



THE Will Rogers
FOLLOWS

a life in revue



GOODSPEED MUSICALS
AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

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THE *Will Rogers* **FOLLIES** *a life in revue*

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THE GOODSPEED

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IN MUSICAL THEATRE

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Production History



Original Broadway cast of *The Will Rogers Follies*. Photo by Martha Swope.

THE WRITERS

With a book by Peter Stone, music by Cy Coleman, and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, *The Will Rogers Follies* had a truly all-star team. Book writer Peter Stone had written several movies and musicals, including *Charade* and *1776*. Composer Cy Coleman was fresh from his noir hit *City of Angels*, but still best known for *Sweet Charity*. And lyricists Betty Comden and Adolph Green were nothing less than American comedy and musical theater royalty, penning *Singin' in the Rain*, *On the Town*, and *Peter Pan*, among many others.

DIRECTOR TOMMY TUNE

Tommy Tune, the show's original director and choreographer, specialized in razzmatazz. Also a famous performer (known especially for his dancing), Tune was the first to win Tony Awards in four different categories.

THE ORIGINAL CAST

The original Broadway production starred Keith Carradine as Will (the original star, John Denver, dropped out due to a perceived insult from book writer Peter Stone), Dee Hoty as Betty Blake, Dick Latessa as Clem, and Cady Huffman as Ziegfeld's Favorite, and featured the recorded voice of Gregory Peck as Ziegfeld (the ensemble included Jerry Mitchell, who would go on to become the Tony-Award winning director and choreographer of many shows).

A BROADWAY HIT

The Will Rogers Follies opened at the Palace Theater on May 1, 1991 and closed on September 5, 1993, playing 981 performances (and 33 previews). It was nominated for eleven Tony Awards and won six, including Best Musical and Best Original Score. Cast replacements included Mac Davis as Will, Mickey Rooney as Clem, and Marla Maples as Ziegfeld's Favorite.

Synopsis

SPOILER ALERT! Read the short take for no spoilers.

Welcome to the *Ziegfeld Follies*, where today's spectacular celebrates the life of the great American cowboy, humorist, and star Will Rogers. We begin with a big opening number lead by Ziegfeld's favorite showgirl celebrating the phenomenon known as Willamania: the country can't get enough of Rogers and his folksy wisdom. Will himself appears and tells us that the show we're seeing will cover his life from his birth to his death in an Alaskan plane crash. After he gets the order from Ziegfeld (the legendary producer himself is overseeing the show from the audience) to stall for time with a little display of his roping talents, Will starts his story at the beginning, with his birth in Oklahoma in 1879. His father Clem, already the father of six daughters, celebrates having a son whom he thinks will take over the family ranch with a big number. But a teenaged Will rejects that life, preferring instead to travel to Argentina and become a cowboy there. But before he goes he meets Betty Blake, a farm girl from Arkansas who just happens to run into Will on the moon (well, actually Missouri, but Florenz Ziegfeld demands a flashier location for his Follies). They fall in love, and against her better judgment she waits more than two years while he sees the world and joins a traveling Wild West show. They get married (although Ziegfeld demands that the big wedding number waits until the end of the act). Will and Betty travel the country as Will becomes more and more well-known and their family expands (all in a musical montage, of course). Will, knowing Betty is fed-up with the traveling life, announces they're heading home to Oklahoma—until a telegram comes offering him a spot

in the famous *Ziegfeld Follies* as not just a cowboy, but as a comedian. It's an offer they can't resist, and they head off to the Follies, then to Radio and Hollywood and fame. After a brief visit from Will's father, Ziegfeld gets the big wedding number he wanted to end the act.

Act 2 begins with a few more rope tricks. Will has become so popular for his folksy humor and social commentary that he runs for president. He doesn't get elected, but the big song and dance number about his campaign is spectacular. Back home in Oklahoma, Betty sings about her frustration at Will's constant absence despite his luxurious gifts and their life of wealth. Will comes home and assures her that he loves her more than ever. The Depression strikes, and the country is hit so hard that even the Follies we're watching is in danger of shutting down. Will is asked to make an address to the country to provide cheer, but he can't bring himself to do anything but tell the truth about the sorry state of the nation. Disillusioned, he starts to question whether his life as an entertainer has been helpful enough to his fellow man. His father visits from heaven to remind Will that he cheered people up when they needed it and asked questions that needed to be asked, and that was a life well lived. He tells Will that it's time for him to take the flight in Alaska that ended his life. We hear about the aftermath of his death: the entire country mourned, including the White House. Looking back at this life, Will sings a song about the secret to his happiness—his love for his wife, and his philosophy of finding something to like about every person he ever met. With that, he bids us goodbye.



SHORT TAKE: The spoiler-free synopsis

Welcome to the *Ziegfeld Follies*, where today's spectacular celebrates the life of the great American cowboy, humorist and star Will Rogers. With Ziegfeld himself overseeing the show and his favorite Follies girl onstage to play various roles, the show is full of big song-and-dance numbers full of signature Ziegfeld razzmatazz, and Rogers himself is your host, leading you through his own life with his singular wit and charm. Beginning in the small Oklahoma town where he was born, we meet his father, Clem, who wants his only son to stay home and take over the family ranch. But Will wants to travel the world and become a cowboy, which he does. Finally he returns home, marries the love of his life Betty Blake, and sets off to tour the country as the star of a Wild West show. Though his family grows and domesticity beckons, Will becomes more and more famous for his folksy humor. He becomes a star on Vaudeville and then on radio and in Hollywood, and eventually he even runs for President. But as the Depression hits and Will faces the end of his show, he finds himself wondering whether a life spent entertaining people has been meaningful enough.

Characters

WILL ROGERS: an Oklahoma cowboy of Cherokee heritage who rises to immeasurable fame as an actor, trick roper, and political humorist

VOICE OF FLORENZ ZIEGFELD: the creator and producer of the *Ziegfeld Follies*, a series of elaborate Broadway musical revues mounted in the early 20th century, and the director of the *Will Rogers Follies*

ZIEGFELD'S FAVORITE: Mr. Ziegfeld's favorite showgirl who assumes several minor roles throughout the Follies

WILEY POST: the American aviator famous for making the first solo flight around the world, he is also a close friend of Will Rogers

CLEM ROGERS: Will Rogers' father who wishes his son would abandon his career in show business and return to the family trade of cattle ranching

STAGE MANAGER: the stage manager for Ziegfeld's retrospective production about Will Rogers' life

BETTY BLAKE: Will Rogers' wife

Actor Spotlight DAVID M. LUTKEN



David Lutken plays Will Rogers in Goodspeed's production of *The Will Rogers Follies*, but this is neither his first time on The Goodspeed stage nor his first time portraying the cowboy humorist. Audiences may have seen David on our stage in the 2008 production of *Big River* or in *Finian's Rainbow* in 1997, when he played The Musician and Woody Mahoney, respectively. His history with *The Will Rogers Follies* goes back to 1991 when he was a replacement cast member in the original production on Broadway. He was brought in first as Stage Manager, then Wiley Post, and, finally, Will Rogers. He has since played the role nine times, including the first national tour and numerous productions at regional theaters. David's other Broadway credits include *Inherit the Wind* (2007), *Ring of Fire* (2006), and *The Civil War* (1999), but he is probably best known as the creator and lead actor of the touring show *Woody Sez: The Life and Music of Woody Guthrie*, for which he won the Helen Hayes Award for Best Actor in 2013.

Photo of David M. Lutken
by Diane Sobolewski

Meet the Writers

PETER STONE (*Book*) was born on February 27, 1930 in Los Angeles, California to Hilda and John Stone. Both of his parents were film writers, and his father produced many silent films for Fox Studios including ones starring Buck Jones, Shirley Temple, and Charlie Chan. Even as a child, Peter knew he wanted to work in theater. He graduated from University High School in Los Angeles and subsequently received his bachelor's degree from Bard College and a master's degree from Yale. After college, Stone spent over a decade in Paris during which time he worked for CBS Radio. He made his Broadway debut in 1961 as the book writer for the musical version of Jean



Paul Sartre's *Kean*, starring Alfred Drake. Stone would go on to be credited on 15 Broadway productions, notably: *Skyscraper* (1966 Tony Nomination for Best Musical), *1776* (1969 Tony Award for Best Musical), *Woman of the Year* (1981 Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical), *My One And Only* (1983 Tony Nomination for Best Book of a Musical), *The Will Rogers Follies* (1991 Tony Nomination for Best Book of a Musical), and *Titanic* (1997 Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical). Also the screenwriter of more than two dozen feature films, he was the first writer to win a Tony, an Oscar, and an Emmy, winning the Oscar for *Father Goose* in 1965. Other films by Stone include: *Charade*, *The Taking of Pelham 1-2-3*, *Mirage*, *Arabesque*, *Sweet Charity*, *Skin Game*, *Who's Killing the Great Chefs of Europe*, and *Just Cause*. He received his Emmy Award in 1961 for the CBS series *The Defenders*. Later in his career, Stone was responsible for the revised libretti of *Finian's Rainbow* and *Annie Get Your Gun*, both of which removed culturally offensive references to minorities. Peter Stone served as president of the Dramatists Guild from 1981 to 1999. He died on April 26, 2003.

BETTY COMDEN and **ADOLPH GREEN** (*Lyrics*) comprised one of the most successful partnerships in musical theatre that endured for 6 decades. Betty was born Baysa Cohen (she would become "Betty Comden" officially in 1935, though by that time she had gone by "Betty" for years) in Brooklyn, New York on May 3, 1917 to her parents Leo, a lawyer, and Rebecca, a teacher. As a child, Betty dreamed of becoming a star, and she frequently performed at school. She attended Erasmus Hall High School where she discovered a love for poetry and, later, New York University, where she first studied Shakespeare in the Dramatic Arts Department. With the support of several aunts and uncles, she grew up attending vaudeville shows, movies at her uncle's New Haven theater (he would go on to be an executive at Columbia Pictures), operas and symphonies at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and ultimately landed a meeting with the Theatre Guild. Not long after, Betty met Adolph Green when they both performed with the Washington Square Players. Adolph was born in the Bronx, New York



on December 2, 1914, the son of Hungarian immigrants Daniel and Helen Weiss Green. He attended De Witt Clinton High School and also studied drama at New York University. Adolph had aspirations of becoming an actor when he met Betty, and with a small group of friends, they formed a cabaret act called "The Revuers" in 1939 that performed at the Village Vanguard. Leonard Bernstein, a friend of Adolph's from a summer camp, was the group's accompanist, and when he called Betty and Adolph to help him and Jerome Robbins adapt a ballet they had done into a musical, they jumped at the opportunity. The ballet was called "Fancy Free," and it became Comden and Green's first Broadway hit, *On the Town*. The pair would go on to collaborate on such notable shows as: *Wonderful Town* (1953 Tony Award for Best Musical), *Peter Pan*, *Bells Are Ringing*, *Applause* (1970 Tony Award for Best Musical), *On the Twentieth Century* (1978 Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical and Best Original Score), and, of course, *The Will Rogers Follies* (1991 Tony Award for Best Musical and Best Original Score). Comden and Green's talents also reached into film, with musical movies *Good News*, *The Barkleys of Broadway* (the film that reunited Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire after 10 years apart), *Singin' in the Rain*, and *The Band Wagon*. In 1958 and, later in 1977, Comden and Green brought *A Party with Betty Comden and Adolph Green* to Broadway in celebration of their enduring and highly successful partnership. Mr. Green passed away on October 23, 2002, and Ms. Comden died a few years later on November 23, 2006.

Meet the Writers

CY COLEMAN (*Music*) was born Seymour Kaufman on June 14, 1929 in a tenement in the Bronx, New York. His family—parents, Max and Ida, and his five older siblings—spoke mostly Yiddish, and they typically played religious or klezmer music, not the scores of Broadway musicals. Max and Ida Kaufman were immigrants from Bessarabia, ruled by Russia at the time but currently the Republic of Moldova. Though Ida could not read or write, she was



shrewd in business, and she bought several tenements in the Bronx. When the Depression hit, many affected families were either evicted or fled their apartments; one of these families left behind an upright piano, and Ida took it into her own apartment for her family. Cy (then still called Seymour) was only 4 years old, but he took to the instrument immediately with his ability to play melodies he heard on the radio by ear. By the age of 7, the youngest Kaufman was playing publicly. At 9 years old, he won a scholarship to study with Rudolph Gruen at the New York College of Music, and though Ida was adamantly opposed to his pursuit of a musical career, Seymour attended New York's High School of Music and Art (now the High School of Performing Arts) and New York College of Music before the faculty sent him to study with a true master: Adele Marcus. Still just a teenager, Coleman began taking side gigs while he studied, playing weddings, jazz clubs, private parties, concerts for military troops—and taking a job as the rehearsal pianist for the Broadway musical *If the Shoe Fits*, which led to writing vocal arrangements for the show. By 1948, Cy was 19 years old, had a new name, played on a nationally broadcast radio show, and saw his first musical produced: written with lyricist Lawrence Steiner and librettist Lesley Savage, *You Gotta Regatta* premiered at Bellport Summer Theatre on Long Island. In 1950, he

branched out into television with a variety show called *Shopper's Matinee* as well as into commercial recording. He signed with Decca's Coral Records Label and recorded his first album: *Cy Coleman His Piano and The Cytones*. Coleman continued to succeed as a recording artist, putting out another two-sided single with Decca before moving on to MGM where he began working immediately on a complete album and on his act at Café Society with other MGM artists. His song "Why Try to Change Me Now?" put him and his writing partner Joseph McCarthy, Jr. on the map when Frank Sinatra recorded it (later, Coleman would write "Witchcraft" with lyricist Carolyn Leigh, another hit song for Frank Sinatra). Over the next several years, Coleman continued to write songs that were recorded by some of the biggest names of the time (like Sammy Davis, Louis Armstrong, Peggy Lee, and Liza Minnelli) as well as contribute to Broadway musicals, plays, and musical revues. Finally, in 1960, Coleman's first musical opened on Broadway: *Wildcat* starring none other than Lucille Ball. Three years later he met Dorothy Fields, legendary Broadway writer, at a party and asked if they could write together. Soon after, the pair began work on *Sweet Charity* with Bob Fosse. Before the show even opened, recording artists like Barbra Streisand, Tony Bennett, Silvia Syms, and Peggy Lee released singles from the score. The show opened on January 29, 1966 at the Palace Theatre, received 9 Tony nominations, and ran for 609 performances. Over the years Cy Coleman contributed to over 20 musicals, concerts, and revues on the Great White Way, including *I Love My Wife*, *On the Twentieth Century* (with Betty Comden and Adolph Green, 1978 Tony Award for Best Original Score), *Barnum*, *City of Angels* (1990 Tony Award for Best Original Score), and, of course, *The Will Rogers Follies* (1991 Tony Award for Best Musical and Best Original Score). Coleman also scored four feature films, wrote several television specials for Shirley MacLaine, and won three Emmys and two Grammys. He was elected to the Songwriter's Hall of Fame in 1981, received the Johnny Mercer Award in 1995, and was awarded the ASCAP Foundation Richard Rodgers Award for lifetime achievement in American Musical Theatre. Cy Coleman died on November 18, 2004 at the age of 75.

Meet the Creative Team

DON STEPHENSON (Director) directed *Guys and Dolls* at Goodspeed; *Titanic* at Lincoln Center; *Broadway Classics* at Carnegie Hall; *Of Mice and Manhattan* for the Millennium Stage at the Kennedy Center; *The Other Place* at Alley Theatre; *The Producers*, *Lend Me a Tenor*, and *Vanya, Sonia, Masha, and Spike* at Paper Mill Playhouse; *Buyer and Cellar* and *Noises Off*



at Pittsburgh Public Theatre; *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* and *Sister Act* at the Marriott Theatre; *The Cottage* at Theatre Aspen; *I'll Eat You Last: A Chat With Sue Mengers* at Theatreworks/Hartford; *Titanic* at The MUNY and Westchester Broadway Theatre; *Deathtrap*, *Noises Off*, and *The 39 Steps* at Flat Rock Playhouse; *The Mystery of King Tut* and *Skippyjon Jones* for Theatreworks/USA; and *The Great Unknown* for The New York Theatre Festival. He has been nominated by BroadwayWorld as "Best Director of a Musical" for *The Roar of the Greasepaint - the Smell of the*

Crowd (Goodspeed), *Lend Me a Tenor* (Bay Street Theatre), *Titanic* (Hangar Theatre), *Struck* (New Jersey Rep), and *A Comedy of Tenors* (Paper Mill Playhouse). He directed the critically-acclaimed productions of *Oleanna*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and the hit musical comedy *Doctors and Diseases* at the historic Barter Theatre. Other New York directing credits include *Attack of the Elvis Impersonators* (Theatre Row), *A Charles Dickens Christmas* (Urban Stages), *Buck Simple* (Garrick Gaities), *When Pigs Fly* (Kaufman Theatre), *Golden Voices* (Symphony Space), *Old Flames* (Theatre Studio Inc.), and the workshop production of *My Time of Day: The Letters, Lyrics, and Music of Frank Loesser*. He has directed productions of *The Desperate Hours* and *Through All Kinds of Weather* at the Clarence Brown Theatre and *Sleeping Beauty* at American Stage Festival. As an actor, Don played the D'ysquith family in the Tony Award-winning *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* and starred as Leo Bloom in the Tony Award-winning Broadway production of *The Producers*. His other Broadway credits include *Rock of Ages*, *Private Lives*, *Dracula*, *Titanic*, *Parade*, *By Jeeves*, *The Bandwagon*, *Pardon My English*, and *Wonderful Town*. On television, he will be seen on upcoming episodes of *The Americans* and *Deception*. A native of Chattanooga, he holds a BA from the University of Tennessee.

KELLI BARCLAY (Choreographer) has choreographed six Goodspeed productions including *How to Succeed...*, *My One And Only* (CTCC Award for Best Choreography); *Hello! My Baby*; *Hello, Dolly*; *Damn Yankees*; and *Anything Goes*. NYC productions: *Himself and Nora* at the Minetta Lane Theatre, City Center's Encore's production of



Pipe Dream. Associate Choreographer on four Broadway productions, *RCMH Christmas Spectacular* Detroit, MI. Most recently: Ogunquit Playhouse's *White Christmas*, Dir./Chor. North Shore Music Theatre's acclaimed production of *42nd Street*. Kelli also set London's current Award-winning West End production of *42nd Street*, getting to work with Kate Middleton. Feature film: *Made For Each Other*. Extensive Dance background and company work including on faculty at American Ballet Theater NYC Dance Intensive.

MICHAEL O'FLAHERTY (Music Director) is in his 27th season as Goodspeed's Resident Music Director. Broadway: *By Jeeves*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Also: Paper Mill Playhouse, North Shore Music Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Ford's Theatre, The Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Kennedy Center, Pittsburgh

Public Theatre, and the Smithsonian Institution. Musical Supervisor and Cabaret Director of the Williamstown Theatre Festival for 11 years. His original musical *A Connecticut Christmas Carol*, for which he wrote music and lyrics, will be presented at Goodspeed's Terris Theatre in Chester again this fall.

Director's Vision

AN INTERVIEW WITH DON STEPHENSON

When director Don Stephenson began researching Will Rogers in advance of the Goodspeed's *The Will Rogers Follies*, he didn't know much about the man beyond his folksy cowboy persona and his famous sayings (and the fact that Stephenson's grandfather had been a big fan). He was stunned by what he learned about the famed Oklahoma cowboy who vaulted from the Wild West show to Hollywood and radio,

to a national syndicated newspaper column, and even to a presidential run. "In 1933, Will Rogers was the biggest box office star in the world. There's evidence that 40 million people read his column every week. That's a huge number, even today!" Stephenson says. "He was a multimedia star—he was truly the king of media at that time." And since his column focused often on politics, "he was Walter Cronkite and Stephen Colbert and Bill Maher and Samantha Bee combined." But with one major difference from some political commenters today: "Rogers was never mean."

The knowledge of Rogers' truly spectacular life led Stephenson to realize that his production of the *The Will Rogers Follies*, which tells the story of Rogers' life in the form of a Ziegfeld follies revue (Will Rogers was a headliner for the glamorous shows that impresario Florenz Ziegfeld produced), had to do two things: "I knew it had to be entertaining, but I felt like it also had to teach people who



Will Rogers was." To that end, Stephenson will fill his production with images and quotes from Rogers' life.

But of course, the show, with its fabulous *Follies* setting, is also a theatrical spectacular, a great American story told by some of the greatest storytellers of the American musical theater (composer Cy Coleman, librettist Peter Stone, and lyricists Betty Comden and Adolph Green are a Broadway dream team). With choreography by Kelli Barclay, all the "va-va-voom showbiz factor,

with lots of tap dancing and scantily-clad girls coming down stairs" (a favorite feature of Ziegfeld's) will all be there, Stephenson promises. But he took additional inspiration from another part of Ziegfeld's world. At midnight after the large-scale *Follies*, Ziegfeld would host intimate shows on the roof of the theater. "It was a little more intimate and maybe a bit more risqué, but still had all the famous people right there with you," says Stephenson. His production will have this more rarified, intimate feel.

Stephenson also loves that the creators of the piece chose to tell Will Rogers' life story within a *Ziegfeld Follies*, complete with interruptions from Ziegfeld himself when Rogers' story doesn't feel sufficiently dramatic (hence why Will meets his wife on the moon, instead of at a train depot in Oologah, Oklahoma). "It's audacious, what they did, and wild and funny," says Stephenson. But luckily, "it really works!"

Director Don Stephenson with Choreographer Kelli Barclay at rehearsal for *The Will Rogers Follies*.
Photo by Diane Sobolewski.

Presents for Mrs. Rogers

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEPHANIE TAFF, COSTUME DRAPER/CRAFT MANAGER

What are you making?

I am making headpieces for some of our female ensemble members that represent different gemstones. Each gemstone has a distinct headpiece—they're not just the same one in different colors—and some of them have distinct vibes. The emerald is very Egyptian in style; it's got that classic "bust of Nefertiti" shape. Topaz is very Aztec-inspired with feathers. It's almost reminiscent of a warrior helmet. Pearl looks very Russian with pearls of all different sizes. The headpieces are really big in scale, especially for our theater.

How many headpieces are there, and how big are they?

There are six of them, and I believe the tallest one is around eighteen inches. They range from about thirteen to eighteen inches. Some of them are also very wide, like sticking-out-over-the-shoulders wide. They're all built onto skullcaps—hard, basically head-shaped forms—that they can pop right onto the actors' heads over their wig prep.

Where did the idea for these pieces come from, and how do they support the show?

There's a scene in which Will Rogers comes home, and Betty, his wife, is mad because he's been away too long. So, he sings about all the jewels he's going to give her to try and make up for it. Because he's telling his story in the context of *The Ziegfeld Follies*, as he's singing the lyric "diamonds for Mrs. Rogers," a Follies girl dressed as a diamond comes out. He sings about all these gemstones, the ladies come out on stage, and they're supposed to be over-the-top showgirls—and showgirls have big headpieces.

Halfway through the song, though, they have to take off parts of their costumes, including the big headpieces. So, these things are on stage for a pretty short time. Which is often what happens with giant projects in costumes; they're made specifically for a big moment, and then that's it. But it's still really fun to work on them.

What kind of research did you do before you started making these pieces?

The designer, Ilona Somogyi, certainly did a bunch of research, and when she sent me her sketches, she also sent along images that had inspired her. I had to research how we were going to make her vision a reality at an affordable price. I did a lot of Google-ing random materials. For example, some of Pearl's pearls are painted ping pong balls, because they're big enough for stage and super lightweight. I am also using plastic half-spheres from DIY ornament kits that fit together and make a little plastic ball. I take half of that, paint it, and it's half a pearl!

Another really fun thing about this project was that some of the designs for the headpieces as well as for their costumes called for really large jewels—between six and eight inches long—and I learned that you can't really buy those. We then looked into resin casting, because you can mix your color, you can add glitter, you can do all kinds of things. But then the question became, "Okay, what are we going to cast them in? Can we buy molds for giant jewels? Do people make chocolate molds this big?" The answer was pretty much "no." So, I patterned faceted jewels out of heavyweight paper, taped them together into their 3-D shape, made a mold, and cast it in resin. Because we had so much lead time on this show, we were able to make these from scratch because it's something we don't need an actor's measurements for; we just needed time.

Have you ever had to make a mold like that for any other costumes you've made?

Not professionally, just in grad school.

What is the process for making one of these headpieces?

I got the sketches and did some basic math to figure out the scale of the rendering compared to a real person's head.



Topaz costume sketch by Ilona Somogyi

Presents for Mrs. Rogers

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEPHANIE TAFF, COSTUME DRAPER/CRAFT MANAGER

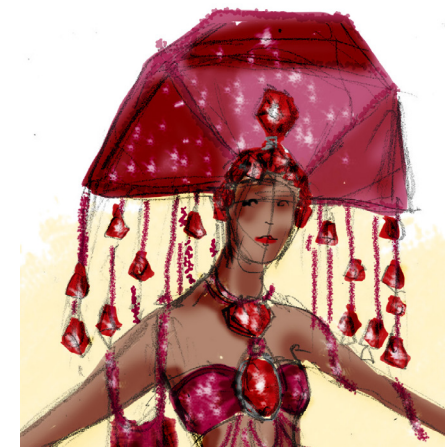
After that, I made mock-ups of the headpieces, and because they're very geometric I made them out of poster board and wire instead of fabric. Then Ilona Somogyi, the designer, came in and looked at them, and she gave me notes and revisions by drawing on the poster board mock-ups.

Once I finished the mock-ups, I took the poster board pieces and the lengths of the wires that I used and applied those measurements to the real materials. Right now I'm in the process of putting the final materials together into the jewel shapes. Each person has their base skullcap that's covered in fabric, and then the large gemstone shapes are applied on top of them. The shape of Emerald's headpiece reminds me of a little bit of a giant Ring Pop situated on the top of the head. To make that, I used a thermoplastic called Fosshape that, when heated, becomes a nice, flat, relatively stiff but still flexible material. I made the individual pieces out of Fosshape, covered them with fabric, and glued them all together to make the different facets, or sides, of the jewel. That will then get stitched to the skullcap, which we will cover with fabric. Then there are always tiny tweaks to make once you put it on an actor, like if it doesn't cover their hairline, and you need to add some trim.

How long does it take you to make one?

Oh, boy. That's a hard question, because I'm working on them all at once while also working on a million other things. It's back and forth: while this dries, do this; while that dries, do that.

It's probably a week for each one. At this point other people are also helping with bits and pieces of them, which helps. If I had to do them



Costume sketch of the Ruby headdress by Ilona Somogyi

again, it would go a lot faster. The challenge is that each one's different. Now that I've figured out how to do one, I can't just remake it in red for Ruby. Ruby is this other, totally different shape.

What kinds of materials are you using?

Fabric of all different kinds: sequined fabric, lamé, the skullcaps are all covered in stretchy fabrics, because that's

easier to work with when covering round shapes, like heads. There's lots of wire involved and some 1/8-inch diameter aluminum rod that I'm soldering together. (It's actually brazing, but it's basically soldering.) Ping pong balls, plastic craft supplies, the little ornament spheres, pre-purchased tiaras will be altered and incorporated into Diamond's headpiece, feathers, lots of acrylic and glass jewels we had in stock, more jewels that I cast...

Did you have to learn anything new or teach yourself a new skill before starting this project?

Yes. Creating faceted gemstones out of nothing. That was really hard. I've done the mold-making and casting before but never this exact thing, and my goal is to get the molds really smooth; casting with no air bubbles is a little bit of a challenge. Brazing the aluminum is also a skill that I've been working on.

The great thing about working in costumes is that everything's always different. Even if you've done a similar project before, something's always different about it the next time. Whether it's a different kind of fabric, or a piece that fits someone's shape differently, you're never doing exactly the same thing. These headpieces are really out there for me, because I've never painted a ping-pong ball and put it on a hat, but now I have. And no one will know it's a ping-pong ball... except the people who read this!

How often do these kinds of costume craft projects come up in Goodspeed shows, and have you gotten to work on any of them in previous productions?

I have done these sorts of projects before—making the really cool, really sparkly stuff is my favorite part of working in costumes. In *A Wonderful Life* in the 2015 season, one of the angels had giant wings, which I made. But most of the "costume magic" pieces that I do are rip-away costumes or hidden-reveal costumes. Those always require a lot of engineering: where to put the snaps, where to put the magnets. There was a costume in *Chasing Rainbows* in 2016 that facilitated a big transformation between dresses in the opening number. There was also a costume in *Darling Grenadine* last season at The Terris Theatre where an actress had a long evening dress engineered to be hidden under a knee-length coat, and when she took the coat off, the dress flowed out for the big reveal.

What will happen to the pieces once the show closes?

They will go into our costume stock, and hopefully people will rent them either for other productions of *The Will Rogers Follies* or for different shows that call for big, ornate headpieces!

Will Rogers

"I joked about every prominent man in my lifetime, but I never met one I didn't like."

- WILL ROGERS -

EARLY LIFE

"I was born on November 4, which is election day ... my birthday has made more men and sent more back to honest work than any other days in the year."

Will was born in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) on November 4, 1879 to Clem and Mary Rogers. Both of his parents were of Cherokee and European descent, had grown up in Cherokee communities, and attended Cherokee schools. Will was the youngest of 8 children born to Mary and Clem, but sadly, 3 died in infancy. Though Clem faced adversity following the Civil War, by the time Will was born, he was one of the most successful men in the Territory and owned an enormous cattle ranch. Like most children living on the frontier, Will worked the ranch from the time he could walk, riding horses and swinging a rope.

SCHOOL & EDUCATION

"A man only learns in two ways, one by reading, and the other by association with smarter people."

Will spent his childhood on the western frontier surrounded by kids of all different races, family backgrounds, and religions, and they all attended school together. Though he bounced from school to school (at times being expelled for preferring to practice rope tricks over going to class), he eventually graduated from a secondary school in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, called Willie Halsell College. Clem sent Will to college at Scarritt Collegiate Institute in Missouri, but again Will was expelled for excessive roping. Clem made one more attempt at bolstering Will's education and enrolled him in Kemper Military School in Missouri, but Will left after a short time.

DRIFTING COWBOY

Following his brief stint in military school, Will drifted around the southwest from the Oklahoma panhandle to New Mexico and even California before circling back home in 1899. By this time the Homestead Act and the Curtis Act had changed completely the landscape of the Territory, and Clem's ranch had shrunk significantly in size. Even so, he sent Will and a friend to run the land in his stead while he established the first bank in the town of Claremore. During this time Will entered his first roping contest, and he won in Claremore that year. Eventually Will grew restless running his father's ranch, and he headed to Argentina where he was determined to become a gaucho. He made it to Buenos Aires (via New Orleans, New York, and England) but quickly

realized that there were hundreds of men competing for the same few jobs. When a job came up tending cattle on a boat sailing for South Africa, Will jumped at the opportunity.

BETTY BLAKE

"We don't know what we want, but we're ready to bite somebody to get it." (1930)



Betty and Will Rogers

1899 was a big year for Will Rogers, as it was also the year he met his future wife, Betty Blake. Betty had moved temporarily to Oologah when she met Will through a mutual friend. They bonded over music: he could carry a tune, and she could play one on the piano. When Betty returned to Arkansas, Will sent her two letters to which she never replied; it would be two years before they spoke again. When they did, it was at the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1904, where Will was performing in a wild west show. When Betty heard a passerby mention his name, she sent him a note, and he replied inviting her to meet him backstage. About a year later, Will took a trip home, and his sisters invited Betty to visit at the same time. Though Will had sent Betty numerous letters practically begging her to marry him, he barely spoke to her during her visit. A few days after she left, however, he went to her house in Arkansas, asked her to marry him, and insisted she come on the road with him. Betty, not having a very high opinion of entertainers, declined. When Will returned a year and a half later after performing in Europe and all across America, though, she finally agreed to marry him. Immediately following the ceremony, they boarded a train to St. Louis and prepared to tour the Orpheum Circuit. They had a happy, if somewhat hectic, marriage, and had four children: Will Jr. (Bill), Mary, James, and Fred (named for Will's friend, Fred Stone).

Will Rogers

BREAKING INTO SHOW BIZ



Will had his first exposure to performing at the St. Louis Fair in 1899 when he was hired to be a plant in a performer's band. The comedian would bet the audience that he could pull a random musician from the band, and he would rope better than anyone in the audience (Will was the "randomly chosen" musician). It was in South Africa, however, that Will became a professional performer. He was hired as a trick roper in *Texas Jack's Wild West Show & Circus* where he also rode a bucking horse and sometimes performed in scenes and reenactments of America's wild west. Will credits Texas Jack with teaching him the tricks of the show business trade and one skill in particular: when to leave the stage to keep the people wanting more. He returned home to the states and began performing with *Colonel Zack Mulhall's Wild West Show* at the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1904.

A NEW ACT FOR VAUDEVILLE

While Will was performing with Mulhall's show, he also took an engagement at the Standard Theatre, a vaudeville house. Though they had never seen one done before, Will, Mulhall, and their friend Theo McSpadden came up with the idea for a trick roping act on stage. The act was a hit, and Will accompanied Mulhall to New York, where he made his debut at Madison Square Garden on April 27, 1905. During one of these shows, a full-grown steer spooked, ran into the ring, and headed for the stands that were packed with onlookers. Will acted quickly: he threw his rope, caught the steer's horns, and pulled it back to the ring. The incident made major news headlines, and Will took that publicity straight to the theater managers. Soon Will was playing vaudeville impresario Willie Hammerstein's rooftop spot at the Victoria and earning rave reviews. During his time at the Victoria, Will began developing the dialogue of his act with no script, preparation, or forewarning to the orchestra. His naturalistic way of speaking and addressing people worked, and he never scripted his performances, preferring to talk off the cuff about whatever was on his mind. Soon, he was on his way to play the most important houses in Europe:

the Winter Garden in Berlin, the Palace in London, and the Ranelagh Club (where, he learned later, Edward VII had been in the audience).

WILL MEETS MR. ZIEGFELD

"This would be a great world to dance in if we didn't have to pay the fiddler." (1930)

When Will returned from Europe he spent a year on the Orpheum Circuit before landing a two-week engagement at the Midnight Frolic, a property of none other than Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr. The audiences at the Frolic were unique in that many of them came to the show every night, and Will learned quickly that he could not use the same material two shows in a row. It was at the Frolic that he first began reading from newspapers and commenting on the headlines. Though Mr. Ziegfeld had intended to fire Will, he couldn't deny the popularity of the newspaper bit, and he extended Will's contract one week at a time. During this engagement Will developed his natural rapport with audiences that made them feel at ease, his trademark as a performer. In the spring of 1916, Ziegfeld finally invited Will to join the *Follies*. Now, Will was doing two shows per night in addition to two matinees per week; he bought three different newspapers a day to keep up with the headlines as they were published. Though Will never signed a contract with Mr. Ziegfeld—he was a man of his word, after all—he worked for him for 10 years.



Will Rogers backstage with the 1924 "Ziegfeld Follies" cast. Image courtesy of Will Rogers Memorial Museum.

WILL ROGERS GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

"I never miss a good chance to shut up."

Though Will's first venture into film was in silent pictures, by the time he moved to Hollywood the industry was booming. He landed his first role through his friend, actor Fred Stone, and his wife. The film did well at the box

Will Rogers

office, and the producer offered him a two-year contract making films in Hollywood. At the end of the two years, Will had made 12 pictures. Will then decided to follow in the footsteps of some other actors in Hollywood and try his hand at writing, producing, directing, and starring in his own films. He made three of them: *Fruits of the Faith*, *The Ropin' Fool* (which can be found online even today), and *One Day in 365*.

COLUMNIST & HUMORIST

"All I know is what I read in the papers." (1923)

Following his solo venture in Hollywood, Will found an agent to schedule him for after-dinner talks and lectures, a common form of social entertainment at the time. During these talks, Will interacted with people from extremely diverse backgrounds and discovered that he could find common ground with just about anyone, a trait that would serve him well throughout his lifetime. In December of 1922, Will started writing a weekly syndicated newspaper column—commenting humorously on affairs both foreign and domestic—for *The New York Times*; his column would be in syndication throughout the country for 13 years. Also for *The Times*, Will started writing a series of quippy daily telegrams, and the installment—called “Will Rogers Says”—was for 9 years featured in more than 500 newspapers in the United States with forty million readers. Later he was hired by *The Saturday Evening Post* to embark on a tour of Europe (during which he did everything, from meeting the Prince of Wales to interviewing Mussolini to attending the Preliminary Conference on Disarmament in Geneva) to write a series of articles for the magazine called “Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President.”

CLICK HERE to read Will Rogers' syndicated column *The Daily Telegram* <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bz3yw4a2bMWS3ZRZ3c3ck5PSm8/view>

POLITICS & HUMANITARIANISM

"Everything is changing in America. People are taking the comedians seriously and the politicians as a joke."

In December of 1926, the residents of Beverly Hills unceremoniously appointed Will as mayor. A passage from his acceptance speech sums up his opinion on the topic:

"They say I'll be a comedy mayor. Well, I won't be the only one. I never saw a mayor yet that wasn't comical. As to my administration, I won't say I'll be exactly honest, but I'll agree to split 50-50 with you and give the town an even break. I'm for the common people, and as Beverly Hills has no common people I won't have to pass out any favors."

Since his appointment to mayor followed no legal protocol, he was swiftly deposed. Will had important work to do in 1927 anyway, when a huge flood overcame the Mississippi Valley and the federal government was reluctant to allocate the necessary funds for relief. Will was relentless in his calls for aid in his column and articles and even pointed out the obvious racism against the people of the valley, most of whom were black. For the first, but not the last, time in his career, Will took relief efforts into his own hands. He asked Mr. Ziegfeld to donate the use of a theater so he could put on a benefit for the flood victims; he raised over \$65,000. The following year in 1928, Will Rogers was “nominated” as the presidential candidate for the fictitious “Anti-Bunk Party” by the humor magazine *Life*. It was not the first presidential election in which Will would receive write-in votes; two Arizona delegates to the 1924 Democratic Convention had cast their votes for Will Rogers, and he received a smattering of write-ins during that national election. When the Stock Market crashed in 1929, however, it was back to relief efforts for his fellow Americans. Throughout the Great Depression, Will advocated constantly for those suffering the worst and shamelessly exposed legislators’ inaction. After a failed meeting with President Hoover to secure more funds for the Red Cross, Will again set out to raise the money himself. He embarked on a charity tour, taking on the cost of production, travel, and expenses himself, and raised over \$225,000 in 18 days.

THE “TALKIES”

"The movies are the only business where you can go out front and applaud yourself."



Will Rogers in the 1931 film A Connecticut Yankee

1929 also marked Will's return to Hollywood with the advent of “talkies”: films with sound. His first was *They Had to See Paris*, and it premiered in September of that year. He was so nervous to hear himself talk on screen that he took a sudden trip home to Oklahoma the day before the premiere; he only returned when Betty had wired him that

Will Rogers

the premiere had gone well and he could come home. After his first talkie, Will was hooked, though he never did memorize his lines, preferring instead to improvise on whatever topic he found most intriguing when he read the script (and he only read it once). He made several notable films in the thirties, including: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *David Harum*, *The County Chairman*, *State Fair*, *Life Begins at Forty*, and *Steamboat 'Round the Bend*. Though Will resided and worked in Hollywood and was certainly very famous, he never became a "Hollywood star" type, and he continued to dress simply in his jeans, boots, and Stetson hat and was friendly to the public, frequently interrupting filming to visit with tourists. By 1932 he was in the top 10 box office stars, leading the pack at number 1 in 1934 (he dropped to second in 1935, after Shirley Temple).

WILL ON THE RADIO



As a performer best known for his conversational style of speaking, radio was perhaps the form of mass entertainment best suited to Will. He did a few broadcasts in the early twenties that built on his newspaper column, but it wasn't until the Great Depression that he truly made his mark there. In October of 1931, President Herbert Hoover invited Will to give a joint address on the topic of unemployment relief in a live national radio broadcast. While it is impossible to say what, if any, impact the broadcast had on unemployment figures, that President Hoover reached out to Will – one of his own biggest critics, particularly on his handling of the Depression – proves that Will's ability to connect with his fellow citizens and boost morale was unmatched. In 1932, Will signed a contract with Gulf Oil Company to do a series of radio talks as part of his continued fundraising efforts for those struggling through the Depression. His contract stipulated that he would earn \$5,000 for each broadcast; \$2,500 of which would be donated to the Red Cross while the other half went to the Salvation Army. The series, which aired on Sunday evenings at 9pm, continued for 2 years. Radio was an adjustment

for Will, however, and he often found himself being cut off mid-sentence because he was not accustomed to speaking within a time constraint. Finally, Will started bringing a wind-up alarm clock with him, and when the alarm buzzed, he would finish his thought and sign off. It helped Will stay within his time frame, and audiences ate up the comedy of it.

AVIATION

"Heroing is one of the shortest-lived professions there is." (1925)



Will Rogers and Wiley Post

Throughout his adult life, Will was completely fascinated with airplanes and aviation and wrote in his columns that he believed it to be the mode of transportation of the future (this was not the only topic on which Will was particularly prescient; he had also all but predicted the Stock Market Crash of 1929 as well as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidential campaign in his column). He met pilots and befriended them, including the famous Charles Lindbergh, and by the time he died he had flown with most of the great aviators of his time. Unfortunately, Will's complete trust in his friends and his unbridled sense of adventure would be his downfall, and he and acclaimed aviator and fellow Oklahoman Wiley Post died in a plane crash near Barrow, Alaska on August 15, 1935.

Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr.

AND THE ZIEGFELD FOLLIES

When Will Rogers got the offer to be a part of *The Ziegfeld Follies*, he had hit the biggest of big times. In 1916, when Rogers first appeared in one of the *Follies*, *The Ziegfeld Follies* were synonymous with entertainment: spectacular revues featuring the biggest stars of the day, all overseen by the legendary impresario Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr.

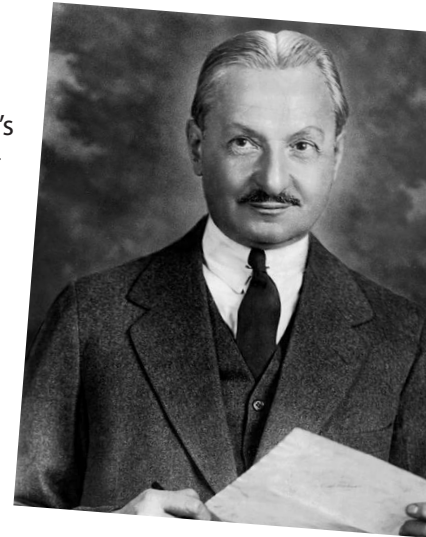
EARLY LIFE & CAREER

Born in 1869 to immigrant parents (a Belgian mother and German father), young Florenz (called Flo) was managing a variety of shows even as a teenager. Sent to Europe by his father, the founder of the Chicago Music College, to find classical musicians and orchestras, young Ziegfeld returned instead as the manager of Sandow, "the Strongest Man in the World." With a knack for spotting talent, he found another European performer to represent: a French-Polish singer named Anna Held. Helped by Ziegfeld's knack for managing publicity (and creating some carefully orchestrated publicity stunts), Held became a star across the country as well as Ziegfeld's wife.

ZIEGFELD ARRIVES ON BROADWAY

When Ziegfeld began to produce Broadway shows, Anna Held starred in many of them, and it is said that it was she who first suggested that he create an American version of Paris's *Folies-Bergère* (but less risqué). In 1907, Ziegfeld did so and launched the first of a series of lavish revues that

came to be known as "Ziegfeld's Follies." The revues were larger-than-life extravaganzas and always featured the beautiful showgirls in opulent costumes that became the shows' signature (the shows' slogan was "Glorifying the American Girl," and stars including Josephine Baker, Barbara Stanwyck, and Gypsy Rose Lee began as Ziegfeld Girls).



THE FOLLIES, FAME & LEGACY

In addition to the dazzling showgirls, the *Follies* featured numbers and comedy routines from some of the greatest performers of the time, such as Fanny Brice, Bert Williams and Eddie Cantor (in addition to Will Rogers, of course). *The Follies* were produced annually for 23 years, until the Great Depression brought an end to the spectacles, although four more were produced after Ziegfeld's death in the 1932. Although Ziegfeld was also a successful Broadway producer, most famously of *Show Boat*, it was his lavish revues that he was most known for, and which came to define an era in American popular entertainment.



— Wiley Post, Aviation Marvel —

Wiley Post was one of the most famous aviators of the early 20th century and a close friend of Will Rogers. Born in Grand Saline, Texas on November 22, 1898 to farmers William Francis and Mae Quinlan Post, Wiley had a typical childhood on the American frontier. His family settled in Oklahoma when he was 5 years old, and while he attended grade school, he dropped out and never completed his formal education. Wiley Post did not discover a love for aviation until his late twenties, having first worked for the Army during World War I and later on an oil rig in Oklahoma, where an accident resulted in the loss of his left eye and the collection of a tidy settlement from the oil company. He then joined a flying circus called *Burrell Tibbs and His Texas Topnotch Fliers* as a parachutist, and his life as an aviator began. With the money he received from his eye injury settlement, Wiley bought his first airplane and



started a career as a private pilot for oil tycoons like F.C. Hall. During this time, Wiley entered the Los Angeles to Chicago Men's Air Derby and won by 58 seconds, inspiring him to attempt to break the around-the-world flight record set by the German aircraft the Graf Zeppelin. He succeeded; the Graf Zeppelin had set the record at 21 days, while Wiley completed the trip in just 8 days and 16 hours with his navigator, Harold Gatty. Two years later, he would best his own record in the first solo flight around the world, completed in 7 days and 19 hours. His solo flight utilized new navigation technology, and Wiley continued to be an innovator in the field of aviation until his death, even working with the Goodrich Company to construct the first pressure suit for aircrafts as part of his experimentation with high-altitude flight—during which he also discovered the jet stream.

— Texas Jack and the Wild West Show —

While Will Rogers achieved a level of international fame and acclaim that few other cowboys could have even dreamed about, he was not the first to introduce audiences to wild west shows as entertainment; in fact, neither was his mentor, Texas Jack, Jr., though he borrowed the name of the man who was. Following the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865, short stories and dime novels depicting frontier life became staples of popular culture, and in 1872 a version of one such story became the first stage production in the canon of wild west entertainment and gained popularity on the vaudeville circuit. It was called *Scouts of the Prairie*, and it starred real life cowboys and rangers Texas Jack (the first) and Buffalo Bill in their inaugural turns on the stage reenacting battles and scenes from



the American frontier. In 1873, a third well-known cowboy of the time, Wild Bill, joined the show, and the production became known as *Scouts of the Plains*. While the original Texas Jack passed away of an unexpected illness at the young age of 34, the articles he wrote as a newspaper correspondent for *The New York Times* and *New York Herald* about his life as a cowboy became instrumental to Buffalo Bill's enduring wild west show in the late 1880s. His legacy was also carried on by a young orphan whom Texas Jack rescued. A sharpshooter and trick roper in adulthood, Texas Jack, Jr. was granted permission by Texas Jack's family to adopt the moniker as his stage name, and he created *Texas Jack's Wild West Show & Circus* around 1900 in South Africa.

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