

# Float Like A Butterfly...Sing Like A Bee?

I have already touched upon this subject by mentioning those fly-by-night performers on a certain reality show becoming Broadway performers but the practice of bringing big names in an attempt to fill New York audiences is nothing new. I found it rather interesting to discover that in 1969 Muhammad Ali sang in the musical *Buck White*. According to the [Internet Broadway Data Base](#), the show only ran from 12/2/69-12/6/69. So, bad example... I never said the shows in which the names appeared were successful.

-Julia Roberts was in the play *Three Days of Rain* from April-June, 2006.

- In Fall 2007, Jennifer Garner starred as Roxanne opposite Kevin Kline's title role in a limited production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

-Perhaps most notably and most successfully has been the continuing revival of the musical *Chicago*. This seems to be a revolving door of pop culture names appearing on stage. Melanie Griffith, Bebe Neuwirth (so she was a stage actress prior to Cheers), Wayne Brady, Joey Lawrence, Usher, Brooke Shields(?), KELLY OSBOURNE(?!... as Mama Morton), ASHLEE SIMPSON. Ok... so even most of the names do not appeal to me. Most would turn me off of the show (which is good seeing live). But the musical is still running.

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# Make The Most Of What You Are Given

I just learned that I will be portraying the role of Braxton in my local theatrical production of [Little Women](#). Since I know very little about the show apart from the book that I read years ago, I have no idea who this character is. He is part of the ensemble which could mean anything. However important the character is I will do my best to make him as memorable as I can. Hopefully, it calls for some amount of energy and a chance to stand out (if not who's to say I cannot do so on my own). There are no small parts only small performers, right?

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# Poppies... Poppies Will Put Them To Sleep

Yes, Spring has finally arrived. For most, that means looking forward to making plans for the summer getaway. For me it means looking forward to auditioning for one of two (or this year... three) big musical productions in the area. I narrowed my choices down to two this week. I really wanted to audition for a production of [The Wizard of Oz](#). I have always wanted to be the Cowardly Lion... a fantastic character role if ever there was one. I contacted the director of the show to ask about performance dates. Alas, they begin in mid-July (after auditions for another play I am extremely excited about trying

out for (now be nice)... [The Nerd](#). **And yes, I will be auditioning for the title role**, but of course will gladly accept any part offered to me.

Even while considering the possibility of dreaming that “If I Were King of the Forrrrrrest” (not Queen, not Duke, not Prince), the more logical option seemed to be to try out for the musical that is closer to home with the group I have been involved with for the past two years. It will save a bit of money on the gas tank as well. So... according to an email I received earlier today, I will make my way tomorrow to audition for a role in [Little Women](#) (and yes, there are male roles in the production).

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## **Six Little Engines That Tried**

Tonight was the episode of “American Idol” that I have been waiting to see since season two. Not because it featured music from the Andrew Lloyd Webber songbook but that a good question was posed to a certain British judge whom everyone admires greatly: “Given the rather negative comments you pose to performers who would be better suited for the Broadway stage how does one approach these songs?” Mr Cowell responded: “Make them memorable yet contemporary.” A rather cryptic response if ever there was one.

Six contestants remain. Those who were familiar with the songs showed it and those who were less familiar showed it (perhaps even more so).

Syesha Mercado started the evening with “One Rock & Roll Too Many” from [Starlight Express](#). Not being extremely familiar with the show, I cannot say too much about it. However, the bluesy rendition was quite nice.

The next contestant, Jason Castro, did not fare as well. Even Lord Andrew commented that he never thought he would see the day when "Memory" would be sung by a young man in dreadlocks. The composer even provided a bit of background into the character from [Cats](#) who performs the song ("a rather old glamour puss"). Jason looked like the proverbial deer in the headlights on stage.

The halftime performer, Brooke White, also had difficulty. The song "You Must Love Me" was composed by Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice for the [movie version](#) of [Evita](#). It is sung by Eva Peron (played by Madonna) on her deathbed. Unfortunately, Brooke lost her lyric in the first line, stopped, apologized, and started over. I'm not sure if this would be allowed in an actual audition but to do so on a television show which is seen by (reportedly) millions of people each week takes some degree of chutzpah.

The "contestant to beat" this year, 17-year-old David Archuleta, chose to take a diva song of nearly operatic proportions and turn it into a boy band pop ballad. Lloyd Webber wrote the role of Christine in [Phantom of the Opera](#) specifically for his wife at the time, Sarah Brightman. For a young man to change such a song with the composer sitting in the audience watching and listening takes a great deal of courage. However, good ol' Simon did not find the performance especially memorable.

The Irish female rocker, Carly Smithson, decided to change her song from "All I Ask of You" to the title track of [Jesus Christ Superstar](#). A wise choice on her part.

However, the final performer did not choose wisely. Male rocker David Cook attempted to sing "Music of the Night." The rendition was as unimpressive as the movie version of [Phantom of the Opera](#). I was hoping he would chose a song better suited to his rock sensibilities, but he decided to go a different route and it just did not work.

I guess I found half of the performances enjoyable. But as Lord Andrew told most of the contestants: you must know not only what you are singing but also what you are singing about. Find the meaning behind the words.

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## Hey Rocky Watch Me Pull A Rabbit Out Of My Hat

There have been several one-night open and close flops on the Broadway stage. Some of these include a revival of George M. Cohan's [Little Johnny Jones](#) (starring Donny Osmond); the more recent [Dance of the Vampires](#); and quite famously, the musical based on the Stephen King novel [Carrie](#). Apparently, there is another such production that is such a stinker that it is the show by which all stinkers must be compared : *Moose Murders*.

For a history and brief synopsis of the show and a recent 25th anniversary revival of sorts follow the link:

[A Broadway Flop Again Raises Its Antlers](#)

After reading the article, I noticed several signs that the show was doomed after its opening night performance. The opening night cast party at Sardi's was vacated after dessert was served. One party goer gave a two word review of the show to its creator Arthur Bicknell ("the worst"). Mr. Bicknell spent the rest of the night drinking, talking with friends, and taking in a midnight drag show (NOW THAT'S DEPRESSING!!!! Who else would take in a drag show after a GOOD opening... or after a bad one for that matter?). Before going to bed the next morning, he walked by the [Eugene O'Neill Theatre](#) to find that the set was being unloaded from the stage. If none of the other occurrences had tipped him off...

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# Happiness Is...

Going waaaaaay off on a tangent, I believe that my first acting gig was in the first grade as a balloon salesman who had one line: "Balloons for sale! BALLOONS FOR SALE!!! Red and YELLOW AAND GREEN BALLOONS!!!" And the finale was a ditty entitled "H-A-double P-I-N-E-double S." But that is not what this post is about.

Friday evening I had the opportunity to take my four-year-old niece to see a production of [\*You're a Food \(Er... GOOD... sorry\) Man Charlie Brown\*](#). Happily, she was a very good audience member.

The musical is a fun vignette of scenes featuring the main characters of Charles Schultz immortal comic strip "[Peanuts](#)." We have the siblings Lucy and Linus; the Beethoven fanatic Schroeder; little Sally; and of course the well meaning, though perpetually insecure title character. However, the star of the show is the scene-stealing beagle, Snoopy. Whenever the canine is on stage, the action seemed much more alive, energetic, and fun. Whether he was aboard his trusty Sopwith Camel as the World War I flying ace in search of the dasterdly Red Baron, simply chasing rabbits, or singing the praises of his favorite time of day: "Suppertime," the actor totally exemplified the exuberance of Joe Cool.

Another fun scene is "Book Report" in which Charlie Brown, Lucy, Schroeder, and Linus all attempt to compose a report on Beatrix Potter's classic story "Peter Rabbit." Each character at times in solo and at other times in a quartet, gives voice to the words they are formulating on paper.

The set of the show was also very well imagined. The trees,

doghouse, fence, big comfy couch, etc. were all constructed in such a way that the comic strip was brought to brilliant life. While in the dogfight (HAHAHA) with the Red Baron, Snoopy's giant doghouse actually moved up and down just enough to give the illusion of flight. The only thing missing, according to the critical eye of a four-year-old, was the sun and clouds.

*You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* is a fun show for all ages. Although I was not sure how a young girl would act during the performance, I was actually glad that I was able to take her.

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## Crossing the Big Pond

Planning a trip to London? Let me be your guide to the best the West End has to offer in theatre. Already there are the Broadway hits [Wicked](#), [Phantom of the Opera](#) (ok, ok, it was in London first), and the just opened [Jersey Boys](#). However, there are several productions which have not yet made the leap over to the U.S.

There is the Andrew Lloyd Webber produced revival of *The Sound of Music*. Apparently, Lord Lloyd Webber cannot produce anything new on his own that is capable of making money so he must revive not only his past successes but also breathe new life into other's works as well (whatever happened to his planned sequel to *Phantom*?). There is also a revival of Webber's [Joseph...](#). In a bit of "American Idol" meets musical theatre, the Joseph for this production was chosen on a reality television show. In 2007, the new Broadway cast of [Grease](#) was chosen in this way on a series called "Grease: You're the One that I Want." Not a very original title.

There is also a new musical version of the classic novel and movie [Gone with the Wind](#). The Trevor Nunn directed production

stars [Darius Danesh](#) as Rhett Butler. Darius was seen on “Pop Idol” which is the British phenomenon that inspired “American Idol.” I wonder if the judges told him that he was “too theatrical” as Simon Cowell has been known to tell American contestants.

Perhaps the strangest if not the most ambitious show of all is the staging of J.R.R. Tolkien’s [Lord of the Rings](#) trilogy. It took three films of nearly three hours each to scratch the surface of the novels. I’m sure Rings purists are left wanting after only one 3 hour musical.

So... if you are in West End or are planning a trip over the Atlantic, consider taking in one or more of these stage hits. Of course many times, today’s hits of London become tomorrow’s Broadway blockbusters and vice versa.

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## **Hungry As The Wolf Felt When He Met Red-Riding Hood**

In 1949, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II brought to the Broadway stage what would be their third musical blockbuster, [South Pacific](#). It tells the tale of Ensign Nellie Forbush, a “Cockeyed Optimist”-ic Naval nurse from Little Rock, stationed on a remote Pacific island, who falls in love with a worldly French planter. This type of interracial pairing was extremely controversial for a show in the 1940s. Even more so was the introduction of Emile de Becque’s two Polynesian children. After learning of the children, Nellie vows to “Wash that Man Right Out of Her Hair.”

A secondary plot revolves around the romance between Lt. Joseph Cable and a mute Polynesian native. The plots are

brought together when de Becque and Cable are called upon to go on a dangerous mission which leads to tragedy.

The theme of racial prejudice is explored throughout the show and no more so than in the song "You've Got to be Carefully Taught." Because of its biting commentary on prejudice, Rodgers and Hammerstein were encouraged to take the song out of the show to which they both responded that there would be no show without it.

*South Pacific* opened at the Majestic Theatre on Broadway April 7, 1949 (40 years ago, today) and had a run of 1,925 performances. It was the recipient of 9 Tony Awards (including all 4 of the major acting trophies). It also received the prestigious 1950 Pulitzer Prize for Drama (one of only 7 musicals to have done so). Most of the songs have become standards: "Some Enchanted Evening," "Younger than Springtime," "Bali Hai," and "There is Nothing like a Dame" (a rousing chorus number led by the great character Luthor Billis and his chorus of Seabees). The [movie](#) was released in theatres in 1958 as well as a [televised version](#) in 2001 starring an out-of-place Glenn Close who is much too old to play a young, naive Naval nurse. Ironically, it is the only major Rodgers and Hammerstein show to have never been revived on Broadway until it recently opened at the [Vivian Beaumont Theatre](#).

**ADDENDUM: Any errors in mathematics are solely the responsibility of the blogger. He takes full responsibility for his ignorance and hopes that his brilliance does not become the topic for a post on another site. Unless it is by his own doing.**

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# Put A Dime In the Jukebox

It may cost more nowadays to play a song on a jukebox (think the last time I played one it cost a quarter). Which brings me to another trend in musical theatre of the past few years: the jukebox musical. These are shows which include songs from artists from other genres: country, pop, rock and roll, etc. Music from artists such as Elvis Presley, Billy Joel, Patsy Cline, Frankie Valli and the 4 Seasons, the Beach Boys, and Johnny Cash have each had their music be the focal point of stage shows. [\*Smokey Joe's Cafe\*](#) was a Broadway hit which brought the Mike Stoller and Jerry Lieber songbook to the stage. Songs such as "Jailhouse Rock," "Yakety Yak," "Charlie Brown," and 36 others are the focal point of the musical revue.

An attempt was made to set the tunes of Elvis Presley to an original story. *All Shook Up* probably would have done better if it had something to do with the king of rock and roll or at least staged one of his better movies (many of which are better left forgotten).

Perhaps the best known jukebox musical is *Jersey Boys*. The turbulent history of the 1960s pop music group Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons is told through many of its greatest hits ("Big Girls Don't Cry," "Sherry," "Walk Like A Man," and several others. *Jersey Boys* was the recipient of four 2006 Tony Awards; is still playing strong at the August Wilson Theatre on Broadway; and has touring companies throughout the U.S. and other countries, including Australia.

So... the next time you are playing a game and the question is asked; "What kind of music makes you want to get up and sing?" be careful. Broadway music may now have more than one meaning.

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# Movie to Broadway

Ok... a recent trend that has come to the Broadway stage is the reimagining of Hollywood movies as stage musicals. I am not speaking of Disney animated features being adapted for the stage (I have made at least 2 postings on that subject). I have felt that the best of these cartoons easily lend themselves to staging. However, musicals such as [The Producers](#), [Hairspray](#), [Xanadu](#), and most recently, [Young Frankenstein](#) all seem to be doing quite well.

I think the strangest of these creations is *Xanadu*. The [1980 movie](#) was to be Olivia-Newton John's follow-up to the phenomenal hit *Grease*. I'm not precisely sure why the movie flopped but it could have been the death of disco or perhaps that the movie was just terrible. It was the winner(?) of 1 Razzie and nominated for 4 others. Hopefully, I am not going to be the victim of a mob of cultists who actually liked the movie. Strangely enough 25 years later, nostalgia (or the few people who have actually seen and enjoyed the movie) must have created the necessity to revisit the movie. I wish I could dwell on the plot of the show. However, I have never seen either version and reading synopses just gave me a headache because they made little sense.

I suppose that this streak of bringing movies to the stage will continue as long as they are profitable. On the horizon a stage version of the Dolly Parton, Lili Tomlin, and Jane Fonda classic(?) [9 to 5](#) opens in Los Angeles in September '08. I'm certain that I have heard rumors of a [Back to the Future](#) musical being produced. Any others? While Mel Brooks seems to be on a role, he might as well develop [Spaceballs](#) or [Blazing Saddles](#). Or how about [Road House: The Stage Version Of The Cinema Classic That Starred Patrick Swayze, Except This One](#)

Stars Taimak From The 80's Cult Classic "The Last Dragon" Wearing A Blonde Mullet Wig (oops that was not a musical, correct?).

What other movies would make great musicals or which am I forgetting besides *Footloose* and *Saturday Night Fever* to name a few.