

Jewish Legacy in Broadway Musicals on NET Television

Why has the Broadway musical proven to be such fertile territory for Jewish artists of all kinds? From Broadway's golden age, names like Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, the Gershwins, Arthur Laurents, Jerome Robbins, Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim immediately come to mind. More recently, Broadway babies such as Stephen Schwartz, Marc Shaiman and Andrew Lippa represent a sampling of the Jewish talents who continue to leave their mark on musical theater.

Airing New Year's Day, Tuesday, Jan. 1, at 8:30 p.m. CT on NET1/HD, filmmaker Michael Kantor focuses on this central question when "Broadway Musicals: A Jewish Legacy" airs on "Great Performances."

Narrated by Joel Grey, the program explores the unique role of Jewish composers and lyricists in the creation of the modern American musical. Featuring interviews and conversations with some of the greatest composers and writers of the Broadway stage, "Broadway Musicals: A Jewish Legacy" showcases the work of some of the nation's pre-eminent creators of musical theatre including Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, George and Ira Gershwin, Lorenz Hart, Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, Kurt Weill, Sheldon Harnick, Jerry Bock, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, Stephen Schwartz, Jule Styne and many others.

Though these remarkable songwriters were purveyors of what we think of today as the Broadway sound, the documentary demonstrates how there were echoes of Jewish strains in many of the works. From "Yiddishkeit" (all things Jewish) on the stages of the Lower East Side at the turn of the century to a wide range of shows including "Porgy and Bess," "West Side Story" and "Cabaret," the program explores how Jewish music and ethos informs many of America's favorite musicals.

Dynamic footage includes performances by stars such as David Hyde Pierce ("Spamalot"), Matthew Broderick and Kelli O'Hara ("Nice Work if You Can Get It"), Zero Mostel ("Fiddler on the Roof"), Betty Comden and Adolph Green ("On the Town"), Nathan Lane ("The Producers"), Al Jolson ("Sinbad"), Fanny Brice ("The Great Ziegfeld"), Barbra Streisand ("Funny Girl"), Danny Kaye ("Lady in the Dark"), Ethel Merman ("Gypsy") and Kristin Chenoweth and Idina Menzel ("Wicked").

Also included are rare clips of Irving Berlin singing "God Bless America," rehearsals for Jule Styne and Stephen Sondheim's "Gypsy," and original "South Pacific" star William Tabbert singing "You've Got to be Carefully Taught" with Richard Rodgers at the piano.

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