Tiré à part

American Musicals

Stage and screen / L'écran et la scène

Anne Martina
& Julie Vatain-Corfdir (dir.)

SUP

What happens when American musicals travel from Broadway to Hollywood, from Hollywood to Broadway – or indeed to Paris? Taking its cue from the current partiality towards cross-media interaction, this collective volume aims at reassessing the role and impact of stage/screen transfers on the genre, by blending together academic and creative voices, both French and American. The bilingual chapters of the book carefully explore the musical, dramatic and choreographic repercussions of transposition techniques, evidencing the cinematographic rewriting of theatrical processes from Lubitsch's screen operettas to Fosse's *Cabaret*, or tracking movie-inspired effects on stage from *Hello, Dolly!* to *Hamilton.*
The focus being at once aesthetic and practical, equal attention has been paid to placing performances in a critical framework and to setting off their creative genesis. Musicals are approached from the varied angles of dance, theater, film and music scholarship, as well as from the artist's viewpoint, when Chita Rivera or Christopher Wheeldon share details about their craft. Taking full advantage of the multimedia opportunities afforded by this digital series, the chapters use an array of visual and sound illustrations as they investigate the workings of subversion, celebration or self-reflexivity, the adjustments required to "sound Broadway" in Paris, or the sheer possibility of re-inventing icons.

Que se passe-t-il quand une comédie musicale américaine voyage de Broadway à Hollywood, d'Hollywood à Broadway… ou à Paris ? Le penchant ambiant pour l'intermédialité et le succès grandissant du *musical* en France ont inspiré ce volume collectif qui, en croisant les voix universitaires et artistiques, françaises et américaines, entreprend de réévaluer l'impact des transferts scène-écran sur le genre. Les chapitres bilingues de cet ouvrage sondent les répercussions musicales, dramatiques et chorégraphiques des techniques de transposition, mettant au jour la réécriture filmique de procédés théâtraux depuis les opérettes cinématographiques de Lubitsch jusqu'au *Cabaret* de Fosse, ou pistant les effets de cinéma sur scène, de *Hello, Dolly!* à *Hamilton*.
Dans une visée à la fois esthétique et pratique, la genèse créative des œuvres est envisagée aussi bien que leur cadre critique. Les *musicals* sont ici abordés sous l'angle de disciplines variées : danse, théâtre, cinéma, musique ; ainsi que du point de vue de la pratique, lorsque Chita Rivera ou Christopher Wheeldon témoignent de leur art. Au fil de chapitres enrichis d'un éventail d'illustrations visuelles et sonores grâce aux ressources de l'édition numérique, les auteurs interrogent les mécanismes de la subversion, de l'hommage et de l'auto-réflexivité, les ajustements nécessaires pour « chanter Broadway » à Paris, ou encore la possibilité de réinventer les icônes.

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FOREWORD

Anne Martina & Julie Vatain-Corfdir

The history of American musicals is that of constant, complex, and fruitful media interaction. And yet, media crossovers long escaped enquiry. Artists themselves were often to blame for a biased perception of their work, particularly in film. In the many interviews they gave, Busby Berkeley or Gene Kelly were keen to present their work, and the history of film musicals in general, as a growing emancipation from stage models. Following their lead, early film critics showed a tendency to analyze Hollywood musicals produced in the 1930s, '40s, and early '50s as *cinematographic* achievements, characterized by a refined use of the codes of classical Hollywood cinema. When increasing economic difficulties arose in the mid-fifties – due to the collapse of the old studio system, the rise of television, and gradual shifts in public tastes – Hollywood was compelled to devise a set of strategic responses, leading to the evolution of the film musical (some would say its decline). The first, and most conspicuous reaction was to limit financial risk by increasingly foregoing original works in favor of adapting successful Broadway shows as faithfully as possible. A second response was to use rock 'n' roll music, and later pop music, to cater to younger generations, thereby often altering the classical syntax of the genre through increased subservience to the record industry (examples abound from *Jailhouse Rock* to *Woodstock* and *Moulin Rouge*). A third, more creative reaction was to scatter the script with elements of *auto-critique*, at the risk of undermining the mythologizing process at the heart of the genre and alienating its traditional audiences (from *A Star is Born* and *It's Always Fair Weather* to *All That Jazz*, *Pennies from Heaven* or *La La Land*).[1] From these combined factors stemmed the common belief that artistic achievement in Hollywood musicals was synonymous with aesthetic autonomy and narrative originality, while decline was entailed by a growing subjection to other media forms.

Conspicuously enough, reciprocal trends have been pointed out – and found fault with – on and off-Broadway, where musical versions, sequels or prequels of profitable films and Disney movies are a staple cause for complaint or irony among critics and audiences alike. Scholars of the stage musical have in fact shown the recent evolution of the genre to respond to economic pressure in ways that mirror the choices made

1 See Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1987, pp. 120-121.

earlier by the film industry – some, like Mark Grant and Ethan Mordden, explicitly lamenting the supposed collapse of musical shows. Grant's catchy (albeit reductive) book title, *The Rise and Fall of the Broadway Musical*, encapsulates a Spenglerian model, according to which the demise of the genre has been entailed, since the late 1960s, by radical economic and aesthetic shifts – the rise of entertainment conglomerates functioning as theatre producers, the popularity of spectacle-oriented "megamusicals," and the proliferation of adaptations. All of which testify to Broadway's increased dependence on mass media, in particular music videos and film.

Yet laments about the end of a so-called "Golden Age"[2] characterized by artistic integrity do not resist critical investigation. Not only are they imbued with nostalgic overtones, implying that musical works produced before and after the "Golden Age" have less artistic value and cultural depth than those from the pivotal period, but they also ignore the complex, ceaseless interaction between Broadway and Hollywood *throughout* the history of the genre, which more recent research has brought to light. The rise of cultural and intermedial studies in the 1990s was critical in this respect. Opening new avenues for research on the American musical, it has led to a fruitful reassessment of the influence of Broadway stage forms and aesthetics on iconic Hollywood films. This has been exemplified by Martin Rubin's illuminating investigation of the way Busby Berkeley's art is indebted to 1910s and 1920s Broadway shows[3] or, more recently, by Todd Decker's insightful study of the many rewritings of *Show Boat*.[4]

However notable and influential such analyses have proven to be, much remains to be investigated. This reliance on recycling other media to spur creativity prompts enquiry into the nature, shape and influence of Broadway-to-Hollywood or Hollywood-to-Broadway transfers, as well as into the interactions and cross-fertilizing processes they generate. Current research indicates that such sustained investigation is under way. Theater-driven reference works on the American musical[5] have shown a growing interest in film, though chapters that truly focus on cross-media transaction are still rare. In France, a 2015 international conference – from which five of the essays in this

2 For a critical assessment of the term "Golden Age" in the field of musical comedy, see Jessica Sternfeld and Elizabeth L. Wollman, "After the 'Golden Age'", in Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, Stacy Wolf (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011, p. 111.

3 Martin Rubin, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle*, New York, Columbia UP, 1993.

4 Todd Decker, *Show Boat: Performing Race in an American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2013.

5 See Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf, *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011; William Everett and Paul L. Laird, *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 3rd ed., Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2017.

volume proceed – directly addressed those issues, while the three-year "Musical MC²" research project headed by Marguerite Chabrol and Pierre-Olivier Toulza has been comprehensively exploring the influence of cultural and media contexts over classical Hollywood musicals. Simultaneously, on the Paris stage, a reciprocal interest in the reinvention of classics has been displayed, for instance, in the Théâtre du Châtelet's widely-acclaimed productions of *An American in Paris* (2014), *Singin' in the Rain* (2015) and *42nd Street* (2016), all of which have been hailed as fully creative rather than derivative.

Such contemporary partiality – and curiosity – towards intermediality provided the inspiration for the present volume, which aims at reassessing the role and impact of stage/screen transfers (in both directions) on American musicals, by blending together academic and creative voices, both French and American. The essays and interviews collected here carefully explore the musical, dramatic and choreographic repercussions of transposition processes, evidencing the wide range of rewriting and recoding practices encompassed in what is commonly referred to as "adaptation." How does re-creation for another medium affect the shape and impact of a musical, both aesthetically and practically? How can the "adapted" version assert its status and value with regards to the "original," striking a balance between due homage and legitimate creative claims? These questions are tied to issues of authorship and authority, as well as to the notion of self-reflexivity, which can prove equally conducive to celebration or to subversion. They also call into question the audience's reception of the work, in particular when it comes to iconic scenes, or to characters illustriously embodied by a famous performer. In fact, any study of the relations between Broadway and Hollywood would be incomplete without reflecting upon the impact of *human* transfers – not only in terms of stars, but also in terms of directors, composers and lyricists, choreographers or costume designers.

The chapters of this volume fall into three sections, the first of which focuses on formal innovation and re-invention. It opens with an investigation into Ernst Lubitsch's endeavors to invent a cinematographic equivalent to the operetta around 1930, when the norms and form of the musical picture were yet to be established, ultimately showing how music, in such early examples, becomes a way to create a fictional world on screen (Katalin Pór). While this study offers a chronological foundation stone to analyze subsequent transfers and influences, the second essay provides a more theoretical perspective on the question, by comparing directorial choices in adaptation over a wide range of periods and production types (Dan Blim). From *Damn Yankees!* to *Hamilton*, the chapter explores the ways in which stage and screen

media deal differently with breaks and "sutures" in a musical's narrative continuity, thereby shedding light on the specificities of each medium. These insightful inaugural essays then make way for the in-depth study of such canonical examples as the screen-to-stage transfers of *42nd Street* and *An American in Paris*. The two shows are carefully compared in terms of their "conservative," "innovative" or "reflective" approach to adaptation, and placed in the context of constantly refashioned Hollywood and Broadway motifs (Anne Martina). This is given further resonance by the following roundtable with the creators of *An American in Paris*, which provides a mirrored point of view on reinvention from the artists' and producers' perspective. The precision and generosity with which they discuss the show's genesis, musical construction and color palette offer a unique insight into the vision behind this contemporary (re-)creation (Brad Haak, Van Kaplan, Craig Lucas, Stuart Oken, Christopher Wheeldon).[6]

8 The second section delves into the political and cultural implications of adaptation, using several case studies of major musicals which have been rewritten, reinterpreted, and sometimes transferred back to their original medium. The first of these analyses offers a refreshing outlook on *My Fair Lady*, by suggesting that the musical's romanticized ending may not be as out of line with George Bernard Shaw's original feminist vision as is commonly assumed. This leads to a detailed exploration of romantic and feminist ramifications in the crafting and filming of the musical (Aloysia Rousseau), and is followed by a performer's perspective on the same work – and others – from the point of view of a professional singer of musicals in France today (Julien Neyer). The next two essays then continue with the study of famous adaptations from the 1960s, by focusing on shifts in the political and racial significance of *Finian's Rainbow* (James O'Leary) or the consequences of tone and scale alterations in *Hello, Dolly!* (Julie Vatain-Corfdir & Émilie Rault). Francis Ford Coppola's screen version of *Finian's Rainbow* is thus shown to revise the stage show's politically-oriented innovations in order to align the script with New Left conventions, while Gene Kelly's adaptation of *Hello, Dolly!* is analyzed as the somewhat maladroit aesthetic product of contrasting tendencies towards amplification on the one hand, and sentimentalization on the other. Moving on from the last of the optimistic "supermusicals" to one of the finest examples of a darker and more cynical trend, the last essay in this section focuses on the successive rewritings of *Cabaret* for the stage, screen – and stage again. Amid this circular pattern, Bob Fosse's version of the iconic musical emerges as a re-defining moment not only for the show, but also for the evolution of the genre itself (Anouk Bottero).

6 All of our interviews are transcribed and published with kind permission from the speakers.

The third section of the volume takes a closer look at the challenges facing the performers of musicals on stage and screen, in particular when it comes to singing and dancing – live or in a studio. A shrewd analysis of Gene Kelly's career – short-lived on Broadway but stellar in Hollywood – shows how his choreographic bent towards perfectionism evolved, from *Cover Girl* to *Singin' in the Rain*, and how his apparent doubts about his acting talents came to be expressed and answered through his screen dances (Jacqueline Nacache). This is followed by the direct testimony of a legendary dancer and Broadway performer, who talks at length about the expressivity of "character dancing," the different lessons in focus learned on stage or in front of the camera, or the joys of working with Leonard Berstein, Jerome Robbins or Bob Fosse (Chita Rivera). Building on this dancer's experience, the following chapter asks the question of how to re-choreograph a cult scene and dance it anew, using examples from Robbins' choregraphy for *West Side Story* (Patricia Dolambi). Finally, shifting from dance to song, the last interview of the volume turns to the evolution of singing practices and spectators' tastes, from opera to "Golden Age" musicals and on to contemporary musicals. Voice placement and voice recording are discussed, along with specific techniques such as "vocal twang" or "belting," by a singing coach with experience both in the US and in France (Mark Marian). This comparative perspective re-emphasizes the fundamental dynamic of the volume, which is that of transgressing borders – between media, disciplines or, occasionally, reception cultures – bringing together the voices of music, dance, film and theater scholars as well as performers and producers, in order to shed light on creative phenomena which, though they are as old as the advent of the talking picture, still prove multifaceted and prolific today.

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DEUXIÈME PARTIE

From subversion to self-reflexivity

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"THEY BEGAT THE MISBEGOTTEN GOP"
FINIAN'S RAINBOW AND THE US CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

James O'Leary

Years later, librettist E.Y. Harburg recalled how difficult it had been to find backers for his 1947 musical *Finian's Rainbow*. "We had a hard job getting it on Broadway, I'll tell you that," he said. "Nobody would touch it. We knew the reason. The problem in the show was the black man's problem, the white man's problem, the racist problem, the gold problem, the Fort Knox problem. Our system was reduced a little bit to absurdity."[1] On the surface the show seemed to be merely a bizarre fable: an Irishman named Finian is on the lam from a leprechaun whose gold he has stolen. But these fairytale characters wander America's deep south, and their supposedly innocent story unravels against a politically charged backdrop: Finian's daughter falls in love with a union organizer, who has returned to Missitucky to save a mixed-race group of sharecroppers from a racist white senator who is trying to foreclose on their land. The script ran the gamut from comic to Communist, which, according to Harburg, made *Finian's Rainbow* subversive, even politically dangerous.

When Francis Ford Coppola adapted the show for film in 1968, however, he said that whatever had once seemed trenchant in the original production had become "dated." According to him, *Finian's Rainbow* was nothing more than "a real relic from an earlier time in the mid '40s and certainly something that predated what was then happening in the '60s related to Civil Rights." He said that he found himself "with the very difficult job [of] reconciling the old book from the theater show with what was then a new feeling about film, and also, in our country, the advancing Civil Rights movement which was so different from the type of story that *Finian's Rainbow* was."[2]

How did *Finian's Rainbow*, which once seemed so radical, come to seem tame by 1968? To answer this question, this essay will compare the Broadway musical of 1947 to the film version of 1968. I argue that the stage version of *Finian's Rainbow* had been radical both in its politics and its style – a testing ground for a kind of protest-music idiom that became widespread for a brief time in the 1940s. However, by the 1960s

1 Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Yip Harburg: Legendary Lyricist and Human Rights Activist*, Middletown, Wesleyan UP, 2012, p. 146.

2 Francis Ford Coppola, "New Introduction and Commentary," *Finian's Rainbow*, DVD, dir. Francis Ford Coppola, Burbank, Warner Home Video, 2005.

Civil Rights movement, both political and aesthetic values had shifted so drastically that the show's original radical connotations became obscure – so obscure, in fact, that Coppola did not even recognize them.

By the time he wrote *Finian's Rainbow*, Harburg had long been engaged in New York's political theater scene, which included both commercial Broadway ventures, and experimental, avant-garde, agitprop productions that appeared either Off-Broadway or in non-traditional venues. Although he had connections to both, Harburg primarily wrote for the former. His earliest hit was "Brother Can You Spare a Dime," which he wrote for the 1932 revue *Americana*, and which became an anthem for progressive politicians of the Depression. *Americana* joined company with a number of popular, political Broadway shows at the time, including George and Ira Gershwin's *Strike Up The Band* (1927, revised 1930), *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) and *Let 'Em Eat Cake* (1933); Harburg and Harold Arlen's *Hooray for What!* (1937); Richard Rodgers's *I'd Rather Be Right* (1937); Kurt Weill's *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938); Harold Rome's revue *Pins and Needles* (1937); and so on.

Starting in the mid 1930s, however, as composers in New York began to collaborate with émigré musicians such as Hanns Eisler, many writers began to argue that, in order to be truly political, Broadway musicals could not simply feature commercial, popular music with populist words. Familiar styles would merely produce habitual emotional reactions, manipulating listeners instead of challenging them. These émigrés argued that popular music was a double-edged sword: if popular music could sway listeners into adopting a particular political belief by tapping into their emotional reactions, such music would probably have the same effect with words of any political stripe whatsoever. Therefore, these composers sought to create music that would not provoke an immediate emotional response, but rather a critical, thoughtful contemplation.

They argued that to do this, musicians had to compose in an "oppositional" idiom, so to speak, one that undermined received modes of listening, composing, and performing. Charles Seeger, for example, maintained that Eisler's aesthetic

> [used] ordinary fragments of technique in an unusual way, because we thought *that* was revolutionary and therefore suitable for the workers to use. We didn't give them those same patterns in the usual way, which was what Broadway did. Broadway just handed out a certain number of formulas in the usual way; but we took those same formulas, simply used them differently, and hoped that we were doing something revolutionary. Lots of compositions were in that type. They had unusual harmonic

> progressions in them, but usual chords. Or if there were some unusual chords, they put them in conventional patterns.[3]

This kind of music appeared on Broadway in Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937) and in the Roosevelt Administration's Living Newspapers (1936-1939), a series of shows that cobbled together statistical research, historical documents, and reportage to create experimental, multi-media performances that advocated strong political positions on current events of the day.[4] The goal was to create a style that was popular-but-not-too-popular, experimental-but-not-too-experimental, a style that would combine avant-garde and popular styles into an idiom that would be at once critical of capitalist, commercial culture, yet also familiar and direct enough to allow for the musically untrained to take part.[5]

By the early 1940s, the oppositional aesthetic had moved off Broadway once again, giving way to a group of composers and critics who expressed their political views in a different way. They tended to promote a politics that was not based on divisive, oppositional messages, but upon ideas that would affirm humanity's common goodness – what one might call an "affirmative aesthetic." Its major proponents included critics such as Van Wyck Brooks, Olin Downes, and Brooks Atkinson (the latter two were respectively the head music and theater critics of the *New York Times*). As Atkinson wrote during World War II:

> In a year or two we shall know whether a sense of humor can survive the crack, thrust and destruction of fanaticism. The screaming Hitler, the bellicose Mussolini, the crafty Stalin impose systems of living on nations by force. If they had a sense of humor they could not tolerate their own company. A sense of humor left unmolested inside their armed camps would ultimately destroy the systems they have founded on the myth of the superman […] Even a sense of humor has social significance when you come

3 David K. Dunaway, "Charles Seeger and Carl Sands: The Composers' Collective Years," *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 24 / 2 (May, 1980), p. 164.

4 The Roosevelt administration's Federal Theater Project produced a series of Living Newspapers between 1936 and 1939 on subjects ranging from the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (*Ethiopia*, 1936), to electricity policy and the controversial Tennessee Valley Authority (*Power*, 1937), to poverty and slum housing (*One-Third of a Nation*, 1938), to syphilis testing (*Spirochete*, 1937). By 1939, these and other Federal Theater Project productions became increasingly controversial, and Congress shuttered the Federal Theater Project (and, thereby, the Living Newspapers) that year.

5 A complete discussion of the oppositional and affirmative aesthetics lies beyond the scope of this article. For more information, see chapter 1 and chapter 5 of James O'Leary, *Exit Right: Broadway and America's Hidden Avant-Garde*, Oxford/New York, Oxford UP, forthcoming.

to think about it. And this gentleman who wants to laugh after office hours has this column's full permission.[6]

Musically, such affirmative shows tended to draw upon emblems of a shared, common, national culture. The prime example of this was Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Oklahoma!* (1943). The politics of *Oklahoma!* were not overtly partisan or divisive, but instead asserted a general enthusiasm for heartland America and its homey values – a sentimental show that would no doubt have had political resonances during World War II, even if it did not have an explicit political agenda. In terms of its form – the aspect of the show that became most famous in the decades following its premiere – it was self-consciously smooth, unified, and "integrated," a far cry from the disjointed style of the oppositional aesthetic. While the claim of the musical's revolutionary form may have been overblown at the time (such integrated forms existed as long as there had been musicals), it certainly seemed new in light of the experimental shows of the late 1930s.

In this climate, with the rhetoric of integration at full tilt in the press and among Broadway composers, Harburg began to pitch his political script for *Finian's Rainbow* in late 1945. Postwar producers balked – but not because they disagreed with Harburg's political positions, as Harburg would later claim. William Liebling, for example, wrote to Harburg that he and his partner Audrey Wood were "with you one hundred percent as usual," but continued that they "had to speak our minds from a commercial standpoint […] In this type of musical one doesn't have to actually have message lines in order to get the authors' message across. In other words, all the things that you both believe so strongly will be felt just as keenly without pounding away at end with actual lines and situations."[7] Neither producer objected to Harburg's left-wing politics, nor did they think left-wing politics needed to be entirely absent from the show. Rather, they objected only to the blatant style in which Harburg expressed them. Harburg faced a predicament: he had to find a way of stating political ideas at a time when Broadway had grown largely averse to them. Even his collaborator, composer Burton Lane, later noted Harburg's intensity on this subject. "I liked [*Finian's Rainbow*] because it had something to say, but I might have liked it if it didn't have something to say – if the idea was a good one. In other words I was not primarily interested in only doing a socially significant show. Yip was… unless you could get social significance into it, he didn't want to do it."[8]

6 Brooks Atkinson, "Early Summer Settles on the Broadway Theatre," *New York Times*, June 15, 1941.

7 Letter from William Liebling to E. Y. Harburg dated December 26, 1945, E. Y. Harburg Collection, Irving S. Gilmore Library, Yale University, Box 21, Folder 163, "Finian's Rainbow Correspondence."

8 Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Yip Harburg*, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

To situate Harburg's progressive proclivities amid the largely apolitical atmosphere of postwar Broadway, the creative team had to devise a new way of expressing political ideas when writing *Finian's Rainbow*. The resulting show included hot-button partisan issues, but did so in a style that did not seem overtly oppositional or avant-garde. Rather, the goal was to make the controversial topics seem agreeable, even cheery – or, as Harburg claimed, its warm-hearted comedy blunted the edgy commentary and "gilded the philosophical pill."[9] To achieve this, Harburg and Lane created a score that was almost entirely pastiche, evoking recognizable styles that seemed alien to the Broadway stage in order to create ironic or satirical commentary. There were folk-style songs ("Look to the Rainbow"), religious-revival songs ("The Great Come and Get It Day"), a madrigal ("When the Idle Poor Become the Idle Rich"), a gavotte ("Something Sort of Grandish"), and the blues music of the real-life southern blind harmonica player Sonny Terry. As if to underscore these unusual generic juxtapositions, the final words of the published vocal score all but wink at the player: it says, "End of Opera," not "End of Show."[10] All of these relied on familiar musical styles to put an ironic spin on social or economic positions of the day.

Consider, for example, "The Begat," sung near the end of Act II. At this point in the plot, Sharon has inadvertently used the leprechaun's gold to turn the racist senator black, and he wanders the South singing with an all-black male quartet. The song, a parody of Bible Belt evangelism, was accompanied by a walking bass, cup-muted trumpets, and growling trombones – a style reminiscent of Duke Ellington's Cotton Club "jungle style."

> The Whites begat,
> The Reds begat
> The folks who shoulda stood in bed begat.
> The Greeks begat,
> The Swedes begat,
> Why even Britishers in Tweeds begat.

The political implications of this song are oblique. The lyrics list groups that are often considered prudish or morally conservative (the D.A.R, the bourgeoisie, the League of Women Shoppers, movie censors, the "misbegotten GOP," and so on), and the song seems to deflate these organizations' pretensions by reminding the listener that they, too, "begat." Risqué, yes, but also risky: because this song featured four black

9 *Ibid.*, p. 166.
10 Burton Lane, E. Y. Harburg, *Finian's Rainbow*, New York, Chappell Music Company, 1968, p. 137.

men singing about the sexual proclivities of predominantly white groups, it raised the specter of miscegenation. On the one hand, such provocation might seem in line with the divisive politics of the 1930s avant-garde musical. But on the other hand, the irony here was by no means detached, distant, or oppositional. Rather, "the Begat" drew on shared stereotypes of so-called "jazz" music (that it was lowbrow, low down, low class, low morals – and eminently popular) in order to make its commentary. The result was the alienating gesture of avant-garde theater delivered in purely popular, familiar styles – as satire, not critique.

In addition to incorporating pastiche for ironic effect, Harburg and Lane also picked up on the popular-but-not-too-popular aesthetic of the 1930s, taking traditional song forms and defamiliarizing them. But they did so in a way that did not create a critical, oppositional distance between the audience and the action onstage. Instead, they sought to inspire an even more intense emotional investment. For example, the song "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" seems at first to be cast in a typical verse-chorus form, with a refrain that, in general outline, follows many of the patterns of an AABA, thirty-two bar piece. For the first two phrases of the refrain, Lane repeats a nostalgic eight-measure phrase in D-flat major. Things change in the B section – the character seems hopeful that she will hear news from Ireland – and accordingly the song moves away from the tonic. In most songs, this sets up the final, culminating A section, in which these problems are resolved. Instead of returning back to the A section, however, Lane ends the song abruptly, as if the final A section's presence is merely suggested by the contour of the final phrase and the repetition of the opening words. Thus the central question of the song – "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" – hovers in the air for the rest of the play. In the final scene of the show, the character Finian realizes that the gold he has pinned his hopes on has turned to dross. Suddenly, he perks up, and opens his suitcase:

> Finian – Do you know what's in this bag? A pair of socks – and the fate of Wall Street. A toothbrush – and the wealth of empires.
> Rawkins – Why, that's just an ordinary piece of moonstone.
> Finian – Ah, you're blind. You can only see what you're lookin' at. Inside this piece of stone is a whole multitude of gnomes, elves and fairy folk, like Neutron the Latent and Proton the Potent, ready to go to work for you and bring you all happiness… Aye, lass. I've outlived Fort Knox… To Oak Ridge, Tennessee![11]

11 Laurence Maslon, *American Musicals 1927-1949: The Complete Book and Lyrics of Eight Broadway Classics*, New York, The Library of America, 2014, pp. 433-434.

After this speech, Sharon finally reveals where Glocca Morra is: "It's only in Father's head," upon which the cast once again picks up this final section of the opening song, with a slight change in words, singing "May we meet in Glocca Morra" instead of "How are things in Glocca Morra?" On the one hand, the reappearance of this song rounds off the evening. Yet the sudden appearance of a hot-button political issue (Oak Ridge was the site where the Manhattan Project developed the atomic bomb), the reappearance of the open-ended A section of Sharon's first song, and lines that reference a future meeting in an imaginary place, all suggest that the creators may have been trying to avoid reaching any pat conclusion, leaving the audience with a provocative musical and symbolic gesture to contemplate as they left the theater – tactics that had been common in the oppositional-style musicals of the 1930s.

Even though politics remained in the final version of *Finian's Rainbow*, the press nonetheless sensed that there was also another mode of critique at work in this musical. Cyrus Dugin exclaimed that writers of *Finian's Rainbow* "have done that rare thing in the theater: concocted a book that makes sense and nonsense, and really hangs together."[12] What could it mean to make both "sense and nonsense"? Yet this paradox reappeared often in the press. *The Christian Science Monitor*, for example, maintained that the show "is compounded of wit and wily *nonsense*, social *significance*, magic, songs and dances."[13] Nonsense and significance, sense and nonsense: the aesthetic hinged on obliqueness, on the signifying power of those aspects of theater that, in the strictest sense, do not signify: style and form. Essentially Lane and Harburg managed to convey controversial political ideas in a manner that seemed agreeable to all, giving them the patina of nonsense through the madcap antics, but using stylistic elements in a way that made them seem like common, shared ideas.

Finian's Rainbow melded a 1930s aesthetic of avant-garde, popular, and populist art, but it did so within a commercial, postwar context. More specifically, it couched politics in the kind of engrossing love story that was typical of the integrated postwar Broadway musical. In *Finian's Rainbow*, Harburg relied on familiar musical styles to convey the divisive politics in an "affirmative" manner. Atkinson recognized this and wrote in the *New York Times*, "If the American musical stage continues to improve, it will no longer be necessary for anyone to speak dialogue on stage. Everything essential can be said in song and dancing."[14] *Finian's Rainbow* seemed to him, not just a love

12 Cyrus Durgin, "*Finian's Rainbow*, a Wonderful Musical, Comes to the Shubert," *Boston Daily Globe*, 19 October 1948.
13 No author, "Of Men and Leprechauns," *Christian Science Monitor Boston*, 18 January 1947.
14 Brooks Atkinson, "The New Play," *New York Times*, 11 January 1947.

story, not just propaganda, but also an experiment in expression, a new kind of protest music that attempted oppositional political discourse through affirmative speech.

In the mid 1960s, Coppola made no secret of the fact that he did not like the original script of *Finian's Rainbow*. He could not understand why the serious story (about racism and resistance) would be wrapped up in a "cockamamie" fairy tale (about the leprechaun and his magical gold).

> If I did it faithfully it was going to look like a twenty-two-year-old show. So I tried to make it faithful and yet make it acceptable for contemporary audiences. I think I always knew that the show, critically, was going to be received ungenerously. A lot of liberal people were going to feel it was old pap, because of its dated civil rights stance. And they were going to say, "Oh, the real *Finian's Rainbow* we remember was wonderful." If they were to look at the material today, they might not love it so much.[15]

To Coppola, the show's politics and its style were problematic and outdated. He faced a conundrum: on the one hand, he was tasked with reviving an old chestnut for audiences who cherished the original show, but on the other hand, he felt impelled to revise the parts of the musical he felt had become passé in order to make a biting commentary for the 1960s.

Politically, Harburg had written *Finian's Rainbow* from the point of view of the socialist left, focusing on workers (the sharecroppers and their labor on the tobacco farm) and unions (one of the main characters, Woody, was an organizer). Starting around 1960, however, a younger generation of liberal, progressive writers began to push back against the socialist left. This group, which has come to be known loosely as the New Left, boasted C. Wright Mills and Tom Hayden among its most visible spokesmen, and counted the Students for a Democratic Society as its most recognizable group. The foundational ideas of the New Left rejected some of the socialists' core principles. Mills, for example, did not understand why liberal politicians "cling so mightily to 'the working class' of the advanced capitalist societies as *the* historic agency, or even as the most important agency."[16] Focusing on categories of labor, the argument went, was dehumanizing. As the infamous *Port Huron Statement* declared: "Personal links between man and man are needed, especially to go beyond the partial and fragmented bonds of function that bind

15 Joel Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar*, Garden City, Doubleday, 1970, p. 9.
16 C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," excerpted in *"Takin' It to the Streets": A Sixties Reader*, ed. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, Oxford/New York, Oxford UP, 1995, p. 78.

men only as worker to work, employer to employee, teacher to students, American to Russian."[17] Put crudely (but not altogether inaccurately), rather than create an economic revolution to solve social problems, the New Left sought to create a social revolution to solve economic problems.

Broadly speaking, the former Socialist left tended to argue that economic relationships formed the foundation of all social interactions (the base), and out of this arose ideology and culture (the superstructure). The New Left, however, turned this model (which Mills called "a legacy from Victorian Marxism that is now quite unrealistic"[18]) upside down. They argued that social factors such as race, creed, and identity (which, in this model, is the base) determined the shape of the country's economic climate (which, in this model, becomes the superstructure). Therefore, to affect society on its most fundamental level, many on the New Left sought to empower individuals in a "participatory democracy," the catchphrase coined by Tom Hayden and the Students for a Democratic Society: "We would replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power rooted in love, reflectiveness, reasons, and creativity."[19] This was the era, for example, of the infamous 1965 Moynihan Report, which attempted to raise African Americans out of poverty, not simply by addressing labor and wealth, but by addressing social issues, such as broken homes.[20] Despite the ensuing controversy, the logic was entirely New Left: by focusing on repairing the social situation (in this case, families), the economic situation, they thought, would naturally improve.

When Coppola revised *Finian's Rainbow*, he brought the plot more in line with these New Left ideas. To do this, he drew on imagery that would have immediately suggested contemporary politics to its audiences. For example, the opening sequence of the film, in which the racist sheriff comes to foreclose on the sharecroppers' land, begins as rally-style chanting and gradually becomes a full-cast musical number. Musically it was more or less the same as the 1947 Broadway musical. But Coppola's visual language incorporated explicit references to the 1960s Civil Rights movement.

17 [Student for a Democratic Society], "Port Huron Statement," excerpted in *ibid*., p. 74.
18 Mills, *ibid*., p. 78.
19 Students for a Democratic Society, *ibid*., p. 67.
20 United States Department of Labor Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Washington, D. C., U. S. Government Print Office, 1965.

In this sequence, an African American sharecropper (costumed to look like the real-life activist Stokley Charmichael pictured here, lower right corner of the frame) leads the farmers in a "sit in," a famous Civil-Rights tactic that protestors used to desegregate restaurants in the South during the 1950s and 1960s.[21] At the end of the song, the sharecroppers tip the policeman's car, another image that would have carried political overtones during the riots of the 1960s.

Just as important as what Coppola added, however, was what Coppola omitted from the Broadway version. Most conspicuously, Coppola cut the song "Necessity." This song, performed in the stage version by workers in a tobacco field, describes the economic conditions that force them to toil.[22]

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21 Jeff Menne, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
22 The song is heard briefly, as background music, near the opening of the film, without words.

My feet want to dance in the sun
My head wants to rest in the shade
The Lord says go out and have fun
But the landlord says, "Your rent ain't paid."

Necessity, it's plain to see
What a lovely world this old world can be
But no, it's all a mess, account of necessity.

Because of this cut, the movie features very little discussion of what the sharecroppers actually do on the farm, nor is there any footage of the sharecroppers working – labor, in its most concrete sense, is entirely absent from the film. Whenever the workers do appear onscreen, they typically are seen running through fields, weaving garlands, hugging one another, or protesting the government, and otherwise enjoying communal life on the farm – but they never harvest tobacco. The song "If This Isn't Love," for example, portrays the farmers singing as they chase a greased pig and skip around a maypole. How such vignettes relate to the plot is unclear, but they do give the overall impression of an idyllic, hippie lifestyle. The result is a film that suppresses issues of labor, promoting instead a multi-racial society built on mutual appreciation and affection – Rainbow Valley became a New Left Eden.

Updating the show's politics did not just entail rewriting the script. The camerawork also seems atypical for Hollywood musicals. In the opening sequence the sharecroppers' protest gives way to a series of jarring jump cuts, which portray a restless Woody approaching by train to interrupt the foreclosure.

Francis Ford Coppola, *Finian's Rainbow*, opening sequence

In most movie musicals, the camera tends to be as carefully choreographed as the dancers. But as the opening song of *Finian's Rainbow* reaches its conclusion, Coppola instructed the operator to hurl the camera down the length of the car.[23] This lends the final moments of the sequence a helter-skelter look, far removed from the gliding, graceful tracking shots typical of Hollywood musicals.

Even beyond the actual images and words in the film, Coppola famously distanced himself from the typical Hollywood studio-system of production, resulting in a new, avant-garde style. Stereotypical "old Hollywood" musicals tended to feature armies of dancers traipsing over gigantic studio sets in lavish costumes constructed by battalions of unionized workers. Film critic Pauline Kael described this system as essentially Socialist, in which "almost everyone worked beneath his capacity" in order to "liberate and utilize the talents of his co-workers."[24] For film scholar Jeff Menne, Coppola's

most important work as a producer was to unsettle entrenched Hollywood studios by streamlining capital and labor in the film industry. If the New Left believed economic Socialism resulted in bloat, duplication, and wasted talent, Coppola's solution was to allow his actors greater input into the film's production, thereby using their talents in multiple ways, not just as performers, but also as collaborators in the film's blocking.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Coppola's approach to choreography. The dancing that does appear in the film tends to be brief, rough, and barely coordinated – far removed from the typical slick, synchronized, clockwork steps of most other Hollywood musicals at the time. In fact, the original choreographer for the film had been Hermes Pan, who had spent his career collaborating with Fred Astaire on his stunningly intricate dances for the screen. But from the beginning of the collaboration, the relationship between Coppola and Pan was strained. Pan himself described it as a clash of generations: he represented the experienced, studio-system stalwart, and Coppola represented the young, brash, avant-garde. "You see, these schoolboys who studied at UCLA think they're geniuses," Pan quipped, "but there is a lot they don't understand."[25] Coppola fired Pan only a few weeks into rehearsals, and from that point on the choreography began to drift away from familiar studio-system steps and sequences. In what little remains of Pan's choreography in the final version of the film, Coppola tends to cut away and insert small vignettes, shots that interrupt the overall design of each number.[26] For the rest of the dancing, in place of traditional

23 Renata Adler, "Screen: Finian's Rainbow," *New York Times*, October 10, 1968.
24 Quoted in Jeff Menne, *Francis Ford Coppola*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2014, p. 9.
25 Quoted in John Franceschina, *Hermes Pan: The Man Who Danced With Fred Astaire*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2012, p. 248.
26 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

film-musical steps, Coppola himself devised a kind of communal choreography that allowed individual actors to improvise their own steps and suggest routines for the entire ensemble.[27] In other words, the dancers took part in a kind of "participatory democracy" to stage and choreograph the film.

Astaire, who played Finian, also represented the older studio musicals to Coppola. He remained in the production even after Pan left, but the director tried to remove any hint of studio slickness from his star. "Try not to make Astaire be like Astaire," Coppola supposedly told Pan early in the process.[28] After seeing the film, reviewer Renata Adler described Astaire as "looking ancient, far beyond his years, collapsed and red-eyed."[29] In the final cut, not only did Coppola deprive Astaire of any memorable dancing, but he also created a look for Astaire that was far removed from his previous top hat-and-tails glamor.

Ultimately the film version of *Finian's Rainbow* was not just an adaptation, but rather a wholesale rethinking of the show, its politics, and its style. From camerawork, to costuming, to choreography, Coppola fashioned each element to invoke a political message that was, to a great degree, sympathetic with the New Left. Although Coppola and his compatriots' New Hollywood techniques and productions would eventually shift (and shock) the entire film industry, when *Finian's Rainbow* opened, it tended to strike contemporary reviewers as exaggerated, dated, and tired. One reviewer called it the "Rip Van Winkle of this season's regressive musicals," another called it a "classic antique," and still another called it, simply, "quaint."[30] Ultimately, instead of the edgy film Coppola had hoped to produce, his *Finian's Rainbow* struck reviewers as either mocking or sloppy (and not entirely without reason; when the studio requested that they blow up the 35mm film to make a 70mm roadshow, they ended up cutting the top and bottom of each frame-often including the dancers' feet).[31]

The feeling of "quaintness" does not simply describe Coppola's aesthetic, but it also attests to a watershed in the history of experimental, political art. By the late 1960s, the New Hollywood aesthetic essentially eclipsed the avant-garde styles of 1940s Broadway. Today *Finian's Rainbow*, if discussed at all in histories of the musical

27 James M. Welsh, Gene D. Phillips, Rodney F. Hill, *The Francis Ford Coppola Encyclopedia*, Lanham, MD, Scarecrow Press, 2010, pp. 88-89.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

29 Renata Adler, "Screen: Finian's Rainbow," *New York Times*, October 10, 1968.

30 A. Sarris, "Finian's Rainbow," *V. V.*, November 7, 1968; Barbara Falconer, "Movie Report: Finian's Rainbow," no paper, December 1968; John Mahoney, "W7's 'Finian's Rainbow' Breezy Musical Blend Fantasy, Comment," *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 9, 1968. All three reviews can be found in New York Public Library, MFL+ *Finian's Rainbow*, Newspaper Clippings.

31 Michael Schumacher, *Francis Ford Coppola: A Filmmaker's Life*, New York, Crown Publishers, 1999, p. 60.

theater, tends to be grouped with other post-*Oklahoma!* integrated musicals, perhaps only exceptional for its exuberant choreography and bluntly left-wing book, but not for any experimental style. Historian Gerald Bordman's assessment is typical: "The propaganda was blatantly left-wing (has anyone ever heard of a right-wing musical on Broadway?), but it was so sunny, so warm-hearted, and so witty that only the most archly conservative curmudgeon could object."[32] But even though *Finian's Rainbow* may seem rosy today, in 1947 Harburg faced real political consequences, both for his lyrics and his style. In the years after the show opened, the House Committee on Un-American Activities and Joseph McCarthy would begin to interrogate artists, supposedly for inserting subliminal messages into their work in an effort to revive prewar socialism, and for creating, not just politically minded works, but also a subversive style of music that would make Communist messages appealing to regular citizens around the country. The paranoia about a specifically far-left aesthetic reached a point where actor Adolphe Menjou would testify before the government, "I believe that under certain circumstances a Communistic director, a Communistic writer, or a Communistic actor, even if he were under orders from the head of the studio not to inject Communism or un-Americanism or subversion into pictures, could easily subvert that order, under the proper circumstances, by a look, by an inflection, by a change in the voice."[33] Style, not just substance, had become dangerous. Within a year of the *Finian's Rainbow* premiere, Harburg himself would be blacklisted from working in Hollywood for a decade. And like so many others in this era, it was not only for the political opinions he stated outright. It was also because of his Communist style.

32 Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Comedy*, Oxford/New York, Oxford UP, 1982, p. 170.
33 Eric Bentley, ed., *Thirty Years of Treason*, New York, The Vicking Press, 1911, p. 122.

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ABSTRACT

Between the 1930s and the 1960s, as political discourse and race relations in the United States experienced dramatic upheavals, the conventions of political theater and music changed as well. This essay explores these changes by describing how the 1947 Broadway show *Finian's Rainbow* changed when it was adapted into the 1968 film version, directed by Francis Ford Coppola. The original stage production adopted avant-garde styles of 1930s New York theater to make political points in an experimental vein. By the 1960s, however, Coppola no longer recognized the show's stylistic innovations, and revised the script to be more in line with New Left mores and conventions.

Keywords

New Left; socialism; Broadway; Burton Lane; E. Y. Harburg; Francis Ford Coppola; *Finian's Rainbow*; Hermes Pan; film music

RÉSUMÉ

Entre les années 1930 et 1960, alors même que le discours politique et les relations raciales aux États-Unis connaissent des bouleversements considérables, les conventions du théâtre et de la musique politiques évoluent elles aussi. Cet article interroge ces changements en explorant la façon dont la comédie musicale *Finian's Rainbow*, créée en 1947 à Broadway, se voit modifiée pour son adaptation cinématographique en 1968, sous la direction de Francis Ford Coppola (titre français : *La Vallée du bonheur*). La version scénique d'origine adoptait, à des fins politiques, le style avant-gardiste du théâtre new-yorkais des années 1930, dans une veine expérimentale. Dans les années 1960, en revanche, Coppola ne reconnaît plus les innovations stylistiques du spectacle, et révise le scénario pour l'aligner davantage avec les mœurs et les conventions de la Nouvelle Gauche.

Mots-clés

Nouvelle Gauche ; socialisme ; Broadway ; Burton Lane ; E. Y. Harburg ; Francis Ford Coppola ; *Finian's Rainbow / La Vallée du bonheur* ; Hermes Pan ; musique de film

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