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'Gilding the Guild': Art theatre, the Broadway revue and cultural parody in *The Garrick Gaieties* (1925–1930)

ABSTRACT

The legendary Garrick Gaieties *revues of the mid-1920s are credited with launching the Broadway careers of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, with developing the style of the 'sophisticated revue' and with establishing Rodgers' collaboration with the Theatre Guild, which later produced* Oklahoma! *(1943) and* Carousel *(1945). Beyond these more familiar innovations,* The Garrick Gaieties *invites closer scrutiny for the series' complex relationship with the Little Theatre and art theatre movements of the 1920s, as represented by the Theatre Guild. Through cultural parody satirizing both the Theatre Guild and Broadway commercialism, the creators of* The Garrick Gaieties of 1925, 1926 *and* 1930 *not only used the revue form to destabilize cultural hierarchies and address tensions concerning art and commerce, but to bridge the distinct traditions of the Broadway musical and art theatre during the culturally dynamic years of the 1920s.*

KEYWORDS

Broadway revue
Rodgers and Hart
Theatre Guild
art theatre
parody
intertextuality

The Garrick Gaieties revues of the mid-1920s are legendary for launching the Broadway careers of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart. Bringing Rodgers and Hart 'their first major recognition' as a songwriting partnership (Hischak 2007: 92), these witty revues produced the team's first nationally popular hits:

the urban and bucolic odes 'Manhattan' and 'Mountain Greenery', respectively. More significantly, *The Garrick Gaieties* have been recognized for developing a style of intimate 'sophisticated revue' that flourished during the Depression era and for establishing Rodgers' collaboration with the Theatre Guild, the eventual producers of *Oklahoma!* (1943) and *Carousel* (1945). Beyond these familiar milestones, *The Garrick Gaeities* invites closer scrutiny for the series' complex relationship with the Little Theatre and art theatre movements of the 1920s, as exemplified by the Theatre Guild. Filled with self-reflexive satire, directed both at Little Theatre aesthetics and Broadway commercialism, the libretti of *The Garrick Gaeities* suggest not only new evaluations of Rodgers and Hart's (and, later, Rodgers and Hammerstein's) relationship with the Theatre Guild, but of the 'Golden Age' American musical to its long-supposed antithesis: the theatrical modernist avant-garde. Through a close reading of cultural parody in the two Rodgers and Hart *Garrick Gaieties* (and a third, 1930, edition scored by other composers), these revues reveal how Rodgers and Hart, their collaborators and the Theatre Guild satirically bridged anxieties about cultural production and hierarchies in the 1920s: the relationship of art with commerce, downtown to Broadway and the musical to the larger American theatrical landscape.

The Garrick Gaieties drew upon a larger theatrical tradition, as, during its heyday, the commercial Broadway revue – represented by such annual spectaculars as *The Ziegfeld Follies* and the Winter Garden *Passing Shows* – thrived on destabilizing cultural categories and on unsettling what David Savran calls 'the binary opposition between highbrow and lowbrow' (2004: 212) consolidated in the late nineteenth century by America's social and cultural elite (Levine 1988: 167). Revues were eclectic forms ranging across the cultural spectrum, with ballet in particular a 'fixture' of the genre in the World War I era (Magee 2012: 124). Yet if Florenz Ziegfeld's *Miss 1917* (1917) offered 'Falling Leaves: A Poem Choreographic', revues simultaneously fed upon the burlesquing of 'serious' and 'high' art, as with Fanny Brice's number 'Becky is Back in the Ballet' in the *Follies* of 1916. Cultural parody was strategically vital to the revue, a form defined by its populist energy and satiric edge. In the 'first true Broadway revue', 1894's *The Passing Show*, the sketch 'Round the Opera in Twenty Minutes' took audiences on a satirical tour of grand operas such as *Tannhäuser* and *Pagliacci* (Davis 2000: 60). Yet while the genre challenged cultural hierarchies, revues – with their unruly cavalcades of gags and girls, and fabled appeal to the 'tired business man' – figured less exaltedly in the theatrical hierarchy of the 1920s, the decade of the Theatre Guild's eminence. In a 1926 *New York Times* essay, Brooks Atkinson noted the revue being 'frequently patronized as a light-headed diversion of low breeding and inferior intelligence' (1926b: X1).

Thus, it came as a great surprise to critics and theatregoers when, in 1925, the 'Junior Players' of the Theatre Guild – the prestigious 'art theatre' that John Dos Passos compared with America's Comédie Française (Savran 2009: 147) – opened a new revue at the Garrick Theatre by burlesquing the Provincetown Players, the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Actor's Theatre. Costumed as acolytes of each Little Theatre company and singing insouciantly to the music of Rodgers and the lyrics of Hart, three performers chanted:

> We bring drama to your great metropolis,
> We are the little theatre group.

Each of us has built a small acropolis
To hold our little theatre troupe.

(Hart et al. 1925: 1–1)

In the next song in the opening number, 'Gilding the Guild', the company of *The Garrick Gaieties* satirically skewered the high-culture prestige of the Theatre Guild itself:

We suppose you wonder
Wonder what in thunder
This revue is all about.
If this entertainment
Is for art or gain meant
We'll remove your every doubt.

(Hart et al. 1925: 1–4)

In response to this unprecedented self-parody on the part of the 'frantically intellectual' Theatre Guild, critic Richard Dana Skinner of *The Commonweal* mused, 'There are few things more surprising – pleasantly and otherwise – than an art theatre on a spree. The business of taking oneself seriously has, apparently, certain limits, and when those limits are reached, something volcanic happens' (1925).

In the three editions of *The Garrick Gaieties* (1925, 1926 and 1930), the Theatre Guild turned the business of temporarily not 'taking itself seriously' into an immense, if not volcanic, creative and commercial success, even as the revues themselves playfully teased the tensions between Broadway 'gain' and the 'high art' represented by the Little Theatre Movement and the Theatre Guild. *The Garrick Gaeities*, recalled by the Guild's Lawrence Langner as 'gay, youthful, impudent, and satirical', exemplified the decade's wide-ranging love for parody and satire; as Margaret M. Knapp notes, 'one of the most intriguing characteristics of the American theatre in the nineteen twenties was its ability to laugh at itself' (1975: 356). Influenced by such innovative predecessors as the Neighborhood Playhouse's *The Grand Street Follies*, *The Garrick Gaieties* helped pave the way for a mode of revue (termed variously by scholars as 'sophisticated revue' and 'intimate revue') that valued satiric sleekness over spectacle, as later represented by such 1930s' revues as Dietz and Schwartz's *The Little Show* (1929). As Philip Furia notes of the *Gaieties*, these 'sophisticated revues (were) as much as a streamlined antidote to Ziegfeldian extravaganzas as the Princess (Theatre) shows had been to florid European operettas' (1990: 99). Cultural parody and satire comprised the 'urbanely witty fare' (Furia 1990: 99) that characterized these new revues.

In its irreverent parodies of 'highbrow' theatre, and in the erudition and artistry with which Rodgers and Hart infused a 'lowbrow' form, *The Garrick Gaieties* boldly shuffled theatrical and cultural hierarchies. Rodgers and Hart's revues poised art theatre and the Broadway musical into a tensely playful dialogue, rather than a stark dichotomy. Atkinson noted as much in his *New York Times* review of the 1926 *Garrick Gaeities* when *The Grand Street Follies* and the *Gaieties* ran concurrently at the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Garrick Theater, respectively:

In the past few seasons playgoers have found pleasure in these boisterous holidays of the impeccable art theaters – *The Grand Street Follies* and

> *The Garrick Gaieties*. After a season of intellectual drama [come] these experiments in the vernacular, snickering with irony. […] For the enjoyment comes as much from contrast with the more serious 'art' productions of the year as from the substance of the revues themselves.
>
> (Atkinson 1926a: 11)

Atkinson's review resonated with an ongoing and heated discourse in the 1920s about the conflicts of art and commerce – what Andreas Huyssen has termed 'The Great Divide', or 'the categorical separation of high art and mass culture' (1986: ix). These debates divided theatre makers, critics and audiences during the World War I era and into the 1920s and 1930s. This was the heyday both of the Little Theatre Movement in America and the Broadway revue, and also the era of their surprising convergence.

THE LITTLE THEATRE MOVEMENT, THE THEATRE GUILD AND THE BROADWAY REVUE

By 1925, when *The Garrick Gaieties* opened on Broadway, the Theatre Guild was no longer a Little Theatre, but a financially prosperous theatrical institution with a lease on a Broadway theatre (named after the great eighteenth-century actor-manager David Garrick). In addition to the Garrick Theatre, the Guild boasted 14,000 season subscribers and a prestigious reputation for performing 'relatively highbrow European fare by the likes of Shaw, Molnar, Andreyev, Tolstoy and Ibsen' (Savran 2009: 147–148), and less frequently the works of American playwrights such as Elmer Rice and Sidney Howard. With administrative directors Langner and Theresa Helburn at the helm of a board of directors, the Theatre Guild, founded in 1918, was America's preeminent 'art theatre' into the late 1920s, when the company restructured into 'a large scale commercial producing organization' (Savran 2009: 156). The Theatre Guild familiarized American audiences with such European-born modernist movements as Symbolism and Expressionism, and presented the American premieres of such landmark dramas as Karel Čapek's *RUR* (1920) and Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923). The Theatre Guild presented art theatre with a glamourous professional lustre.

Yet in its amateur roots as the Washington Square Players, the Theatre Guild had its origins in the innovations of the American Little Theatre Movement. Clustered geographically in Greenwich Village (but prominent in cities throughout America), the Little Theatre Movement 'manifested itself in small amateur theatre groups' that blended avant-garde formal experimentation, inspired by European theatrical models (and companies such as the Moscow Art Theatre), with often leftist political ideals (Hischak 2011: 1). In its earlier incarnation as the Washington Square Players, of which Langner was a co-founder and Helburn was a key member, the Theatre Guild had shared a comparable artistic mission to the Neighborhood Playhouse, and the Provincetown Players, the early playwriting showplace of Eugene O'Neill. These theatrical predecessors to off- and off-off-Broadway, founded in New York between 1914 and 1916, defined themselves in distinct opposition to commercial theatre: in essence, as the anti-Broadway.

As Savran recounts, the 1920s witnessed a widening cultural schism between the Broadway theatre and a highbrow/upper middlebrow art theatre represented by the Little Theatres and their more commercial uptown offshoot, the Theatre Guild. According to Savran, a 'new middle class (of) salaried,

white-collared employees' (2009: 144) sought self-improvement through theatre-going. This self-declared 'intelligent minority' (Savran 2009: 103) sought, through the attainment of cultural capital, to distinguish itself from the mass audience frequenting the jazz-inflected forms of burlesque, vaudeville, movies and musical comedy (even as Gilbert Seldes in his groundbreaking 1923 book *The 7 Lively Arts* argued for the validity and vitality of the popular arts as distinctive expressions of the American character). Joined by the interests of a conservative WASP upper class and theatre critics such as Walter Pritchard Eaton, this new middle class solidified an existing cultural hierarchy that elevated literary drama and stigmatized commercial musical theatre forms.

Given its reputation as 'a genuine art theatre of artistic standing and prestige' (as described by *Theatre Magazine*'s editor Arthur Hornblow; Savran 2009: 148), the Theatre Guild might not have waded into the 'low' waters of the Broadway musical revue had not a rival art theatre, the Neighborhood Playhouse, successfully experimented with the revue and theatrical parody in *The Grand Street Follies* (from 1922). The innovative, wickedly satiric *Grand Street Follies* series became the Neighborhood Playhouse's most lucrative enterprise to date. As a sophisticated revue, rather than an opulent 'girl show', both *The Grand Street Follies* and *The Garrick Gaieties* had a number of notable predecessors, such as the Algonquin Round Table's *The 49ers* (1922), Nikita Balieff's droll *Chauve-Souris* series (from 1922); *Andre Charlot's Revue of 1924*, a British import introducing Gertrude Lawrence, Beatrice Lillie and Jack Buchanan to Broadway; and John Murray Anderson's exquisite *The Greenwich Village Follies*, which debuted at the Greenwich Village Theatre in 1919 and blended Anderson's trademark aestheticism with sexy 'artist's model' chorus girls, and the satiric high camp represented by *The Greenwich Village Follies*'s star female impersonator Bert Savoy. Yet what distinguished *The Grand Street Follies* from similar revues was its strong emphasis on cultural parody and theatrical satire: the very wellsprings of *The Garrick Gaieties*.

FROM GRAND STREET TO THE GARRICK: THE *FOLLIES* OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAYHOUSE

Before *The Garrick Gaieties*, many of New York's wittiest and most irreverent parodies of mainstream Broadway theatre stemmed from an unlikely pocket of the Lower East Side: the Neighborhood Playhouse on Grand Street, a small theatre subsidized by the philanthropic Henry Street Settlement. It was *The Grand Street Follies*, which premiered in 1922, that provided the model for the first *Garrick Gaieties*. Billed as a 'Lowbrow Show for High-Grade Morons', the first *Grand Street Follies* set the template for future editions of the revue. Originating in private skits for the Playhouse's self-amusement, *The Grand Street Follies* were presented as limited-run fundraisers at the end of each Neighborhood Playhouse season, featuring a blend of self-directed theatrical parody of Neighborhood Playhouse productions and more general satires of Broadway productions and celebrities (the latter charge led by the star mimics Dorothy Sands and Albert Carroll, famous for his impersonations of Pavlova, Lynn Fontanne, and particularly, John Barrymore). As Linda J. Tomko notes, *The Grand Street Follies*, with its 'smart tone and light hearted approach', was aimed at a cosmopolitan audience versed in the intertextualities of New York theatre culture and not primarily at the Neighborhood Playhouse's core audience base (2000: 127).

The Neighborhood Playhouse presented five editions of *The Grand Street Follies* between 1922 and 1927 and two later Broadway editions in 1928 and 1929, produced at the Booth Theatre. The series was performed by the Neighborhood Players, with most of the sketches written (and sometimes performed) by the *Follies*' director Agnes Morgan, a veteran of George Pierce Baker's 47 Workshop at Harvard. Morgan, one of four female theatre managers leading the Neighborhood Playhouse, was a keen parodist and the key creative force behind the *Grand Street Follies*. As John P. Harrington notes in his history of the Playhouse, Morgan and her colleagues were faced with the challenge of balancing not only conflicting goals of amateurism and professionalism, but the Playhouse's settlement mission of cultural edification aimed at a (mostly) immigrant Jewish audience, with their own ambitions towards a more formalistic art theatre steeped in Yeats and Lord Dunsany. *The Grand Street Follies* was, then, conceived upon thrumming cultural fault lines.

The theatrical parodies offered in the various editions of the *Grand Street Follies* foreshadowed those in *The Garrick Gaieties*, in their gleeful collisions of art and Little Theatre aesthetics with commercial Broadway fare. *The Grand Street Follies*' parodies included a 1926 satire of '*Uncle Tom's Cabin* in a Constructivist Setting – An Example of the Sympathetic Elastic Theatre', as presented by the Moscow Art Theatre, and '*The Wild Duck* of the 18th Century', a 1925 pastiche of Ibsen and Restoration comedy featuring such characters as Mr Ekdal Scandal, Mrs Gina Scandal, Mr Gregers Tattle and Ducky (Knapp 1978: 487). If more so in its earlier seasons, the *Follies* thrived on self-parody; the 1924 edition featured lampoons of the company's season hits, including *The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet* by 'G. B. Phsaw' (Harrington 2007: 169). Just as the first *Grand Street Follies* parodied Neighborhood Playhouse productions, to the delight of an in-the-know theatregoing audience, so would the *Garrick Gaieties* – in even greater measure – lampoon the Theatre Guild.

ENTER THE *GAIETIES*

The popular and critical success of *The Grand Street Follies* opened the door for *The Garrick Gaieties*, which, like the former revue series, was produced towards fundraising purposes, and similarly appealed to a sophisticated, in-the-know, but not necessarily 'highbrow', audience. The Theatre Guild, seeking to raise money for tapestries for the walls of its newly constructed Guild Theatre, recognized the profitable potential of mounting a revue. Yet the seed for the Gaieties germinated with the organization's young, ambitious Junior Players – the proverbial spear-carriers during the Theatre Guild's regular theatrical season. Edith Meiser, one of the featured performers in the *Gaieties*, recounted:

> In those days, everybody gave balls for fund-raising things, and everybody went. […] All of us who were working for the Guild […] the small fry, we did takeoffs, not only of the Theatre Guild plays but of other plays, theatrical takeoffs, to amuse the people at these great big balls. […] We said, 'Why don't we put on a revue like *The Grand Street Follies*. […] We'll do one for you', meaning the Guild. Now all we have to do is find someone to write the music and lyrics.
>
> (Quoted in Nolan 1994: 62)

Of course, that collective someone proved to be Rodgers and Hart, who were signed on through the efforts of Meiser and Benjamin M. Kaye, a lawyer by profession, whose theatrical parodies and sketches would be prominently included in all three editions of the *Gaieties*.[1]

The Garrick Gaieties marked the breakthrough of Rodgers and Hart, who had written songs for a few Broadway musicals (and had their book musical *Dearest Enemy* on the way). As Rodgers recounted in *Musical Stages*, he was ready to give up songwriting and accept a job as a babies' underwear wholesaler when he received the call to audition with Hart for the *Gaieties* (Rodgers [1975] 2002: 57). In front of Langner and Helburn, Rodgers and Hart played 'Manhattan', among other numbers. Thrilled, the Theatre Guild administrators 'promised to provide the necessary funding – five thousand dollars – and the free use of the Garrick Theatre' (Nolan 1994: 64).

In addition to Meiser, the 1925 *Garrick Gaieties* featured over 30 performers, including Philip Loeb (who also directed), Sterling Holloway, Romney Brent, Peggy Conway, and in small roles, Libby Holman, Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg.[2] Rodgers and Hart's score included 'Manhattan' and 'April Fool', while Kaye's sketches dominated the line-up of skits written by diverse Junior Players of the Theatre Guild.[3] Filled with a mix of songs, theatrical pastiches and topical skits satirizing social foibles and current events, the *Gaieties* originally ended its first act with Rodgers and Hart's short, department store-set 'jazz opera' *The Joy Spreader* (Davis 2000: 222).[4] As was the standard practice with early twentieth-century revues, the selection and order of numbers and sketches shifted moderately throughout *The Garrick Gaieties*' Broadway run.[5]

Thanks to what Rodgers described as 'an irresistible mix of innocence and smartness', the first edition of *The Garrick Gaieties*, which opened on 8 June 1925, was so well received by audiences and critics that the production, originally planned for two benefit performances during 'dark days' of *The Guardsman*, was extended at the Garrick Theatre and ran for 211 performances (Rodgers [1975] 2002: 64). Critics – some of whom noted the influence of the *Grand Street Follies* – also compared the *Gaieties* favourably with more opulent Broadway revues. One *Wall Street Journal* critic declared that the *Gaieties* was 'the best revue we have ever attended – and there is no second choice' (W. H. K. 1925: 3). *The New York Times* also praised the *Gaieties*, noting 'Before the evening was over, nearly everything and everyone connected with the Guild had been thoroughly and genially satirized' Anon. 1925: 12).

CULTURAL PARODY IN *THE GARRICK GAIETIES OF 1925*

The parodic interplay of highbrow and lowbrow saturates the 1925 *Garrick Gaieties*, which included Kaye's satires of the Guild's previous hits – among them, Sidney Howard's *They Knew What They Wanted* (1924; parodied as 'They Didn't Know What They Were Getting')[6] and Ferenc Molnar's *The Guardsman* (1924), a high-comedy hit for Lunt and Fontanne. Yet Rodgers and Hart reserved their sharpest barbs for the Theatre Guild itself and its profile of immaculate *ars gratia artis* (the next year's *Grand Street Follies* would refer similarly to the company as 'The Gilt'). *The Garrick Gaieties of 1925* satirically gestured to the contradictory position of the Theatre Guild as 'promoting a commercial theatre that earned its economic and cultural capital by critiquing the foundations of commercialism' (Savran 2009: 1956). At the same time,

1. Kaye was then one of the patients of Richard Rodgers' physician father and an attorney representing the Theatre Guild (Marmorstein 2012: 92).
2. As Gary Marmorstein notes, 'Work on the *Gaieties* forged some durable friendships. Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg became close friends, and the Group Theatre emerged out of that friendship' (2012: 97).
3. While the majority of songs were written by Rodgers and Hart, Edith Meiser contributed lyrics to Rodgers's 'Old Fashioned Girl'. Another song, 'The Butcher, The Baker, the Candlestick Maker', featured lyrics by Kaye and music by a woman billed only as 'Madame Mana-Zucca'.
4. *7 Lively Arts* cultural critic Gilbert Seldes gave Rodgers and Hart the idea for *The Joy Spreader*; 'the program credited (Seldes) for being "primarily responsible for this outrage"' (Rodgers 1975: 64). George Gershwin's groundbreaking one-act jazz opera, *Blue Monday*, as performed in *The George White Scandals of 1922*, preceded *The Joy Spreader*.
5. Upon its commercial opening, five numbers were dropped, including *The Joy Spreader* (Rodgers 1975: 66). Later in the run, Morrie Ryskind and Philip Loeb's 'And Thereby Hangs a Tail', a satire of the Scopes Monkey Trial (played before a jury of actors in monkey suits), was dropped when William Jennings Bryant suddenly passed away (Marmorstein 2012: 98–99).
6. *The Grand Street Follies*, the same year,

parodied Howard's Napa Valley love triangle by splicing it with Eugene O'Neill's rustic drama *They Knew What They Wanted Under the Elms* (Harrington 2007: 205).

7. While the Shubert Brothers and Flo Ziegfeld need no introduction, A. H. Woods was notorious in the 1910s and 1920s for his production of bedroom farces with titillating titles such as *His Bridal Night* (1916) and *Up in Mabel's Room* (1919).

8. Acclaimed for his abstract and expressionist scenic designs inspired by the European 'New Stagecraft', Jones designed *Anna Christie* (1921) and *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), among many other collaborations with Eugene O'Neill.

Rodgers and Hart roasted the golden calf of Broadway extravagance, in the guise of figures such as 'Mr. Shubert, Mr. Ziegfeld and Mr. Woods'.[7]

The first edition of the *Gaieties* opens with 'Soliciting Subscriptions', with performers representing the Provincetown Playhouse, the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Actor's Theatre. With deft lyrical touches, Hart parodies the distinct artistic profile of each Little Theatre group (no doubt reminding cognoscenti of the Guild's origins as the Washington Square Players). Provincetown declares that it still owns

> The art of Robert Edmond Jones;[8]
> From the classic drama we're a notable secessionist;
> The verity of Gene O'Neill;
> The meaning doesn't matter if the manner is expressionist.
>
> (Hart et al. 1925: 1–1)

The Neighborhood Playhouse claims to 'shine/South of the Macy-Gimbel line/It was built to make a ride for people on Fifth Avenue!', as Hart satirizes the Neighborhood Playhouse's appeal to uptown 'carriage trade': 'Grand Street Folk, we never see 'em/They think the building's a museum' (ibid: 1–2). The Actor's Theatre, a small theatre with Edwardian inclinations, sings:

> We spurn the bedroom dramas
> With heroes in pajamas
> For things that pleased our mamas,
> Such as Candida's romance.
>
> (Hart et al. 1925: 1–2)

Rodgers and Hart end each playhouse's turn on a triple punchline: Provincetown is 'sure of what we do/Because we always take a chance' (ibid: 1–1); the Neighborhood Playhouse claims 'we don't know what we do/But then we like to take a chance', and the Actor's Theatre is 'sure of what we do/Because we never take a chance' (ibid: 1–2).

After 'Soliciting Subscriptions', an actress shares 'the glad tidings that we don't need any more money' for the new Guild theatre, but then asks for 'voluntary contributions' of over a million dollars to fund 'six life-sized statues of the six directors of the Theatre Guild' in various gemstones and minerals. This satire of theatrical grandiosity is followed by the entrance of the Theatre Guild Junior Players 'bearing placards of various Theatre Guild successes and carrying brushes, in which they are guilding [*sic*] a cut-out of the (new) Guild Theatre' (ibid: 1–3). Launching into 'Gilding the Guild', they carol:

> We possess a fine artistic touch.
> Money doesn't count – not much!
> Shubert may say
> Art doesn't pay,
>
> But we built that cozy little shack,
> Though we lack
> Shubert's jack.
>
> (Hart et al 1925: 1–3)

The Shubert Brothers, along with Ziegfeld and David Belasco, are among the impresarios parodied in the second act number, 'Ladies of the Box Office'. Here, Rodgers and Hart repeat the comic formula (and music) of 'Soliciting Subscriptions' – but with a twist. This number parodies not the anti-commercial pretensions of the prosperous Theatre Guild, but spoofs the 'Broadway Theatre bunch'. In Philip Loeb's staging of this number, Betty Starbuck appeared dressed as Mary Pickford, in the guise of 'The Movies', Libby Holman as a 'Ziegfeld chorus girl' symbolizing 'The Girl Show' and June Cochrane as Sadie Thompson, the prostitute protagonist of *Rain* (1922), representing 'The Problem Play'. In the lyrical highlight of the latter, 'Sadie' sings:

> A bottle of Belasco sauce
> Supplies my hot tabasco sauce,
> I'm the sexy play that makes the clergymen censorious.
> My leading lady must subtract
> Her virtue in the second act,
> But when the curtain falls her sacrifice is glorious.
>
> (Hart et al. 1925: 13–2)

Mirroring the punch lines of 'Soliciting Subscriptions', Mary Pickford sings that 'The Movies' seldom let the audience think, the Girl Show never lets them think and the Belasco-style 'Problem Play' lets them 'think they think'.

The 1925 *Gaieties* also concluded with acerbic cultural parody, as an actor costumed as George Bernard Shaw – one of the staples of the Theatre Guild's repertoire in the 1920s – appears to gloat that he, no less than the Theatre Guild, is getting rich from their productions of his plays. In the Shavian 'Finale' of the *Gaieties*, reciting Hart's W. S. Gilbert-like patter, the (Fabian socialist) Shaw sings:

> Just look up to Bernard Shaw, he
> Is a sage who's wise and hoary …
> Though his art he may adore, he
> Gets his cash down a priori
> That's the moral of the story!
>
> (Hart et al. 1925: A–7–1)

In contradiction of Shaw's 'moral', a bevy of the playwright's characters – Bluntschli and Raina from *Arms and the Man* (1894), Dick Dudgeon of *The Devil's Disciple* (1897) and the title characters of *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898) and *Saint Joan* (1923) charge onstage, successively decrying theatrical commercialism and defending Shaw from the 'vulgarity' of the Broadway revue. Saint Joan protests:

> The Garrick where so long I was sainted,
> By vulgar antics has been tainted.
> No longer am I gratified
> That I have been beatified!
>
> (Hart et al. 1925: A–7–2)

In a stroke of devilish audacity on the part of Rodgers and Hart, the famously contrarian Shaw suggests that he himself write a 'new refrain' for 'Manhattan', the great song hit of the show. Soon, 'Caesar and Cleo' are singing, to the

tune of 'Manhattan', such quintessentially Hartian lyrics as 'And I will wise-crack you, dear, amid/The shades of a pyramid' (ibid: A–7–3). As Broadway lyricist Shaw gives his blessing to the *Gaieties*, Rodgers and Hart daringly depict the great Irish playwright anointing them as Broadway wordsmiths: as theatrically legitimate as any of the highbrow dramatists of the Guild. While the Theatre Guild might have initially bristled at Rodgers and Hart's satire, they were undoubtedly pleased at the outcome of presenting the *Gaieties*. *The Bookman*'s Louis Bromfield, saluted the 'fresh and amusing' wit of the *Gaieties*, and noted the 'shrewdness' of the Guild: 'For skill in picking material and staging it, the Guild leaves the Broadway managers far in the rear' (1925: 6).

THE GARRICK GAIETIES OF 1926 AND 1930

According to Frederick Nolan, it was Langner and Helburn, rather than Rodgers and Hart, who initiated the second edition of *The Garrick Gaieties*, which opened at the Guild Theatre on 10 May 1926 for a run of 174 performances (1994: 80). Some critics perceived a lessening of 'spontaneity' in the second edition – a response anticipated by Rodgers and Hart in the number 'We Can't Be as Good as Last Year', in which the chorus sang 'We've lost all that artless spirit/With our Broadway veneer' (Hart et al. 1926: 1–4). Yet the reviews were generally strong; Atkinson wrote of the second edition as 'a well-sustained flow of pure delight' (1926c: 25). This edition featured as its breakout song hit 'Mountain Greenery' and skits and satiric songs such as the slangy 'Idles of the King', described in the programme as 'a song of that obsolete affair immortalized by Mallory's *Morte d'Arthur* but now superceded in the literature by the "Vie d'Algonquin"' (1926: 2). Much of the original cast of Theatre Guild Junior Players returned for the 1926 edition, including Meiser, Romney Brent and Sterling Holloway, with Philip Loeb again directing.

Following their own example with the first *Garrick Gaieties*, Rodgers and Hart blended cultural parody aimed at the Theatre Guild with satires of Broadway commercialism. In the opening number, 'Six Little Plays', company members dressed to represent such Theatre Guild productions as *Arms and the Man* (1925) and Franz Werfel's *The Goat Song* (1926) mock-lamented a season in which 'Ev'ry play they did was charming/But the death-rate was alarming'(Hart et al. 1926: 1–1). Along with S. Ansky's mystical Yiddish-language drama *The Dybbuk* (1914), *Goat Song* – an allegorical German tragedy about a village's sacrifice of a child following the birth of a monstrous goat-like baby – was also parodied in Benjamin M. Kaye's sketch, 'DeBock Song'. Absurdly mashing up the plots of *Goat Song* and *The Dybbuk* (an immense 1925 success for the Neighborhood Playhouse), Kaye satirized 'a season (that) has been notable for plays that were fantastic, metaphysical, symbolical, and allegorical' (Hart et al. 1926: 2–1). Kaye also spoofed the Guild's practice of educational weekend lectures, as a dramaturgical 'Speaker' constantly interrupts the action: 'instead of making you wait until Sunday before someone comes and explains everything, I have arranged to attend every performance and explain it while the action takes place' (ibid: 2–1).

At the opposite end of the satiric spectrum, Rodgers and Hart spoofed formulaic conventions of the Broadway musical with the first act finale, *The Rose of Arizona*, which featured a book by Herbert Fields (Rodgers and Hart's most frequent librettist throughout the 1920s). In the introduction to the scene, a compère assures the audience, 'Perhaps the esoteric – or should we rather

say "the Precious" nature of the Harlequinade might lead you to believe the young people who have made this revue are perhaps a little bit "Arty" – Oh! Perish the thought! They can be very Broadway!' (ibid: 9–1). The compère then introduces: 'The One Hundred Percent American Musical Comedy, *The Rose of Arizona*!'

Although described as 'musical comedy', *The Rose of Arizona* deploys the type of plot formulas common to 1920s' operetta, particularly evoking *Rose Marie* (1924) and the following year's *Rio Rita* (1927). The heroine is Gloria van Dyke, the beautiful daughter of an oil prospector working the Arizona–Mexico border. Against the wishes of her father, and after being kidnapped by the bandit Casaba Caramba, Gloria ends up married to 'that handsome Captain of the Police' Allan Sterling (who has resisted being 'vamped' by Pimento, 'a girl of the Pampas'). In this musical sketch, which trades on common 1920s' ethnic stereotypes, Rodgers and Hart successively skewer an array of Broadway song and performance forms. 'It May Rain (When the Sun Stops Shining)', sung by the lovers, is a satire of the optimistic charm ballads written by Rodgers' musical hero, Jerome Kern, for such shows as *Sally* (1920) and *Sunny* (1925). The finale number, in which Allan and his men rally to rescue Gloria from the bandits, satirically juxtaposes the heroic march songs of operetta against Allan's band of businessmen brigadiers: 'All you Shriners and Elks and Pythian Knights/And Babbits of low degree/Just listen to me' (Hart et al. 1926: 9–12). In the song, which specifically takes off on 'The Vagabond Song' from *The Vagabond King* (1925), Allan sings mock-rousingly: 'Boys of noble Arizona/Will you stand for Mexico?' (Hart et al. 1926: 9–12).[9]

The Rose of Arizona also punctures *The Ziegfeld Follies* – the über-revue against which all others were measured in the 1920s. 'Say it with Flowers' (a pun on Irving Berlin's 'Say it with Music') presages the team's *Pal Joey* (1940) pastiche 'Flower Garden of My Heart', as Rodgers and Hart parody Ziegfeldian displays of pulchritude. When Allan calls out to Gloria 'My flower of the world!', Pimento protests, 'Why cry for one leetle flower, the world is full of them'(Hart et al. 1926: 9–11). As chorus girls outlandishly costumed as 'Bluebell, Lily, Tulip, Orchid, Poppy, Violet, Chrysanthemum, and Rose' parade across the stage, the (heavily accented) Pimento sings such couplets as:

> I am sure there's no land
> Like dear old Holland
> Where tulips are simply immense.
> Oh, the orchids grow under the drizzle
> Of the rain that is falling in Brazil.
>
> (Hart et al. 1926: 9–11)

The 1926 edition of the *Gaieties* concluded with the ensemble once again spoofing the Theatre Guild, as actors pretended to be multitasking as stage hands, for 'the Theatre Guild who runs this show/Has many ways of saving dough'(Hart et al. 1926: 19–1).

The next, and last, edition of the *Gaieties* would not be performed until 1930, minus the participation of Rodgers and Hart (who were busy and very successful writing book musicals),[10] but with the talents of Grand Street's star, Albert Carroll (*The New York Times* mused of the 1930 edition '*The Garrick Gaieties* and *The Grand Street Follies* seem to be combining into one entertainment'; (Anon. 1930: X1). Joining Carroll at the Guild Theatre were such *Gaieties* regulars as Meiser and director Loeb, and new additions such as

9. In the equivalent lyric in *The Vagabond King*, François Villon sings, 'Sons of toil and danger/Will you serve a stranger/And bow down to Burgundy?' (Friml et al 1926: 23).

10. Between *The Garrick Gaieties of 1925* and the *Gaieties of 1930*, Rodgers and Hart wrote a prolific chain of book musicals including *Dearest Enemy* (1925), *The Girl Friend* (1926), *Peggy-Ann* (1926), *A Connecticut Yankee* (1927), *Chee-Chee* (1928), *Spring Is Here* (1929), and *Simple Simon* (1930).

Imogene Coca and (the pre-Hollywood) Rosalind Russell. The 1930 *Gaieties* retained Benjamin M. Kaye as its lead parodist, and reviews made much of the fact that the new edition was written by a super-team of 32 writers, composers and lyricists, including Vernon Duke, Ira Gershwin, Kay Swift, E. Y. 'Yip' Harburg and Marc Blitzstein. The latter's musical satire 'Triple Sec' framed a boulevard farce plot as a 'modernistic opera', while both Swift and Duke composed songs for the sketch 'They Always Come Back', a satire of anti-union former New York police commissioner Grover Whalen so caustic that the latter threatened legal action against the Theatre Guild. Indeed, given the participation of such noted liberals as Harburg and Blitzstein, the 1930 *Gaieties* was the most politically charged edition to date.

While the 1930 *Gaieties* abounded in cultural parody, its satire was aimed less directly at the Theatre Guild itself than previous editions. However, the Guild's favourite Irish-born playwright was back with a dance-craze number devised after 'Miss Helburn […] found Mr. Shaw practicing a new dance step in a bathing suit' (Harburg et al. 1930: 17–1). A group of four chorus girls shimmied and sang:

> Too, too divine
> Pirandello
> Couldn't mellow
> Those Shavian shivers.
>
> (Harburg et al. 1930: 17–2)

This was followed by company members engaging in celebrity impersonations of Helen Kane, Maurice Chevalier and John Barrymore (Carroll reprised his famous Grand Street 'Great Profile', singing of sister Ethel as 'too, too divine'). In addition to Shaw, Chekhov was parodied in Landon Herrick's skit 'Uncle Sea Gull', featuring seven 'old nurses' named Masha, Sasha, Yasha, Pasha, Dasha, Basha and Fasha, who make fatalistic utterances until Pasha shoots all the nurses, only to be killed by Basha, who then muses, 'Something terrible is going to happen here someday' (Harburg et al. 1930: 11–4).

The Evening Graphic's Bob Grannis, like most critics, repeated the praise of the earlier editions: 'most of the sketches showed great originality […] we urge you to attend a performance of the Theatre Guild's revue, and see for yourself that this serious-minded organization is capable of throwing back its head for a hearty laugh' (1930: 2). Yet after this edition the series lost steam and ceased production, although Kaye consolidated the songs and less topical sketches of the 1925 and 1926 editions into a 1946 radio adaptation for the Theatre Guild.[11] In the introduction of that broadcast, Langner reminisced of the Rodgers and Hart songs,

> Even now, twenty years later, the lyrics have a freshness and inventiveness that make them a joy to listen to. And why not? They were written by a lad who became the leading lyric writer of the musical comedy stage. And as for the male composer – well, American has been singing his songs for 20 years.
>
> (Langner 1945)

In 1946, *Oklahoma!* was in its third blockbuster year in its Theatre Guild production at the St. James Theatre and the *Garrick Gaieties* had become the stuff of both theatre history and legend.

11. According to the Theatre Guild Archives at Yale's Beinecke Library, two proposed resurrections of *The Garrick Gaieties* failed to materialize: the first, a new 1949 edition to be written by Charles Gaynor (*Lend an Ear*, 1948), and to premiere at Langner's Westport Country Playhouse in Connecticut; the second, a 1956 television adaptation proposed by Helburn.

THE LEGEND AND LEGACY OF THE *GARRICK GAIETIES*

The Garrick Gaieties remains legendary as the breakout show for Rodgers and Hart and as one of the many achievements of the Theatre Guild. Yet even beyond this legacy, *The Garrick Gaieties* holds significance in both the development of the American musical and in the history of the Broadway revue. The *Garrick Gaieties*, along with such influential series as *The Grand Street Follies*, bridged the distinct traditions of the Broadway musical and art theatre in the culturally dynamic years of the 1920s, when revue itself served as a junction of the era's diverse cultural avenues. While tensions concerning highbrow and lowbrow, art and commerce, propel much of the parody of the *Gaieties*, Rodgers and Hart approached the revue (and their musical comedies) as a form capable of challenging and unsettling cultural hierarchies, while appealing to a broadly cosmopolitan theatregoing audience.

Similarly, in its hybrid cultural vocabularies, *The Garrick Gaieties* reflected how Rodgers and Hart negotiated assimilative identities as Jewish Americans. The men were, at once, social outsiders and cultural insiders, straddling the borders of the vernacular and the elite: as the second-generation scions of European Jewish immigrant families, Rodgers and Hart rose from outside the margins of the WASP social establishment, even as they joined the ranks of Ivy League intellectuals, winning laurels in the late 1910s for their series of witty and urbane Varsity Show musicals at Columbia University.[12] With their two editions of *The Garrick Gaeities*, Rodgers and Hart drew upon a vision of cultural democracy that was both erudite and inclusive. If the *Gaieties* had a literary analogue in the 1920s, it is the cultural criticism of Rodgers and Hart's friend Gilbert Seldes (whose 1924 *The 7 Lively Arts* preceded the first *Gaieties* by one year), and such 'Smart Set' magazines as *Vanity Fair*, which endorsed a diverse cultural menu of high and vernacular modernisms: of art and Little Theatres, musical comedy, burlesque and revues.[13]

The Garrick Gaieties swayed the trajectory both of the Broadway revue and the book musical. The successors of the *Gaieties* were such sophisticated revues as Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz's *The Little Show* (1929), *Three's a Crowd* (1930) and *The Band Wagon* (1931), the latter often 'considered the greatest of all revues' (Bloom 2003: 132), and producer Leonard Sillman's long-lived franchise of *New Faces* revues (launched in 1934): streamlined shows, filled with cultural parody and topical satire, with which the Depression replaced the luxurious pageants epitomized by *The Ziegfeld Follies*. In fact, lyricist Dietz acknowledged the direct influence of Rodgers and Hart on his creation of *The Little Show*:

> *The Little Show* was to be a revue, but not in any respect like the rhinestone creations with huge staircases of Flo Ziegfeld or Earl Carroll, the G-string tittivator [*sic*]. If it was to be compared to any show, it got its inspiration from *The Garrick Gaieties*. It was to be topical and artistic, a witty travesty in the leitmotif, if possible.
>
> (Furia 1990: 195)

Less directly, the influence of the sophisticated revue can be strongly discerned in the Broadway and Hollywood musicals of Betty Comden and Adolph Green, whose *oeuvre* is distinguished by its displays of intertexuality and self-reflexive satire. Such classics as *On the Town* (1944), *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) and *The Band Wagon* (the 1953 film) featured scripts written by Comden and

12. Lorenz Hart's family 'had an intellectual background', according to Richard Rodgers. Hart was the great-grandnephew of the German Romantic poet and satirist Heinrich Heine (Marmorstein 2012: 21).

13. The terminology of a popular/mass-produced and -consumed 'vernacular modernism', as contrasted with 'high modernism', was originated by film historian Miriam Hansen (1999: 59–60).

Green, who, with Judy Holliday, Al Hammer and John Frank, had started in the late 1930s as the performance troupe The Revuers, entertaining audiences at the Village Vanguard (the famed Greenwich Village jazz club owned by *The Band Wagon* (1931) stage producer Max Gordon). Working in the eruditely parodic tradition of *The Grand Street Follies* and *The Garrick Gaieties*, The Revuers thrived on 'deflating the pompous' (Robinson 1994: 8) as they spoofed subjects ranging from Joan Crawford films to *Tristan and Isolde*.[14]

If the format and parodic sensibility of *The Garrick Gaieties* influenced both Broadway revue and musical comedy, the circumstances of its production impacted the integrated musical play revolution, galvanized in 1943 by Rodgers and Hammerstein with *Oklahoma!* It was the vibrant success of the three *Garrick Gaieties* revues that launched the Theatre Guild in its association with Rodgers. Post-*Gaieties*, the Theatre Guild would present not only the original productions of the Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess* (1935) and *Oklahoma!*, but of Rodgers and Hammerstein's masterwork *Carousel* (1945). All of these musicals were based on previous dramatic hits for the Theatre Guild: respectively, Lynn Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs* (1931), DuBose and Dorothy Heyward's *Porgy* (1927) and Ferenc Molnár's 1909 play *Liliom* (1921).[15] By the mid-1940s, the Guild's productions of not only *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, but also Rodgers and Hammerstein's ambitious modern allegory *Allegro* (1947), evoked the high-cultural prestige that Rodgers and Hart had punctured in the *Gaieties*. In a stroke both ironic and prophetic, in the 1926 *Rose of Arizona* musical satire, the compère had satirically speculated that *The Rose of Arizona* will 'win the Pulitzer Prize as the one Musical Comedy most conducive to the elevation of American morals' (Hart et al. 1926: 9–1). In 1950, Rodgers and Hammerstein won the Pulitzer Prize for *South Pacific* (1949). The distinct formal and tonal differences between Rodgers and Hart's *The Garrick Gaieties* and the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical plays not only illustrate contrasting attitudes to the Theatre Guild's cultural capital, and to the aesthetic intentions and capabilities of the American musical, but of the genre's fluid categorical positioning among constructs of lowbrow, highbrow and middlebrow.

If *The Garrick Gaeities* suggests new evaluations of the Broadway musical's relationship with the theatrical modernist avant-garde,[16] so does it expand the range of the latter's influence upon the former both in artistic and in production contexts. The complex, and sometimes contradictory, contributions of the New York art theatre and Little Theatre movements towards the development of the Broadway musical have yet to be fully recognized and assessed. Certainly, as the *Gaieties* so pointedly satirized, the Theatre Guild invested in the revue form with an eye towards commercial profit (and a *Green Grow the Lilacs*-based musical was similarly initiated by Theresa Helburn and Langner when the Guild teetered on bankruptcy; Marmorstein 2012: 403). Nevertheless, art theatres such as the Neighborhood Playhouse, and then the Theatre Guild, took risks in experimenting with the musical revue, even while many cultural authorities of the 1920s – recalling Saint Joan's charge of 'vulgar antics' – still questioned the form's artistic legitimacy.

Finally, *The Garrick Gaieties* illustrates the importance of the parodic impulse – and its expressions in the revue form – to the history of the American musical. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and throughout Broadway's 'Golden Age', the musical's creators, including Rodgers and Hammerstein, continued to expand the form's sophistication and ambitious scope. Yet the American musical owes a great deal to the bright, impudent youngsters of 1925 as they playfully 'gilded the Guild'.

14. Gerard Alessandrini's *Forbidden Broadway* revue series, launched in 1982, is a contemporary off-Broadway successor to this tradition of cultural parody.

15. Exactly 24 years before *Carousel*, the multilingual Lorenz Hart, then an operetta translator for the Shubert Brothers, worked, uncredited and from a German version of the Hungarian original, on a translation for the Theatre Guild's 1921 production of *Liliom* (Marmorstein 2012: 76–77).

16. The relationship between the terms 'modernism' and 'avant garde', and the precise ideological and representational territories of each, has long been a source of academic debate (see Smith 1998: 399). In the context of 1920s' art theatre and Little Theatre companies, which produced both modernist and avant-garde work, a close interrelationship is assumed.

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