



## Program Notes

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The daring, poignant, and enduring Broadway classic *Carousel* has had a profound impact on audiences for more than half a century. The richly melodious score was Richard Rodgers' favorite composition during his prolific career and the beautifully crafted story continues to enchant audiences the world over. In fact, *Time* magazine voted *Carousel* the best musical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; but its consistent staging is surely the most significant testament to its universal appeal.

When the show premiered at the Majestic Theatre on April 19, 1945, authors Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers' revolutionary and wildly successful musical *Oklahoma!* was still playing to packed houses across the street at the Saint James Theatre. Their first collaboration on a Broadway show, *Oklahoma!* impressed critics and audiences by successfully building upon the level of integration achieved by *Show Boat* sixteen years earlier. In *Carousel* and *Oklahoma!*, Rodgers, Hammerstein, and their collaborators had seamlessly weaved together music, libretto, lyrics, characterization, staging, dance, and décor. Hammerstein actually wrote most of the words for *Carousel* and *Oklahoma!* before Rodgers composed the music. This was not the customary approach, but it helped focus those elements on telling a powerful story. Understandably, expectations were extremely high for *Carousel* after *Oklahoma!*'s monumental artistic and financial success. Nevertheless, Rodgers and Hammerstein were undaunted and eager to continue exploring the potential of their newly formed partnership.

*Oklahoma!* was produced by The Theatre Guild and Rodgers and Hammerstein regularly met with producers Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langer at Sardi's to discuss matters related to that production. At one of those meetings in 1944, Helburn and Langer asked Rodgers and Hammerstein if they would like to adapt Ferenc Molnár's *Liliom* into a musical play. They initially rejected the idea, mainly due to the bleak and unappealing setting. The play took place in 1919 on the outskirts of Budapest in Hungary, a country that was allied with Nazi Germany in 1944. In accordance with their daring artistic spirit, Rodgers and Hammerstein were unconcerned by the dark and rather tragic aspects of the story. Ultimately, Rodgers and Hammerstein agreed to adapt the piece as long as they could make some significant changes. After all, Molnár had turned down Puccini's request to transform *Liliom* into an opera and he had only granted the Theatre Guild permission to make the offer after attending a performance of *Oklahoma!*.

If the show was to be successful, Rodgers and Hammerstein knew they had to set the piece somewhere else. At first they considered New Orleans, but they later agreed that the dialect and other musical considerations would be prohibitive. They settled on a Maine fishing village between 1873 and 1888. *Liliom* became Billy Bigelow; Julie became Julie Jordan; Marie became Carrie Pipperidge; Wolf Beifeld became Enoch Snow, and Mrs. Hollunder became Mrs. Mullin. In contrast to the play, rather than have Julie become Billy's mistress, Rodgers and Hammerstein had them marry. Rodgers and Hammerstein also made significant changes to the ending so that the musical finishes on a bittersweet note, as opposed to the completely sorrowful ending in the play where *Liliom* presumably burns for eternity. However, the elements of fantasy in Molnár's drama, which had been adapted by Benjamin Glazer, were preserved.

Hammerstein had been concerned about making the piece work until he could find a way to make carnival barker Billy Bigelow more sympathetic than the beggar *Liliom* in Molnár's play. He achieved that by writing a number of profound stature—"Soliloquy"—a lengthy solo that Bigelow delivers after learning that his wife, Julie, is pregnant. In this number the audience suddenly learns that Bigelow is more than a heartless brute. He is overwhelmed by the news and he expresses genuine enthusiasm and tenderness for his unborn son or daughter. By the end of the number, he proclaims his duty as a prospective father and pledges to do anything to ensure his offspring a better life than he had experienced.

Rodgers and Hammerstein were never afraid to strike out on their own artistically and dispense with theatrical convention. In the case of *Carousel*, as opposed to beginning with the traditional overture, the opening waltz was treated as an eight-minute pantomime to introduce the main characters. Hammerstein also used an important songwriting technique that he first implemented in *Show Boat*. In the memorable song "If I Loved You," Hammerstein wrote a scene where Billy and Julie discussed their love in the conditional sense, which allowed for a romantic interplay of song and dialogue to occur much earlier in the show.

The show went into production with most of the collaborators who had worked on *Oklahoma!*. It was directed by Rouben Mamoulian and choreographed by Agnes de Mille; Miles White designed the costumes and Joe Mielziner joined the team to design the scenery. After *Oklahoma!*, de Mille was seen as a revolutionary choreographer for ensuring that every movement stemmed from motivation and was character-oriented. Her second act ballet for *Carousel* is regarded as a true artistic achievement, as virtually every movement effectively depicts Louise's unhappy youth. Her unique approach to dance is widely celebrated and it certainly contributes to *Carousel's* success.

Through our relationship with Rogers and Hammerstein, Goodspeed is honored to be given the opportunity to produce this magnificent show. Director Rob Ruggiero will anchor our production to the specific world of the small New England fishing village, while exploring the authenticity and intimacy that exists beyond the epic emotional journey within. Rob and his team hope to create an experience that is profound, magical, entertaining, provocative, and inspirational on many levels. We like to think of our audience as members of the Goodspeed family and an integral part of our artistic community. As you walk through the doors to the Opera House, you will never walk alone. Know that you will always be among friends.



*Photo: Jan Clayton as Julie Jordan and John Raitt as Billy Bigelow in the original 1945 Broadway production. Photo courtesy of Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.*