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JOHN KENRICK

MUSICAL THEATRE

A HISTORY

FOREWORD BY OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN III

SECOND EDITION

BLOOMSBURY

Musical Theatre

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A History

Second Edition

John Kenrick

Foreword by Oscar Andrew Hammerstein III

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I dedicate this book to Scott Larson and to my mother Mary Pinizzotto Kenrick Marotta. Their loving support made this project possible. I also thank the late Marty Jacobs for teaching me so much, and my friend Oscar Andrew Hammerstein III for writing the foreword for this new edition.

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Foreword: Us

Oscar Andrew Hammerstein III

Now I know that many of my grad students at Columbia University took my class just to see what I was all about, this Hammerstein family historian on his maiden voyage into teaching. I had easy pass written all over me. All true. I began my class by asking this question: What is the most important factor in creating a hit musical?

The eager few in the front row, who saw their opportunity to polish this professor's apple, confidently proclaimed that, of course, it was the story aka the book aka the libretto aka the plot that was of singular importance to any Broadway musical's success.

Not so fast, bravely chimed a young woman in the second row. The plot is merely an armature; a handy synagogue for that magical wedding of words and music called the "Broadway song." And isn't music what audiences are supposed to come out humming? The second row then broke into argument with itself over words and music—who's more important and who comes first. Things were going great!

One unsentimental fellow in the third row, minoring in theatre on his way to a sensible career in finance, shrugged and said that it was the pragmatic marriage of money with star power that made the theatre world go round and that all creative efforts were secondary piffle. There followed a pained silence.

This was broken by a young man in the fourth row, who resembled my father, quietly insisting that without the guiding hand of a wise director you may as well take the whole mess and set it on fire. I liked his way with words. Next to him, a dancer held her tongue, but I knew what she yearned to express. Someone dressed as a giant rat, shouted, "You got nothin' without the unions!" Another pained silence followed.

Yes, yes, I said yes. But no. When we are staring at an actor on a stage, what is he staring at? A long silence was broken by my future assistant who quietly offered—"Us?"

Acknowledgment

In *The King and I*, Oscar Hammerstein II observed that "when you become a teacher, by your pupils you'll be taught." The new edition of this book reflects what I have learned from an additional decade of teaching this subject at New York University's Steinhardt School, The New School University, Philadelphia's University of the Arts, and Marymount Manhattan College, as well various libraries, museums, adult education programs, including the Center for Adult Life Enrichment in Hewlett, NY, and the Peninsula Library in Lawrence, NY. I dedicate this book to all the students and listeners of all ages who have questioned, enlightened, and inspired me over the years—including the fourth and fifth graders I taught at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School in Astoria in the early 1980s.

Introduction: "Let's Start at the Very Beginning"

Where did my love for musicals come from? Frankly, I have no idea. My parents were both "theatrically challenged." Although I grew up a thirty-minute subway ride away from Times Square, I did not see my first Broadway musical until I was in high school. But musicals became one of the abiding passions of my life. I've attended literally hundreds of them. I also worked in various capacities on productions at every level from amateur to Broadway, and for the past twenty years have written and lectured about musical theatre history, doing my best to pass that passion on to college students, adult education groups, and library audiences.

You can expect the unexpected in this book. I have served as an assistant to six Tony Award–winning producers. I have worked with some legendary talents, and some monstrous egos. So I view musical theatre history as someone who has been there and done it. I know all too well that a lot of history winds up lost or forgotten—and that every stage production is shaped by human frailties that rarely make it into the written record.

Definitions and Key Ideas

Let's start by defining what we are going to discuss. What is history? Napoleon Bonaparte called it "a set of lies generally agreed upon." Philosopher Jorge Santayana described history as "a pack of lies about events that never happened told by people who weren't there." Much of what is published as "history" reflects the prejudices and personal agendas of authors who either have reputations to defend or axes to grind.

It is particularly tricky to study the history of musical theatre. Many sacred truths in this field were invented by press agents. It is second nature for theatre people to reshape reality. A Broadway producer I worked for revised his bio every few months, saying, "No one in this business can resist fixing a script." In this new edition of *Musical Theatre: A History*, every effort has been made to brush away the cobwebs and fabrications, to get you as close as possible to the people and events that shaped this art form. I include a few questionable stories that are just too good to leave untold, but with appropriate disclaimers.

While we are defining things, what is a musical? One dictionary defines it as "a musical comedy." That is just one of many genres within this art form. Here is my definition, one that far more inclusive:

> A *musical* (noun) is a stage, screen or television production using popular style songs to either tell a story (book musicals) or showcase the talents of songwriters and performers (revues)—dialogue optional.

And what is the point of studying the history of musical theater? For starters:

- *Musicals vividly reflect the popular culture of their time*—So musicals are an entertaining way to learn about the nations, cities, and eras that spawned them.
- *They help you know how the art form got to where it is now*—If musicals matter to you, then you should know how they have developed over time.
- *They aid in enriching your theatergoing*—Every musical makes more sense when you know its context.
- *They make you realize that your heroes/heroines are flawed and human*—If they could succeed, so can anyone—and that includes you.

When I was a teenager, aging theatre buffs insisted that the Broadway musical's "golden age" ended in the 1950s, as if all the *really* good stuff happened long ago. In fact, musical theatre has enjoyed several golden ages. Odds are there are more to come. A new one may even be starting as you read this.

History shows us that musicals thrive in communities that meet four essential criteria:

1. A population large and prosperous enough to support an active theatrical culture.
2. A thriving artistic community that nurtures successive generations of creative and performing talent.
3. A shared sense of optimism about the community and its future.
4. Freedom from extensive government censorship and political oppression.

This book examines how musical theatre has thrived in different cities over the centuries, and considers how each of its hometowns has placed its own unique stamp on the art form. As an art of the now, theatre defies second-hand appreciation. Photographs, films, videos, and sound recordings can preserve elements of a performance, but nothing yet invented fully captures the excitement, the visceral impact of live theatre. Each performance is unique—you are either there to share in it, or you can "do no more than guess" what it was like.

In these pages, I cannot hope to bring past performances back to life. If only there was a time machine that would allow us to whisk through time and attend the premieres of *Les Brigands*, *The Mikado*, or *My Fair Lady*! But we can go beyond statistics and plot summations by examining the people and environments that gave birth to these musicals. With such knowledge, we can better appreciate what led up to the musical theatre of our own time, and make some educated guesses about the future of this powerful art form.

The primary job of a musical is to tell a story—or, in the case of a revue, to tell a number of brief stories through songs and skits. When all goes well, a musical's blend of song, dance, and the visual arts evokes an intellectual as well as emotional response, but in order for any of those elements to matter, a musical must tell a compelling story in a compelling way.

An art form requires an artist, a medium, and eventually an audience. A popular or commercial art form requires the same trinity, with one crucial difference: there must be a paying audience that makes the act of expression profitable for the artist. When the art form is a collaborative, multidisciplinary one like musical theatre, it must be profitable for everyone who helps to bring an artist's conception to life (producers, director, designers, actors, investors, etc.—and yes, investing is a talent). The taste and attitude of audiences play a tremendous role in determining the development of the product; demand helps to shape the supply. So we will consider how audiences have contributed to the development of musicals.

As a commercial art form, musical theatre reshapes itself continually to meet ongoing changes in popular taste. In the past few decades, those changes have ranged from the superficial (electronic amplification, hydraulic sets, etc.) to the essential (using recycled pop songs). Commercial success ignites new trends and styles. Who in their right mind would emulate a financial failure?

Elements of a Musical

From a purely technical point of view, all musicals consist of certain key elements:

- Music and lyrics—the songs
- Book/libretto—the connective story expressed in script or dialogue
- Choreography—the dance
- Staging—all stage movement
- Physical production—the sets, costumes, and technical aspects

Over the centuries, a great deal of creative energy has been spent in *integrating* these elements, making them all smooth-flowing parts of the storytelling process.

And what makes a great musical, one that delights audiences for generations? A great musical must have:

- *Brains*—Intelligence on the part of all the creative and performing talents involved.
- *Heart*—Emotional content that audiences can connect with, both on the opening night and generations afterward.
- *Courage*—The audacity to do something new and innovative.

And you thought that trinity was just a plot device in MGM's *The Wizard of Oz*? Well, from *The Mikado* to *Oklahoma!* to *Hamilton*, the best musicals all have these three assets.

Critics and awards do not make a musical "great." Condescending or negative reviews for *Cats, Les Miserables, Miss Saigon*, and *The Lion King* did not prevent those shows from achieving decade-plus runs. Critics may carp, but millions of theatergoers consider them great musicals—and so they are. (Though to be frank, I hate *Cats*.)

Am I suggesting that a flop cannot be great? Well, yes. A show without a large, lasting audience cannot have much of a commercial or artistic impact.

What to Expect in the Pages Ahead

Every chapter in this book has been revised since the original edition, and several chapters are entirely new. It examines the artistic, business, and social forces in various cities and countries that helped to forge important new ideas and trends—a process that continues today, in New York, London, and elsewhere.

Our journey begins in ancient Greece, where drama was invented as musical theatre. The Romans borrowed most of their theatrical conventions from the Greeks, adding several of their own. The Middle Ages brought musical dramatizations of Bible stories. Then came commedia dell'arte, pantomimes, and comic opera, all of which involved music. By the time grand opera appeared in the 1700s, a separately evolved popular musical theatre was already thriving in much of Europe.

In Paris during the 1840s, composer Jacques Offenbach turned operetta into an international sensation. After some developments in Vienna, London was home to the ingenious creations of Gilbert and Sullivan, and early burlesque. Meanwhile, the United States developed its own homegrown forms of musical theatre. New York saw the first blackface minstrel shows, and Broadway introduced "extravaganza." The rise of British music halls, American vaudeville, and burlesque contributed elements to a later genre that both England and America would lay claim to—the musical comedy.

After years of British theatrical dominance, American musicals gained worldwide popularity in the twentieth century. The groundwork laid by George M. Cohan and Victor Herbert made it possible for Jerome Kern and a succession of creative talents to turn Broadway into one of the world's primary sources of musical entertainment. Cole Porter, the Gershwins, and the team of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart brought musical comedy to new creative heights. In the 1940s, Rodgers teamed with Oscar Hammerstein II to create the organically integrated musical, a variation that enjoyed worldwide acclaim for decades. Now labeled by many sources as "the golden age of the Broadway musical," this era came to an end with the rise of hard rock music in the 1960s.

Broadway was reduced to a side street of popular culture—still profitable, but rarely noticed by most of the general public. But musical theatre continued to thrive, on Broadway and beyond. The twenty-first century has brought a fresh wave of musical comedies, mega-musicals, adaptations of old movies, and a flurry of "jukebox musicals" (using established pop songs). As public tastes change, musicals must do the same.

This book discusses hundreds of essential musicals and creative talents. If some of your favorites are missing, my apologies; a 2,500-year chronicle crammed into one volume must be selective. My goal is to be informative, not exhaustive. For each

musical discussed in the text, you will find the year of its premiere and the number of performances listed in parenthesis. If not already clarified by the surrounding text, I also specify the city.

Rich in stories about great shows and the people who made them happen, *Musical Theatre: A History* is a celebration designed to delight new fans and veteran aficionados alike, a joyous book about a joyous form of entertainment. So curtain up, light the lights, and we will begin our story in an era when the first stage musicals were done without benefit of any curtains or artificial lighting.

A Note to Educators and Students

I considered including a list of performance videos links. But such videos have a tendency to come and go without warning. So I have posted those links on my website, where they can be regularly updated. You can find them at www.musicals101.com/mthvid.htm.

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Ancient Times to 1800: "Playgoers, I Bid You Welcome!"

Theatre is a communal activity where one or more people act out a story for an audience. Musical theatre can trace its roots back to prehistoric religious rituals. These ceremonies involved costumes, makeup, props, choreography—and music in the form of chants, accompanied by drums and possibly other instruments.

However, there is little solid evidence as to what the earliest of these rituals were like. So we will begin our discussion with the earliest form of musical theatre to leave behind a substantial literature. As it happens, it is the earliest known form of drama.

"The Glory That Was Greece"

Anyone who thinks that *Oklahoma!* was the first musical to integrate music and dialogue is off by more than two thousand years. At the very beginnings of theatre in ancient Greece, the first dramas were musicals that used dialogue, song, and dance as integrated storytelling tools. Isn't it reassuring to know that show tunes have been around for two thousand and five hundred years?

You didn't know that the classic tragedies and comedies of ancient Greece were musicals? Small wonder! Many scholarly histories of theatre do not even mention the existence of musicals, so the last thing they would admit to is that drama began as musical theatre.

Some educators try to get around this by classifying early Greek drama as "lyric theatre." Well, that is just another way of saying "musical theatre." Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes were not only playwrights; they were also composers and lyricists. Their plays used music and dance as interwoven storytelling elements. Call these works "lyric theatre" or whatever else you like; they were musicals. When you envision the birth of musical theatre, don't picture the bright lights of Broadway—think of a sun-drenched hillside in Athens, fifth century BCE.

By that time, Athens was a thriving city-state with a population of approximately one hundred thousand. With trade ties that reached from the Mediterranean to inner Asia, it was one of the ancient world's business and cultural centers. By the fifth century BCE, the Acropolis, the massive, flat-topped rock that towers over the city at some five hundred feet above sea level, was adorned with a collection of temples and other public buildings. They included the world's first stone theatre, a semicircular open-air structure cut into the southern base of the Acropolis. This theatre was a place to honor the gods, dedicated to the divine patron of agriculture, wine, and joy itself—the god Dionysus.

The Greeks had a tradition stretching back to prehistoric times of honoring Dionysus with choral performances. These musical retellings of mythological tales were known as *Dithyrambs*. According to Aristotle, Thespis of Icaria was a writer-composer as well as a performer. In a moment lost somewhere between legend and history, Thespis became the first soloist to step out of a dithyramb chorus to enact a specific role by singing and speaking lines. So he is revered as the inventor of acting (actors are still called *thespians*) and of a new form of dithyramb called *tragedy*.

When Athens held its first tragedy competition in 534 BCE, Thespis won. This contest was part of the annual five-day celebration of spring known as the Dionysia, when Athens honored Dionysus with athletic and artistic events. Imagine the Super Bowl, Olympics, World Cup, and Tony Awards all taking place in the same week, and you have some idea of the excitement this festival generated.

Over time, three distinct types of drama evolved, each of which incorporated music and dance:

- *Tragedy* used stories taken from Greek mythology. These plays delved into the darkest subjects, including murder (*Electra*), revenge (*Medea*), and incest (*Oedipus*). The characters existed solely in their dramatic framework, never referring to current events. Dramatists could alter the details of legends in order to make a point. Violence was never enacted on stage, but could be described after occurring offstage.
- *Comedy* was lighter and usually provided a happy resolution to the plot. Characters addressed the audience, mentioning recent news events and current celebrities—even if the plot was set in the past. A separate comedy competition was added as of 487 BCE. Old or Attic Comedy took aim at specific issues and individuals; Middle Comedy (starting about 404 BCE) avoided political subjects and dropped the chorus; Late Comedy (from the mid-fourth century BCE onward) reflected a decline in Athenian culture by focusing on the cost of foolishness and moral weakness.
- *Satyr plays* involved a mythological race of half-man/half-beasts. Exclusively male, these creatures lived in a state of perpetual (and visible) sexual arousal, which made them perfect mirrors of impetuous masculine behavior. Although these plays gave "satire" its name, their content was not necessarily what we would call satirical.

Drama reached other cities, but the Dionysia competitions made Athens the center of theatrical activity in Greece. Athenians saw these contests as both a form of religious

worship and an expression of civic pride. Plays provided a chance to act out the never-ending moral and intellectual debates that were a defining element of Athenian democracy. Participation in the theatre, whether on stage, behind the scenes, or in the audience, was vital for self-respecting Athenians of every class.

The city's democratic government supervised the competitions. Before each festival, a magistrate selected a slate of competing dramatists. Initially, each dramatist served as his own director and leading actor, but over time those tasks became separate jobs. In a society where the only women with public lives were priestesses or prostitutes, men played all the stage roles. Early casts consisted of volunteers. By the later fifth century BCE all actors were professionals paid by the city.

All production expenses fell to a volunteer producer or *choregos*. The wealthiest men in Athens campaigned for this costly honor. The winning dramatist earned bragging rights and a modest cash prize, while a choregos won nothing more than the right to build a triumphal column to honor himself. Such was the perceived value of sponsoring a theatrical success.

Showtime in Ancient Athens

Depending on the city's finances, admission to the Theatre of Dionysus was either nominal or free. All performances were held in full daylight. Spending hours in blazing sunshine would have been pleasant in early spring, when daytime temperatures hovered around 60 degrees Fahrenheit (15.5 Celsius).

The front row of stone seats was reserved for priests, magistrates, and other dignitaries. Behind them, fifteen thousand spectators filled concentric marble benches that formed a bowl-shaped semi-sphere surrounding three sides of the flat, rectangular performance space known as the *orchestra*. This stone floor could be accessed from passageways on the left and right. Today, the location of the original theatre is filled by the ruins of a replacement structure built in Roman times. But surviving Greek theatres are acoustical marvels; words spoken from the performance space are audible in the last row. Behind the orchestra stood the *skene*, a tent or stone cottage that the actors used to change costumes and store props. It could also be used to represent a building in the play, and provided support for painted scenic panels called *skenographia*.

During performances, actors wore masks to make it easier for the audience to tell one character from another. These masks also made it possible for actors to play multiple roles without causing confusion. None of these masks has survived, but it is believed that they included small megaphone-like cones to help amplify the voice. Since masks rendered faces invisible, the actors relied on vocal pitch and physical gestures to express emotion. The male actors used padded body suits to depict female physical characteristics, as well as those of animals and mythical creatures.

During competitions, several plays were offered each day. Theatre audiences were enthusiastic. They responded to successful plays with laughter, cheers, and tears, and were known to express disapproval so vociferously that some performances were cut short. Each competition was judged by ten *kritai*, citizens elected by lot who were not necessarily experts (appropriate ancestors for today's *critics*). They voted on tablets that

were placed in an urn. To give the gods a say in the results, only five of the tablets were randomly drawn to select the winning play.

The chorus sang, danced, and provided their own accompaniment using the harp, flute, and other instruments. Bawdy humor, bathroom references, and even giant phalluses were common features on the Athenian stage. Songs allowed the chorus to comment on the play as well as take part in the dramatic action. Stretches of *monologue* (one speaker) or *dialogue* (two or more) were interspersed with musical contributions by the chorus. Since songs were often used to advance the plot and develop characters, it is fair to classify some of these early Greek dramas as artistically integrated musicals.

After Athens declined, most of its plays were lost. Of the more than seventy plays credited to Aeschylus, only seven full-length scripts survive. The texts of only four-dozen ancient Greek plays endured. While some evidence of ancient musical notation has been discovered, the melodies used in surviving plays are long gone, so we do not know what Athenian show tunes sounded like. The lyrics had to be audible to an audience of thousands, so the tunes must have lent themselves to vocal projection, and the accompanying instrumentals had to be relatively simple.

The Birds

One of the comic musicals familiar to ancient Athenians is *The Birds*, written in 414 BCE by Aristophanes (448–385 BCE). At age thirty-four, Aristophanes was already a past winner of the Dionysia and one of the most famous men in Greece. *The Birds* is an excellent example of how music was used in early Greek drama.

In this lighthearted fantasy, common citizens Eulpides and Pisthetaerus, fed up with life in Athens, set out in search of Epops, a mythical king who transformed himself into a bird. The two men offer the bird king a bold proposal: since birds rule the skies that sit between earth and the gods, why not build a magical wall to separate the two, and demand tribute from both sides? After all, gods need human worship as much as men need divine assistance! The birds (played by the chorus) gather in conference, and promise not to peck the two men to pieces—so long as the judges will grant this play a unanimous victory in the Dionysia. The birds then agree to erect the wall, and a nightingale proclaims their new power over both men and gods.

The nightingale appears in the form of a flute player who introduces the *parabasis*, a feature unique to Old Comedy in which the chorus offered three songs, alternating with three speeches. These could be integrated into the action of the play or offer departures from it. In this case, Aristophanes has the birds begin by retelling the creation story from their point of view, claiming that their origin predates the gods of Olympus. Their song then assures humankind:

If you recognize our divine power,
We shall be your guide and inspiration.
Through us you will know
The winds and the seasons,
Summer, winter, and the temperate months.

We shall not withdraw like Zeus to distant clouds,
But shall be among you and shall give
To you and to your children
And your children's children,
Health and wealth, long life, peace,
Youth, laughter, songs and feasts;
In short, you will all be so happy
That you will be exhausted with pleasure.

Euelpides and Pisthetaerus are given wings and feathers as the massive walls of "Cloud-cuckooland" are erected. When Pisthetaerus sets himself up as dictator, Euelpides returns to earth in disgust.

The Olympian gods miss their earthly sacrifices and send Poseidon and Hercules to offer Pisthetaerus a chance to marry Zeus's beautiful handmaiden Basileia. Pisthetaerus accepts, realizing that this marriage will cement his power over both gods and mortals. The play ends as the bird chorus offers a hymn of praise to the bride.

What brought the golden age of Athenian musical theatre to an end? After decades of war, Athens was ultimately defeated by the Spartans in 404 BC, and the city's fortunes never recovered. It was ruled by a series of petty dictators who soon terrorized the life out of the theatre. By the time Philip II of Macedon conquered the city sixty-six years later, Athenian drama was a thing of the past—but what a past!

The Roman Empire

The Romans took good ideas from those they conquered, so it is not surprising that they co-opted most Greek theatrical conventions. The mixture of dialogue, song, and dance was retained. Romans also produced plays as part of festivals honoring their gods, but there was no government involvement. In fact, for several centuries, many in the Roman establishment saw theatre, with its reversals of social norms, as a dangerous influence.

As attitudes changed, the Romans built semicircular open-air stone theatres in their cities. But for many years, Roman dramas were presented in simple, temporary wooden structures. Prominent citizens had priority seating, with the general public scrambling for bench space or standing room. The performing area was a raised wooden platform. A drop curtain was lowered into a trough at the front of the stage to signify the start of performances.

There was no chorus in Roman plays, so casts were small, and there could be substantial interplay between the actors and boisterous audiences. To make dance steps more audible, actors attached metal chips (*sabilla*) to their sandals, precursors of modern-day tap shoes. Initially, all of the actors in Roman theatre were men, so a color code was developed to clarify who was who. Wig color signified age or status (black=young, white=old, red=slave), a yellow robe indicated a woman, and a yellow tassel indicated a god. Eventually, female slaves played women's roles, but the color codes remained in use.

Over time, Roman theatre became increasingly tawdry. By the time the empire collapsed, the Catholic Church condemned theatre as sinful. Professional theatre ceased to exist in Europe for several centuries—until some churchmen stumbled on the idea of using theatre as a teaching tool.

Comedy Tonight: "Something Familiar"

Plautus (254–184 BCE) is the best remembered Roman playwright. His comedies included songs, dances, and instrumental accompaniment, and used conversational Latin as opposed to the more formal language of high poetry. Plautus also relied on a stable of stock comic characters. They included:

- *Pseudolus*: a clever slave forever outsmarting his Roman masters and hoping for freedom
- *Senex*: his ridiculous, aging master, an inveterate girl-chaser
- *Miles Gloriosus*: a vain, swaggering soldier
- *Mulier*: the domineering wife of a respectable citizen
- *Courtesan*: an attractive young woman men seek to own

In 1962, comedy writer Larry Gelbart revived these characters in his libretto for *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Most even kept their traditional Roman names. Zero Mostel gave a Tony Award–winning performance as Pseudolus, scheming to attain his freedom. And commander Miles Gloriosus defined himself with his entrance line, "Stand aside, everyone! I take large steps!"

In *Forum*, Pseudolus gets his freedom, Miles Gloriosus gets a rather different bride than he expected, and—with an assist from Gelbart and songwriter Stephen Sondheim—these characters provided fresh laughter more than two thousand years after Plautus created them.

The Middle Ages: Saints and Clowns

During the Middle Ages, individual minstrels and clowns crisscrossed Europe, offering popular songs and slapstick pantomime in exchange for tossed coins, or for food and lodging. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Catholic Church began presenting religious music-dramas. At a time when most people could not read, these plays were designed to make Bible stories more accessible. However, since the texts were in liturgical Latin, the lowest classes might not have found performances particularly instructive.

These church dramas were often presented in conjunction with religious holidays, such as Christmas and Easter. The casts consisted of clerics, choir boys, and in some instances, nuns. Originally performed in church, these plays eventually moved to outdoor stages where crude content was permissible. By that time, members of local

craft guilds were taking an active role in these productions. There were various types of medieval music-drama:

- *Mystery plays* were dramatizations of Bible stories.
- *Miracle plays* involved the lives (true or fictional) of saints.
- *Morality plays* were allegories illustrating the seven deadly sins.
- *Folk plays* involved popular myths, such as the legend of Robin Hood.

Some of these works have survived, such as *The Play of Herod* and *The Play of Daniel*. Both are sung through, with instrumentation that includes recorder, harp, bagpipe, and rebec (a type of fiddle). Polished metal bowls could be used to reflect sunlight on performers—in effect, the first follow spots.

In the 1400s, *commedia dell'arte* developed in Italy, where it remained popular for the next four centuries. Itinerant commedia troupes toured all over continental Europe. Always on the move, these companies used no written scripts. They improvised performances using stock characters to enact various stock scenarios. Commedia performers used partial face masks to help define their characters.

Commedia plots usually involved a pair of young lovers (*inammorati*) thwarted by one or more elders (*vecchi*), but eventually outsmarting them with the help of a sympathetic servant such as *Harlequin* or *Columbina*. Actors mixed traditional jokes with topical references to current events. Comic stage battles were accentuated by using a slapstick, two flexible pieces of wood that simulated a loud "smack!" Although the slapstick has fallen out of use, its name is still used to describe knockabout physical humor.

During the Renaissance, Italian intellectuals rediscovered ancient Greek drama. Because of the extensive use of choral verse in the surviving scripts, it was assumed that these plays were sung-through. In the 1570s, this error led Monteverdi and a group of artists known as the Florentine Camarata to use Greek drama as the model for the first grand operas. So, instead of musical theatre being a descendant of opera, it turns out that opera is actually a descendant of musical theater.

Shakespeare included the occasional song in his plays, but none of these works could be described as a musical. In France, at the end of the 1600s, Moliere turned out several comedies with songs for Louis XIV's court at Versailles. Moliere's *Le Mariage Force* (1664) and *Le Bourgoise Gentilhomme* (1670) used music provided by composer Jean Baptiste Lully. However, these musical entertainments inspired no trends.

Comic and Ballad Opera

During the Age of Enlightenment (1715–89) the first stirrings of popular musical theater occurred in England, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and France. Each of these countries was enjoying different degrees of prosperity and cultural renewal. Coupled with the gradual growth of cities, this created a ready-made audience for new and more sophisticated forms of entertainment. Grand opera was popular, but primarily among the upper and newly formed middle classes. Other forms of stage entertainment enjoyed a popularity that appealed to the rich and poor alike.

In the 1700s, a typical theatrical evening anywhere in Europe meant a program of several varied works. After a brief one-act curtain raiser came a full-length play, followed by a shorter afterpiece. Any of these offerings might involve songs. Producers and publishers used various terms to describe musical stage works, which has led to some confusion among scholars. At least three separate genres of musical theatre developed during this period:

- *Comic opera* used operatic conventions and musical styles to amusing effect, usually involving a heavy dose of romance. Michael Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl* (1845) told the story of an Austrian noblewoman kidnapped in infancy, who, ignorant of her heritage, falls in love with the polish aristocrat who carried her off. The score included the aria "I Dreamed I Dwelt in Marble Halls," which became a staple in the soprano concert repertory. Comic opera was a precursor of *operetta*, a form that would come into its own in France during the mid-1800s (see Chapter 2).
- *Pantomime* included songs and dialogue, dance, physical comedy, acrobatics, and special effects. It retained several commedia dell'arte characters, including Harlequin. These works were popular with general audiences. The Pantomime tradition in the United States would reach its peak in the 1870s (see Chapter 3). A different form of pantomime evolved in England, where such shows are still presented as Christmas entertainments for children.

Ballad operas used existing popular ballads and operatic arias, usually in such a way that the original title or lyrics of a song added a subtext. The first ballad opera ever written is the considered by many to be the ancestor of English-language musical theatre.

The Beggar's Opera: Frustration as the Mother of Invention

People can react to unemployment in different ways. The world might be a far happier place if more followed the example of John Gay (1682–1732), whose thwarted job hunt inspired him to pick up a pen and invent a new kind of musical theatre.

British writers of the early 1700s had little income from their creative efforts and were dependent on political appointments or the patronage of wealthy aristocrats. As the youngest son of a youngest son, Gay came to London at age twenty-two with no title, no money, and only a few useful contacts. Thanks to a witty mind and an eloquent pen, he made friends among London's literati, including Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift. Gay's connections in the Tory Party brought him government jobs during the reign of Queen Anne, but all that ended when her successor came to the throne.

German-born King George I left the everyday management of his new kingdom in the capable but corrupt hands of Sir Robert Walpole, who is considered Great Britain's first prime minister. As leader of the Whig party, Walpole blocked the careers of many Tories, including John Gay. This left the aspiring writer and his circle of discontented intellectuals drowning their frustrations in ale as they pondered the foibles and injustices of London society.

It was widely known that Walpole enriched himself at the nation's expense. Under Walpole, corruption became systemic. Administrative posts were available to the highest bidder. Once in a job, purchasers felt entitled to profit on their investment. For example, after the keeper of London's Newgate Prison paid a princely five thousand pounds to obtain his job, he openly charged prisoners hundreds of pounds for accommodations with access to light and fresh air. The poor had to settle for dark, dungeon-like cells.

One of the most celebrated lawbreakers of the day was Jonathan Wild, a minor criminal who organized the thieves and pickpockets of London into a citywide operation. For more than a dozen years, he posed as a crime fighter, arranging for victims to get back their stolen property, for a fee—much of which wound up in Wild's pocket. Eventually arrested, Wild continued to run his criminal empire from a cell in Newgate. Executed in 1725, he left behind several wives and numerous children.

At the other end of the social spectrum, grand opera from Italy was all the rage among London's high society—some of whom had obtained rank and fortune through dubious means. Foreign composers and singers were imported at great cost. Feuding sopranos Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni each earned two thousand pounds or more for a single season in London. Fireworks were anticipated when both women were cast in the London premiere of Handel's *Alessandro* (1726), but the composer balanced their roles note for note, so that neither singer could complain.

When Gay realized that he would probably never receive another government appointment, he penned a theater piece designed to attack the corrupt system. If government administrators were no better than common thieves, Gay reasoned that respectability was nothing more than a pretense. Why not use the format and conventions of Italian opera, so beloved by the upper class, to illustrate that class's resemblance to low criminals? He borrowed operatic melodies as well as barroom ballads, and set them to his original and sometimes scathing lyrics. The result came to be known as the *ballad opera*. But the extensive use of dialogue and the profusion of popular-style melodies make it easy to see that his creation was a form of musical play.

Gay found London theatre owners uncertain about presenting his potentially controversial script. The management of the Lincoln's Inn Fields Playhouse took it on—at least in part because Gay's benefactor, the Duchess of Queensberry, promised to cover all costs. A curious crowd of thirteen hundred packed the theatre for the premiere on January 29, 1728, including Prime Minister Walpole. We can only guess if he had any idea that he was about to face a withering comic attack, set to music.

Plot Summary

The Beggar's Opera (1728) opens with a humble beggar explaining that he has written an opera. He boasts that it follows the required forms without being "unnatural, like those in vogue." In a reference to Handel's dueling divas, the beggar says that the two leading female roles are so equal "that it is impossible for either of them to take offence."

The plot involves Macheath. Clearly inspired by Jonathan Wild, this professional thief and murderer calls himself a "Capitan" and is "as good as a Lord." This charming

criminal has secretly married Polly, the not-so-innocent daughter of Mr. Peachum, a "respectable" businessman who fences stolen goods for the thieves of London.

Anxious to have his daughter's marriage annulled, Peachum learns that Lucy, daughter of the jailer Lockit, is another one of Macheath's romantic conquests. Worse yet, Lucy is pregnant. Peachum and Lockit arrange for Macheath's arrest, knowing that he will hang. In prison, Macheath pays a hefty bribe to obtain a better cell and complains: "The fees here are so many, and so exorbitant, but few fortunes can bear the expense of getting off handsomely, or of dying like a gentleman."

When four additional women appear claiming that Macheath is the father of their babies, the scoundrel tells the executioner that he is ready to die. But the play's beggar-author reappears. When scolded that "an Opera must end happily," he admits that "in this kind of drama, 'tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about." And so, Macheath receives a pardon, swears to find partners for the women he has wronged, and publicly confirms his marriage to Polly, even while calling her a "slut."

Of the sixty-nine songs in *The Beggar's Opera*, forty-one used melodies taken from tavern ballads. The rest were taken from operas and other classical sources. British did most of their socializing in taverns, where customers joined in the singing of songs that ranged from the sentimental to the comic to the patriotic.

Barroom ballads remained a mainstay in Britain and its colonies for decades to come. In 1812, while American lawyer Francis Scott Key watched the British navy attacking Baltimore harbor, he was inspired by the sight of his country's flag waving amid the bombardment. He composed a poem, "Defense of Fort M'Henry," which appeared in a local newspaper. A music publisher made some adjustments and set it to the tune of the barroom ballad "To Anacreon in Heaven." The result was "The Star Spangled Banner," which the United States would adopt as its national anthem.

Although the melodies of *The Beggar's Opera* were borrowed, Gay's lyrics were original and quite specific to the characters and plot. In this scene, Peachum and his wife discover that their daughter has married Macheath. As it happens, the Peachums themselves were never legally married. The melody Gay used in this excerpt comes from "Grim King of the Ghosts," a ballad about a vain girl forced to marry a phantom. Audiences would have appreciated the connection between Polly's situation and that of the girl in the original song. The dialogue uses frank language:

MRS. PEACHUM: I knew she was always a proud slut; and now the wench hath played the fool and married, because forsooth she would do like the gentry. Can you support the expense of a husband, hussy, in gaming, drinking, and whoring? Have you money enough to carry on the daily quarrels of man and wife about who shall squander most? There are not many husbands and wives who can bear the charges of plaguing one another in a handsome way. If you must be married, could you introduce nobody into our family but a highwayman? Why, thou foolish jade, thou wilt be as ill-used, and as much neglected, as if thou hadst married a lord!

PEACHUM: Let not your anger, my dear, break through the rules of decency, for the captain looks upon himself in the military capacity, as a gentleman by his profession. Besides what he hath already, I know he is in a fair way of getting, or

of dying; and both these ways, let me tell you, are most excellent chances were white. Tell me, hussy, are you ruined or no?

MRS. PEACHUM: With Polly's fortune, she might very well have gone off to a person of distinction. Yes, that you might, you pouting slut!

PEACHUM: What, is the wench dumb? Speak, or I'll make you plead by squeezing out an answer from you. Are you really bound wife to him, or are you only upon liking? (*Pinches Polly.*)

POLLY: (*screaming*) Oh!

MRS. PEACHUM: How the mother is to be pitied who has handsome daughters! Locks, bolts, bars, and lectures of morality are nothing to them—they break through them all. They have as much pleasure in cheating a father and mother as in cheating at cards.

PEACHUM: Why, Polly, I shall soon know if you were married by Macheath's keeping from our house.

AIR (To the tune of "Grim King of the Ghosts")

POLLY: *Can love be controlled by advice?*
Will cupid our mothers obey?
Though my heart were as frozen as ice,
At his flame t'would have melted away.
When he kissed me so closely he pressed,
T'was so sweet that I must have complied:
So I thought it both safest and best
To marry, for fear you should chide.

MRS. PEACHUM: Then all the hopes of our family are gone for ever and ever!

PEACHUM: And Macheath may hang his father and mother-in-law, in hope to get into their daughter's fortune.

POLLY: I did not marry him (as 'tis the fashion) coolly and deliberately for honor or money. But I love him.

MRS. PEACHUM: Love him! Worse and worse! I thought the girl had been better bred.

At a time when London stage productions were lucky to run for a week, *The Beggar's Opera* reached sixty-two performances, making it the world's first long-running musical hit. Its lyrics were heard in every ale house and front parlor. So were its jokes, including a reference to "Bob Booty," a nickname for the unscrupulous Robert Walpole.

When Gay announced plans for a sequel called *Polly*, Walpole's government banned it. Although the published text of *Polly* became a bestseller, the author soon withdrew from London to a benefactor's country estate. Four years after the premiere of *The Beggar's Opera,* John Gay died at age forty-seven. Future ballad operas avoided political content. None of these later works are performed today.

The Beggar's Opera became one of the most frequently performed English stage works of the eighteenth century. A 1923 London revival ran for three years, igniting

fresh interest. Laurence Olivier sang the role of Macheath on the big screen in 1953, and rocker Roger Daltrey headlined a 1983 British television production. The text provided the inspiration for Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Die Dreigroschenoper/The Threepenny Opera* (1928), which updated the action to Victorian London. With an all-new score, this work became an international sensation in its own right. (We cover this in Chapter 12.)

Ever since *The Beggar's Opera*, British and American audiences have shown an affinity for musicals that tweak the establishment's nose. A long list of writers, from Gilbert and Sullivan to the creators of *The Book of Mormon*, can look back on John Gay as an artistic forefather.

Such are the earliest known roots of musical theatre. While some of these works are occasionally performed today, the modern musical's family tree can be traced no further back than the 1850s, when a new strain of lyric drama appeared in Paris.

2

Continental Operetta (1840–1900): "Typical of France"

On the evening of April 12, 1867, the cream of French society was packed into a Paris theatre for the premiere of *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein*. While awaiting the overture, the glittering audience had no way of knowing that the premiere was on the brink of being cancelled.

Backstage, the star soprano Hortense Schneider received word that the French government would not permit her to wear a bejeweled medallion. It was a replica of those that actual royalty wore as a mark of rank. Schneider didn't care who would be offended, and refused to go on without the decoration. As she raised royal hell, curtain time came and went. Composer and producer Jacques Offenbach, who had frequently battled with her over the years, finally decided that the curtain had been held long enough. He strode out into the orchestra pit, and struck up the overture.

As Offenbach expected, when Schneider heard the ravishing melodies composed especially for her, any thought of letting an understudy go on evaporated. She went on without wearing the controversial bauble. But when Schneider posed for a portrait of herself as 'La Grande-Duchesse,' she made sure the medal was prominently displayed on her breast. And why not? The horde of royals crowding nightly into Schneider's dressing room (and her boudoir) soon led contemporaries to refer to her as "le passage du princes."

The French like to believe that everything of value in Western culture originated in France. Well, drama and great cooking were first cultivated in Greece, opera was invented in Italy, electric light was developed in the United States, and attitude was perfected by Asians when the ancient Gauls were still building mud huts. But what we now know as the modern musical first appeared in Paris, for which we can be eternally grateful. The composer most responsible for developing this new genre was not born in France. From the very start, the modern musical was an international art form.

Paris

The Romans built the first known settlement on the island that sits where the River Seine transacts with an ancient trade route. After the first Frankish kings made Paris

their capital, it gradually spread out on both sides of the Seine in a jumble of streets and neighborhoods. Realizing that uprisings would be impossible to control in such a city, monarchs preferred to spend most of their time at a safe distance.

Theatre thrived in the city by the 1600s, thanks in part the encouragement of courtiers and bureaucrats. The poor of Paris exercised their mob power with riots in the late eighteenth century, culminating in the upheavals of the French Revolution (1789–99). In the bloody years that followed, the blade of the guillotine rose and fell relentlessly, as did a series of governments, but Paris remained a center of the arts, including music and theatre.

When Napoleon Bonaparte was forced out of power in 1815, his illegitimate nephew Louis, who had been prince of Holland, was also deposed. More than three decades later, the revolution of 1848 led to the formation of a new French Republic. Louis Bonaparte used his famous last name to get himself elected president. Bored by constitutional limitations, he staged a coup in 1851. Out of respect to his dead cousin, who had technically ruled for a few days following the first Bonaparte's abdication, Louis declared himself Emperor Napoleon III. Historians call his eighteen-year reign the Second Empire.

While Napoleon III had little regard for civil rights, he instituted reforms and encouraged modernization of the French economy. He also had the luck to come to power just as the industrial revolution created new jobs for the working class and new opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs.

The emperor gave Paris a facelift, demolishing twisted old neighborhoods to make way for wide boulevards and grand public parks—not only ornamental, but allowing better crowd control. Napoleon III knew only too well that four predecessors had been forced off the throne by mobs barricading the streets of Paris. By deftly responding to shifts in the vox populi, he enjoyed extraordinary popularity.

The Birth of Operetta

Theater and opera had long been part of Parisian life, attracting talent to the city—not only from the rest of France, but from other countries. In 1833, a fourteen-year-old Jewish native of Cologne, Germany, arrived in Paris to study the cello. Preferring the excitement of making music to the tedium of classroom studies, he soon dropped out of the Conservatoire, developing a reputation as a soloist and composer. To be as French as possible, he converted to Catholicism and changed his first name from "Jacob" to become Jacques Offenbach (1819–80). He wanted to create a new kind of musical entertainment that would offer more fun than grand opera while retaining a degree of musical sophistication.

Florimonde Ronger was already attempting this, with limited success. He protected his career as a church organist by doing his stage work under the pseudonym Hervé (1825–92). In 1854, he presented more than thirty of his own operettas, and showcased several early pieces by Offenbach. So why is Offenbach celebrated while Hervé is almost forgotten? To answer that, let's start with a definition:

> The *operetta* is a versatile form of musical that integrates songs and musical sequences to dramatize a story, retaining the vocal pyrotechnics and forms of grand opera (arias, choruses, act finales, etc.) but relying on more accessible melodies. The songs develop character and/or advance the plot, which can be comic, romantic, or a combination of both.

Hervé's librettos reflected his idiosyncratic sense of humor. The results are hit and miss, and none of his operettas have had lasting popularity. However, Offenbach chose plots that skewered social, political, and personal pretense. The blend of solid stories with Offenbach's infectious melodies have kept his best works entertaining, making him the father of operetta and the grandad of modern musical theatre.

Offenbach's First Hits: *"Entrez, Messieurs, Madames!"*

In 1855, Napoleon III mounted a world's fair designed to show the world that France was thriving. Realizing that this exposition would attract millions of visitors to Paris, Offenbach leased a rundown three-hundred-seat theatre by the Champ Elysee. A little paint, and the newly rechristened Theatre Bouffes-Parisiens was ready for business. It wasn't much, but it was near the fairgrounds and just the right size for intimate musical productions.

Offenbach would have preferred to work on a larger scale, but imperial law forced him to keep it small. To prevent competition with government-sponsored productions, independent theaters were strictly regulated. Offenbach's compositions could be no more than one act in length and utilize no more than three singing characters—an additional silent character could be added by special license. Rather than complain, Offenbach and a small team of librettists embraced these limitations.

The first program at the Theatre Bouffes-Parisiens opened on July 5, 1855. It consisted of four one acts, all with music by Offenbach. Playwright Ludovic Halvey (1834–1908), a civil servant who wrote stage works by night, provided the libretto for the opening prologue, and would coauthor scripts for many of Offenbach's hits.

The main feature was *Les Deux Aveugles* (*The Two Blind Men*), in which two Parisian beggars pretending to be blind squabble over a prime begging spot. Offenbach's style of operetta, which combined opera-sized singing with zany satirical plots, is specifically referred to as *opera-bouffes*. The music was lighter than the bombast one heard in grand opera. But it was still vocally demanding, requiring classically trained voices. Amid all the singing, *Les Deux Aveugles* allowed Parisians to laugh at themselves.

Offenbach's operettas became the "must see" events of the Exposition season. Everybody who was anybody made a point of attending, including members of the imperial court. Because these works had only refined hints of sexual innuendo and were staged with unfailing good taste, respectable women could attend, with or without their husbands. The Exposition had been a tremendous success for Napoleon III, but the most lasting legacy of that summer was the introduction of Offenbach's operettas.

When the Exposition shut down in the autumn, Offenbach leased a larger theatre in the enclosed walkway called the Passage Choiseul. At 668 seats, the auditorium was still

intimate enough to allow every audience member to see and hear clearly. Offenbach christened it Theatre des Bouffes-Parisiens, the name it is known by even today.

On December 29, 1855, Offenbach opened the new house with *Ba-ta-Clan*, the story of Alfred and Virginie, two Parisians shipwrecked in the fictional Far Eastern kingdom of Che-i-noor. Although they have become members of the imperial court, they want nothing more than to return to France. But Emperor Fe-ni-han wants Alfred to succeed him and thwart the royal ambitions of Ko-ko-ri-ko, a captain of the guard (who, in keeping with the legal three-character limit, is discussed but never seen). Alfred and Virginie discover that Fe-ni-han is another stranded Parisian who wound up ruling this Asian country even though he doesn't speak its language. Ko-ko-ri-ko turns out to be a Parisian too, and sends a letter informing the others that he is willing to take the throne and let the rest of them return to France. *Ba-ta-Clan* kept the new Bouffes Parisiens packed for months.

Offenbach composed with astonishing speed, providing audiences with a steady stream of fresh hits. The whacky plots were always rooted in social satire. In *Le 66* (1856), a peasant thinks he holds the winning lottery ticket 66, only to find out that he's actually got number 99. Offenbach's melodies delighted all classes of society, with his music equally at home in seedy taverns and gilded ballrooms.

As tourists visiting Paris brought these melodies home, Offenbach's songs swept Europe, with productions of his operettas sprouting up in Brussels, Berlin, and other theatre centers. Offenbach's own Bouffes company occasionally toured the continent.

The Offenbach "Bounce"

Offenbach lived well, and poured the rest of his profits into new productions and renovations. On one occasion, when two seats in the Bouffes-Parisiens needed repair, Jacques replaced every seat in the theatre. As a result, debt was never far off. By the time the French government lifted its restrictive production regulations in 1858, Offenbach was in desperate need of a money-making hit. Halévy and co-librettist Hector Crémieux conceived a full-scale burlesque of the Greek legend of Orpheus, which had already inspired several operatic versions, including one by Gluck.

In *Orphée aux Enfers*/*Orpheus in Hell* (1858, 228 performances in Paris) the musician Orpheus goes into the dreaded land of the dead to bring back his deceased wife Eurydice. But in this version he is a philanderer who loathes his equally adulterous spouse, and only makes the trip in order to placate a nagging character named "Public Opinion." Orpheus must first seek assistance from the gods of Olympus.

The gods are depicted as vain, capricious, and sexually amoral, just like Napoleon III's courtiers. And the womanizing Jupiter is a clear satire of the emperor. However, the government made no attempt at censorship. The intention was to evoke laughter, not to incite rebellion or, heaven forbid, to preach morality. So censorship would have looked bad, and displeased (you've guessed it) public opinion.

Initial response to *Orphée aux Enfers* was positive but far from overwhelming. About six weeks into the run, with ticket sales falling, a major critic published an article vigorously condemning the show for "profaning sacred antiquity." Offenbach

published a witty reply in a competing paper, and the public suddenly wanted to see what inspired this controversy. Ticket sales soared, and *Orphee* ran for seven months. The exhausted cast forced the production to close, protesting that it was "unnatural" for any production to run so long!

Orphée aux Enfers was soon revived at the Bouffes, where it passed the three-hundred-performance mark. Its "infernal gallop" remains the most famous can-can melody ever written, a universally recognized musical symbol of French culture. And Napoleon III attended a command performance, visibly enjoying the comic jabs at his court and himself.

Offenbach's melodies are sophisticated but never pretentious. His "upbeat" tunes have a quality that your humble author calls the "Offenbach bounce," an infectious, heady lilt that offers the sonic equivalent of drinking a few glasses of quality champagne. In *Orphée aux Enfers*, the god Mercury's *rondo saltarelle* ("E hop! E hop! / Look out! Look out!") sets feet tapping and makes listeners smile as much on the one hundredth hearing as on the first. Offenbach may not have invented such melodies, but they are a hallmark of his style and a key to his popularity. Imitations of the "Offenbach bounce" remained a permanent feature of European operetta.

Orphée aux Enfers marked the beginning of a dozen golden years for Offenbach. His full-length operettas from this period are sometimes called "Offenbachiades." These "celebrations" boast giddy music, delicious comic plots, and a frank attitude regarding sexual misbehavior.

Thanks to a lack of international copyright laws, American producers could present Offenbach's operettas without paying a penny in royalties. By the 1870s, it was common for ten or more productions of Offenbach to play Broadway during any given year. The composer was not overly concerned by the lack of royalties from the United States. After all, new hits just kept pouring out of his pen.

The year 1864 brought two more crucial talents into Offenbach's team. The first was playwright Henri Meilhac (1831–97), who teamed up with Halévy to create dozens of librettos spoofing everything from ancient mythology to contemporary Parisian society. Offenbach drew inspiration from Meilhac and Halévy's librettos. The resulting operettas were not plays ornamented with songs, but artistically integrated musicals that used songs as a vital part of the storytelling process.

Also joining Offenbach's circle at this time was the first great star of the musical stage, Hortense Schneider (1833–1920). She was no classical beauty, and her singing left something to be desired, but from the time of her Paris debut in Offenbach's *Le Violoneux* (1856), Schneider's charismatic performances made her a star. Offstage, a series of highly publicized love affairs with the rich and powerful only added to her celebrity.

In 1864, after deserting another manager, the petulant Schneider announced her retirement. Offenbach saw his chance and promptly offered her the lead in *La Belle Helene*. She resisted, until he offered an unprecedented salary of two thousand francs a month. Schneider was a true diva, terrorizing coworkers and managers with demands, tantrums, and walkouts. She often battled with Offenbach, who had a fiery temper of his own. Since each professionally needed the other, hatchets were usually buried in time for opening nights.

With gifted librettists and a charismatic star on his team, Offenbach presented a series of hits that would be enjoyed worldwide for decades to come:

- *La Belle Helene* (1864): The legendary beauty Helen is married to the boring King Menalus of Sparta. At the behest of the gods, she is seduced and carried off by Prince Paris of Troy.
- *La Vie Pariesienne* (1866): Two Parisian profligates set out to seduce a Swedish baroness. During a party where servants masquerade as aristocrats, a series of mistaken identities leads the baroness into her loving husband's arms.
- *La Perichole* (1868): A lovely Peruvian street singer must choose between marrying a poor artist or the powerful Spanish viceroy.
- *Les Brigands* (1869): A band of Italian bandits plan to rob a womanizing duke, who unintentionally echoes *The Beggar's Opera* by observing that "one steals in accordance with one's rank." Schneider refused the role intended for her in this show, and broke with Offenbach—only to find no one else could offer comparable successes.

La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein (1867) was the crowning achievement of the "Offenbachiades." It takes place in a fictional duchy ruled by a coquettish noblewoman. She has a weakness for men in uniform, and starts a war in order to find some fresh romantic prospects. She reveals her true intentions in the suggestive "Ah, que j'aime les militaire" ("Oh, How I Love the Military!"):

> Ah! How I love the military!
> Their cocky uniforms,
> Their moustaches and their little plumes …
> I would like to be their canteen girl!
> I'd always be with them,
> And I would intoxicate them!
> With them, valiant and heady,
> I would launch into battle.

The "plumes" on military helmets at the time were usually stiff and upright. A canteen girl would be the only female among thousands of lonely men, leading to obvious sexual opportunities. Such refined innuendo delighted Parisians, but was expurgated from prudish English translations.

Attracted to the handsome but naïve Private Fritz, the randy Duchess promotes him through the ranks in a matter of minutes. She orders General Fritz (!) to lead her army into battle. This distresses several of her courtiers, including the acoustically named General Boum (the displaced commander), Baron Puck, and Prince Paul (her long-ignored suitor).

After Fritz pulls off a surprise victory by getting the enemy drunk, the Duchess sings the seductive "Dites-lui" ("Tell Him"), telling Fritz that a woman of the court is in love with him, and clearly suggesting that she is the woman. But the bumpkin fails to