

“Come on along, you can’t go wrong Kicking the clouds away!”

GEORGE and IRA GERSHWIN'S

My ONE and ONLY

Broadway was booming in the 1920s with the energy of youth and new ideas roaring across the nation. In New York City, immigrants such as George Gershwin were infusing American music with their own indigenous traditions. The melting pot was cooking up a completely new sound and jazz was a key ingredient. At the time, radio and the phonograph weren't widely available; sheet music and live performances remained the popular ways to enjoy the latest hits. In fact, New York City's Tin Pan Alley was overflowing with "song pluggers" like George Gershwin who demonstrated new tunes to promote the sale of sheet music.

George and his brother Ira Gershwin composed music and lyrics for the 1927 Broadway musical *Funny Face*. It was the second musical they had written as a vehicle for Fred and Adele Astaire. As such, *Funny Face* enabled the tap-dancing duo to feature new and well-loved routines. During a number entitled "High Hat," Fred sported evening clothes and a top hat while tapping in front of an enormous male chorus. The image of Fred during that song became iconic and versions of the routine appeared in later years. The unforgettable score featured such gems as "'S Wonderful," "My One And Only," "He Loves and She Loves," and "The Babbitt and the Bromide." The plot concerned a girl named Frankie (Adele Astaire), who persuaded her boyfriend Peter (Allen Kearns) to help retrieve her stolen diary from Jimmie Reeve (Fred Astaire). However, Peter pilfered a piece of jewelry and a wild chase ensued. *Funny Face* was the first production at the newly built Alvin Theatre (now the Neil Simon Theatre) and it ran for 244 performances.

During the 1927-1928 season there were 264 shows on Broadway, making it the peak of the most production-filled decade in history. The desire to revisit such a vibrant time on Broadway was enticing and in 1981, a revival of *Funny Face* was in discussion. After opening on Broadway as *My One and Only*, the show would retain seven songs from *Funny Face* and the program stated that, "It is, in all other respects, a wholly new invention." Those songs included the excised number "How Long Has This Been Going On?" as well as "My One and Only," "High Hat," "He Loves and She Loves," "In the Swim," "Funny Face," and "'S Wonderful." To complete the score, additional songs were pulled from other Gershwin shows and movies, such as "Strike Up the Band" from the show of the same name and "Nice Work If You Can Get It" from the movie *A Damsel in Distress*.

On May 1, 1983 *My One And Only* opened on Broadway; a stylish art deco entertainment, it featured glamorous hoofing flappers, a debonair fly boy, a winsome English Channel swimmer, and classic Gershwin music. Despite its success at the St. James Theatre and the glorious appeal of the elements mentioned above, the show followed a classically difficult route.

During an interview two years earlier, writer and producer, Bernard Carragher learned that Tommy Tune desired to be back on stage. Tune had not had a role on Broadway since 1974, when he won a Tony for his part in *Seesaw*. Carragher later spoke with Peter Sellars, a young director at the American Repertory Theatre who wanted to make a musical. Carragher informed Sellars that Tune was eager to be in one. Tune and Sellars agreed to work together and Tune

persuaded Sellars to hire the English model Twiggy as his co-star. Craig Smith would be Music Director, and he was charged with a difficult task: the original *Funny Face* orchestrations didn't exist. Meanwhile, Sellars' friend, Timothy S. Mayer penned a script inspired by his "obsessive, irresistible image of Tommy and Twiggy tap-dancing together."

Before the show opened out-of-town, there was clear dissension between Sellars and Tune. Sellars' vision for the production resembled Brechtian satire, while Tune intended something lighter and more accessible. The producers brought Peter Stone and Mike Nichols in as "show doctors" and Stone later reported the following: "Nothing was working. The concept, above all, was not working. It was very hard to describe because it was a neo-Brechtian, socioeconomic pageant using the trappings of an old Gershwin show." Daniel Sherkow of Paramount Theatre Productions ultimately fired Sellars a few days before the show was to open in Boston and Craig Smith met a similar fate. After the opening at the Colonial Theatre, the show's co-choreographers, Thommie Walsh and Tommy Tune, were credited with staging and choreography, while Jack Lee took over as Music & Vocal Director.



The producers considered closing the show and everything seemed to be falling apart. However, Peter Stone and Mike Nichols were in love with aspects of the production and asked the producers for ten days to rewrite the book. Their efforts proved successful and the producers planned to open in New York two weeks later. Many in the Broadway community wanted to see the show succeed. Even Michael Bennett volunteered to help adjust the dance numbers. After the Broadway opening, *Variety* described *My One And Only* as "one of the most successful salvage efforts in recent Broadway history." The show went on to tour internationally, receive nine Tony awards, and leave audiences floating on air.

Twiggy & Tommy Tune in the original 1983 Broadway production

In a moment, you will enjoy an old fashioned tap-dance spectacular, re-envisioned for contemporary audiences, using the latest projection technology. We hope our production will hit on all sixes and send your spirit soaring!

~Joshua S. Ritter, Goodspeed Education and Library Director