

# GOODSPEED MUSICALS

AUDIENCE INSIGHTS



## A Wonderful Life

*The Musical*

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*The Musical*

**A WONDERFUL LIFE**  
Goodspeed Opera House  
Sept 18 - Nov 29, 2015

Adapted from the Frank Capra  
film "It's A Wonderful Life"

Music by  
**JOE RAPOSO**

Book and Lyrics by  
**SHELDON HARNICK**

Lighting Design by  
**SCOTT BOLMAN**

Costume Design by  
**JENNIFER CAPRIO**

Scenic Design by  
**BRIAN PRATHER**

Choreographed by  
**PARKER ESSE**

Directed by  
**MICHAEL PERLMAN**

Executive Director  
**MICHAEL GENNARO**

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# THE CHARACTERS

**A Wonderful Life**  
*The Musical*

**GEORGE BAILEY:** A small-town boy with big dreams. He longs to leave his hometown of Bedford Falls and travel the world, but he continuously puts his dreams on hold to support his family, friends, and save his family's business.

**HARRY BAILEY:** George Bailey's younger, happy-go-lucky brother.

**UNCLE BILLY:** George and Harry's scatterbrained uncle.

**MILLIE BAILEY:** Matriarch of the Bailey family and mother to George and Harry.

**TOM BAILEY:** George and Harry's father and the founder of the family business, the Bailey Building and Loan Association.

**MARY HATCH:** A beautiful but shy young woman who has had a life-long crush on George Bailey.

**MR. POTTER:** The wealthiest man in Bedford Falls and the man determined to put the Bailey Building and Loan Association out of business by any means necessary.

**SAM WAINWRIGHT:** A dashing young man and George's best friend.

**CLARENCE JOHNSON:** George's bumbling guardian angel who is desperate to earn his wings.

**MATTHEW:** An Executive Angel.

**TOMMY, BETH & ZUZU BAILEY:** George Bailey's children.

**ERNIE, BERT, MR. MARTINI, MRS. MARTINI, KAREN, MRS. HATCH, VIOLET:** Residents of Bedford Falls.



*Frank Vlastnik as Clarence in  
Goodspeed's production of A Wonderful  
Life. ©Diane Sobolewski.*





Duke Lafoon as George Bailey and Frank Vlastnik as Clarence in Goodspeed's production of A Wonderful Life. ©Diane Sobolewski.

stating that George is worth more dead than alive. Potter goes so far as to call the police and have them issue an arrest warrant for George on various charges. Disheartened and angry, George returns home and takes his emotions out on Mary and their children. Distraught and helpless, George considers ending his life. He is about to step in front of a train when he sees a strange man (Clarence) jump onto the railroad tracks. Unable to stand by and watch a man die, George gives up his plan of suicide and saves the stranger.

Clarence thanks George for his act of heroism and reveals his identity as an angel. George scoffs at this declaration and in the course of their conversation makes a wish that he had never

been born. Clarence grants his wish and George sees what would happen to his family, friends and hometown if he had never existed. Deeply shaken by what he witnesses, George begs Clarence to reverse his wish.

Again, Clarence grants his wish and George joyously greets the family and friends he took for granted. He also finds out that the people of Bedford Falls have taken up a collection to raise the \$8,000 needed to save George and the Building and Loan Association. The police and the auditor are so touched by the townspeople's gesture that they tear up the arrest warrant. Harry Bailey arrives amidst the celebration and toasts his brother, declaring him "the richest man in town."





**JOE RAPOSO** (*Music*) was born in Falls River Massachusetts in 1937 to Joseph Raposo and Maria (Mary) Ascencao. Joe Raposo Senior was an accomplished violinist, pianist and classical guitarist who passed his love of music on to his son. Raposo graduated from B.M.C Durfee High School in Falls River and continued his education in the undergraduate division of Harvard University. He studied music in school and was well known for writing scores to several Hasty Pudding shows. In 1965 he followed the advice of a friend and moved to New York City to pursue a career as a songwriter.

Raposo worked as a musical supervisor, arranger and composer on various projects around New York City including the original off-Broadway production of *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*. He became famous in 1969 for his work with Jim Henson and the creation of the iconic children's television show, *Sesame Street*. He wrote the "Sesame Street Theme" as well as many of its most popular songs, such as "Being Green," "C is for Cookie," "Sing," and "ABC-DEF-GHI". He also served as the Musical Director for *The Electric Company*, a television series designed for children that had outgrown *Sesame Street* from 1971 to 1974, composed the music for the HBO animated adaptation *Madeline* and the Canadian cartoon series *The Smoggies*.

Though he is primarily known for his work in television, Raposo contributed music to several stage musicals including an adaptation of the text and poems of *A Man's a Man* by Bertolt Brecht and a stage musical about *Raggedy Ann*, which was performed in the Soviet Union and had a brief Broadway run in 1986. He also collaborated with Sheldon Harnick on a musical adaptation of the film *It's a Wonderful Life* entitled *A Wonderful Life*.

Raposo contributed theme songs, incidental music and scores to various projects on stage and screen including *The Great Muppet Caper*, *Curious George*, *Shining Time Station*, *Three's Company*, *House of Flowers*, *Play it Again, Sam*, *Half a Sixpence* and *The Mad Show*. His song "The First Time It Happens," from *The Great Muppet Caper*, was nominated for an Academy Award in 1981 but lost to "Arthur's Theme" from the film *Arthur*.

Raposo passed away in 1989 of Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma at the age of 51. Despite his relatively short career, friends, family and children all over the world remember him fondly.



Joe Raposo and Big Bird on the set of Sesame Street.



**CLICK HERE**  
to listen to Joe Raposo sing "It's Not Easy Being Green."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRZ-lxZ46ng>



**CLICK HERE**  
to watch a Sesame Street montage of "Sing"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wH4HZuz\\_Vjs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wH4HZuz_Vjs)



# DIRECTOR'S VISION BY MICHAEL PERLMAN



Director Michael Perlman at the first read-through of *A Wonderful Life*. ©Diane Sobolewski

## **What is your inspiration for *A Wonderful Life*?**

Our inspiration, as a creative team, springs from trying to honor the story's spirit of warmth, hopefulness, and family. *A Wonderful Life* is a story with a huge heart. Especially when times are tough, as times certainly grow tough for George Bailey, it is important, relevant, and necessary to remember that we all have the power to affect and transform others' lives in profound and unexpected ways. In this way, the story of George Bailey is the story of all of us. For the telling of this story to be successful, we have to be able to see ourselves in George Bailey's struggles, but also in the ways that he keeps going, keeps moving forward, and puts the hopes, dreams, and needs of others first. He is a remarkably dynamic, complex, and sympathetic character, which explains a lot of why he has such resonance in American life.

To bring Bedford Falls to stage, the designers and I looked at Norman Rockwell paintings, which are the sort of timeless artwork that inspires nostalgia for small town America. We were also looking for ways to communicate how the angel characters in the show, Matthew and Clarence, are able to observe Bedford Falls from heaven. The concept of a snow globe was a recurring theme in our conversations, the idea being that heaven is populated with various snow globes, each containing a different person's story. We were also drawn to the way that windows are used in the story—including as a magical way to make wishes come true. You will notice that a collage of windows serves as our set. This is part of the idea of a window as a way to peer into someone else's soul.

## **What makes *The Goodspeed* the perfect fit for this production?**

*The Goodspeed* is the perfect fit in so many ways. East Haddam, like Bedford Falls, is a small, close-knit community, evocative of a simpler time. The performance space is so intimate that it allows the audience to truly feel close to the action onstage, which reinforces the idea that we are sharing an intimate glimpse into each character's life.

Also, since part of the show actually takes place in heaven, we thought it would be useful to imagine *The Goodspeed* itself as heaven. As soon as the lights go down and the show begins, we are transported to another realm, and we share the vantage point of an angel when we observe, as Clarence does, the process of watching critical moments unfolding in George Bailey's life.

## **What are the challenges to staging in this unique venue?**

Well, it's a very small space, that's true. When I first saw the space, I described it as a big hug around the stage. For our creative team, we knew the uniqueness of the venue would reinforce our efforts if we could get the heart of the story right and build our approach from there. Our biggest challenge was figuring out how to produce a musical with so many locations over such an expanse of time. We are talking about decades in the life of a town, and this requires a great variety of interiors and exteriors.

## **What can the audience expect to see?**

The audience can expect a timeless story in a timeless setting. I think it will be fun for them to notice that, while there are definitely homages to the movie in both the script and the design, the actors are bringing life to these well-known characters in surprising and heartwarming ways. I think people will be visiting a world that feels at once familiar and new, and they will see *The Goodspeed* as a place where magic can happen.



# BEHIND THE SCENES COSTUMES BY JENNIFER CAPRIO

George Bailey



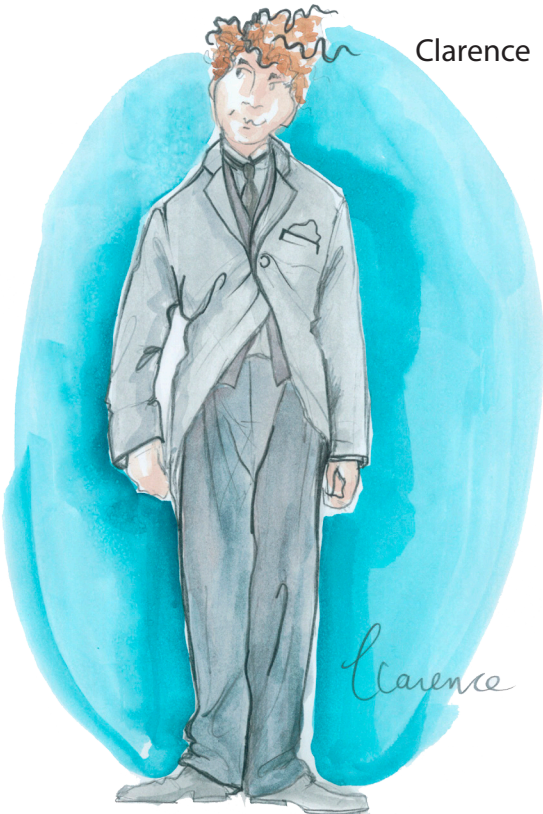
Mr. Potter



Mary



Clarence



Violet



Matthew



C.D. 4706  
COSTUME DESIGNER

SIGNATURE 



Arena Stage produced it professionally for the first time. In 2005, there was an Actors Fund benefit concert of *A Wonderful Life* at the Shubert Theatre in New York City. Most recently, Harnick made some changes to the script of *A Wonderful Life* in preparation for Goodspeed's production.

The basic moral at the heart of "The Greatest Gift", *It's a Wonderful Life*, and *A Wonderful Life* is that we are interconnected and important in ways we can never fully understand. These timeless works serve to remind us that it is impossible to calculate our impact on the lives of those around us. What's more, the film and stage version add narrative elements that further convey what many consider the truly valuable things in life such as sacrifice for the common good, community, friends, family and love. They achieve this while immersing the audience in the nostalgia of traditional Christmas holidays, old-fashioned romance, post-war

America and the idealized ethos of small town USA. It's no wonder countless families have made this timeless classic a holiday tradition.

Director and award winning playwright Michael Perlman will be making his Goodspeed debut with this production of *A Wonderful Life*. He sees Goodspeed as the perfect place to stage the show because the intimacy of the space allows the audience to know and appreciate the characters in an unusually heightened way. He also sees Goodspeed as a theatre that is part of a small, close, community that is evocative of a simpler time. Perlman intends to pay homage to the classic movie while making the show at once familiar and new on stage. We hope you enjoy this heartwarming family musical that celebrates the power of love and the goodness in all of us.



A scene from *It's A Wonderful Life*.

# ART OF THE AMERICAN MUSICAL: CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CREATORS - SHELDON HARNICK (EXCERPT)

**You have been quoted as saying, "inspiration is the act of drawing up the chair to the writing desk." Would you say that that is how you approached lyric writing for the American musical theater?**

**Sheldon Harnick:** Actually, that's not my quote. I found that somewhere and loved it, so I put it above the mantelpieces, along with a quote from Sean O'Casey, "Get on with the bloody job."

more and more time, and then suddenly, as I say, it just takes over.  
.....

**Following your partnership with Jerry Bock you worked with Joe Raposo on a musical version of the film *It's a Wonderful Life*. How did that happen?**

**SH:** Jerry Bock and I had had a falling out during *The Rothchilds* because of some aspects of the way the show was done. As a matter of fact, I did ask Jerry to do the show, but he said no. I thought I would like somebody who can write a nice simple tune but who also has a legitimate background and can do complex stuff, because I wanted to do some complicated things in the show. I knew that Joe Raposo had studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and had lived in her home as a protégé of hers, so I asked Joe and he said yes. I don't know if Joe was intimidated by me, but he never gave me any music first. I love to work to music as well as writing lyrics first, but in this show, for whatever reasons, all of the lyrics came first. I feel that Joe did a superb job; I love the score. One of the reasons that I wanted to do it when I was asked was that the film always made me weep, and there were aspects of the movie that I thought were never realized. There are a lot of close-ups where you look at Jimmy Stewart's face and you don't really know what he's thinking; you think you know what he's thinking, but I thought I would like to say what I think he's thinking. Also the show was about something that's very close to me, and that's the sense of failure, the sense of time being wasted. I've been there, I've experienced that; I wanted to say things about it.

The other reason is that I thought the role of George Bailey was a great role. I felt that it was wrong to confine it or restrict it to one man who happened to be the one cast in the movie; it should be played by a lot of people. That's why we did it. When we did it at Arena Stage in Washington, I personally was thrilled that I heard it was wonderful. When I looked around at the end of the show, I found people weeping. I felt it was very successful.  
.....



Sheldon Harnick in his New York apartment.  
©Carlo Allegri for The Washington Post

**What is your writing process? How do you start, and how do you discipline yourself to do it? Is it hard or is it easy?**

**SH:** Discipline has always been hard for me. I rationalize that by telling myself that the reason it's hard is that once I really get involved with a project, it takes over and everything else in my life suffers. I don't know whether that's a rationalization or not. It is true that once I get into it, it becomes obsessive. So I avoid it at all costs. I don't know if you've read the old essay by Bob Benchley on all the ways that writers can find to procrastinate: you sit down to write and suddenly you find that you must build a paperclip chain that's four feet long, exactly four feet long. There are innumerable ways to keep from working. My discipline is saying, "Today I will work on it a half hour." Then, little by little, I put in





This 1937 photo by Margaret Bourke-White's shows a line of African Americans waiting for bread after the Louisville floods. They are ironically framed by a poster in the background depicting a white, middle-class American family, who are enjoying the fruits of the American Dream.

according to urban policy expert Matt Lassiter, outlined the expectation "if you worked hard and played by the rules, you deserved certain things. You deserved security and decent shelter and to not have to worry that you might lose your house to bankruptcy." To, once again reference Tom Bailey, Americans simply wanted to be one of the lucky ones, one of the favored few, who were able to earn their way.

The events of *A Wonderful Life* traverse this economic journey from the 1920s to the late 1940s and depict the inner struggle that the pursuit of the American dream has on the citizens of Bedford Falls, specifically George Bailey. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the American dream as "an American social ideal that stresses egalitarianism and especially material prosperity." Material wealth is often viewed as the hallmark of a successful life and the pinnacle of the American dream. This perception of the American dream can make people without great financial wealth feel as though they have failed. George spends the entirety of *A Wonderful Life* desperately in search of the best opportunity, the most exotic trip or whatever else he thinks will satisfy his pursuit of happiness. He negotiates his way through the ever-changing time periods yet stays focused on the idea of monetary

wealth as the ultimate characterization of success. Meanwhile, the new American dream is focusing on the desire for home ownership and George does not realize the importance of his role in making this a reality for members of the community.

Though the details of the American dream may have changed throughout history, finding a place to belong has always been at its heart. *A Wonderful Life* is a reminder that the American dream is not something that can be measured by monetary means but rather refers to the choices individuals must make for their own lives. By using *A Wonderful Life* as a lens to examine what the American dream means, it becomes clear that the answer is extraordinarily simple. For many, the American dream is a place to belong. George embodies the best parts of this interpretation of the American dream both for his eventual realization of how much he values his family and community and by providing countless individuals a way to find their own place to belong. *A Wonderful Life* blends American optimism and family values with the spirit of Christmas to create a powerful, sentimental portrayal of life and the American dream.



# IT'S A WONDERFUL PHILOSOPHY CONTINUED

As the ultimate capitalist, Potter is continuously chasing financial rewards and does so at the cost of the people of Bedford Falls. Unlike George, he doesn't care if individuals are unsafe or live in rickety apartment buildings with no heat. When there is a run on the town bank, his concern is for the institution rather than the individuals affected; he also sees this as a business opportunity and bails the bank out of financial ruin in order to increase his own wealth. Harper's Magazine published a quote in 2005 that succinctly sums up this money oriented view of the world, "Capitalism is at once far too rational, trusting in nothing that it cannot weigh and measure, and far too little as well, accumulating wealth as an end in itself."

## How these philosophies play out in the musical

Capitalism and utilitarianism are not polar opposites; they simply approach things from contradictory angles much like Potter and George. George Bailey and Henry Potter lock themselves in a battle that neither can win. Though George is the philanthropic hero of *A Wonderful Life*, his good-hearted gestures would do Bedford Falls little good without the economic stability that Potter provides. Yet, at the same time, allowing Bedford Falls to

become Pottersville and focusing solely on the economic aspect would not be healthy for the community either. George and Potter are two sides of the same coin and though they detest each other, they are necessary for the others survival.

The idea of George Bailey and Henry Potter representing different philosophic or even governmental points of view is not new. In 1946, one year after RKO released the film version of *It's a Wonderful Life*, the FBI issued a memo stating that the film could be communist propaganda. A segment of the document alleged "to the picture 'It's a Wonderful Life,' [redacted] stated in substance that the film represented rather obvious attempts to discredit bankers by casting Lionel Barrymore as a 'scrooge-type' so that he would be the most hated man in the picture. This, according to these sources, is a common trick used by Communists. [In] addition, [redacted] stated that, in his opinion, this picture deliberately maligned the upper class, attempting to show the people who had money were mean and despicable characters." Frank Capra, the director of the film, denied any Communist agenda and said that the theme of the film was truly about "the individual's belief in himself."

With regard to the picture, "It's A Wonderful Life", [redacted] stated in substance that the film represented a rather obvious attempt to discredit bankers by casting Lionel Barrymore as a "scrooge-type" so that he would be the most hated man in the picture. This, according to these sources, is a common trick used by Communists.

In addition, [redacted] stated that, in his opinion, this picture deliberately maligned the upper class, attempting to show the people who had money were mean and despicable characters. [redacted] related that if he had made this picture portraying the banker, he would have shown this individual to have been following the rules as laid down by the State Bank Examiners in connection with making loans. Further, [redacted] stated that the scene wouldn't have "suffered at all" in portraying the banker as a man who was protecting funds put in his care by private individuals and adhering to the rules governing the loan of that money rather than portraying the part as it was shown. In summary, [redacted] stated that it was not necessary to make the banker such a mean character and "I would never have done it that way".

An excerpt from the 1946 FBI memo stating that *It's A Wonderful Life* was communist propoganda.



# WHAT IS A WONDERFUL LIFE?

**A Wonderful Life**  
*The Musical*



A scene from *It's A Wonderful Life*.

Musical theatre allows its audiences to suspend their disbelief and bask in an alternate version of reality. In this theatrical version of the world, it is commonplace for a character to burst into song, fifty relative strangers to enter a dance break perfectly in sync and for years to pass in a literal blink of an eye. There are numerous theatrical forms in the world besides musical theatre

with their own standards and peculiarities; however, they all rely on the same basic framework to tell their stories. There is drama, tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, satire, romantic comedy and realism to name a few. Musical theatre, by its very nature, is usually not terribly realistic since people don't often nonchalantly burst into song in the course of their everyday lives, yet, it can contain elements of realism. *A Wonderful Life* is an interesting example of a piece of theatre and though it is clearly a musical, it does not fall neatly into one of the genres mentioned above.

*A Wonderful Life* contains elements of tragedy within its story as it chronicles the life of George Bailey. The audience watches George deal with the death of his father and become trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of disappointment until he can no longer cope and contemplates suicide. However, *A Wonderful Life* it is not quite a tragedy since bumbling Clarence, Angel Second Class, saves him.

*A Wonderful Life* is certainly a tale with amusing characters that contains a very happy ending, so perhaps it could be classified as a comedy. However, as heartwarming as the ending may be, it incorporates death, betrayal, theft, jealousy, religious aspects and the idea of suicide. For *A Wonderful Life*, the genre of comedy does not seem to be a good fit either.

If viewed through a satirical lens, both George and Henry Potter could be characters created by the authors to show the foibles of greed, materialism and blind ambition. Satire exposes the weakness or vices of an individual or a society and ridicules these negative behaviors. George is so caught up in the idea of a "perfect" life that he comes perilously close to losing everything he holds dear and Potter resorts to petty thievery out of anger. However, *A Wonderful Life* does not hold either man up as an example of what to do or not do. There does not seem to be an obvious bias in the work that leads the audience to scorn or ridicule one man over the other.

The genre of tragicomedy may be the best fit for this particular musical though the definition provided by *Merriam-Webster* is vague, "a drama or a situation blending tragic and comic elements." Combining the idea of tragicomedy with romance, which is defined as "a narrative treating imaginary characters involved in events remote in time or place and usually heroic, adventurous, or mysterious," may be the most fitting classification for *A Wonderful Life*. Combining these genres takes into account the serious aspects of the show, its uplifting conclusion, the love story between George and Mary and the fantastical elements provided by Clarence. However, this classification is simply a combination of four different genres into one phrase, a romantic tragicomedy.

*A Wonderful Life* is a piece of musical theatre that defies straight forward classification. However, the beauty of *A Wonderful Life* is that it is a narrative that encompasses so many different ideas that it develops into its own unique creation. The audience views a work that balances elements of tragedy, realism, comedy and romance.

# INTERESTING FACTS

**A Wonderful Life**  
*The Musical*



Jimmy Stewart receiving the French Croix de Guerre with Palm in 1944

- Filming for *It's a Wonderful Life* took place during a summer heat wave.
- Jimmy Stewart served in WWII and was one of the highest-ranking officers in the United States Auxiliary Air Force.
- Casting directors considered Ginger Rogers, Olivia de Havilland, Martha Scott and Ann Dvorak for the role of Mary Bailey before ultimately awarding the role to Donna Reed.
- *It's a Wonderful Life* is the second film to star Jimmy Stewart that Sheldon Harnick helped turn into a musical. *She Loves Me* is based on the film *The Shop Around the Corner*.
- Jimmy Stewart was 37 years old when he portrayed George Bailey as an 18 year old and beyond.
- A short story written by Phillip Van Doren Stern in 1939 entitled *The Greatest Gift* was the inspiration for both *A Wonderful Life* and *It's a Wonderful Life*.
- Bedford Falls is not a real place. Frank Capra combined the towns of Seneca Falls and Bedford Hills to create the town name.
- The protagonist of *The Greatest Gift* is George Pratt not George Bailey.
- Joe Raposo passed away before a complete production of *A Wonderful Life* was staged.



**CLICK HERE to  
watch the making of  
*It's A Wonderful Life***

[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=lhaKfDyRoH4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhaKfDyRoH4)

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