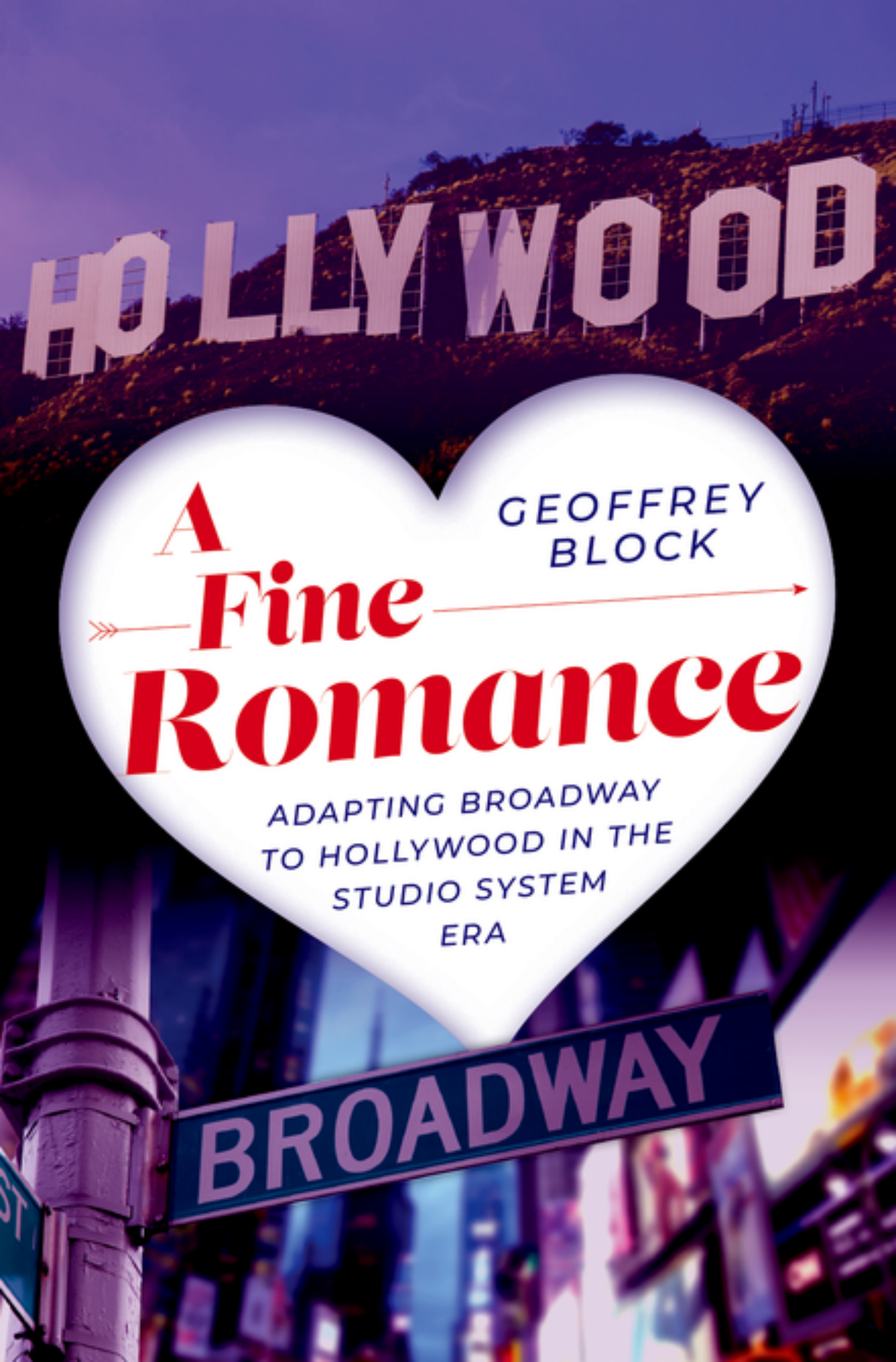
HOLLYWOOD
A Fine Romance
GEOFFREY BLOCK
ADAPTING BROADWAY TO HOLLYWOOD IN THE STUDIO SYSTEM ERA
BROADWAY

A Fine Romance

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Adapting Broadway to Hollywood in the Studio System Era

GEOFFREY BLOCK

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To Dominic Broomfield-McHugh
Superb scholar, treasured colleague, and, best of all, friend

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Preface

Two Confessions

When I began to think of what to say in my Preface, for some reason I couldn't help thinking of Rousseau's famous lament divulged early in his *Confessions* (1781–1788), "My birth was the first of my misfortunes." Even knowing I can't top Rousseau, I begin this book on stage musicals and their screen adaptations with a confession of my own, Confession No. 1 (the first of three): Due, not to a misfortune but an accident of birth, I was born too late to see any of the first eleven (of twelve) stage works discussed in the pages that follow until *after* I had seen their film adaptations. To compensate for this deprivation, my prescient parents thoughtfully brought their Rodgers and Hammerstein–obsessed son along to see the newly arrived film versions of *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*. For the record, the *stage* version of *Oklahoma!* debuted five years before my birth and *The King and I* when I turned three. This leads to Confession No. 2: In my sheltered life (so far) I have yet to see a stage production of nearly half of the musicals explored in the book you are now reading (*The Cat and the Fiddle*, *Roberta*, *Cabin in the Sky*, *Call Me Madam*, and *Silk Stockings*). It provides small comfort to know that most readers of this volume will join me in this same crowded confessional.

The first edition of my first book on Broadway musicals, *Enchanted Evenings*, a survey that scrutinized such topics as the compositional genesis and the relationship between drama and music in more than a dozen stage musicals from *Show Boat* to Sondheim, appeared in 1997.[1] The survey didn't discuss film adaptations, but after issuing the usual caveats about how film musicals differed markedly and generally offered usually pale imitations of their stage models, these films proved useful for teaching purposes. For the second edition twelve years later, I added two new chapters, this time devoting attention to the film adaptations of the stage shows I wrote about from *Show Boat* to *West Side Story* and providing commentary on the film versions of *Sweeney Todd* and *The Phantom of the Opera* in an expanded Sondheim chapter and a new chapter on Andrew Lloyd Webber. With two exceptions, again *Show Boat* and *West Side Story*, this volume does not revisit stage shows and film adaptations considered in the earlier survey. When these shows and films are reprised here (along with two works previously discussed elsewhere), the goal is to say something new about them.[2]

The Chosen Ones

The central topic of *A Fine Romance: Adapting Broadway to Hollywood in the Studio System Era* is the symbiotic relationship between a dozen Broadway musicals and their Hollywood film adaptations.[3] Since I couldn't conjure up a sensible way to avoid doing so, I begin as I did in *Enchanted Evenings* with the Broadway opening of the pivotal *Show Boat* in 1927, but this time my story will conclude with *Cabaret*, a work that in its 1966 stage version arrived at the end of the Broadway era that began with *Oklahoma!* The multiple Oscar award–winning film version of *Cabaret* that followed in 1972 (although losing to *The Godfather* in the Best Picture category) marked a glorious valedictory moment that preceded thirty years of perceived decline. The curse was broken in 2002 when the film adaptation of *Chicago* captured the Oscar for Best Picture, a milestone that helped inspire a renaissance in the movie musical of all types that is continuing as of this writing.[4]

Here is my list of the twelve Chosen Ones, shows and films, arranged in the order they first appeared on the stage (performance run totals and film run times, respectively, follow the artworks' dates in parentheses):

1. ***Show Boat***, 1927 (572); Universal 1936 (113 min.)
2. ***The Cat and the Fiddle***, 1931 (395); MGM 1934 (92 min.)
3. ***Roberta***, 1933 (295); RKO 1935 (105 min.)
4. ***Cabin in the Sky***, 1940 (156); MGM 1943 (99 min.)
5. ***Oklahoma!***, 1943 (2,212); Magna 1955 (145 min.)
6. ***On the Town***, 1944 (463); MGM 1949 (98 min.)
7. ***Brigadoon***, 1947 (581); (MGM 1954 (108 min.)
8. ***Call Me Madam***, 1950 (644); 20th Century-Fox 1953 (117 min.)
9. ***Silk Stockings***, 1955 (478); MGM 1957 (118 min.)
10. ***West Side Story***, 1957 (732); Mirisch-Seven Arts 1961 (151 min.)
11. ***Flower Drum Song*** 1958 (600); Universal 1961 (133 min.)
12. ***Cabaret***, 1966 (1,165); Allied Artists and ABC 1972 (124 min.)

These twelve stage shows and their film adaptations span a period of thirty-nine years (1927 to 1966) for the stage works, thirty-eight for the films (1934 to 1972). All but one of the original stage productions was at least a modest commercial hit in its era. In half the cases, they were either the longest-running show of their respective decade (*Oklahoma!*), or among the longest (*Show Boat*, *The Cat and the Fiddle*, *Brigadoon*, *West Side Story*, *Cabaret*). The exception is *Cabin in the Sky*, a major cultural milestone with its all-Black, all-star cast, both on Broadway and in Hollywood, stage and film, but only a *succès d'estime* on the stage. The films, which followed their stage predecessors by intervals between two years (*Roberta*,

Silk Stockings) and twelve years (*Oklahoma!*), were for the most part commercially successful and critically highly regarded in their day. Several have matched or overshadowed the acclaim of their stage predecessors and are widely regarded as film classics.

All but three of these film adaptations clocked in under two hours, and three flew by in less than 100 minutes. Since the average two-act stage musical lasts about two and a half hours, not including intermission, the length of a film adaptation constitutes a pre-existing condition that provides a starting point for many of the differences between stage and screen versions. With the exception of the period between the film versions of *Oklahoma!* in 1955 (145 minutes) and *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1972 (180 minutes), the decreed film length of screen adaptations before and after these milestones was no more than two hours. What this meant as a practical matter was that for most film adaptations, roughly thirty stage minutes of dialogue or music had to go.

Most of the stage musicals chosen for this study debuted during the twenty-year period between *Oklahoma!* (1943) and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), often designated as a Golden Age. It was the era of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, Cole Porter, Frank Loesser, Leonard Bernstein, George Abbott, Agnes de Mille, and Jerome Robbins whose legacy included many of the most memorable and frequently revived shows of all time. Film historians have designated their own overlapping but also chronologically distinctive Golden Age of Hollywood (or more formally, Classical Hollywood Cinema in the Sound Era).[5] This era began before *Oklahoma!* with the earliest sound films of 1927 and continued briefly after the collapse of the studio system in the late 1950s, several years before the twilight of Broadway's Golden Age. While this extended time period fits the range, diversity, and artistic accomplishment of *original* film musicals (i.e., film musicals *not* based on stage works), *A Fine Romance* will argue that the Golden Age of film *adaptations* of Broadway shows did not begin in earnest until the 1950s and was nearly over by the mid-1960s, several years after the decline of the studio system.

On Adaptation

A common (and perhaps prevailing) critical position offered by stage and film critics is that adaptations are intrinsically inferior to "original" film musicals. For these critics, the idea of a Golden Age of Film *Adaptations* is an oxymoron. According to this critical consensus, film adaptations of stage classics, including *Oklahoma!*, *My Fair Lady*, or *West Side Story*, despite the Oscar-winning status of the latter two films, simply don't belong in the same league as original film musicals such as *Love Me Tonight*, *Top Hat*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Singin' in the Rain*,

The Band Wagon, and *Gigi*. Readers might as well know sooner rather than later that I am not one of these critics. Based on anecdotal evidence and personal encounters, conventional wisdom, and my familiarity with vitriolic or snide film critics who regularly regard adaptations with disdain as deformations of stage musicals, I strongly suspect that until recently I have been in the minority. In fact, over the years I have come across few colleagues or published critics prepared to acknowledge that any but a handful of film adaptations approximate their stage sources in quality.

Adaptations most often lauded among this handful regularly include the 1936 version of *Show Boat*, *The Sound of Music*, *Cabaret*, *Chicago*, and sometimes a few others such as *Kiss Me Kate* (minus the comma), *The King and I*, *West Side Story*, *The Music Man*, *My Fair Lady*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Into the Woods*, several of which are explored in *A Fine Romance*. But for the most part, despite their consistent commercial success and sometimes surprisingly high rankings in various polls, when it comes to film adaptations, a cognitive dissonance remains between popularity and critical respect.[6]

The tone and tenor of this book will thus differ from many (but by no means all) in its tolerance for and appreciation of the art of adaptation. In contrast to the conventional wisdom dating back to the origins of the species, I consider the adaptations discussed here as mostly worthy films, even (or perhaps especially) when they flaunt their infidelity and fool around with revered stage material. My critical position maintains that the collection of twelve stage musicals and film adaptations gathered here not only encompasses a wide range of stage shows and films but presents works in both genres that are historically and aesthetically significant. The chosen stage musicals feature work by some of the most prominent lyricists, composers, directors, choreographers, and costume, set, and lighting designers of their time. In their efforts to offer fresh media-appropriate approaches, the film adaptations employed some of the finest film talent available, including directors, other major off-camera creative figures, and stars that regularly repeat their stage successes. Moreover, beginning in the 1950s film adaptations more often than not thankfully leave their exceptional musical scores largely intact. As a fringe benefit, the retention of these scores helps preserve the *theatrical* legacy of shows such as *The Cat and the Fiddle*, *Roberta*, *Call Me Madam*, *Silk Stockings*, and *Flower Drum Song* which have become a vanishing presence in musical theater history.

Through the use of primary sources (libretti, screenplays, scores, recordings) and documentary materials such as production and censorship files and letters, the chapters that follow will focus on the connections between original Broadway shows and their Hollywood screen adaptations with the goal of illuminating the intricate and varied adaptation processes and interconnections between these genres. In keeping with the principles of adaptation theory and fidelity studies,

the film adaptations will not be judged on the extent to which they follow their stage predecessors but as equally and mutually nurturing (or exploitative) romantic partners.[7] Adaptation theorist David L. Kranz persuasively argues that "there is no reason to replace the comparative analysis at the heart of fidelity criticism."[8] Instead, he sensibly suggests replacing the term "fidelity criticism" with "comparative criticism" thus "making the issue of fidelity (still important for economic, audience-response, and hermeneutic reasons) only one of several related questions in the comparative equation."[9] I agree and will follow Kranz's lead and stick mainly to "comparative criticism."

A Fine Romance does not wish to minimize the significant and fundamental differences between live stage and mediated film performances and the visual possibilities afforded by the latter. For example, most of the films explored here effectively employ the classic cinematic technique of montage (scene sequences made up of contrasting camera angles and actions, the latter often superimposed or overlapping). Several take their viewers on location to New York, New York in *On the Town* and *West Side Story*, Arizona for *Oklahoma!* (standing in for the Indian Territory of 1907), and the German countryside in *Cabaret*. Like most films of their era, most of the films in our list, however, including *Brigadoon* and *Flower Drum Song*, with their constructed replicas of the Highlands of Scotland and San Francisco's Chinatown, respectively, were filmed on elaborate studio soundstages. Also, in sharp contrast to the requirements of the stage, half of our films—*On the Town*, *Call Me Madam*, *Brigadoon*, *Silk Stockings*, *West Side Story*, and *Flower Drum Song*—feature vocal dubbing for at least one major character.

In "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory," leading adaptation theorist Thomas Leitch asserts that "of all the explicitly stated fallacies that have substituted for theoretical principles in adaptation study," the fallacy that "literary texts are verbal, films visual . . . is the most enduring and pernicious."[10] Had Leitch been focusing on stage versus film musicals, he might have rephrased the fallacy to read that "stage works are theatrical, films cinematic." In elaborating how this fallacy plays out for literary texts versus films, Leitch makes the obvious but surprisingly often overlooked assertion that applies equally well to screen musicals: "Films are not strictly speaking visual."[11] Since the arrival of synchronized sound, films have been *audio-visual*, depending as they do on soundtracks as well as image tracks for their effects. Commentators who continue to brush aside synchronized sound as a mere appendage to the visual essence of cinema are impervious to several crucial and powerful developments in film history more broadly, but especially film musical history.[12]

As we will see, stage musicals often demonstrate a marked cinematic quality, and film musicals regularly adopt theatrical features to their arsenal of reimaginings. Yet when the film adaptation of his *Sweeney Todd* (1979) was finally released in 2007, Sondheim stated in an interview with Jesse Green that "everyone

who has attempted to translate a stage musical to film has underestimated the distance between the languages."[13] Sondheim is not alone in thinking that stage musicals are from Mars and their film adaptations from Venus.

Such a divide might be true of novels and films, but stage and film do in fact speak a common language. In particular, they both rely on sound as much as visual material to communicate their narratives. Consequently, many of the films examined here depend on music as much as visual imagery to tell their stories. Stage musicals and their adaptations may not use all the dialogue or all the music from their stage sources, and they regularly interpolate new musical possibilities and alter the libretto much as a stage revival of a musical might do, but both genres rely on sound as well as image to convey dialogue, lyrics, and melody.

As a musicologist who specializes in musical theater and musical film history, I will practice my trade here. Consequently, while I will try to contribute something meaningful about the visual component of film adaptations, which I consider of incalculable importance, I will place my central emphasis, without apology, on the aural component of films, the words the characters speak, the music they sing, and the ways film adaptors use and discard the words and music of their stage sources. Too often the music, especially in musical films, gets short shrift from scholars and critics. The present volume will travel in the opposite direction in its emphasis on the musical component of a stage musical or musical film, beginning with detailed considerations of how, and how much, the stage score was altered and then moving on to why.

In the 1930s and 1940s the film studio structure, commercial interests, and the tastes of the viewing public led to a conspicuous lack of fidelity in film adaptations of stage musicals. For reasons addressed in chapter 1, starting in the 1950s and continuing through the mid-1960s, fidelity became increasingly fashionable (and profitable). But even *Oklahoma!*, the film version discussed here that comes closest to its stage source in its retention of its dialogue, songs, and dance, removed one of the stage show's most powerful songs, Jud Fry's "Lonely Room." This liberty, however, was a far cry from what happened to *Cabin in the Sky* and *On the Town*, in which studios removed most of the original stage scores, instead offering new songs drawn from a pool of contracted composers and lyricists.

Show Boat, *Call Me Madam*, *Silk Stockings*, and *Cabaret* featured newly interpolated songs. But following one of the Commandments of film adaptation (introduced in chapter 1), producers and directors commissioned the original songwriters rather than studio composers to write them. *The Cat and the Fiddle* and *Roberta* retained most of their original scores but greatly altered their presentation, ordering, singer assignments, and dramatic contexts. *Flower Drum Song* and *West Side Story* retained nearly all of the music but made significant changes to the stage song order. The film versions of *Oklahoma!* and *West Side*

Story kept most of the original stage choreography by de Mille and Robbins, whereas the film adaptations of *Cabin in the Sky*, *On the Town*, *Call Me Madam*, *Brigadoon*, *Silk Stockings*, *Flower Drum Song*, and *Cabaret* discarded most of the original choreography.[14] Even in the Age of Fidelity, opportunities for cheating were seemingly endless.

A Fine Romance: The Condensed Version

The romance explored in *A Fine Romance* begins in 1927, the year *Show Boat* began its long "life on the wicked stage" (to steal a song title from that show). The birth of *Show Boat* coincides conveniently with the birth of the sound film, after which chapter 2 continues with a discussion of two more hit stage musicals with music by Jerome Kern from the 1930s, *The Cat and the Fiddle* and *Roberta.* In subsequent chapters film adaptations of four 1940s musicals (*Cabin in the Sky*, *Oklahoma!*, *On the Town*, and *Brigadoon*) and four 1950s musicals (*Call Me Madam*, *Silk Stockings*, *West Side Story*, and *Flower Drum* Song) offer significant opportunities to explore a fascinating variety of instructive case studies. In some cases, the Hollywood studios approached the process of adaptation with genuine love and even respect, but seldom, and in this case to their credit, with unwavering fidelity. The end of the affair arrives, at least in this volume, with Bob Fosse's cinematic 1972 re-envisioning of *Cabaret*, our sole stage representative from the 1960s.[15]

During the forty-five years encompassed between the stage debut of *Show Boat* and film debut of *Cabaret*, the relationship between Broadway and Hollywood was frequently turbulent, laden with disappointments and broken promises, mutual attempts at economic and artistic domination, and occasional irreconcilable differences. At other times, the stage and screen planets (and their bright stars) aligned, leading to well-crafted, artistic, entertaining, remunerative, magical, inspiring, occasionally even breathtaking films. Generations of Broadway musical and Hollywood film audiences, critics, aficionados, music, stage, and film historians, performers, and practitioners provide continuous proof that the two-way romance between the two genres can sometimes lead to commercial and artistic unions based on respect and love rather than merely marriages of commercial convenience.

For more than twenty years following *Show Boat*'s stage debut the institutional policies, corporate structures, and aesthetic attitudes practiced within the Hollywood studio system were determined by film executives who viewed the work of virtually everyone involved with a given stage production as expendable. Consequently, film adaptations of stage musicals in these earlier years took significant liberties with the narratives seen and musical scores heard during the

Broadway run. While usually profitable, with few exceptions the critical verdict on these films remains mostly negative.

After two decades of rampant infidelity, film studios had an about-face and decided that greater fidelity would better serve their greater interests. The resulting films beginning in the 1950s would soon be accused of being *too* faithful by not adopting a more original or cinematic approach to their stage sources. Despite the frequently impressive commercial successes of film adaptations of stage musicals in the 1950s and 1960s, original film musicals (i.e., film musicals not based on stage sources), continued to dominate the critical attention of film scholars.[16]

Following years of condescension and neglect from critics and scholars, critical attitudes on adapted film musicals began to soften.[17] As evidence of the increased attention paid to film adaptations, accompanied by a more accepting critical outlook, interested readers can turn to *The Oxford Handbook of Musical Theatre Screen Adaptations*, edited by Dominic McHugh, a collection that devotes twenty-seven chapters and 700 pages to the critical and scholarly scrutiny of film adaptations.[18] A few years prior to this milestone Ethan Mordden offered a sympathetic treatment of the topic and Richard Barrios conveyed positive critical verdicts in a survey of fifty film musicals that included nineteen adaptations.[19] I am grateful for the critical support as well as the insights these new perspectives offer.

While the discussion of these shows and films will focus on the connections between song and story, it also addresses questions related to the business underpinnings of Broadway and Hollywood, how the relationship between these rival yet collaborative entities evolved, and how the differing commercial and aesthetic models and goals of Broadway and Hollywood created both conflict and harmony. Although the emphasis will be on aesthetic and critical issues, the case studies, especially those focusing on *Show Boat*, *Cabin in the Sky*, *West Side Story*, *Flower Drum Song*, and *Cabaret*, will also engage crucial social issues such as race and ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual identity.

It was noted earlier that the central topic of *A Fine Romance* is the symbiotic relationship between a dozen Broadway musicals and their Hollywood film adaptations. To this end, each chapter addresses the symbiosis between Broadway and Hollywood through an examination of one to three significant, representative, and mostly hit stage musicals and their film adaptations. Throughout this process I have been guided by the ancient but timeless wisdom of musicologist Joseph Kerman, who encouraged scholars in my discipline to embrace critical positions without apology and to take to heart former Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's often-quoted assertion that humans are entitled to their own opinions but not to their own facts.[20] For each work, I will strive to address the following questions. What happened in the transfer from stage to

film? How are the two versions similar and different? What pragmatic and critical criteria motivated decisions to alter or preserve stage elements in the transfer to film? Who made these decisions and why? What are the dramatic and musical consequences of these commercial and artistic choices and to what extent might they be considered successful ones?

Final Confession: Mea Culpa

In what follows I express the view that (for the most part) the adaptations under scrutiny offer something new and serve the newer medium without providing a disservice to the old. With the exception of *Brigadoon*, I will try to make the case that the film adaptations of stage musicals in this survey offer effective and successful artistic alternatives that coexist, without embarrassment, with their distinguished predecessors. This position brings me to my final and perhaps most heretical, confession, Confession No. 3: Although I am old enough to know better, I continue to harbor a special affection for these films, and even when I discovered that film versions more often than not fell short of what I saw and heard on stage, it didn't stop me from enjoying and appreciating these films.

After confessing my sins as a musical theater and musical film historian I conclude with one last heresy. Much to my surprise, I am now prepared to espouse the unpopular critical position that most of the films discussed here merit admiration, and sometimes even love, more than they deserve scorn, pity, or neglect. I would go even further and assert my critical position that in their imaginative expansion of the dance component, four of the twelve film adaptations discussed in *A Fine Romance—Roberta*, *Call Me Madam*, *Silk Stockings*, and *Flower Drum Song*—go a long way to disprove Ralph Waldo Emerson's adage that "imitation cannot go above its model."[21]

1

The Hollywood Studio System and a Brief Survey of Film Adaptations from *Show Boat* to *Cabaret*

You never give the orchids I sent a glance!
No! You like cactus plants,
This is a fine romance.

—Dorothy Fields, "A Fine Romance"
from *Swing Time* (1936)

The Studio System and the Broadway Musical in the 1930s

To understand how adaptation from stage to screen happened the way it did requires an explanation of the sometimes compatible and sometimes competing aims and goals of Broadway and Hollywood. The remaining sections of this introductory chapter offer a brief survey of how and why film adaptations evolved from their stage origins between *Show Boat* and *Cabaret*.

Whether for the stage or the screen, the business of mounting musicals has always been driven by the marketplace and the need to create an entertaining show or film that can reach its intended market. Sometimes attitudes and practices evolved in different ways from one medium to the other. A good example of this is the changing view of song interpolation (i.e., the introduction of film songs that were not in the original stage show). Broadway songwriters gradually achieved autonomy over their own material, but when George and Ira Gershwin, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, and Cole Porter began their careers in the 1910s and 1920s (Jerome Kern's career began in the early 1900s), song interpolation was a common practice that helped these famous future songwriters get their start when producers used their songs in someone else's show.[1]

The situation could also backfire—for example, when Rodgers and Hart discovered on an opening night in 1920 that half of the songs in what they thought belonged to their own Broadway show, *Poor Little Ritz Girl*, had been replaced with songs by Sigmund Romberg and lyricist Alex Gerber. By the 1930s, the days were far less common when Florenz Ziegfeld could insert Irving Berlin's "Blue

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Skies" on opening night to boost the sinking prospects of Rodgers and Hart's *Betsy* (1926) without the principal authors' knowledge or permission.[2]

In contrast, until the 1950s, Hollywood executives and directors would continue the practice of replacing Broadway songwriters with studio songwriters who would produce new songs. As the Depression took hold and songwriters like Rodgers and Hart traveled to a financially more lucrative Hollywood haven to escape the economically troubled New York theater environment, they were regularly required to sign movie contracts that left them without the authority they were beginning to enjoy on Broadway.

As we will see in considering the film adaptations of *On the Town* (chapter 3) and *Cabin in the Sky* (chapter 4), even the most famous Broadway songwriters were often unable to decide which songs could stay in a film, which had to go, and which would be assigned to studio songwriters under contracts representing in-house publishers. The songs created by these songwriters under contract earned substantial profits for the studios and their music publishing companies as studio executives were contractually free to replace the work of Broadway composers with new songs written by a studio staff when the executives believed these could better reach what Ethan Mordden called the "American village."[3] To their financial, if not always artistic credit, the commercial results more often than not validated these decisions.

By the late 1910s and early 1920s, before the advent of sound, the studio system had established its hegemony over a vast commercial domain when independent film producers merged with theater chains and film distributors, creating an oligopoly. In 1928, one year into the sound era, RKO became the fifth major studio conglomerate, joining Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Fox Film Corporation (which merged with Twentieth Century in 1935 to become 20th Century-Fox), Warner Bros., and Paramount Pictures. Universal Pictures and Columbia Pictures employed similar production methods but owned fewer theater chains, while United Artists had access to ownership of production studios and mainly served as financial backers for independent film producers.

These were the eight companies known as the majors; collectively these companies produced the majority of films during the studio system era and also owned most of the 15,000 movie theaters in operation by the end of the 1930s.[4] The stable of contracted lyricists and composers whose songs were owned and distributed by the studios were joined on vast lots and soundstages by a large staff of screenwriters, set designers, technicians, prestigious directors, and the popular stars of the day, many of whom had also signed exclusive contracts.[5]

During the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, each major studio developed its own personality, specialties, and style. Although Paramount, MGM, and 20th Century-Fox specialized in the genre, all the studios made at least some memorable musicals. Paramount, a technological pioneer in the transition to sound,

produced perhaps the most widely appreciated film musicals from sound's early years (1929 to 1934) in a series of five films directed by Ernst Lubitsch and one by Rouben Mamoulian starring Jeanette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier, either alone or together.[6]

Near the end of the Lubitsch-Mamoulian-MacDonald-Chevalier reign, Warner Bros. released *42nd Street* (1933), the first in a series of spectacular dance musicals directed by Busby Berkeley that featured large ensemble dancing with kaleidoscopic military precision, often with overhead and other striking camera shots that couldn't be duplicated on a stage. The same year, RKO released *Flying Down to Rio*, the first of nine iconic 1930s films that featured the partnership of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in a series that would include *Top Hat*, *Roberta*, *Swing Time*, and *Shall We Dance*, featuring timeless scores by Berlin, Kern and Dorothy Fields, and the Gershwins. Beginning in the 1930s, 20th Century-Fox offered superb sound, visuals in Technicolor, and a seemingly endless succession of female stars from Shirley Temple through Alice Faye, Betty Grable, June Haver, and Marilyn Monroe into the 1950s (later referred to as "the 20th Century-Fox blondes").[7] Universal, best known in the early 1930s for its horror films like *Frankenstein* and *The Bride of Frankenstein*, both directed by James Whale, surprised and delighted the skeptics when Whale was assigned to direct *Show Boat* in 1936.

The Big Five studios produced seven of the twelve film adaptations explored in *A Fine Romance*, including five films produced between 1934 and 1955 by MGM, the most prolific producer and distributor of musicals in the Studio Era: *The Cat and Fiddle*, *Cabin in the Sky*, *On the Town*, *Brigadoon*, and *Silk Stockings*. *Roberta* was the third in the Astaire-Rogers series of RKO films. *Call Me Madam* was produced by 20th Century-Fox. Twenty-two years after producing *Show Boat*, Universal (also among the top eight companies) added *Flower Drum Song*. Completing the dozen are three films produced outside of the studio system: *Oklahoma!* (Magna Theatre Corporation); *West Side Story* (The Mirisch Company); and *Cabaret* (Allied Artists Pictures and ABC).

While musicals are among the best-remembered films produced during the Studio Era, they represented only a small, albeit significant proportion, 4%, of the total number of films produced. MGM was by far the most prolific. As a sign of their productivity and dominance, during the post–World II years between 1946 and 1955, more than half the musicals made in Hollywood were MGM movies.[8] This came to about 25% of MGM's total output or eighty-one of their 316 films during this period.[9] The most consistently profitable musicals in their day and probably still the most memorable in ours are the forty musicals produced by Arthur Freed (1894–1973), who, after serving as associate producer of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) headed his own team at MGM known as the Freed Unit until 1961, one year before he retired (see Table 1.1, "Musicals Produced by the Freed Unit").[10]

Table 1.1 Musicals Produced by the Freed Unit.

	Adaptations (15)	**Original Musicals (25)**
1939	*Babes in Arms* (Busby Berkeley)	*The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming)
1940	*Little Nellie Kelly* (Norman Taurog)	*Strike Up the Band* (Berkeley)
1941		*Lady Be Good* (Norman Z. McLeod)
1942	*Panama Hattie* (McLeod)	*Babes on Broadway* (Berkeley)
1943	***Cabin in the Sky* (Vincente Minnelli)** *Du Barry Was a Lady* (Roy Del Ruth) *Best Foot Forward* (Edward Buzzell) *Girl Crazy* (Taurog)	*For Me and My Gal* (Berkeley)
1944		*Meet Me in St. Louis* (Minnelli)
1945		*The Clock* (Minnelli) [not a musical but included here because it starred Judy Garland and was directed by Minnelli] *Yolanda and Thief* (Minnelli)
1946		*The Harvey Girls* (George Sidney) *Ziegfeld Follies* (Minnelli)
1947	*Good News* (Charles Walters)	*'Till the Clouds Roll By* (Richard Whorf)
1948		*The Pirate* (Minnelli) *Summer Holiday* (Rouben Mamoulian) *Easter Parade* (Walters) *Words and Music* (Taurog)
1949	***On the Town* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen)**	*Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (Berkeley) *The Barkleys of Broadway* (Walters)
1950	*Annie Get Your Gun* (Sidney)	*Pagan Love Song* (Robert Alton)
1951	*Show Boat* (Sidney)	*Royal Wedding* (Donen) *An American in Paris* (Minnelli)
1952		*The Belle of New York* (Walters) *Singin' in the Rain* (Kelly and Donen)
1953		*The Band Wagon* (Minnelli)
1954	***Brigadoon* (Minnelli)**	
1955	*Kismet* (Minnelli)	*It's Always Fair Weather* (Kelly and Donen)
1956		*Invitation to the Dance* (Kelly)
1957	***Silk Stockings* (Mamoulian)**	
1958		*Gigi* (Minnelli)
1959		
1960	*Bells Are Ringing* (Minnelli)	

• Musicals discussed in *A Fine Romance* are highlighted in bold.

• Directors are indicated in parentheses in each column.

Freed claimed to prefer original musicals to adaptations, and indeed the twenty-five musicals he produced in the former category are probably his best known, most notably *The Wizard of Oz, Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Easter Parade*, *An American in Paris*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *The Band Wagon*, and *Gigi*.[11] But although they have received considerably less attention, Freed also produced a significant number of film adaptations, fifteen between *Babes in Arms* and *Bells Are Ringing*. In both categories, one of the keys to Freed's success was his ability to assemble, sign, and in some cases discover a parade of outstanding directors, songwriters, screenwriters, choreographers (several of whom Freed groomed to become directors), and a pool of singers and dancers widely considered the most talented in the business.

Looking at Table 1.1, in the four Freed films included in this volume, two were directed by Vincente Minnelli, one by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, and one by Mamoulian. One film was choreographed by Hermes Pan (uncredited) and one each by Busby Berkeley (also uncredited) and Kelly.[12] Composers and lyricists include Vernon Duke and John Latouche, Leonard Bernstein, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, and Porter, with interpolations supplied by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg to an abbreviated Duke-Latouche score and new music by Roger Edens set to words by the original stage lyricists Betty Comden and Adolph Green for an even-more-reduced Bernstein score. Although none of the four Freed adaptations showcase his great "discovery" Judy Garland, who appeared in fourteen Freed films, they boast the singing and/or dancing talents of Ethel Waters, Lena Horne, and John W. Bubbles (John Sublett) in *Cabin in the Sky*, Kelly and Vera-Ellen in *On the Town*, Kelly and Cyd Charisse in *Brigadoon*, and Astaire and Charisse in *Silk Stockings*.

The 1950s ended on a high note for MGM and the Freed Unit with *Gigi* (1958). With its screenplay and lyrics by Lerner, music by Loewe, and direction by Minnelli, this original musical was critically acclaimed, Academy Award–winning, and a commercial juggernaut that earned $10 million on a budget of $3.3 million. Unfortunately, the series would end anti-climactically two years later with a Freed-Minnelli collaboration, the modestly successful *Bells Are Ringing*.[13] According to Eric Hodgins, as a sign of their decline, by 1957, studios made only about 50% of the movies produced, with the other half created by independent producers.[14]

The fall of the studio system has been attributed to three main factors. The first blow was a case brought to the Supreme Court in 1948 that ruled against the studios' anti-competitive film distribution model and demanded that they sell their theater holdings, a major source of income and power over film distribution. Studios were also required to abandon the monopolistic practice known as block booking, which forced theater owners to purchase multiple films as a unit.[15] Since theaters were no longer required to screen their films, by

the mid-1950s the major studios found it financially necessary to reduce their production output by more than a third and to cut their staff and budgets accordingly.[16] Earl Hess and Pratibha A. Dabholkar report that from 1948 to 1952, although enormously productive years for the Freed Unit, "the film industry [as a whole] lost close to 75% of its audience and 50% of its revenue.[17] In 1957, even MGM lost money for the first time and had laid off 345 of the 598 actors it had under contract in the previous decade.

The second challenge to the system was the rise of independent producers. This development led to fewer films but greater autonomy and more lucrative contracts for top stars, directors, and writers formerly controlled by the major studios. The third and final blow that led to the demise of the studio system was the rise of commercial television, a free entertainment that offered new audiences a reason to stay home rather than go out and pay to see a movie, even a movie using the trendy visual and song technologies Porter spoofs in his song "Stereophonic Sound" from *Silk Stockings*: "Glorious Technicolor/Breathtaking CinemaScope or/Cinerama, Vistavision, Superscope or Todd-AO and/Stereophonic Sound."

Anything Goes: Stage and Film at Cross Purposes

Despite markedly different infrastructures and markets and contrary ideas about the best way to satisfy their mutual financial desires, Broadway and Hollywood danced cheek to cheek from the earliest days of sound films since they shared a common quest for commercial success. Nevertheless, in the 1930s and 1940s, conflicting procedures and values almost invariably led to film adaptations that departed significantly from their stage predecessors. Among the central issues to consider when taking stock of the "fine romance" between Broadway and Hollywood in the 1930s are the disparities between film studios' primary commercial interests and the critical verdicts of musical theater and film scholars, critics and commentators, and audiences.

Anything Goes, a hit musical in 1934 and a hit movie in 1936, admirably exemplifies these differences and how they led to contrasting outcomes. Following closely behind the 441 performances of *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), at 420 performances *Anything Goes* (1934) was the second-longest running book show of the 1930s.[18] After disappearing for nearly thirty years as a stage work (the songs remained popular), it re-emerged, first with a considerably revamped and modestly successful 1962 off-Broadway revival run (the basis of the 1969 London revival) and twenty years after that in a popular 1987 revival at the Vivian Beaumont Theater in New York. Unlike many revivals of 1930s shows and nearly all film adaptations, the Vivian Beaumont version, which also served as the basis

for successful revivals on Broadway in 2011 and London in 1989, 2003, and 2021, retains all but one of the songs from the original 1934 production. On the other hand it also includes notable changes to the original book and a number of song interpolations from other shows by Porter, who wrote the music and lyrics.

The catalyst for the stage version was the failure of George and Ira Gershwin's *Pardon My English* the previous year, a flop that broke a string of hits produced by the team of Vinton Freedley and Alex Aarons, frequently with scores by the Gershwins and stars Fred and Adele Astaire.[19] Freedley and Aarons' (and the Gershwins') last major hit, *Girl Crazy* (1930), marked the spectacular Broadway debut of Ethel Merman singing "I Got Rhythm." After *Pardon My English* the Gershwins focused on the creation of *Porgy and Bess*, a collaboration with DuBose Heyward. To fill this gap, Freedley, without Aarons, enlisted Porter, who had been enjoying his own string of hit shows from *Paris* (1928) to *Gay Divorce* (1932), the latter Astaire's first show without his sister and his final Broadway show overall. To write the book for a musical set to take place aboard a ship, Freedley hired Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse, the co-authors of books and lyrics to several historic Kern scores in the mid-1910s known as the Princess Theatre musicals.

Starting with Merman in her first major Broadway role after *Girl Crazy*, Freedley assembled an all-star cast for *Anything Goes* with William Gaxton as her leading man. Joining them was Gaxton's partner from *Of Thee I Sing*, the comic actor Victor Moore, who had delighted audiences in two of the Gershwin-Freedley-Aaron 1920s hits, *Oh, Kay!* and *Funny Face*. When Bolton and Wodehouse's libretto was deemed inadequate, Freedley commissioned a new libretto from the team of Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse.[20] Several songs that Porter composed with Merman in mind would be discarded during rehearsals, one of which, "Buddie, Beware," was replaced by a reprise of "I Get a Kick Out of You" at Merman's request early in the run. Significantly, in sharp contrast to the fate that awaited him during the making of the film, Porter was asked to write the *entire* score. If a song didn't fit or the intended performer didn't like it, Porter himself would replace it with another.[21]

Although Broadway audiences appreciated Porter's sophisticated lyrics and music and the way Merman sang them, Paramount, immune to the delights of Porter and both oblivious and impervious to Merman's vocal and dramatic talents, came to a different conclusion about how to satisfy their film viewers. Consequently, Paramount greatly diminished the role Merman would play in her first film reenactment of a starring stage role.[22] Paramount's dim view of Porter's ability to create song hits became the rule rather the exception, beginning with RKO's decision to retain only one Porter song when transforming *Gay Divorce* into the newly titled film *The Gay Divorcee* (1934), the classic "Night and Day." The commercial wisdom of RKO's approach to success was reinforced when one

of the added songs, "The Continental" (by Con Conrad and Herb Magidson), became the first song to win the Academy Award in the new Best Song category.[23]

Porter composed the scores to two more films in the 1930s, *Born to Dance* (1936), an original musical, and *Rosalie* (1937), the latter based loosely on a stage version composed by George Gershwin and Romberg with lyrics co-written by Ira Gershwin and Wodehouse. After *Anything Goes*, the most memorable film adaptations of Porter shows were delayed until the 1950s, *Kiss Me Kate* (1953) (unlike the stage version with no comma after *Me*), which in a rare exception was produced at MGM by Jack Cummings rather than by Freed, and the Freed Unit's *Silk Stockings* from 1957 as the Studio Era and MGM wound down (discussed in chapter 5). The 1936 film adaptation of *Anything Goes* retained only four of the eleven songs Broadway audiences heard in Porter's rich stage score. This amount of cutting remained par for the course until the 1950s, including the considerably altered dramatic scenario offered in the 1956 film remake.[24] What was unusual in 1936 was the film's retention, not only of the basic plot, but a considerable portion of the original stage dialogue, including many of the corny jokes.[25]

In an informative and nuanced study Allison Robbins uses *Anything Goes* to show the contrasting attitudes and needs of the Hollywood studio system and Broadway that led to a significantly altered end product expressly designed to serve Bing Crosby and Paramount's in-house songwriters.[26] The copyrights for the newly commissioned songs belonged to Paramount's publishing firm Famous Music Corp. and thus earned additional income for the studio through radio broadcasts, recordings, and sheet music sales. This system also saved money since the studios could now pay Porter less for fewer songs. A decade before attaining international fame for his rendition of "White Christmas," Crosby, already a recording superstar, was on the verge of becoming a major movie star as well when he was contracted to play the lead in Paramount's *Anything Goes*.[27] To fulfill studio expectations, Crosby needed songs that fit his voice and suited his personality. Paramount's stable of in-house songwriters was ready to supply them.

The four stage songs that Porter wrote to match Merman's vocal strengths were hits in their day and have maintained their classic status: "I Get a Kick Out of You," "You're the Top" (with Gaxton), and "Anything Goes" in Act I and "Blow, Gabriel, Blow" in Act II. One number was assigned to Gaxton without Merman, "All through the Night," an Act I duet Gaxton's character shared with his love interest, the wealthy ingénue Hope Harcourt.[28] The film dropped "Blow, Gabriel, Blow" entirely, retained only about twenty seconds of Merman singing "Anything Goes" (during the credits), and offered only a single verse and chorus of "I Get a Kick Out of You" near the beginning of the film.[29] Only Merman's duet, "You're the Top," significantly with Crosby, was given the full treatment (verse, multiple choruses, and a reprise). The only other Porter song retained in

the film was the pseudo-sea chantey, "There'll Always Be a Lady Fair," first sung only by the Avalon Boys, a male quartet, then joined by Crosby in a reprise.

Paramount's stable of contracted composers proved extremely successful from the early days of sound film. Separately, but more often in collaboration, lyricist Leo Robin and composer Richard A. Whiting were responsible for six of Paramount's ten top-selling songs during these years, including three of the top four.[30] One of Robin's lyrics (with music by Ralph Rainger), the song "Please" from *The Big Broadcast* (1932), sung by Crosby in a purely singing role, sold the third most copies of any song during this period. Robin also set the lyrics to two of the three Crosby songs in the 1936 film version of *Anything Goes*, "Sailor Beware" with Whiting and "My Heart and I" with Friedrich Hollander. By contrast, Rodgers and Hart's "Isn't It Romantic?," originally sung by Maurice Chevalier in Paramount's *Love Me Tonight* (1932) and now regarded as one of the most memorable songs from any era, was only the eleventh top-selling song at 37,266 copies, far below that of "Please" (216,035 copies) and "Louise," the Robin-Whiting hit from *Innocents of Paris* (1929) which sold 385,058 copies and launched Chevalier into fame. Crosby's third song interpolation in *Anything Goes* featured music composed by Hoagy Carmichael with lyrics by Edward Heyman. Although Carmichael was by then well known for "Stardust" (1928), "Georgia on My Mind" (1930), and "Lazy River" (1931), "Moonburn" was the first of his many film songs.[31]

After the camera had already regularly shifted to view Crosby's antics while Merman performed "Shanghai-De-Ho" (lyrics by Robin and music by Frederick Hollander), an embarrassingly Orientalist diegetic (definition to follow) interpolated show number, Crosby gets on stage to join Merman toward the song's end with a few fragments of "You're the Top" thrown in. The addition of "Shanghai" in the film meant that Crosby was featured prominently in no less than six of the eight songs, only two of which were composed by Porter.[32] Despite this diminishment of Porter's contribution to the Paramount score, critics of interpolation can take some comfort that Crosby's three new songs not only suited the film star's vocal strengths but demonstrated their own intrinsic musical merits. Crosby, who began his career in the late 1920s as a pioneering jazz singer, recorded the added songs for Decca records in November 1935 (the film was released in February 1936) with a swinging instrumental trio of players taken from George Stoll and His Orchestra that included the jazz pianist Joe Sullivan, whose short but impressive solo in "Moonburn" resembles the usually inimitable Earl Hines.[33]

Although Porter was silent on the point, it is possible to imagine that Robin and Whiting's "Sailor Beware" might have even pleased the composer of "You're the Top" had they been placed in a different film musical. In addition to its intrinsic memorability, Robin and Whiting's song includes one overt borrowing

(a reference to the opening of the traditional Scottish folk song "My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean") and one possible allusion. Whether intentional or not, the opening of the song's chorus unmistakably evokes the ascending scale and its rhythm in the opening phrase from Porter's "I Get a Kick Out of You."

House Rules in the 1930s (and the Man Who Broke Them)

The time period between *Show Boat* in 1927 and *Oklahoma!* in 1943 was mainly inhabited with stage musicals that did not survive beyond their era. Even the musicals that found a place in the repertoire, *Anything Goes* for example, usually did so with significant reworking of their books and scores. With the exception of Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey* (1940), revived with new orchestrations in 1952, it is a challenge to name a musical prior to *Oklahoma!* that returned to Broadway with its original book and score largely intact. In the case of *Show Boat*, after a virtually unaltered return engagement in 1932, future revivals, beginning with the significantly revised 1946 version supervised by Oscar Hammerstein II (with a new ending and a new final song by Kern), abandoned or replaced much of what viewers witnessed in 1927.

Porgy and Bess, with a book by DuBose Heyward, lyrics by Heyward and Ira Gershwin, and a score by George Gershwin, began its life on Broadway as a through-sung opera designed mainly for opera singers and remains a staple of the world's opera houses. When the work returned to Broadway in 1942, however, audiences witnessed a *Porgy and Bess* in which most of Gershwin's nearly continuous sung recitative was replaced with spoken dialogue. Operatic revivals of *Porgy* have generally exercised fidelity to the score and dramatic restraint, and even the newly conceived 2012 Broadway version of *Porgy and Bess* with an abbreviated and often rephrased libretto by Suzan-Lori Parks, new orchestrations by William David Brohn and Christopher Jahnke, and directed by Diane Paulus refrained from bringing in songs from other Gershwin stage works. *Crazy for You* (1992), based in part on Gershwin's 1930s hit *Girl Crazy*, exhibited a contrasting approach with the addition of a brand-new book based on the stage original and numerous song interpolations from other Gershwin sources. For the most part, the central legacy of shows that premiered between *Show Boat* and *Oklahoma!* more closely resembles what happened to *Girl Crazy/Crazy for You* rather than *Pal Joey* or even the Paulus revival: a treasure chest of autonomous songs from the Great American Songbook.

Although the majority of successful stage musicals were adapted into films, aside from a few prominent exceptions such as the 1936 *Show Boat*, it was the original film musicals such as those directed by Lubitsch (*The Love Parade*) and Mamoulian (*Love Me Tonight*), danced by Astaire and Rogers (*Top Hat)*, or with songs performed by

stars like Judy Garland (*The Wizard of Oz*) that gained the most critical distinction, popular appeal, and respect. Consequently, even the major Broadway songwriters were regularly forced either to compose songs for original films or to endure experiences similar to what happened to Porter's hit-filled *Anything Goes*. Now that we've witnessed the film adaptation fate of a Porter stage musical, here's a quick summary of what happened to Rodgers and Hart, the Gershwins, Berlin, and in the next section, more Porter shows and shows by Kurt Weill.

Three Rodgers and Hart stage scores in 1928 and 1929 were swiftly made into movies in 1930, *Present Arms* (retitled *Leathernecking*), *Spring Is Here*, and *Heads Up!*. None of these films included more than three songs from the stage versions. *Ever Green* (1930), a London musical that did not travel to New York, retained only two songs in its 1934 film adaptation (under the respelled title *Evergreen*). Perhaps even more disappointing, *Babes in Arms* (1937), arguably one of the richest stage scores of the 1930s, retained only two of its songs when transferred to film in 1939.[34] Although it presented the two George Balanchine ballets mostly unchanged, the film adaptation of *On Your Toes* (1936), also in 1939, found no use for *any* songs beyond melodic remnants relegated to orchestral underscoring. By then, Rodgers and Hart had redeemed their reputation in film with their original score to *Love Me Tonight* (1932), which remains widely regarded as one of the finest musical films ever made.[35]

At the dawn of the following decade, Gershwin's *Strike Up the Band* (1940) retained only its title song. In marked contrast to the lack of critical success enjoyed by the film adaptations of this and other 1930s stage musicals, however, the Gershwins created a memorable score for the Astaire-Rogers series (*Shall We Dance* in 1937) and another without Ginger (*A Damsel in Distress* also in 1937). Berlin achieved success by avoiding film adaptations of stage musicals altogether with his scores to three original Astaire-Rogers film musicals (*Top Hat*, *Follow the Fleet*, and *Carefree* between 1935 and 1938) and *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1938). According to the Internet Musicals Database, the last, the first of the cavalcade or "jukebox" musicals based on older Berlin songs (and a few new ones), became the highest-grossing musical of any type the year it appeared.[36]

The career and reception of one composer, Jerome Kern (1885–1945), departs from this dismal disparity between the popularity and perceived quality of adaptations versus original film musicals. In fact, on more than one occasion the film adaptations of Kern's stage musicals survived the studio jungle intact, contradicting the fate suffered by his contemporaries. The next chapter will look at three successful films with music by Kern from among the eight film musicals adapted from thirty-eight stage works composed over the course of forty years. The three musicals are Kern's great 1927 hit *Show Boat* and two Kern hits from the 1930s, *The Cat and the Fiddle* (1931) and *Roberta* (1933). The film versions of all three shows managed to salvage a critical mass of songs as well as comparable

narrative features of their stage sources at a time when film adaptations almost invariably elected to treat their stage sources with cavalier abandon.

The Commandments and Kern

The introduction of Kern provides a glimpse into a future still two decades away beginning shortly after the three sailors in *On the Town* (1949) completed their adventurous twenty-four hours on the town and returned to the Brooklyn Naval Yard. One might even be tempted to assert that the arrival in the 1950s of more faithful film adaptations of popular stage hits launched a new era that came with a new set of aesthetic principles. Ethan Mordden makes precisely this assertion in *When Broadway Went to Hollywood* and calls these principles Commandments, of which there are three:

1. Thou shalt cast by talent rather than by fame, if practical with the original Broadway star.
2. Thou shalt retain the original narrative structure and all or most of the score, without interpolations.
3. All right, thou mayest interpolate, but thou shalt let the original creators make the new numbers.

To which I propose a Fourth Commandment:

4. Thou mayest transform a singing character into a dancing one, but only if the metamorphosis is dramatically credible and enhances the narrative and the music.

While the changing approach to film adaptation began in earnest in the 1950s, it didn't begin *ex nihilo*. Just as the 1927 arrival of *Show Boat*, with its book and lyrics by Hammerstein and music by Kern, anticipated the Rodgers and Hammerstein *Oklahoma!* revolution in 1943, the 1936 Universal film adaptation of *Show Boat* anticipated Mordden's Commandments and future adaptations. For starters, it was cast by talent with several major roles duplicated by their original or touring actors and actresses, whose fame would arrive soon enough. Hammerstein's screenplay also closely followed the stage show, or at least the first three-fourths of it, and since Hammerstein was the author, the departures from the stage version in the remaining quarter possessed its own authorial authenticity. The original stage show contained too many songs to squeeze into a two-hour film, but most of the major songs were accounted for. Concerning interpolations, the original show itself, like other