

= Allegro (musical) =

Allegro is a musical by Richard Rodgers (music) and Oscar Hammerstein II (book and lyrics) , their third collaboration for the stage . Opening on Broadway on October 10 , 1947 , the musical centers on the life of Joseph Taylor , Jr . , who follows in the footsteps of his father as a doctor , but is tempted by fortune and fame at a big @-@ city hospital .

After the immense successes of the first two Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals , Oklahoma ! and Carousel , the pair sought a subject for their next play . Hammerstein had long contemplated a serious work which would deal with the problems of the ordinary man in the fast @-@ moving modern world . He and Rodgers sought to create a work which would be as innovative as their first two @-@ stage musicals . To that end , they created a play with a large cast , including a Greek chorus . The production would have no sets ; props and projections served to suggest locations .

After a disastrous tryout in New Haven , Connecticut , the musical opened on Broadway to a large advance sale of tickets , and very mixed reviews . Agnes de Mille , the choreographer of Rodgers and Hammerstein 's previous Broadway productions , both directed and choreographed the work . The show was viewed as too moralistic , and the Broadway run ended after nine months ; it was followed by a short national tour . It had no West End production and has rarely been revived . There are two recordings of Allegro , the original cast album and a studio recording released in 2009 .

= = Inception = =

Oscar Hammerstein II had always wanted to write a serious drama , one which would address the problems of life confronting ordinary people . By early 1946 , four years after his partnership with Richard Rodgers commenced , the duo had two hits (Oklahoma ! and Carousel) on Broadway , and success as producers of musicals others had written . In March , Hammerstein approached Rodgers with the idea for a play with two men as the central characters , rather than the usual " boy and girl " format . Over the following weeks , the two discussed it , and the concept evolved into a musical about one man , a doctor 's son , which appealed to Rodgers , the son and brother of doctors . By September , the general theme for the story had been established : the struggle of the main character to avoid compromising his principles as he progresses in life .

Hammerstein had thought of writing a play about a man , from birth to death . However , having just killed his leading male character , Billy Bigelow , onstage in Carousel , he was reluctant to kill off another . In the end , he took his protagonist from birth to age 35 . He envisioned a simply staged work like Our Town which after its initial run would lend itself to college productions . Allegro was conceived as taking place in an open space , using props and projections to convey scenery to the audience . In addition to the customary singing chorus , there would be a speaking chorus , in the manner of a Greek chorus , which would comment on the action , and speak to both characters and audience .

As background research about the medical profession , Hammerstein interviewed his own doctor . He wrote a few pages of the book before embarking with his wife for Australia to visit his mother @-@ in @-@ law ; when his ship arrived in Brisbane he mailed Rodgers part of the remainder . On receiving the packet , Rodgers , who did generally not compose until Hammerstein supplied him with a lyric , immediately sat down and composed three songs . Hammerstein put a good deal of his own experiences into the play . According to his son , William , " Most of the first act was based on his own memories of his own childhood . He had always been intrigued by it , you know ; his mother died when he was twelve . I always felt his songs came out of his feelings about her . "

Hammerstein spent a year writing and polishing the first act , taking infinite pains over the wording . The second act was more rushed ; under a deadline , Hammerstein completed it only a week before rehearsals began . Hammerstein 's protegee Stephen Sondheim , who served as a \$ 25 @-@ a @-@ week gofer on the production , stated ,

Years later , in talking over the show with Oscar ? I don 't think I recognized it at the time ? I realized he was trying to tell the story of his life ... Oscar meant it as a metaphor for what had

happened to him . He had become so successful with Oklahoma ! and Carousel that he was suddenly in demand all over the place . What he was talking about was the trappings , not so much of success , but of losing sight of what your goal is .

= = Rehearsals and tryouts = =

The duo hired choreographer Agnes de Mille to direct ? a move between two theatre functions which was unusual at the time . De Mille had been the choreographer for the dances in Oklahoma ! and Carousel , designing ballets which disclosed the characters ' psychological states to the audience . She had been concerned about the cohesion of the script as she received it from Hammerstein . When a few days before rehearsals began , she asked Hammerstein what the show was about , the lyricist replied , " It 's about a man not being allowed to do his own work because of worldly pressures . " De Mille answered , " That 's not the play you 've written . You haven 't written your second act . " Hammerstein replied , " But we 're already committed to the theatre in New York . "

De Mille faced an immense task . Instead of conventional sets , locations were suggested by platforms , images projected onto backdrops , and lighting ? there were 500 lighting cues , at the time a Broadway record . There were forty stagehands , needed to shift sixty partial sets , with objects moved onto the stage by a semicircular track hidden by an elaborate series of curtains . According to de Mille biographer Carol Easton , " Allegro was a leviathan of a show , on a scale exceeding the grasp of any individual . "

Rehearsals took place in three New York locations , for principals , singers , and dancers . The production contained 41 principals and over a hundred dancers . De Mille also choreographed the dances , which were both extremely complicated and provided the framework for the scenes which made up the show . During the dances , Joe learns to walk , falls in love , goes astray , and then gets back on the proper track . De Mille used adults in children 's clothes for the dances when Joe is a child ; since there were no actual children on stage to provide scale , the illusion worked . The dance which accompanied " One Foot , Other Foot " was based on de Mille 's own experiences in watching her own son Jonathan learn to walk .

Sondheim later expressed his view of de Mille 's directing , calling her " a horror . She treated the actors and singers like dirt and treated the dancers like gods ... [she was ,] I think , an extremely insensitive woman , an excellent writer , and a terrible director , in terms of morale , anyway . That was my first experience of bad behavior in the theatre . " However , Rufus Smith , who played the minor role of the football coach , stated , " Never again in my life will I experience what it is like to stop a show cold , by doing exactly what she taught me " . The immense job of directing the play finally proved too big for de Mille , who stated " I can 't do the new dances and the new songs and the new book , " and Hammerstein stepped in to direct the dialogue . According to Rodgers biographer Meryle Secrest , at this point the cast was up in arms over de Mille 's treatment of them . James Mitchell , one of the dancers in the production , later stated that de Mille was better at directing dancers than actors , as actors come to the stage with preconceived notions about how to play a part , and dancers do not .

The first tryout , in New Haven , Connecticut , did not go to plan . During the first act , William Ching , playing Joseph Taylor , Sr. , was singing " A Fellow Needs a Girl " when the scenery wall began to collapse , forcing him to hold it up until the stagehands noticed . Dancer Ray Harrison caught his tap in a track in the stage , tore the ligaments in his knee and was carried from the stage , screaming . Lisa Kirk , the first Emily , fell into the orchestra while singing " The Gentleman Is a Dope " . She was catapulted back onto the stage with no pause in her singing , to great applause by the audience . Sondheim remembered ,

Next day in the New York Herald Tribune ... Billy Rose , of all people was saying , " A star is born . " Next night she comes back , came to the same point in the song , and starts to fall , and the entire audience gasps because they 'd all read the Herald Tribune . She recovers quickly , they all sigh , and she gets another ovation . Oscar came backstage at the end and said , " You do that a third time and you 're fired . "

The disasters of the New Haven opener concluded during "Come Home", a song near the end of the play ? the quiet urgings of the chorus and Joe 's mother to entice him to return to his small town . A false fire alarm went off , and the audience began to push towards the exit . Joshua Logan , who was in attendance , loudly ordered the crowd to sit down , which it did . One of the Boston tryouts that followed New Haven was marked by boisterous behavior by conventioners , until Hammerstein yelled , " Shut up ! " and the audience subsided .

= = Synopsis = =

= = = Act 1 = = =

The play opens with Marjorie Taylor in bed , in 1905 . Wife of small town doctor Joseph Taylor , she has just had a son . The people of the town predict great things for Joseph Taylor , Jr . , or Joe as he will come to be called (Musical number : " Joseph Taylor , Jr . ") . Joe learns what a baby learns : the comforting presence of his mother , the presence of another figure , who does not smell as nice , and who always leaves as soon as he picks up his black bag . Joe is seen as a baby and then not again as a child ; the audience takes his perspective . Joe 's Grandma notices him trying to walk , calls for Marjorie to witness the first steps , and once he takes them , as the chorus states , " the world belongs to Joe " (" One Foot , Other Foot ") . Joe grows to school age , and loses his beloved Grandma . He is comforted by Jennie Brinker , a businessman 's daughter . The two grow to high school age and date , though Joe lacks the nerve to kiss her , to Jennie 's frustration . As Joe prepares to leave for college , Dr. Taylor hopes that his son will help him in his medical practice , and he and Marjorie wonder if Joe will marry Jennie (" A Fellow Needs a Girl ") .

At the freshman mixer (" Freshman Dance ") , the audience finally sees Joe onstage . He marvels at his new world , in which he is a loner (" A Darn Nice Campus ") . Joe serves ineffectively as a cheerleader (" The Purple and the Brown ") , rooting for the Wildcats , whose star player is Joe 's freshman classmate Charlie Townsend . Both are pre @-@ medical students and soon become close friends . The friendship helps both ; Joe gains entrance to Charlie 's fraternity and social circles , while Charlie is allowed to copy Joe 's conscientious schoolwork .

While Joe is at college , Jennie remains at home , and her wealthy father , Ned Brinker , who disapproves of Joe for spending so many years in school before earning a living , encourages her to find other boyfriends . Jennie does not bother to conceal these romances in her letters ; Joe is finally fed up , and goes on a double date with Charlie and two girls . Beulah , Joe 's date , is initially enthusiastic about the budding romance (" So Far ") but walks away in disgust when Joe , who is unable to keep thoughts of Jennie from his mind , falls asleep after a passionate kiss . Jennie breaks up with the boy that Joe was afraid would marry her , and she is waiting for Joe when he returns home (" You Are Never Away ") . Marjorie Taylor is convinced that Jennie is the wrong girl for Joe , and after a confrontation with Jennie when she tells her this , Marjorie dies of a heart attack . Despite the disapproval of both families (" What a Lovely Day for a Wedding ") , Joe and Jennie marry , a wedding observed by the unhappy ghosts of Marjorie and Grandma (" Wish Them Well ") .

= = = Act 2 = = =

It is the Depression . Joe makes a bare living as assistant to his father . Mr. Brinker 's business has failed , and he lives with the couple , who are experiencing poverty for the first time in their lives . The poverty affects Jennie more than Joe ? the new Mrs. Taylor dislikes life as an impoverished housewife (" Money Isn 't Everything ") . When she learns that Joe turned down a lucrative offer from a prominent Chicago physician , who is Charlie 's uncle , Jennie at first rages . When she finds that is not effective , she gets him to change his mind through guilt ? if he accepts Dr. Denby 's offer , he can earn the money to start the small hospital of which his father dreams and they will have the money to bring up a child properly .

Joe accepts the job , and sadly leaves his father . He soon finds himself ministering to hypochondriacs ; he is required to spend time at cocktail parties marked by useless conversation (" Yatata , Yatata , Yatata ") . Charlie is also part of the practice , but the former football star has turned to drink . Joe himself is becoming careless due to the distractions ; one mistake is caught by his nurse , Emily , who greatly admires the physician Joe could be (" The Gentleman Is a Dope ") . Denby congratulates Joe on his skills , both medical and social . The elder doctor has less time for a nurse , Carrie Middleton , who has worked at his hospital for thirty years and once dated him , but who is involved in a labor protest ? Denby orders her fired at the request of Lansdale , an influential trustee and soap manufacturer . Charlie , Joe and Emily comment on the frenetic pace of the Chicago world in which they live (" Allegro ") .

Joe has become increasingly disillusioned by his life in the city , and worries about his former patients in his home town . He learns that Jennie is having an affair with Lansdale . As Joe sits , head in hands , his late mother and a chorus of the friends he left behind appeal to him to return (" Come Home ") . Joe has been offered the position of physician @-@ in @-@ chief at the Chicago hospital , replacing Denby , who is taking an executive position , or as the elder doctor terms it , being " kicked upstairs " . At a dedication of a new pavilion at the hospital , Joe has a revelation and shifts the path of his life ; as he does so , Grandma appears and calls for Marjorie to come watch , an echo of the scene in which he learned to walk . Joe refuses the position , and will return to his small town to assist his father , accompanied by Emily and Charlie , but not by Jennie (Finale : " One Foot , Other Foot " (reprise)) .

= = Musical numbers = =

= = Production history = =

Given the outstanding success of Oklahoma ! and Carousel , Allegro was anticipated with close interest by the theatre community and public . The musical attracted \$ 750 @,@ 000 in advance sales , at a time when the top price ticket for a Broadway musical was \$ 6 .

Allegro opened on Broadway at the Majestic Theatre on October 10 , 1947 . It starred John Battles as Joseph Taylor , Jr . , Annamary Dickey as Majorie Taylor , William Ching as Dr. Joseph Taylor , Roberta Jonay as Jennie Brinker , Lisa Kirk as Emily , and John Conte as Charlie Townsend . A special performance the afternoon of the opening for friends and associates generated wild applause ; the audience at the official opening that evening clapped little . As de Mille 's husband , Walter Prude , put it , Allegro went over " like a wet firecracker " .

The mixed reviews prompted ongoing discussions of the play 's merit , continuing well after the first night . Some of the news that the show generated had nothing to do with its worth ? de Mille had dancer Francis Rainer fired , and Rainer alleged that the dismissal was due to her union activism . After Actors Equity became involved , Rainer was rehired . More bad publicity came when the producers proposed to dismiss several orchestra and chorus members to cut costs so the show might continue through the summer of 1948 , and the fired performers also alleged dismissal for union involvement . The show closed before the summer , and in the fall , a national tour began . The national tour ran eight months , much shorter than that of Oklahoma ! or Carousel . No London production was mounted . According to Thomas Hischak in his The Rodgers and Hammerstein Encyclopedia , the show made a small profit ; other sources state that the show lost money .

The show was popular in the 1950s among amateur drama societies , because of the large cast with no star and the bare stage . It has rarely been revived professionally : the St. Louis Municipal Opera presented it in 1955 ; Goodspeed Musicals presented it in Connecticut in 1968 . An abridged version was presented Off @-@ Off @-@ Broadway in 1978 by Equity Library Theatre .

In March 1994 a staged concert version was presented by New York City Center Encores ! , with a cast that included Stephen Bogardus (Joseph Taylor , Jr .) , Karen Ziemba and Jonathan Hadary . Christopher Reeve was the narrator , and the concert was directed by Susan H. Schulman . A revised version of Allegro , re @-@ written by Joe DiPietro , who was a protege of Oscar 's son

James Hammerstein , was produced at the Signature Theatre (Arlington , Virginia) in January 2004 . This version cut the musical in size and scale . The cast was cut with some characters being combined ; the original , lavish orchestrations were simplified .

The Canadian premiere of *Allegro* took place in 2004 , staged by the Toronto Civic Light @-@ Opera Company . With full orchestra and a cast of 30 , the production was designed and directed by Joe Cascone , and became one of the inspirations for the all @-@ star 2009 recording . It was attended by Ted Chapin , Bruce Pomahac and Dina Hammerstein , respectively , CEO of the Rodgers & Hammerstein organization , director of music for R & H , and Hammerstein 's daughter @-@ in @-@ law . The production was a major success , both artistically and financially for the company .

The Astoria Performing Arts Center in cooperation with Actor 's Equity mounted a production from May 1 ? 17 , 2014 in Astoria , Queens , New York , Tom Wojtunik director . APAC has offices in the historic Kaufman Astoria Studios ; APAC 's performance space is located within the Good Shepherd United Methodist Church .

A 90 @-@ minute edited version directed by John Doyle was presented by the Classic Stage Company in New York City in November 2014 .

= = Music and recordings = =

= = = Musical treatment = = =

Although *Allegro* is filled with music , the music is fragmented , as the characters often break into song briefly . The character of Joe was unusual for a male lead of the time in having relatively little to sing ; Joe has only one solo number (" A Darn Nice Campus ") . Important songs are given to minor characters , such as " So Far " , given to Beulah , who only appears on the one date with Joe . Author and composer Ethan Mordden calls Rodgers 's technique " the deconstruction of theatre music , to match the show 's deconstruction of traditional theatre design " .

Rodgers 's music is more subtle than in his previous musicals , and his melodies more muted . The key changes are less dramatic than in other musicals of that time . Rodgers did not intend for the songs to become hits ; instead they were designed to draw the audience into the action , as onstage events were described subjectively in song .

= = = Recordings = = =

An original cast recording was released in 1947 , heavily abridged . According to Hirschak , only Lisa Kirk as Emily shines on the recording , which he calls " sad evidences of a very ambitious undertaking " . Originally issued by RCA Victor Records on five 78s , sales were poor ; Victor did not reissue it on LP during the rapid transition from 78s to long @-@ playing records in 1949 ? 1950 , when most record companies were hastily transferring their entire catalogues onto the new medium . The recording was made available briefly in simulated stereo in the 1960s , and was reissued in the 1970s in the original mono . The original cast recording was released on compact disc in 1993 .

A studio recording of the complete score was made in 2008 , with an all @-@ star cast featuring Patrick Wilson as Joe , Nathan Gunn and Audra McDonald as his parents , Marni Nixon as Grandma , Laura Benanti as Jennie , Liz Callaway as Emily , Judy Kuhn as Beluh , Norbert Leo Butz as Charlie , with special appearances by Stephen Sondheim , Schuyler Chapin and , through archival audio recordings , Oscar Hammerstein . The album , produced by Sony Masterworks Broadway , was released on February 3 , 2009 . According to musical theatre author John Kenrick , " this all star studio cast glorifies all that is right with this melodious and sometimes adventurous score " .

Vocalist Jo Stafford had a pop hit with ' The Gentleman Is A Dope ' in 1947 .

= = Critical reception = =

The musical received mixed reviews following its opening night . The New York Times critic Brooks Atkinson opined that Rodgers and Hammerstein had " just missed the final splendor of a perfect work of art " . Robert Coleman of the New York Daily Mirror stated that " Allegro is perfection " , and added that it was " a stunning blending of beauty , integrity , intelligence , imagination , taste and skill ... it lends new stature to the American musical stage " . Ward Morehouse of The Sun wrote that Allegro was " distinguished and tumultuous . It takes its place alongside of Oklahoma ! and Carousel as a theatrical piece of taste , imagination , and showmanship . "

However , Wolcott Gibbs of The New Yorker called the musical " a shocking disappointment " . Robert Garland , in the New York Journal American suggested that Rodgers and Hammerstein " had confused allegro [which means at a fast pace] with , say , lento , which means ' slow ' , ' unhurried ' , and even downright ' serious ' " . Critic George Jean Nathan , in a special piece in the Journal American , decried " such hokum mush as the familiar wedding scene and the ghost of a mother who returns at intervals to keep her son from error , but a cocktail party chatterbox number paraphrased from an old Noël Coward movie , a college number dittoed from an earlier George Abbott one , and various other elements hardly rivaling the daisy in freshness " . In Theatre Arts , Cecil Smith called Allegro " acceptable only as an exercise in stagecraft , not as a work of art ... Allegro fails where Our Town succeeded ... Joseph Taylor , Jr . ' s life has little or nothing to tell us about our own lives . " Louis Kronenberger of New York P.M. called the show " an out @-@ and @-@ out failure . "

De Mille 's direction and choreography were reviewed generally positively ; Cecil Smith applauded her for the " ease and flawless design with which Miss de Mille brings mobility to these non @-@ dancing [singing and speaking choruses] ... no previous musical has approached Allegro in consistency of movement , expertness of timing and shapeliness of visual patterns . Times dance critic John Martin stated , " Allegro has definitely made history " for de Mille 's giving " form and substance to material with little of either " . Dance Magazine praised her for creating " the illusion of space and depth far beyond the confines of the proscenium " .

As the disagreement continued past the opening night , Wayne Abrams wrote in the Chicago Sun @-@ Times , " Nobody is neutral about Allegro . The Hammerstein @-@ Rodgers @-@ de Mille musical play is either nigh unto perfection or a dismal flop . There 's that much room for disagreement . "

= = Aftermath = =

Hammerstein was embittered by audience and critical reaction to his book , and felt they misunderstood it . Public perception was that Hammerstein had implied that small @-@ town folk were good while their big @-@ city cousins were neurotic and venal . The lyricist objected , pointing out that the worst character in the musical was a small @-@ town girl , but according to Hammerstein biographer Hugh Fordin , " he knew it was his fault that the message was not clear . " In a preface to the published script , issued in 1948 , Hammerstein tried again to make his point :

It is a law of our civilization , that as soon as a man proves he can contribute to the well @-@ being of the world , there be created an immediate conspiracy to destroy his usefulness , a conspiracy in which he is usually a willing collaborator . Sometimes he awakens to his danger and does something about it .

According to Frederick Nolan , in his book about the pair 's music , " Reexamined today , Allegro 's main fault seems to have been that it was ahead of its time , the integration of story and music far too advanced even for audiences now becoming accustomed to musicals which actually had stories . " Sondheim noted , " Allegro was an attempt to use epic theatre in contemporary musical theatre . It used a Greek chorus , and tried to tell the story of a life , not through events but through generalities . This is now what would be called a Brechtian approach . "

A decade after Allegro 's premiere , after learning of his fatal cancer , Hammerstein returned to the musical , hoping to correct its flaws , but he did not complete the project . While recording an oral history tape for Columbia University , Hammerstein stated , " I intended Dick to write music for it [

the chorus in Allegro] but we wound up reciting the chorus instead ... I 'm not blaming anyone , because we all accepted it , we all collaborated ... but it was a mistake . " Rodgers later stated that the show was " too preachy , which was the one fault that Oscar had , if any , " and " [n] othing to be ashamed of , certainly " . Rodgers further defended the play , " The comments we made on the compromises demanded by success , as well as some of the satiric side issues ? hypochondria , the empty cocktail party ? still hold . "

The relative failure of Allegro reinforced the team 's determination to have another hit . Author James Michener recalled his meeting with the duo over the possibility of converting his book Tales of the South Pacific into a musical . " They were inwardly burning because of the reception accorded to Allegro . Those fellows were so mad I was fairly certain that they could make a great musical out of the Bronx telephone directory . " That project would become South Pacific and be a tremendous hit .

Hischak ties the failure of Allegro to a change in the pair 's style :

The failure of Allegro only partially tarnished the reputation of Rodgers and Hammerstein ; after all , it was a very respectable flop . Yet the long @-@ term repercussions were more serious . Never again would R & H experiment so boldly and risk losing their audience . They would continue to come up with surprising and wonderful things , but the days of radical and foolhardy innovation were over . From then on they would stick to the tried and true . Allegro marked the end of the R & H revolution .

= = Awards and nominations = =

= = = Original Broadway production = = =