

Sometimes musicals come along just when we need them. When *Oklahoma!* burst onto the American stage in March of 1943, a jittery nation faced the uncertainties of WWII. This ground-breaking musical, with its homespun charm and unbridled optimism, deeply touched its anxious audience by offering a unifying glimpse of our shared values and our strong sense of community. That reassuring American spirit—combined with a truly glorious score and the innovative notion of integrating song, dance and story—rocketed *Oklahoma!* to phenomenon status. It ran a previously unprecedented 2,000 performances and marked the beginning of the extraordinary collaboration of Rodgers and Hammerstein. And, like the pioneers it chronicled, it blazed a trail for all new musicals to come.

Rodgers and Hammerstein drew heavily from their source material, the lyrical play *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Oklahoma native son Lynn Riggs, placing story at the fore and tapping into Riggs' authentic, muscular view of the American West at the turn of the century. Riggs endeavored not only to excavate the quirks and customs of his play's inhabitants, but also to touch on the darker more complex aspects of life on the range. Rodgers and Hammerstein followed suit; leaning into the play's natural exuberance, they pushed through barriers of conventional storytelling by using song and dance to propel both the plot and the characters' emotional narrative. In doing so, they captured the heat and violence of the plains and its people. This heady brew of light and dark, set to sweeping, romantic blaze, seized the public's enduring affection, guaranteeing an exalted place not only in the American theatre but as a cultural touchstone as well.

It's been fascinating to reinvest in what many people believe to be the 'quintessential American musical' at a time when the country is struggling to even define what it means to be American. Like all great art, *Oklahoma!* continues to offer fresh insights and pose new questions about our collective past that inform who and where we are today. Not content to stay happily trapped in the amber of its moment, this potent and enterprising show reaches across generations, demanding and daring us to

look beneath its sunny exterior into the contradictions of our country's history: its promise and pitfalls, its aspirations, divisions, loyalties, and dreams. In an effort to add context and perhaps spark discussion, a piece of neglected history will be on bold display in the image that appears on our show drop—a view of the bountiful Indian Territory, featuring a portrait of a Native American in a ceremonial head-dress. The imagery used is taken directly from a poster of the time, advertising the easy procurement of these sacred lands. As neither Native Americans nor their struggle to establish their own state are mentioned or a part of *Oklahoma!* in any way, we've sought to visually represent their presence and sacrifice.

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Inspired by the show's innovative spirit, and armed with gorgeous, bold dance arrangements by Broadway's David Chase, dynamic, fresh choreography by up-and-comer Katie Spelman, and a youthful, combustible cast, our creative team aims to take full advantage of the intimacy of the Goodspeed stage as we explore, in close-up, the lives and loves of these beloved, iconic characters, offering what we hope will be a most personal, visceral, and illuminating view.

I cannot think of a better place to rediscover and enjoy this thrillingly entertaining and important show than right here at The Goodspeed. Nearly 75 years after its premiere, divided and facing a new set of uncertainties, our view may have shifted, but our need to understand one another and come together is greater than ever. What better place to reach out and find each other than in the dark of the theatre, where even old familiar friends spark new understanding and renew our quest for community and healing? Sometimes revivals come along just when we need them.



Director Jenn Thompson at rehearsal for *Oklahoma!*.  
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