characters."<sup>264</sup> In *Pipe Dream*, the only adversary of the poor Monterey denizens is some abstract concept of authority as described in "The Tide Pool." The song describes the life cycle Doc observes in his marine studies and relates the dog-eat-dog nature of the tide pool to human nature.

This idea resonated with 1950s audiences seeking community. Displaced suburbanites in search of social circles made church attendance soar. Lhamon's concept of "deliberate speed" is reflected as individuals embraced consumer electronics while enjoying them within social constructs of the past.<sup>265</sup> For example, watching television

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>264</sup> Jones 150; A great amount of controversy surrounded this aspect of the show, particularly lyrics to the song "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," which states all prejudice is learned. This concept is discussed throughout Most, "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught."

<sup>265</sup> See Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed*.

was a community activity as people gathered to view programs with their neighbors. Middle-class 1950s suburbanites seemed to fear isolation.

In *Pipe Dream*, Suzy typifies the 1950s need for community, as she cannot understand why Doc would carry out scientific study alone. Lonely Suzy recognizes his isolation, leading to the following confrontation:

Suzy: Why should I worry about you, anyway? A guy who lives with snakes and bugs and things. Must be something wrong with a guy like that.  
Doc: Something wrong with most people. Might even be something wrong with you, tootsie.  
Suzy: There's plenty wrong with me...but I don't spend my life scroungin' around in the mud for a lot of lousy starfish. What's the matter? Haven't you got the guts to live like you ought to live?<sup>266</sup>

While the themes of community vs. isolation are not elucidated clearly enough in *Pipe Dream*, both “All Kinds of People” and “The Tide Pool” portray Steinbeck’s world, which “for all its patience with human failings and love of life’s many insane little kindnesses, is nevertheless very firm in admitting how destructive humankind can be.”<sup>267</sup> Musically, “The Tide Pool” is in a driving 6/8 meter, akin to a “wailing march” that portrays the bleakness of life [Ex. 10].<sup>268</sup> Above these chords, set in b minor, the upper voices of the orchestra play a melody that slithers along [Ex. 11], as Mordden states, “suggesting the lunging and thrashing of this cannibal kingdom.”<sup>269</sup> The songs serve their purpose but leave no lasting impression on the listener due to the shallow development of the characters involved.

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<sup>266</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Pipe Dream*, 29.

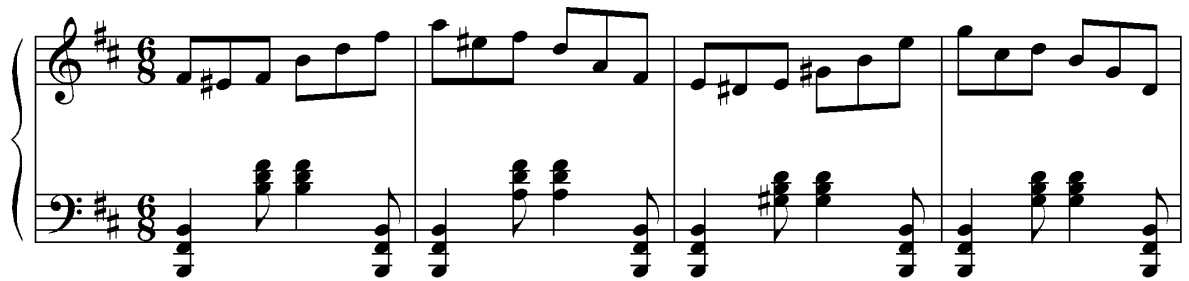
<sup>267</sup> Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 176.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.



Ex. 10. "The Tide Pool"



Ex. 11. "The Tide Pool"

The only song from *Pipe Dream* that sold well was "All at Once You Love Her." However, it is one of the least original parts of *Pipe Dream*. The melody [Ex. 12] is distinctly reminiscent of *Me and Juliet*'s "No Other Love" [Ex. 13]. Both songs also have a tango-inspired Latin feel and share a simple A-B-A form. Despite its popularity in the 1950s, "All at Once You Love Her" opens with a dated lyric stating, "you start to light her cigarette / and all at once you love her." It is doubtful that the sentiment embodied in such a statement would be relevant to today's audiences.



Ex. 12. "All at Once You Love Her"



Ex. 13. "No Other Love"

All in all, *Pipe Dream*'s musical score is effective. Rodgers writes appropriate and catchy tunes, though the music is not adventuresome, and is not as memorable as previous triumphs like *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific*.

Hammerstein's lyrics are strong, but not his finest. After comparing the content of *Pipe Dream*'s spoken dialogue to its song lyrics, it becomes apparent that Hammerstein was more effective in his treatment of the latter. Many songs retain the flavor of Steinbeck's book and were relevant to 1950s audiences. Rodgers's music contains successful aesthetic elements which portray the meaning of the lyrics and the mood of the story. This understanding supports the argument that *Pipe Dream* could be revived, though it is impossible to predict whether audiences would embrace a musical that has been virtually ignored for fifty years.



## Legacy

*Pipe Dream* was a musical unable to live up to its expectations. Rodgers and Hammerstein were unsuccessful with a project that took them into unfamiliar territory. *Pipe Dream*'s failure demonstrates the importance of book adaptation and casting, how extenuating circumstances can wreak havoc on a production, and how audience expectation can interfere with artists' efforts to create something new.

After examining *Pipe Dream*'s book, music, and lyrics, Stephen Citron states that although Fauna, Doc, Suzy, and the other characters in *Pipe Dream* are all victims of society, it is "hard to cry for them."<sup>270</sup> Tragic characters generate sympathy when the book, libretto, and music work together in a way that causes the audience to identify with the events onstage. *Pipe Dream* lacks the depth necessary to make us care about the characters and their plight. We don't care about Doc, because we never get to know him. We don't care about Suzy because we are unable to see her grow from a drifting prostitute into a loving woman. We are apathetic toward their relationship because it never really seemed that improbable; in fact, it was expected. For all its intentions of being new and different, *Pipe Dream* fell victim to convention and expectation. Rodgers accepted this, stating years later:

Had this episode been made into a movie in the heyday of Hollywood musicals, the scenario would have ended with the composer recovering from his operation just in time to attend the opening-night performance of his latest work. With tears in his eyes he acknowledges the thunderous ovation signaling his crowning achievement. Well, if there were any tears in my eyes, it was because *Pipe Dream* was universally accepted as the weakest musical Oscar and I had ever done together.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Citron, *The Wordsmiths*, 259.

<sup>271</sup> Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 287.

*Pipe Dream* raises many unanswered questions. What if, instead of selecting *Sweet Thursday*, Rodgers and Hammerstein had accepted the play *Tevye's Daughters*? It was offered to the pair but they passed it up, and it later became *Fiddler on the Roof*. Likewise, when asked to write songs for *Pygmalion*, Rodgers and Hammerstein said it couldn't be musicalized. Lerner and Loewe felt otherwise and turned it into *My Fair Lady*. We may also wonder what might have happened had Frank Loesser said yes to *Sweet Thursday*. Would he have been able to succeed where Rodgers and Hammerstein did not? As Mordden points out, Loesser adapted his musical style to fit the show at hand, whereas Rodgers and Hammerstein generally sounded more or less like Rodgers and Hammerstein.<sup>272</sup> Most importantly, perhaps, what if Rodgers and Hammerstein had been more faithful in their adaptation of Steinbeck's story? Would the masses have embraced a more truthful representation of Cannery Row? Or would they have rejected it even more soundly, preferring to receive their entertainment through idealistic television sitcoms? Perhaps American audiences in the 1950s felt as though too much in real life was changing and didn't want to be challenged by entertainment.

*Pipe Dream* possibly provided a bit of unintended perspective for Rodgers and Hammerstein. The duo may have gained perspective on the very emotions that the down-on-their-luck characters of *Cannery Row* experienced each day. The two certainly learned never to do a modern-day, plain-dress musical again.<sup>273</sup> The last three collaborations of their career were *Cinderella*, *Flower Drum Song*, and *The Sound of Music*—musicals featuring everything from a Fairy Godmother to Nazis. When it came to costume musicals, Rodgers and Hammerstein were in their element.

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<sup>272</sup> Mordden, *Coming Up Roses*, 137.

<sup>273</sup> The other two modern-day, plainclothes musicals by Rodgers and Hammerstein were *Allegro* and *Me and Juliet*.

The lyrics to *Pipe Dream*'s "The Next Time it Happens" summarize well the fate of Rodgers and Hammerstein in Steinbeck's Monterey. Anxious to try something new, but unable to take hold of it completely and make it their own, Rodgers and Hammerstein learned the hard way.

I leapt before I looked  
And I got hooked.  
I played with fire and burned—  
That's how I learned.

The next time it happens  
I'll be wise enough to know  
Not to trust my eyesight when my eyes begin to glow.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Pipe Dream*, 147.

## CONCLUSION

Together, *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* represent a significant shift in style from previous Rodgers and Hammerstein successes. Unlike *South Pacific*'s portrayal of controversial interracial relationships or sympathetic characters like *Carousel*'s Billy Bigelow, *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* lacked the ingredients necessary to be successful by the new standards of musical theatre Rodgers and Hammerstein themselves helped to create. Some problems are most evident in *Me and Juliet*, others in *Pipe Dream*, and still more in both.

*Me and Juliet* first reveals an author whose strength seems have lied in the adaptation of existing sources. Only Hammerstein's second attempt to write a completely original book, *Me and Juliet* was received even less enthusiastically than his previous original libretto, *Allegro*. The plot and dialogue of *Me and Juliet* is far less captivating than his adaptations of proven source material.

Secondly, Rodgers and Hammerstein underestimated the importance of advertising top stars in *Me and Juliet*. The creators themselves instead received star billing and the duo did not capitalize on their lead actors' past successes. History has demonstrated that musical comedy is most effective when top stars anchor productions and promotional materials emphasize the show's stars.

Thirdly, Rodgers and Hammerstein had never written a musical comedy together. Before *Me and Juliet*, the two excelled in creating socially significant musical plays, and audiences were taken aback by a mood and style that seemed totally out of character for the famous duo. Rodgers's disjunctive score reflected the aimless plot of Hammerstein's play, and audiences reacted negatively to the seemingly meaningless spectacle.

*Pipe Dream* debuted in 1955, the year in which Elvis Presley recorded his first album, and only a day before the beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The changes affecting the consciousness of Americans, whether political or entertainment-based, manifest themselves in Hammerstein's compromise of Steinbeck's novel *Sweet Thursday*. Steinbeck's world of bums and prostitutes was diluted into a milder one in Hammerstein's hands. Hammerstein seems to have been uncomfortable with the source material and sanitized the story's grittiness significantly. Consequently, audiences became confused about Suzy's role, and the redemptive value of her relationship with Doc was considerably diminished.

*Pipe Dream* also suffered from the miscasting of opera singer Helen Traubel. Neither the diva nor Rodgers and Hammerstein were pleased with the collaboration. Unlike Ezio Pinza's role in *South Pacific*, Traubel's experience as an operatic singer proved more a liability than an asset to *Pipe Dream*.

Finally, Rodgers's ill-timed battle with jaw cancer also kept the composer from contributing during the crucial rehearsal period of *Pipe Dream*. Hammerstein struggled to run rehearsals in Rodgers's absence and proved incompetent at making important artistic decisions during the production period.

Together, *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* arguably contain the weakest music, lyrics, and dialogue of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals. *Me and Juliet* is conventional and dull. Though more effective, *Pipe Dream* lacks the continuity and originality of Rodgers and Hammerstein's greatest collaborations.

*Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* also lacked national tours essential to the propagation of mid-century musicals. *Pipe Dream* had no touring cast or London

production and *Me and Juliet* only played Chicago for eight weeks. Without national tours, most Americans outside of New York were unfamiliar with the productions; consequently, audiences failed to purchase the cast recordings, and there was no demand for revivals of either show.

Though Rodgers and Hammerstein challenged audiences in each of their musicals, their greatest triumphs contained trademark characteristics. *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I* used proven source material, were set in exotic or historic locales, and contained clear dramatic action between positive and negative social forces.

In a 1952 interview, Hammerstein wrote that when words are “strung together in a verse, clumsily, unrhethorically, obscurely or ridiculously, your shame stands naked before the world.”<sup>275</sup> Metaphorically speaking, Rodgers and Hammerstein bared it all in *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream*. In doing so, the duo revealed something crucially important about both their collaboration and the attitudes of 1950s theatergoers. Consumers of the 1950s were faced with options never before available. Everything from colored kitchen appliances to cars with power steering, the power of the consumer increased; Broadway audiences accordingly rejected certain musical comedies created in outmoded conventions. Broadway theatergoers were maturing and no longer would they accept musicals irrelevant to their needs and interests.<sup>276</sup> The golden age of musicals was coming to an end as a new social insurgency was beginning; a revolution was taking

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<sup>275</sup> Oscar Hammerstein II, “What Wouldn’t I Give?” *Columbia Jester* 52, no. 5, 13; undated clipping from Oscar Hammerstein Collection.

<sup>276</sup> Admittedly, audiences were still attracted to musical comedies. More discerning audiences, however, honored shows like *The Music Man* (1957), which demonstrated a continued refinement of style and integrated approach including a highly unified score and songs tied closely to action.

place that would pave the way for visionary productions like *West Side Story* (1957) and *Cabaret* (1966). Musicals such as these were testaments to art as a social statement, expressed more openly than in the past.

Little has been written about *Me and Juliet* or *Pipe Dream*. It seems clear that true appreciation for an art form or a time period cannot be gained by studying only the most popular trends. Likewise, true understanding of an artist cannot be complete without knowing both his or her failures and accomplishments. The study of musical flops also provides valuable insights regarding the complexities of creating a Broadway musical. Successful musicals require an effective combination of drama and music. *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* also demonstrate the need for a star cast, healthy collaborators, experience, and apparently—if you’re Rodgers and Hammerstein—costumes and an exotic setting. The addition (or elimination) of dance and technical effects can also alter a production considerably. Clearly, *Me and Juliet* and *Pipe Dream* reveal telling information about Rodgers and Hammerstein’s collaboration, and show that there is still plenty more to be learned.

Uniting the many components and fitting them to the original artistic vision is difficult for even the most capable collaborators. One could say that creating any hit musical is something of a miracle. And as Hammerstein so appropriately asked in *Pipe Dream*, “who expects a miracle to happen every day?”<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Pipe Dream*, 147.

## APPENDIX

### 1947-1960 Chronology – Times of Change

- 1947 Premiere of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Allegro*
- 1949 *South Pacific* (Pulitzer Prize and Tony for Best Musical)
- 1950 Rodgers and Hammerstein produce Steinbeck's *Burning Bright*  
Korean War begins  
*Call Me Madam* and *Guys and Dolls* premiere on Broadway  
Alger Hiss convicted of perjury in Communist spy trial
- 1951 Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I* (Four Tony Awards)  
Chrysler introduces power steering
- 1952 Richard Rodgers composes soundtrack to TV documentary *Victory at Sea*  
Hydrogen bomb successfully tested
- 1953 **Rodgers and Hammerstein musical: *Me and Juliet***  
Hammerstein not allowed to renew his passport  
Rosenbergs executed for treason  
First color television broadcasts  
Korean War ends
- 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision  
Senator Joseph McCarthy censured  
*The Pajama Game* debuts in New York  
GE introduces colored kitchen appliances  
Rosa Parks arrested for refusing to move to back of bus
- 1955 **Rodgers and Hammerstein musical: *Pipe Dream***  
*Damn Yankees* opens on Broadway  
Elvis Presley records his first album
- 1956 Moviegoers flock to *The Ten Commandments*
- 1957 Soviets launch Sputnik  
Broadway premieres: *The Music Man* and *West Side Story*  
Rodgers and Hammerstein television musical: *Cinderella*
- 1958 Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* published  
Nabokov's *Lolita* published  
Rodgers and Hammerstein musical: *Flower Drum Song*
- 1959 First commercial photocopier  
Alaska and Hawaii receive statehood  
Hollywood releases *Some Like it Hot*  
Rodgers and Hammerstein musical: *The Sound of Music* (Six Tonys)
- 1960 Oscar Hammerstein dies



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