

= Me and Juliet =

Me and Juliet is a musical comedy by Richard Rodgers (music) and Oscar Hammerstein II (lyrics and book) and their sixth stage collaboration . The work tells a story of romance backstage at a long @-@ running musical : assistant stage manager Larry woos chorus girl Jeanie behind the back of her electrician boyfriend , Bob . Me and Juliet premiered in 1953 and was not considered a success , although it ran for much of a year on Broadway and returned a small profit to its backers . The show received no Tony Award nominations .

Rodgers had long wanted to write a musical comedy about the cast and crew backstage at a theatre . After Rodgers and Hammerstein had another hit with The King and I , Rodgers proposed the backstage project to his partner . Hammerstein was unenthusiastic , thinking the subject matter trivial , but agreed to do the project . The play required complex machinery , designed by Jo Mielziner , so that the audience could view action not only on the stage of the theatre where the show @-@ within @-@ the @-@ show (also named Me and Juliet) takes place , but in the wings and on the light bridge (high above the stage , from which the lighting technicians train spotlights) as well .

When Me and Juliet began tryout performances in Cleveland , the duo realized that the show had problems with the plot and staging . Extensive revisions during the remaining Cleveland and Boston tryouts failed to cure the difficulties with the plot , which the critics considered weak and uninteresting . The show was met with less than favorable reviews , though Mielziner 's staging won praise from audience and critics . The show closed once it had exhausted its advance sales . With the exception of a short run in Chicago , there was no national tour , and the show is almost never seen ? although a small @-@ scale production was presented by London 's Finborough Theatre in 2010 .

= = Inception = =

The origins of Me and Juliet can be traced to the early days of the relationship between Rodgers and Hammerstein . The musical Oklahoma ! opened in 1943 ; it was Rodgers and Hammerstein 's first work together and a massive hit . Soon after Oklahoma ! opened , Rodgers began considering the idea of a musical set backstage at a theatre staging a musical . The production could explore different areas of the backstage world . Rodgers also saw it as the opportunity to write a pure musical comedy , without the serious themes which had marked their early works ? such as the attacks on racism in South Pacific , and the cultural tolerance in The King and I.

Hammerstein was initially unenthusiastic , thinking the subject matter trivial , but Rodgers pressed the matter . It was Hammerstein 's turn to give in to his partner ; Rodgers had agreed to the project that became the 1947 musical , Allegro , their initial failure , under pressure from Hammerstein , who had long dreamed of doing a serious musical about an ordinary man . According to Stephen Sondheim , a protégé of Hammerstein , " Oscar was able to keep the partnership together by taking Dick 's suggestion [for a backstage musical] , which he did not want to take . " As the two discussed the backstage idea , Hammerstein became more enthusiastic , suggesting that the show start with the stage entirely bare , as if the audience had come in not at performance time but at another time during the day . Such effects are today well @-@ known following the success of other " backstagers " such as A Chorus Line ; in the early 1950s they were unrealized and novel .

The two discussed the matter at a meeting in Palm Beach , Florida , in early 1952 , where Rodgers was vacationing as he worked on melodic sketches for the television program Victory at Sea . Rodgers suggested dispensing with the overture , reserving that for the overture of the show @-@ within @-@ the @-@ show . Following another meeting in mid @-@ 1952 , they called in long @-@ time Rodgers and Hammerstein stage designer Jo Mielziner and hired him to design the sets . Mielziner confirmed that a scene could be played part onstage and part in the backstage world , but that this would be expensive . In August 1952 , Hammerstein began a sketch of the plot ; by early October he had a near @-@ complete first draft . As the show was to be musical comedy , the pair hired one of the top musical comedy directors , George Abbott , who accepted the position without

reading the script . He regretted the haste of this decision as soon as he read the script , finding it sentimental and melodramatic . He confided his concerns to the pair ; in response , Hammerstein told him to make whatever changes in the script he thought best . With Hammerstein 's permission , Abbott made major changes to the plot .

Hammerstein had only briefly described the show @-@ within @-@ the @-@ show . Fearing the show would be uninteresting , Abbott hoped that some highlights would be furnished when the show @-@ within @-@ the @-@ show , as yet only briefly described by Hammerstein , was fleshed out . According to author and composer Ethan Mordden in his book about the duo 's works , Hammerstein thought the show @-@ within @-@ the @-@ show was to be :

something bizarre , to stand out and amaze us , the better to set off the plain life of the actor ... We shall imagine some rather advanced musical of the near future , something beyond even Allegro , with archetypical characters ? a simple hero and his lovable Juliet , the rapacious Don Juan and his volatile Carmen . Then the audience will always know where it is . Contrast is the key . The show @-@ within must look and sound , at every moment , as far from real life as possible .

Hammerstein included an incident he had seen when he was a neophyte assistant stage manager : a chorus boy came up to a chorus girl and asked to use some of her mascara ? to disguise a hole in the boy 's black socks . Hammerstein stated , " we were religious in keeping away from the trite things ? the kindly old stage door man named Pop , the pretty little understudy who replaces the star on opening night . We steered clear , too , of the backstage story of a company putting on a new show , with all the anxieties of the actors and producers ... It seemed right to focus on a show which is already running because we wanted to tell a story about a community , the backstage community , and this community becomes settled and established after a show opens . "

In addition to Abbott , the duo recruited other professionals experienced in musical comedy . Choreographer Robert Alton had worked in such hits as Panama Hattie and in movie musicals . Don Walker was hired to do the orchestrations ; his would be simpler than those of Robert Russell Bennett , who usually performed that function in the pair 's musicals but who was not available . Irene Sharaff was engaged to design the more than 300 costumes which would be needed . The show was originally named Hercules and Juliet , but they soon changed it to Me and Juliet . The Majestic Theatre , which Rodgers and Hammerstein desired to have for Me and Juliet , was currently occupied by their South Pacific , four years into its run . Arrangements were made to shift South Pacific to the Broadway Theatre , though due to schedule conflicts , this meant moving that show to Boston for five weeks .

= = Plot = =

For theatrical terminology , see Stage (theatre) .

The entire action of the show takes place in and close to a Broadway theatre in which the long @-@ running musical " Me and Juliet " (the " show @-@ within @-@ the @-@ show ") is playing . The setting is the early 1950s .

= = = Act 1 = = =

A half @-@ hour remains before the show is to begin . Electrician Sidney and chorus girl Jeanie are irritated at Sidney 's fellow electrician , Bob , for not being there . Sidney needs Bob 's help ; Jeanie , Bob 's girlfriend , is annoyed at being stood up . Sidney warns Jeanie that Bob may not be the right man for her ; these are doubts she has too (Musical numbers : " A Very Special Day " / " That 's the Way it Happens ") .

Jeanie leaves , and Bob appears . Bob tells Sidney he likes dating Jeanie , but does not plan to marry her . When Sidney jokes that Jeanie can do better than Bob , the larger man momentarily chokes him . Jeanie sees this , adding to her doubts about Bob . Larry , the assistant stage manager , is also attracted to Jeanie (reprise of " That 's the Way it Happens ") .

Stage manager Mac sees to the final preparations , and the overture to the internal show is played by the orchestra , led by Dario , the conductor (" Overture to Me and Juliet ") . The internal show 's

curtain rises (" Marriage Type Love ") : the main male character , " Me " (performed by Charlie , a singer) , tells the audience about the girl he wants to marry , Juliet (Lily , a singer) . He also tells the audience of the girl he is determined not to marry , Carmen , who scares him . " Me " feels Carmen (the lead female dancing role) is better suited to his boss , Don Juan (the lead male dancer) . As the internal show continues , Bob and Sidney are on the light bridge . Bob identifies with Don Juan for his reluctance to marry (" Keep It Gay ") .

Another day at Me and Juliet , and the dancers are practicing under Mac 's supervision (conclusion of " Keep It Gay ") . At Larry 's urging , Jeanie decides to audition for the position of second understudy for the role of Juliet . On learning this , Mac takes Larry aside and warns him never to get involved with a cast member of a show while in charge of it . No sooner has Mac said this than his girlfriend Betty (currently in the show across the street) auditions for the role of Carmen . The producer gives her the role . As Larry looks on with amusement , Mac accepts this professionally , then stamps off in disgust .

Jeanie practices for her own audition (" No Other Love ") , and Larry tells her that the audience will accept her if she 's " a real kid " like Juliet , but reject her if she 's a " phony " (" The Big Black Giant ") . Larry desires a romance with Jeannie , but fears the larger and stronger Bob .

Several months pass , during which Jeanie gets the job as second understudy . Larry and Jeanie are meeting secretly and keeping their budding romance from Bob . The rest of the cast is aware of their dates ? one dancer spotted them in a chili restaurant on Eighth Avenue .

Mac , true to his principles , has dumped Betty , but the two are still attracted to each other . Betty enjoys acting (" It 's Me ") . As she performs in the internal show , Bob and Sidney are on the light bridge again .

Bob has been fooled by Jeanie 's lies about why they are not going out , and is enlightened when Sidney lets slip that Larry and Jeanie are seeing each other . Bob demands proof , and Sidney tells Bob to watch what happens in the wings during the upcoming Act 1 finale to Me and Juliet . Bob sees Larry and Jeanie kiss after she comes offstage with a tray of flowers , an action caught by Bob 's spotlight . Mac enters , grasps the situation , sends Larry away , then puts the tray back in Jeanie 's hands and pushes her onstage . She is pursued by Bob 's spotlight , which relentlessly follows her around the stage as more and more of the dancers become aware something has gone badly wrong . Bob drops a sandbag from the light bridge ; it knocks the tray Jeanie is holding to the ground . Mac orders the curtain lowered in front of a stage in panic .

= = = Act 2 = = =

In the downstairs lounge , a few minutes before the Act 2 curtain for Me and Juliet rises , the ushers comment on the remarkable conclusion to Act 1 ? although the audience has noticed nothing unusual (" Intermission Talk ") . As Act 2 of the internal show starts , an enraged Bob is searching the theatre for Jeannie and Larry . Unable to find them , he takes up position at a bar across the street where he can watch the theatre doors (" It Feels Good ") . The perspective shifts to the onstage action in Me and Juliet , where Don Juan and Carmen are on a date (" We Deserve Each Other ") , before moving to the manager 's office where Larry and Jeanie are hiding out (" I 'm Your Girl ") . Mac has only just begun his lecture to them when Bob enters through the window , having heard familiar voices . In the ensuing fight , Bob knocks out Mac , but when the electrician grabs for Jeannie , Larry strongly defends her . The fight ends when Bob accidentally hits his head on a radiator and is knocked out as well .

Ruby , the company manager , sends Larry and Jeannie down to the stage to continue the play . After Bob and Mac recover , Ruby informs Bob that Larry and Jeanie had secretly married earlier that day , and , surprised , the electrician leaves . Mac , fearful of more mayhem , goes in search of him . As Mac exits , the phone rings , and Ruby takes the call . It is the producer , calling for Mac to transfer him to another show , thereby setting him free to resume his romance with Betty .

Onstage , Me and Juliet is concluding . After the internal show finishes (" Finale to Me and Juliet ") , Larry , who will be the new stage manager , insists on rehearsing a scene from the show . Seeing Bob enter with a scowl , Larry orders him and Sidney to be present the next morning to re @-@

angle the lights . Taken aback , and rather sheepishly , Bob says " I didn 't know you were married " before quietly leaving , after stating , " I 'll be here , I guess . " Jeanie is congratulated by her showmates , but Larry , all business , waves them to their places to rehearse the scene . As Lily has had to leave , Jeanie stands in for her as Juliet , while Larry sings the part of Me in the scene , as the curtain falls (" Finale of Our Play ") .

= = Rehearsals and tryouts = =

The cast consisted mostly of unknowns , though Isabel Bigley , who had just originated Sister Sarah Brown in *Guys and Dolls* , was given the leading role of chorus girl Jeanie . For Larry , the assistant stage manager who falls in love with Jeanie , they cast Bill Hayes , a well @-@ known stage and television actor . William Tabbert , the original Lt. Joe Cable in *South Pacific* was considered for the part of Larry , but lost out because he was thought to be too tall to be afraid of Mark Dawson , hired as the towering bully Bob .

Chorus auditions began March 10 , 1953 , at Broadway 's Majestic Theatre ; Rodgers , Hammerstein , and Abbott listened to more than 1 @,@ 000 people . Rehearsals opened at the Majestic for principals and the Alvin Theatre for dancers . According to Saul Pett , a freelance reporter who was allowed to observe the rehearsals , " everyone seems relaxed except Hammerstein . " The lyricist 's son James served as second assistant stage manager . James Hammerstein remembered having a difficult relationship with Rodgers ; the composer suggested James do his work from front of house , rather than from backstage . " I think he thought it was his show and his bailiwick . Why should a Hammerstein be back there ? " James Hammerstein found the lead female dancer attractive , and asked her out . Just before the date , Rodgers fired her , telling James Hammerstein to break the news .

Pett recorded the technical problems which had to be solved to accomplish the complex staging :

A number of key scenes required the audience to both see the play @-@ within @-@ the @-@ play and at the same time observe the realism of the stage manager 's operations in the wings . To achieve this result and to make both elements simultaneous , the major part of the production had to hang on specially @-@ constructed overhead steel tracks . Synchronized electric motors slowly moved the stage pictures off into the wings far enough to expose the stage manager 's desk and actors and stagehands offstage awaiting their cues .

During the rehearsals , the duo took out two production numbers , " Wake Up , Little Theatre " and " Dance " , concerned that the show was running long . The actress playing Juliet in the internal play proved to be a fine singer but a poor actress ; she was replaced by Helena Scott . Abbott had few negative comments after the final New York run @-@ through , and the company entrained for Cleveland , where the first tryouts were to be , in high spirits , sleeping little on the train ride . RCA Records put up the \$ 350 @,@ 000 cost of the production in exchange for a fifty @-@ percent interest and rights to the original cast recording .

The tryouts in Cleveland were at the Hanna Theatre . The dress rehearsal the night before the initial performance revealed a number of problems with the show ; during the first act alone , Hammerstein dictated eight pages of notes . The sandbag which falls from the light bridge near the end of Act 1 dropped off @-@ cue , nearly striking Isabel Bigley , who played Jeanie . Pett remembered that the rehearsal was stopped often , as Rodgers sought to work out each problem as it arose , and the rehearsal , which began at 8 p.m. did not end until 2 a.m.

The Cleveland premiere on the evening of April 20 , 1953 , saw a distinguished crowd turn out . When the stage backdrop failed to come down on time , Hammerstein was heard to mutter , " Damn and damn and damn ! This is a new way : they saved it for the performance ! " Nevertheless , the crowd gave the show a rousing welcome . The Cleveland critics thought well of the show , but were concerned about the weak story . After the Cleveland reactions and problems , according to Rodgers biographer Meryle Secrest , " what had seemed to be a show needing minor adjustments became a musical in serious trouble " . Bigley remembered that she had just come from a hit and " there just wasn 't the same energy " . Hammerstein had intended to omit the overture , with the audience to watch , after the curtain rose , a blank stage on which the play @-@ within @-@ the

@-@ play performers and crew drifted in and began their preparations . Expecting the orchestra to begin the evening , the audience talked throughout the initial scenes before being quieted by the internal show 's overture ; in response , the duo abandoned Hammerstein 's concept and opened with an overture .

In contrast to the levity on their first train ride , the company was downcast and exhausted en route from Cleveland to Boston for the final tryouts . The show opened in Boston on May 6 . A majority of the Boston critics liked the show , and expressed confidence that Rodgers and Hammerstein could fix the problems with the plot . The pair took out one song , " Meat and Potatoes " , which was felt to be too raunchy . After watching it performed by Joan McCracken , who played Betty (Carmen in the play @-@ within @-@ the @-@ play) , the pair decided it had too many double entendres and cut it . It was replaced by " We Deserve Each Other " , which the pair had written in a Cleveland hotel room . Another cut song , " You Never Had It So Good " , included lyrics which satirized the duo 's own earlier efforts . Its lyrics , " I 'll sew , I 'll bake / I 'll try to make your evenings all enchanted . / My honeycake , / I 'm yours to take , but don 't take me for granted " , alluded to two songs from South Pacific , " Some Enchanted Evening " and " Honey Bun " . Audiences continued to greet the show warmly .

During the Boston previews , the duo heard the audience praise the sets , a reaction which usually augured ill for the show itself . Hammerstein wrote to The King and I director John van Druten :

Me and Juliet looks like a great big hit . It is a change of pace for us and in some quarters we may be criticized because it is not as high @-@ falutin ' as our most recent efforts . It is in fact an out and out musical comedy . If this be treason , make the most of it .

= = Production = =

The musical opened on Broadway on May 28 , 1953 at the Majestic Theatre . Large advance sales guaranteed a considerable run ; by the start of November , it had paid back its advance , and closed after 358 performances , paying a small profit to RCA . Thomas Hischak , in his The Rodgers and Hammerstein Encyclopedia , suggests that business fell off after the advance was exhausted " because audiences had come to expect more from a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical " . According to Frederick W. Nolan in his book about the duo 's works , " despite a \$ 500 @, @ 000 advance sale , despite a ten @-@ month run (which , for anyone except Rodgers and Hammerstein , would have represented a major success) , and despite an eventual profit in excess of \$ 100 @, @ 000 , Me and Juliet has to be classed as a failure " .

The backstage drama portrayed in the musical was matched by actual difficulties among the cast . McCracken , who played Betty , was the wife of choreographer Bob Fosse and became pregnant during the run . Bill Hayes later wrote that she lost her baby through miscarriage about the same time she lost her husband to Gwen Verdon . The baby was in fact aborted , because the pregnancy would have endangered McCracken 's health as a result of her diabetes . Hayes noted that in the fifteen months he played Larry , he did not recall ever having a conversation with Isabel Bigley , who was supposedly his love interest and wife : " I doubt that the audience ever believed we were deeply in love . " The show received no Tony Award nominations . During the run , Hammerstein followed his usual practice of visiting the theatre now and again to ensure that the performers were not taking liberties with his book . Upon his return , Hammerstein 's secretary asked him how the show was going . The lyricist thought for a second , then said only " I hate that show . "

No national tour was attempted , but the show did have a six @-@ week run in Chicago in 1954 . Among those who played in the chorus during the New York run was future star Shirley MacLaine ; Shirley Jones was a chorus girl in the Chicago performances . Subsequent productions include one by Kansas City 's Starlight Theatre in 1955 . Equity Library Theatre produced it in New York in 1970 ; it returned to that city , though not to Broadway , in 2002 with the York Theatre . A London production was presented by the Finborough Theatre in 2010 in a fifty @-@ seat theatre ; the production was billed as the show 's European premiere .

= = Musical numbers = =

= = Musical treatment and recording = =

One source of Rodgers 's excitement for the concept that became *Me and Juliet* was his view that a contemporary musical gave him the opportunity for a contemporary score . At the time Rodgers wrote the score , a Latin dance craze had swept the United States , and its influence found its way into the music for *Me and Juliet* . Rodgers put an onstage jazz trio in the production and encouraged the members to improvise . Among the trio was jazz artist Barbara Carroll as Chris , rehearsal pianist . " *Intermission Talk* " , the chatter among audience members early in the second act , is given a bouncy melody and sly references to a number of shows then on Broadway ? including the duo 's own *The King and I* . According to author and composer Ethan Mordden , Rodgers 's score " found [Rodgers & Hammerstein] going for impish , nimble , the sound of the *Hit Parade* as reimagined by [them] " .

Rodgers borrowed the music for " *No Other Love* " from his award @-@ winning score for *Victory at Sea* . RCA , which had those rights , arranged for Perry Como to record the song , and it was rushed onto the market to coincide with the show 's Broadway opening . The record became a number @-@ one hit for Como on the Disc Jockey chart , though # 2 as a best seller , remaining on the charts for 22 weeks .

Hischak described the original cast album as " surprisingly lively and mostly enjoyable for a musical that was considered so dull on stage . " He pointed to " *Intermission Talk* " as a number which probably works better in a recording than on stage and states that " there is no mistaking the hypnotic power of ' *No Other Love* ' " . The original cast recording was released on compact disc in 1993 .

= = Critical reception and assessment = =

Critics ' views were neutral to unfavorable . The New York Times critic Brooks Atkinson praised the acting and choreography , but stated , " This is their Valentine to show business , expressed in the form of a show @-@ within @-@ a @-@ show ; and it has just about everything except an intelligible story . " Herald @-@ Tribune critic Walter Kerr noted that " Rodgers and Hammerstein have come perilously close to writing a show @-@ without @-@ a @-@ show . " George Jean Nathan of the *Journal American* stated that " Hammerstein 's book has the effect of hanging idly around waiting for an idea to come to him . " Robert Coleman of the *Daily Mirror* noted , " Having set new high standards for musicals throughout the world , Rodgers and Hammerstein dipped into the lower drawer of their desk for *Me and Juliet* . It proved a big disappointment for this dyed @-@ in @-@ the @-@ wool R. & H. fan . " John Chapman of the *Daily News* commented , " It is at its most interesting when Jo Mielziner 's sets are in motion " . According to Steven Suskin in his compilation of Broadway opening night reviews , the seven major New York critics allotted the production no raves , one favorable review , one mixed , four unfavorable , and one pan .

One well @-@ received number was " *Keep It Gay* " , a song which in rehearsal had been assigned to several different performers before ending with Bob . The song was liked in part due to the novelty of its setting : it begins with Bob singing from the light bridge high above the stage ; following a blackout the internal play performers take it up on the stage below , and following another blackout , the performers are seen in their workout clothes , at a rehearsal some weeks later . Hammerstein gave credit for the scene to Mielziner , and suggested that it demonstrated one way in which the book had affected the music .

Abbott stated that there were two reasons for what he considered to be the show 's failure . The first was Rodgers and Hammerstein 's overconfidence ; they thought of themselves as Broadway 's " *Golden Boys* " who could do no wrong . The other was the play @-@ within @-@ the @-@ play , which had not been thoroughly thought out by anyone . According to Abbott , Hammerstein remained " positively Sphinx @-@ like " on the subject . At a loss to understand the characters of the play @-@ within @-@ the play , Alton came up with nothing more than routine song @-@ and

@-@ dance numbers . During the run , the duo approached choreographer Jerome Robbins and asked him if he could fix the dances . Robbins said that he could , but he would not , as " it would kill Bob Alton " . According to Hammerstein biographer Hugh Fordin , " [the] intended contrast between onstage and backstage life was never achieved because the onstage show was so tepid and confusing . "

" That 's the Way it Happens " was included in the 1996 stage version of Rodgers and Hammerstein 's 1945 movie musical , State Fair . According to David Lewis in his history of the Broadway musical , " The Rodgers and Hammerstein office has , it would appear , given up on [later R & H musical] Pipe Dream and [Me and] Juliet ever finding an audience ... so these songs are up for grabs . "

Composer and author Ethan Mordden , in his book on the duo 's works , wrote of the conceptual difficulties which Rodgers and Hammerstein had with the musical :

[Me and Juliet] was the first of their plays without a powerful sense of destiny , of characters consequentially interconnected . In Oklahoma ! , Carousel , South Pacific and The King and I especially , the principals ? whether noble or weak , just or impetuous ? change each other 's lives . Me and Juliet 's characters appear to be thrown together by chance and ? except for the lovers ? will part company unaffected by each other as soon as the show closes . This left Hammerstein with nothing to seek out in his people , and Rodgers with nothing to illustrate .

= = Characters and opening night cast = =

Principal characters :

Jeanie , chorus singer ? Isabel Bigley

Bob , electrician ? Mark Dawson

Larry , assistant stage manager ? Bill Hayes

Mac , stage manager ? Ray Walston

Dario , conductor ? George S. Irving

Sidney , electrician ? Edwin Phillips

Herbie , candy counter boy ? Jackie Kelk

Ruby , company manager ? Joe Lautner

Buzz , principal dancer ? Buzz Miller

Characters in " Me and Juliet " (play @-@ within @-@ the @-@ play) :

Charlie (Me) , featured lead ? Arthur Maxwell

Lily (Juliet) , singing principal ? Helena Scott

Jim (Don Juan) , principal dancer ? Robert Fortier

Susie (Carmen) , principal dancer ? Svetlana McLee

Betty , successor to Susie as principal dancer ? Joan McCracken