ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Original Musicals of the Federal Theatre Project: Relief, Relevance, and Regionalism

Eric Winship Trumbull, Master of Arts, 1983

Thesis directed by: Dr. R. T. O'Leary
Associate Professor
Department of Communication Arts and Theatre

To help relieve problems of unemployment during the Depression, the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) from 1935 to 1939 provided government-sponsored jobs to an average of ten thousand theatre workers per year. Plagued by censorship and criticism, the FTP nevertheless managed to present performances of over eight hundred fifty shows. Three hundred nine of them were original shows, and of the originals, twenty-nine were musicals.

This thesis is a critical and historical analysis of the FTP's original musicals. They are analyzed in order to assess their success in achieving the Federal Theatre's aims of supplying relief employment, socially relevant theatre, and regional drama. As such, this study is the first comprehensive survey of the FTP's original musicals.

After Chapter Two examines the Depression, this thesis studies the sixteen musicals for which scripts and materials are available. Chapter Three surveys the FTP's pastiche musicals. Chapter Four discusses revues, and book musicals are examined in Chapter Five. Chapter Six concludes and evaluates the material.

The musicals examined often realized the FTP's goals of relief, relevance, and regionalism, though seldom were all three objectives achieved in equal measure. Frequently, the aims of relief and regionalism overshadowed that of relevance. Furthermore, the musicals' attempts to reach FTP objectives hindered their ability to survive on stage fifty years later. Therefore, most of the musicals were somewhat successful by FTP standards, but their value as enduring works of American musical theatre is limited.

APPROVAL SHEET

Title of thesis: Original Musicals of the Federal Theatre Project: Relief, Relevance, and Regionalism

Name of Candidate: Eric Winship Trumbull
Master of Arts, 1983

Thesis and abstract approved: Ronald T. O'Leary

Ronald T. O'Leary, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Communication
Arts and Theatre

Date Approved: August 10, 1983

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Eric Winship Trumbull.

Permanent address: 6201 64th Ave.#4
E. Riverdale, MD 20737.

Degree and date to be conferred: M.A., 1983.

Date of birth: December 7, 1950.

Place of birth: Schenectady, New York.

Secondary education: Woodrow Wilson High School
Chesapeake and Nebraska Avenues
Washington D.C. 20015
June 1969.

College institutions attended:	Dates	Degree	Date of Degree
American Academy of Dramatic Arts	1970-72	Certificate of Graduation	1972.
Frostburg State College	1976-79	B.S.	1979.
University of Maryland	1981-83	M.A.	1983.

Major: Theatre.

Minor: English.

Professional positions held:

Graduate Teaching Assistant University of Maryland	Acting, Speech, Theatre 1981-83.
Secondary School Teacher Beall Senior-Junior High School. Frostburg, Maryland	Drama and Speech, English, American History 1979-81.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Many people have been helpful and supportive in my efforts to write this thesis. First, to my advisor, Ronald O'Leary, I give special thanks; his patience and advice have guided me throughout my studies. To the entire theatre faculty goes my gratitude for their encouragement. The resource librarians at the Library of Congress Federal Theatre Project Collection at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, were most helpful in showing me through the labyrinth of FTP papers. Joanne and Maxx, proofreaders and spiritual advisors, gave me invaluable assistance. And finally, to my parents, Bettina and Van Vechten Trumbull, most gentle yet critical editors, goes my love and devotion and so much more than thanks.

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Original Musicals of the Federal Theatre Project: Relief, Relevance, and Regionalism

Eric Winship Trumbull, Master of Arts, 1983

Thesis directed by: Dr. R.T. O'Leary
Associate Professor
Department of Communication
Arts and Theatre

To help relieve problems of unemployment during the Depression, the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) from 1935 to 1939 provided government-sponsored jobs to an average of ten thousand theatre workers per year. Plagued by censorship and criticism, the FTP nevertheless managed to present performances of over eight hundred fifty shows. Three hundred nine of them were original shows, and of the originals, twenty-nine were musicals.

This thesis is a critical and historical analysis of the FTP's original musicals. They are analyzed in order to assess their success in achieving the Federal Theatre's aims of supplying relief employment, socially relevant theatre, and regional drama. As such, this study is the first comprehensive survey of the FTP's original musicals.

After Chapter Two examines the background of the Depression, this thesis studies the sixteen musicals for which scripts and materials are available. Chapter Three surveys the FTP's pastiche musicals. Chapter Four discusses revues, and book musicals are examined in Chapter Five. Chapter Six evaluates the material and offers conclusions.

The musicals examined often realized the FTP's goals of relief, relevance, and regionalism, though seldom were all three objectives achieved in equal

measure. Frequently, the aims of relief and regionalism overshadowed that of relevance. Furthermore, the musicals' attempts to reach FTP objectives hindered their ability to survive on stage fifty years later. Therefore, most of the musicals were somewhat successful by FTP standards, but their value as enduring works of American musical theatre is limited.

ORIGINAL MUSICALS OF THE FEDERAL THEATRE

PROJECT: RELIEF, RELEVANCE,

AND REGIONALISM

by
Eric Winship Trumbull

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of the University of Maryland in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
1983

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Great Depression of the 1930s in America brought hard times to people from all walks of life. High unemployment and a crippled economy affected all sectors of American society. To help cure the fevered economic machine of the United States during the Depression, President Franklin Roosevelt instituted economic and social programs of many kinds to try to help banking, business, farmers, railroads, shipping, labor unions, and other sectors of U. S. society.

Out of Roosevelt's "New Deal" came the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a sweeping program formed in 1935 to relieve problems of massive unemployment.. Headed by Harry Hopkins, the WPA aimed to give "socially useful" jobs to both blue-and white-collar workers who needed employment and were willing and able to work.[1]

The white-collar unemployed included people in the arts. To give them jobs, four arts projects were formed, in music, art, writing, and theatre. The Federal Theatre Project received more criticism than the other projects

---

[1] "Unemployed Arts," Fortune, May 1937, p. 175.

for being unnecessary, inefficient, and un-American. After four years, Congress legislated it out of existence by cutting off its funds.

The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) employed performers, directors, designers, stagehands, and other theatre personnel, and it presented free or inexpensive entertainment to many Americans from 1935 to 1939. It produced many standard shows but also fostered new plays and musicals, adding valuable dramatic literature to America's heritage.

The FTP made a significant contribution to the economic survival of the American theatre artist by employing an average of ten thousand people per year,[1] at its height supplying jobs for twelve thousand.[2] Audiences for all performances are estimated to total twenty-five million.[3] The FTP gave approximately twelve hundred productions of eight hundred fifty major works during its four years. New plays totaled three hundred nine, and twenty-nine of those were new musicals.[4] These musicals

---

[1]Jane De Hart Mathews, The Federal Theatre, 1935-1939: Plays, Relief, and Politics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 304.

[2]Emil John Poggi, Theatre in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 161.

[3]Tony Buttitta and Barry Witham, Uncle Sam Presents: A Memoir of the Federal Theatre, 1935-1939 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 231.

[4]Hallie Flanagan, Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre (N.Y.: Benjamin Blom, 1940; rpt. 1965), pp. 380-99.

Flanagan, "regional theatres developing native plays and original methods of production shall be encouraged."[1] Attempting to mold the FTP into "a federation of theatres" centrally administered yet locally run,[2] Flanagan hoped the FTP would develop dramatic literature arising from customs, history, and traditions of each particular region.

I will examine the FTP's original musicals for which scripts are available. I will use the scripts themselves, actual production notebooks, and other primary material relating to the musicals. I will try to determine to what extent the musicals, the productions and the scripts, fulfilled the requirements established by Flanagan and her associates: establishing relief employment, presenting theatre relevant to the concerns of the day, and developing a theatre based on regional concerns.

Detailed discussion of the criteria for selecting musicals to be examined appears in Chapter Two. Sixteen musicals for which scripts are available receive consideration in this study. The sixteen shows have been placed in three different categories according to form and content, and will be discussed in Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

---

[1] Flanagan, p. 29.

[2] Ibid., p. 23.

merit a detailed study, one which will assess their contribution to American musical theatre within the limitations established by the Federal Theatre's goals and purposes.

The FTP had as its major goal the quick re-employment of theatre personnel on relief rolls.[1] But Hallie Flanagan, National Director of the FTP for its four years, wanted relevant theatre as well:

> New days are upon us and the plays that we do and the ways that we do them should be informed by our consciousness of the art and economics of 1935. . . . . The theatre must become conscious of the implications of the changing social order, or the changing social order will ignore, and rightly, the implications of the theatre.[2]

Both Hopkins and Flanagan felt that theatre could play a valuable role by uniting audiences in a conviction that social ills should be cured.[3] Francis Bosworth, head of the Project's Play Bureau in 1936, said that the FTP would be measured by the writers it fosters; he paralleled Flanagan's opinion by suggesting that new plays done by the Project should embody the spirit of the thirties.[4]

Not only were supplying relief and presenting relevant theatre the FTP's goals. Its goals also included encouraging regional drama. "Whenever possible," said

---

[1]Flanagan, p. 29; Mathews, p. 9.

[2]Flanagan, pp. 45-6.

[3]Mathews, p. 32.

[4]Clarence J. Wittler, Some Social Trends in W.P.A. Drama (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1939), p. 41.

The term "musical" in this study refers to a theatrical entertainment in which song and music, on the one hand, and dramatic speech and action on the other, play more or less equal parts. The terms "musical comedy" or "musical drama" will be used only when a distinction is necessary.[3] The terms "FTP" and "Project" refer to the entire Federal Theatre Project. "Original FTP musicals" refer to musicals written in the twentieth century which were rehearsed and/or presented for the first time by Federal Theatre personnel.

The scripts for the musicals provide the foundation of this study. Each is examined along with other primary materials. The Library of Congress Federal Theatre Project Collection at George Mason University Libraries houses thirteen of the available scripts and also provides photographs, programs, correspondence, and taped interviews with many of those connected with the FTP. The records of the WPA at the National Archives also provide valuable primary materials about the Project, including letters, memos, and the script to one musical. Also, similar primary materials are included in the papers of Hallie Flanagan, kept in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at New York City's Lincoln Center Public Library.

---

[1]For detailed discussion of the distinction between musical comedy and musical drama, see Gerald Bordman, American Musical Comedy: From "Adonis" to "Dreamgirls" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 3-8.

Other sources used in this study fall into several categories. The first of these includes books, dissertations, and portions of books dealing with the Federal Theatre itself. Most helpful of the books is Hallie Flanagan's Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre.[1] As National Director of the FTP, Flanagan had extensive knowledge of the Project's activities; her book contains the most detailed primary account and is invaluable to any study of the Federal Theatre. Emmet Lavery's The Flexible Stage: The Federal Theatre in Profile surveys the FTP and its productions.[2] Lavery was an accomplished playwright who headed the FTP's Play Bureau during its last few years; his unpublished manuscript devotes a chapter to FTP musicals and contains an appendix which gives specific data about FTP productions. Jane De Hart Mathews's 1967 The Federal Theatre, 1935-1939: Plays, Relief, and Politics examines the FTP as a national institution.[3] While containing neither detailed case studies nor literary or dramatic analysis, her carefully-researched material proves essential.

---

[1] Flanagan.

[2] Emmet Lavery, The Flexible Stage: The Federal Theatre in Profile, (n.p.: 1941); Lavery's unpublished manuscript can be found at the Library of Congress Federal Theatre Project Collection at George Mason University Libraries, Fairfax, Virginia (hereinafter referred to as George Mason University).

[3] Mathews.

Willson Whitman during the Project's third year wrote Bread and Circuses: A Study of Federal Theatre.[1] Her book praises the FTP and offers useful insights into the Project's activities. Free, Adult, Uncensored, by John O'Connor and Lorraine Brown, gathers posters, photographs, and other materials from George Mason University's FTP collection, and it captures the flavor of the Federal Theatre era.[2] The most recent book about the FTP comes from Tony Buttitta and Barry Witham. Buttitta was a press agent for the FTP, and his Uncle Sam Presents is a valuable memoir.[3] Two other books were of limited value: E. Quita Craig's Black Drama of the Federal Theatre Era and Clarence J. Wittler's Some Social Trends in W.P.A. Drama.[4] Each offers detailed study of FTP plays, but neither discusses musicals.

Dissertations on specific elements of the Project are helpful in supplying information. Especially valuable

---

[1]Willson Whitman, Bread and Circuses: A Study of Federal Theatre (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1937).

[2]John O'Connor and Lorraine Brown, Free, Adult, Uncensored: the Living History of the Federal Theatre Project (Washington, D.C.: New Republic Books, 1978).

[3]Buttitta and Witham.

[4]E. Quita Craig, Black Drama of the Federal Theatre Era (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); see also Wittler.

is Kreizenbeck's study of the FTP's "forgotten" productions, which contains a chapter on minstrel and vaudeville activites.[1] Many books which comment on the FTP include discussion of the theatre of social consciousness, while other books taking a less limited approach also provide useful information about the American theatre of the thirties.[2]

For background information on American musical theatre, this study relies on various books by authorities in that field.[3] Books on history and on American show business supply further material on the political, social, and economic climate of the United States during the Depression.[4]

This study uses the resources mentioned above to examine the original musicals of the FTP. To determine the extent to which the musicals satisfied the Project's aims, Chapter Two provides a brief discussion of the social, economic, and political framework of the Depression Era from which the FTP developed, and it explains which musicals are examined and why. Chapters Three, Four, and Five

---

[1]Alan D. Kreizenbeck, "The Theatre Nobody Knows: Forgotten Productions of the Federal Theatre Project, 1935-1939" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1979); other dissertations are listed in the bibliography.

[2]Each source is listed in the bibliography and will be cited when necessary.

[3]See the bibliography; sources will be cited when necessary.

[4]Listed in the bibliography; cited when necessary.

examine and analyze the musicals themselves. Chapter Six offers conclusions and evaluates the information presented.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND TO THE THIRTIES AND FTP'S ORIGINAL MUSICALS

To help place the FTP and its original musicals in an historical framework and to understand the conditions from which this body of work developed, the social, political, and artistic background of America during the Depression should be examined. This chapter will explore that background, focusing first on the economic conditions of the Depression which led to unprecedented unemployment and thus to the WPA's Federal Theatre Project as part of Roosevelt's New Deal. Next, the political background of the thirties will be discussed, with concentration on labor unrest and conflicting political doctrines, and finally the eventual demise of the Federal Theatre. The third area of discussion concerns the theatre of the thirties, and the fourth covers thirties musicals. Finally, a detailed explanation of which musicals are to be examined concludes the chapter.

Economic Background

In the last year of the 1920s, a decade of an apparently prosperous but in fact endangered economy, the stock market crash brought America face-to-face with world

economic problems. Weaknesses in our agricultural economic system and an increasing dependence on the industrial urban machine brought devastating unemployment to America.[1] Herbert Hoover as President tried to curb unemployment difficulties by a tenuous and timid balance of labor and industry desires; however, during the winter of 1930-31, unemployment exceeded four million, and by March of 1931, eight million were unemployed. President Hoover tried to help the economy, but he did not think desperate measures were necessary because prosperity was just around the corner. Roosevelt and those who elected him next in 1932, on the other hand, did think action needed to be taken.[2]

When Roosevelt was elected in 1932, the national income was half that of 1929, and unemployment reached twelve million (or one out of every four American workers). Corn was at its lowest price since the Civil War.[3] Wheat also was in surplus; it cost less than it had in four hundred years.[4] Worldwide production had declined by thirty-eight percent between 1929 and 1938, and international trade had fallen by two-thirds.[5]

---

[1] Robert G. Athearn, The American Heritage New Illustrated History of the United States, Vol. 14: The Roosevelt Era (N.Y.: Dell, 1963), p. 1176.

[2] Ibid.

[3] R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton, A History of the Modern World, 3rd edition (N.Y.: Knopf, 1968), p. 781.

[4] Athearn, p. 1179.

[5] Palmer and Colton, pp. 779-81.

Roosevelt outlined a program of bold executive action to wage war on the Depression.[1] His New Deal legislation combined recovery, relief, and reform in "a program of improvisation and experimentation."[2] Passing legislation which opened banks (three-fourths of the nation's Federal Reserve banks opened within two weeks of Roosevelt's inauguration),[3] the Roosevelt administration proceeded to nurse the weakened economy. Alphabetical agencies grew: the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in early 1933 found jobs for 250,000 young men[4] and the National Recovery Administration (NRA) initiated measures to use young men to preserve forest resources, 2,000,000 eventually participating.[5] Harry Hopkins headed the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), which was given five hundred million dollars to spend, putting money back into circulation.[6]

---

[1] Athearn, p. 1182.

[2] Palmer and Colton, p. 786.

[3] Athearn.

[4] "Unemployed Arts," p. 174.

[5] Athearn, p. 1183.

[6] Ibid.

These measures helped in part to strengthen the economy of the early thirties. By mid-decade, the focus of New Deal programs shifted, say Palmer and Colton: "The tempo of the New Deal reform after 1935 quickened, and moved in the direction of aiding labor and the little man."[1] Out of these conditions came Roosevelt's unique WPA to form jobs for the nation's unemployed. Headed by Hopkins, the WPA instituted the four arts projects in music, art, theatre, and writing. These arts projects used less than three-fourths of one percent of the total appropriation of money to the WPA,[2] yet were subjected to frequent criticism. The Federal Theatre was the project which aroused the greatest controversy and was loudly damned for being unnecessary, poorly-run, and undemocratic.

Political Background

During the Depression the American laborer certainly suffered no less than most, but organized labor's strength and support from the government increased. A number of laws passed which helped labor. The Fair Labor Standard Act established a forty-hour work week, set a minimum wage, and abolished child labor.[3] The Social Security Act in 1935

---

[1]Palmer and Colton, p. 788.

[2]Gerald Rabkin, Drama and Commitment: Politics in the American Theatre of the Thirties (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 121.

[3]Palmer and Colton, p. 788.

provided for unemployment insurance. The National Labor Relations Act (or Wagner Act), "guaranteed the right of workers to set up and bargain through unions of their own choice" without fear of discrimination by employers.[1] Passage of these laws let labor unions in America know the federal government supported them in their efforts to organize. Union membership had doubled from 1929 to 1940[2] and in 1936 was between four and five million.[3] In the struggle to strengthen its position, organized labor waged a strike of maritime workers in 1936, idling West Coast ports. The strike spread to Eastern and Gulf ports, taking three months to settle. In December of 1936, the United Auto Workers held a strike for recognition by General Motors which continued for forty-four days and paralyzed sixty factories in fourteen states. Violence almost erupted between strikers and National Guardsmen, but General Motors eventually gave in, recognizing the UAW in seventeen of its plants. In 1937, approximately forty-five hundred strikes occurred,[4] including a march on Republic Steel in Chicago,[5]

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 788-9.

[3] Athearn, p. 1223.

[4] Ibid., pp. 1183-4.

[5] Ethan Mordden, Better Foot Forward: A History of American Musical Theatre (N.Y.: Grossman, 1976), p. 164.

and strikes against minor steel companies which resulted in loss of life during battles between strikers and policemen.[1]

Europe during the thirties had developed some dictatorships wrought from economic desperation and fear. But the U.S. did not go the way of Spain, Italy, Germany, or of Communistic Russia. Roosevelt's actions were not the totalitarian measures of those countries, though some of his programs were considered Communistic by many Americans. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), set up for the betterment of the poor Tennessee Valley region by supplying electrical power, flood control, reforestation, and land renewal, was called socialistic because of its "unprecedented incursion into what had been primarily private sectors of the economy."[2] Battles with the Supreme Court over the constitutionality of many of Roosevelt's actions tested the Chief Executive's powers. Often his policies were considered undemocratic. In fact, a Congress fearful of the political events in Europe and of socialistic influence killed the Federal Theatre Project after four years.

While many Americans belonged to the American Communist Party and affiliated themselves with leftist organizations, many others sympathized with organizations of

---

[1]Mathews, p. 123.

[2]Athearn, p. 1186.

the far right which advocated a fascist dictatorship in the U. S. similar to those in Spain, Italy, or Germany. For example, in his study of American Nazism, author Leland Bell states that Fritz Kuhn led the German-American Bund in 1936 as it unified fascist splinter groups. The Bund tried to plant Nazism in America through fierce pronouncements, and its extremism created fear and hatred and often resulted in violence. The Bund was suppressed in December of 1941 after investigation resulted in a lawsuit which banned it.[1]

Other fascist organizations besides the Bund existed in the U. S. While Blackshirts in Italy[2] and Brownshirts in Germany (also known as Hitler's private army of "storm-troopers")[3] controlled the populace in Europe, other fascist groups using "shirts" in their name arose in America. The Silver Shirts of William Dudley Pelley and his Galahad Press published the anti-Semitic Pelley's Weekly.[4]

By the last year of the FTP, the New Deal was mostly over. The Roosevelt administration focused instead on the "gathering storm in Europe and the Far East."[5] But when the FTP was formed in August of 1935, it was at the high tide of New

---

[1]Leland V. Bell, In Hitler's Shadow: The Anatomy of American Nazism (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1973), pp. 17, 5, and 4.

[2]Palmer and Colton, p. 801; Shepard B. Clough, et al, A History of the Western World: 1715 to the Present, 2nd ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1969), p. 1249.

[3]Palmer and Colton, p. 807.

[4]Buttitta and Witham, p. 81; Bell, p. 47.

[5]Palmer and Colton, pp. 789-90.

Deal reformism," and the FTP reflected the aims of many Americans and of the New Deal.[1] That same spirit of reform infected the theatre of the thirties, of which Federal Theatre productions were a part.

Theatre in the Thirties: Social and Political Comment

Drama of the Depression in America expressed the social and political attitudes which helped form it. One characteristic of the theatre in the thirties was a growing tendency toward social consciousness and political awareness. A belief that the world has problems which need fixing showed itself in the theatre. According to Emory Lewis, the spirit was contagious:

> Even the more conservative playwrights felt the change in the climate, and they all began to tilt slightly left of center. Never before or since has there been such commitment in the theatre.[2]

Miller points out a major characteristic of labor plays with a leftist slant: they end "on an optimistic feeling that the people are about to assume their rightful place in American society."[3] Commercial theatre reflected

---

[1]Mathews, p. 307.

[2]Emory Lewis, Stages: The Fifty-Year Childhood of the American Theatre (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 58.

[3]M. Lawrence Miller, "Original Federal Theatre Protest Plays -- 1935-1939: The New Deal Contributions to the American Drama of Social Concern" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1968), p. 167.

the same concerns, though in his dissertation, Miller emphasizes that the "more cautious social plays" presented by the commercial stage, such as Dead End or Street Scene, did not lean as far to the left as plays presented by such groups as the Theatre Union and the Group Theatre, including such plays as Clifford Odets's Waiting for Lefty and Paul Green and Kurt Weill's musical Johnny Johnson.[1] Sam Smiley agrees, in his book on thirties didactic theatre, suggesting that commercial dramas such as Tobacco Road and Dead End gained their popularity primarily as a result of "exaggerated emphasis on their theatrical, comic, and sensational aspects rather than their social comment."[2] Robert Vaughn in his study of show business blacklisting suggests that, in the theatre of the thirties, contrasts between rich and poor were depicted "for the purpose of ironic contemplation rather than violent destruction of the existing social order."[3]

In the theatre of the thirties, then, social consciousness was a strong factor. Theatre people were beginning to realize what a powerful weapon they controlled.[4]

---

[1]Miller, p. viii.

[2]Sam Smiley, The Drama of Attack: Didactic Plays of the American Depression (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1972), p. 85.

[3]Robert Vaughn, Only Victims: A Study of Show Business Blacklisting (New York: Putnam, 1972), p. 43.

[4]Mordden, p. 165; Whitman, p. 104.

In fact, some shows had social consciousness imposed on otherwise apolitical plots and themes. For example, Gerald Rabkin writes that the major significance of FTP's Chalk Dust lies in the fact that the authors felt it necessary to "superimpose social significance upon a quite conventional love story."[1] The authors, Harold H. Clark and Maxwell Nurnberg, in a postscript to the play, seem to sum up the thirties attitude about social significance in the theatre. They claim that they placed a social theme on the play after they wrote it, explaining that "a play that dealt merely with personal relationships no longer seemed to present a complete picture of the school life of today."[2] Social awareness became such an important element in theatre that John Houseman was prompted to comment, "Every Broadway producer is looking for a labor play."[3]

The Federal Theatre Project mirrored the decade's social concerns. In fact, Anita Block considers the FTP to be the "symbolic epitome" of G.B. Shaw's social drama.[4]

---

[1]Rabkin, p. 109.

[2]Clark and Nurnberg quoted in Rabkin, p. 109.

[3]Houseman quoted in Flanagan, p. 197.

[4]Anita Block, The Changing World in Plays and Theatre (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), p. 306.

Edmond M. Gagey as well notes that the FTP made a significant contribution because of its production of drama of social significance.[1] Flanagan herself seemed to consider social consciousness even more important than artistic excellence, in some ways. She felt that social awareness was necessary. A memorandum which carries Flanagan's views gives directions to FTP units around the country regarding the productions of It Can't Happen Here:

> . . . . Avoid all controversial issues--political angles of any degree--special appeals--racial or group appeals--or inferences in any of these directions, since Federal Theatre is interested only in presenting good theatre, neither adopting nor assuming any viewpoint beyond presenting a new and vital drama of our times, emerging from the social and economic forces of the day. . .[2]

Rabkin suggests the inherent incompatibility of Flanagan's wish for an apolitical yet relevant drama:

> Of course, it was to some extent naive to assume that such a vital, contemporary drama as that desired by the directors of the project could totally avoid assuming any political viewpoint, and the Federal Theatre plays inevitably reveal various social concerns and solutions. But the tenor of the directive is clear: the directors of the Federal Theatre, . . . aspired to a non-sectarian social drama, a drama which affirmed the necessity of facing social issues, but which avoided a dogmatically consistent political position upon these issues.[3]

---

[1]Edmond M. Gagey, Revolution in American Drama (New York: Columbia Press, 1947; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 168.

[2]E. E. McCleish quoted in Flanagan, p. 121.

[3]Rabkin, pp. 102-3.

Flanagan did not say what Federal Theatre plays should say, but she felt that they should say something.

Perhaps Flanagan and her associates considered plays with social comment more valuable than plays with high artistic quality. Buttitta hints at Flanagan's preference; he says that Flanagan felt the play It Can't Happen Here was not "a strong one, but it had a provocative idea and, as the audience listened, she was pleased to see that it was moved."[1] Not only were the dramatic plays of the FTP socially-conscious; its musicals contain some social comment as well. They reflect to some degree the theatre's growing awareness of social problems in the thirties, an awareness which reached musicals of the commercial stage as well.

Censorship on the Federal Theatre Project

Federal Theatre productions faced different restrictions from those of the commercial theatre. As a government-sponsored theatre, the FTP met with censorship in varying forms. The very first show slated to open in New York City was censored by WPA officials in Washington. Jacob Baker, Relief Administrator for the WPA, wrote to Flanagan in January of 1936, reacting to the depiction of Haile Selassie in the Living Newspaper Ethiopia. He ordered that no representation of current ministers or heads of foreign states

---

[1]Buttitta and Witham, p. 89.

should occur in Living Newspapers. He shortly modified his order to allow the use of actual quotes, so long as the ruler or minister did not appear as a character on stage.[1] Playwright Elmer Rice, who had feared government interference when he accepted the job as Director of the New York City project, resigned immediately. Rice stated that the fear of international complications was nothing but a pretext for censoring FTP productions.[2] The press played up Rice's resignation and the reasons for it, Flanagan remarks, and many reporters assumed that all FTP productions with social content would be banned. However, she notes, despite the loss of Rice to the Federal Theatre, the publicity surrounding his resignation may have helped to keep the FTP as free from censorship as it was.[3]

Other instances of censorship occurred, though. Flanagan states that the Denver production of Rice's The Adding Machine had censorship problems.[4] Furthermore, Willson Whitman notes that in the San Francisco production of Triple-A Ploughed Under the character of Communist Presidential candidate Earl Browder was eliminated from the show "just to avoid trouble." Triple-A had been severely criticized by the Saturday Evening Post for its use of the Browder character.[5] And in Seattle, local WPA officials closed the

---

[1]Flanagan, p. 65-6; Mathews, p. 65.
[2]Mathews, p. 66-7.
[3]Flanagan, p. 67.
[4]Ibid, p. 296.
[5]Whitman, p. 100.

Negro production of Aristophanes's Lysistrata, after having heard complaints from two people.[1]

Perhaps the most widely-known story of censorship on the FTP concerns the closing of The Cradle Will Rock in 1937. The order to prohibit any new plays from opening was disguised as sound administrative economics, but many thought it was blatant censorship. Since The Cradle Will Rock is examined in Chapter Five of this study, the story of its opening will be related there. The events surrounding Cradle threw a bright spotlight on the FTP and its attempts to provide a theatre relevant to the times.

Often subject to sharp criticism and even direct censorship, the FTP encountered many difficulties. Most crucial of these problems was not censorship, however, but rather simply staying alive. Congress appropriated enough money to support the FTP for four years. But finally, in 1939, Congress acted as ultimate censor. It withdrew its support and the Federal Theatre ended.

The End of the Federal Theatre Project

The FTP was terminated by Act of Congress on June 30, 1939. Flanagan says it was ostensibly an economy move, but that the real reason was that many in Congress "treated the Federal Theatre not as a human issue or a cultural issue, but as a political issue."[2] Ending the FTP

---

[1] Flanagan, p. 305.

[2] Ibid., pp. 334-5

saved no money. Less than three-fourths of one percent of all WPA appropriations went to the arts projects, of which the FTP was a part. No money was cut from the other arts projects' budgets after the end of the FTP; the money saved by stopping the FTP was simply distributed among the other arts projects.[1]

In summer of 1938 the House Committee on Un-American Activities (the Dies Committee) began to investigate the FTP.[2] Since the inception of the Project, it had met with charges of Communism by conservatives both in and out of Congress who disagreed with New Deal policies.[3] J. Parnell Thomas of New Jersey, a Republican member of the Dies Committee, announced that the Committee would investigate the Project for evidence of un-American activities. He stated why he thought the Project should be terminated : "The Federal Theatre Project not only is serving as a branch of the Communistic organization but is also one more link in the vast and unparalleled New Deal propaganda machine."[4] Flanagan wanted to respond to the charges, but

---

[1]Flanagan, pp. 334-5.

[2]Ibid., p. 335.

[3]Mathews, p. 199.

[4]J. Parnell Thomas, New York Times, July 27, 1938, p. 19, quoted in August Raymond Ogden, The Dies Committee: A Study of the Special House Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities, 1938-1944 (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 1945), p. 48.

she received orders from WPA officials in Washington to avoid commenting on charges of Communism.[1]

During the Project's last year, it was accused of amateurism, inefficiency, and subversion,[2] and Flanagan was powerless to respond until summoned. She tried to answer the charges when called before the Committee. But when she mentioned Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe and a Committee member mistook Marlowe for a Communist, Flanagan understood that her responses meant little. She realized that the Federal Theatre had been pre-judged by a Congress out to destroy the FTP.[3]

Flanagan had indeed spoken in vain. On January 3, 1939, the Dies Committee, covering in one short paragraph six months of accusations, said that it had concluded that the FTP employed many Communists or Communist sympathizers, and that some employees felt pressured to join the Communist-dominated Workers' Alliance.[4]

The Dies Committee did not kill the FTP, but the Project was mortally wounded. A Sub-committee of the House Committee on Appropriations, headed by Clifton A. Woodrum, began in early 1939 to investigate the FTP. Accusations

---

[1] Flanagan, p. 335; Mathews, p. 199.

[2] Ibid., p. 338.

[3] Ibid., p. 342.

[4] Ibid., p. 347; Mathews, pp. 225-6.

of inefficiency and radicalism again surfaced, much of it based on hearsay evidence similar to that heard in the Dies Committee hearings.[1]

Despite statements supporting the FTP by theatre critics, the Motion Picture Guilds in Hollywood, and stage actors' unions,[2] a bill passed in June of 1939 to continue the arts projects with the same percentage of WPA appropriations as before, but the bill specifically denied funds to the Federal Theatre after June 30, 1939.[3] With the sacrifice of the Federal Theatre Project, the rest of the WPA survived.

In all, eighty-one titles were criticized in Congress or by witnesses before Congressional committees, in Committee hearings, or in public statements for the press or radio, according to Flanagan. Of those eighty-one, only twenty-nine originated with the FTP. Only two of those original titles are musicals: Sing For Your Supper and The Machine Age.[4]

Musicals of the Thirties: Evolution of Content and Form

"Facism, the threat of war, and then the war itself," according to Ewen, "cast their shadows over the

---

[1]Flanagan, p. 351.

[2]Mathews, p. 286.

[3]Ibid., p. 291.

[4]Flanagan, pp. 433-4.

Broadway musical stage, even as they did over the entire country during the closing years of the thirties."[1] Flexner in 1938 claimed that "the most recent development in social drama is along the lines of musical satire," using as an example Pins and Needles, the "first full-blown 'left-revue,'" and citing The Cradle Will Rock.[2] Dixon Wecter even claims that Pins and Needles had "some assistance from the Federal Theatre."[3] Socially-minded themes extended even down to the vaudeville units of the FTP, according to O'Connor and Brown.[4] Mordden states that "artful social comment" was one of the things which "characterized the best of the thirties revues."[5] "Social and political outlook," claims Bordman, "became as important as entertainment value." Later in the decade, however, paralleling the concerns of the New Deal administration, "topicality largely disappeared from the books of new Broadway musicals." Books to musicals had become trite, less bitingly satiric, and less broadly

---

[1]David Ewen, The Story of America's Musical Theatre (N.Y.: Chilton, 1968), p. 153.

[2]Eleanor Flexner, American Playwrights, 1918-1938 (N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1938), p. 306.

[3]Dixon Wecter, The Age of the Great Depression, 1929-1941 (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1948), p. 265.

[4]O'Connor and Brown, p. 138.

[5]Mordden, p. 120.

romantic. At the end of the decade, American musical theatre was "pallid and limp."[1]

American musicals in the thirties "evolved gradually but steadily throughout the decade" partly because "hitherto taboo subjects were treated openly and with relative honesty."[2] But besides demonstrating the social consciousness of the decade, the musical rose to the level of "legitimate" comedy. Writing teams, such as Kaufman and Hart, the Gershwins, Dietz and Schwartz, and Rodgers and Hart, had raised musicals' stature by contributing musicals as continuous narratives with an overall point of view rather than as star vehicles or segues between bits of vaudeville. Moreover, Hammerstein "forced the evolution of the integrated musical," says Mordden, by a "fusion of text and dialogue into scene entities of musical dramatic exposition."[3] Hasbany calls this integration a "narrative, musical, and choreographic coherence."[4] Throughout the twenties and thirties, the musical play began to place its main interest in the story, characters, situations, and ideas rather than

---

[1]Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 503, 515, and 510.

[2]Bordman, American Musical Comedy, p. 150.

[3]Mordden, pp. 150-1.

[4]Richard Hasbany, "The Musical Goes Ironic: The Evolution of Genres," Journal of American Culture I (Spring 1978): 120.

in what Ewen calls the "jigsaw puzzle" evident in previous musicals.[1] Librettos were changing, increasing their emphasis on "plausible plots, identifiable characters and settings," as Engel says.[2]

"Real musical theatre," Mordden claims, was "tinkered with in the thirties, triumphant in the forties, distilled and varied thereafter."[3] Musicals in the thirties began to receive the critical concern usually reserved for the dramatic stage. A "hardening of standards" occurred, says Bordman,[4] encouraged by the Pulitzer Prize Committee's awarding of its first prize ever to a musical--Of Thee I Sing. But while musicals gained more respect in the thirties, it was the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein which moved the musical, says Richard Kislan, "from entertainment to art."[5]

As the book musical gained more favor, the variety entertainment of vaudeville lost popularity. The Depression saw the slow death of vaudeville. Its disease,

---

[1]David Ewen, The Story of America's Musical Theatre, p. 159.

[2]Lehman Engel, The American Musical Theatre (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1975), p. 9.

[3]Mordden, p. 118.

[4]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 461.

[5]Richard Kislan, The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theatre (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), p. 134.

says Bob Hope, was "creeping atrophy of the box office muscles induced by the twin viruses, talking movies and radio."[1] Although vaudeville still flourished in London,[2] by the mid-thirties many American vaudevillians lacked jobs. The Federal Theatre Project intended to put many of them back to work.

Federal Theatre's Original Musicals: The Selection of Shows in this Survey

Of the eight hundred fifty major titles in over twelve hundred productions presented by the Federal Theatre in its four-year existence, fifty-one were listed as original, and twenty-nine are listed as original musicals.[3]

This study concerns itself only with musicals Flanagan lists as original and for which scripts are available. This eliminates original shows which Flanagan specifically places in other categories: six classical adaptations, one hundred seven modern dramas, twenty-five dance dramas, thirty-two shows for children, thirteen Negro

---

[1]Bob Hope quoted in William Cahn, A Pictorial History of the Great Comedians (N.Y.: Grosset and Dunlap, 1957; rpt. 1970), p. 132.

[2]Sylvia Froos in Bill Smith, The Vaudevillians (New York: Macmillan, 1976), p. 117.

[3]Flanagan, pp. 377-436.

dramas, eleven pageants and spectacles, twenty-seven puppet shows, twenty religious dramas, and three thousand radio programs a year for three years.[1] Of the twenty-nine original musicals Flanagan lists, the scripts to seventeen are available, sixteen at George Mason University and one at the National Archives. Two shows for which scripts can be found have been eliminated and one show which Flanagan does not list has been added.

Flanagan's list has weaknesses, however. Her distinctions were often cloudy. For instance, The Princess on the Pea appears in her list of original musicals, as a joint production in New York with the Music Project.[2] The program for the production, though, indicates that, not only was the show the American premiere, the FTP had no connection with it.[3] Flanagan also lists The Clown Prince as an original musical, but elsewhere she calls it a children's show.[4] Furthermore, she calls A Hero is Born a children's play; others call it an extravaganza[5] or a

---

[1] Flanagan, pp. 380-399.

[2] Ibid., p. 391

[3] Program, George Mason University.

[4] Flanagan, pp. 391 and 308.

[5] Ibid., p. 318; Burns Mantle, The Best Plays of 1937-38 (N.Y.: Dodd, Mead, 1938), p. 448; John Mason Brown, "Two on the Aisle," New York Post, October 2, 1937, p. 10, Papers of Hallie Flanagan, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York City Public Library at Lincoln Center (hereinafter referred to as Flanagan Papers).

burlesque musical.[1] Even if the scripts for these shows were available, they would have limited application to this study. Flanagan herself notes the inconsistencies in her lists. She states in a 1938 letter that FTP production lists should be reviewed because "even in a cursory study, a great number of plays /are/ listed which we have never done."[2]

The first of the musicals to be eliminated from the study is The Dance of Death by W.H. Auden, with music by Clair Leonard.[3] It premiered in London and not with FTP and therefore does not meet the standards of FTP musicals studied here. Also, little singing, if any, takes place in the show. Malcolm Goldstein calls The Dance of Death "an expressionistic play on the self-destruction of capitalistic society,"[4] in which only dancers were on stage.[5] Buttitta calls it "poetic theatre" and Whitman refers to it as a "ballet production."[6]

---

[1]Mordden, p. 166

[2]Flanagan to John McGee, June 29, 1938, National Archives, Record Group 69, Records of the Works Progress Administration (hereinafter referred to as Archives), General Correspondence of the National Office, FTP Press Clippings, Box 75.

[3]W.H. Auden, The Dance of Death, p. 1, George Mason University.

[4]Malcolm Goldstein, The Political Stage: American Drama and Theatre of the Great Depression (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 264.

[5]Ibid., p. 284.

[6]Buttitta and Witham, p. 50; Whitman, p. 40.

Ashley Dukes makes no mention of singing at all in his review of The Dance of Death; this "spoken ballet" was a combination of acting, movement, and words.[1] The show was so short, says Lavery, that he considered it a poor joke that had to be told twice.[2]

The second musical was eliminated because it was written in 1767 and only produced for the first time by the FTP.[3] The Treasure Hunt (or The Disappointment) was the first comic opera written in America, according to Lavery and Flanagan.[4] The fact that it was written long before the twentieth century hinders its application to this study; as historical document, the musical has interest, but as an example of new musical drama in the FTP, its interest is limited.

Fifteen musicals remain to be examined, and to those fifteen I have added one more for which a script is available but which Flanagan does not list at all. The Cradle Will Rock is perhaps the FTP's most well-known musical, though the FTP never officially presented it. Marc

---

[1]Ashley Dukes, "The English Scene," Theatre Arts Monthly XIX, 12 (December 1935), 906-7.

[2]Lavery, Transcript of interview, January 6, 1976, p. 18, George Mason University.

[3]Flanagan, p. 392.

[4]Lavery, The Flexible Stage, p. 178; Flanagan, p. 446.

Blitzstein's musical, though conceived and written independently of the FTP,[1] was rehearsed first by FTP personnel, and gained much of its fame from the publicity generated because its opening was canceled by WPA administrators in Washington. The Cradle Will Rock is essentially an FTP original, in spirit if not in literal fact.

Sixteen musicals therefore comprise this study. I divide them into three categories according to content and form: those using songs not written for them, which I call pastiche musicals; revues, unified by a theme, idea, or technique but without a specific story; and book musicals, in which songs and dialogue are used to show character, situation, and dramatic conflict.

---

[1] Flanagan, 201.

CHAPTER THREE

PASTICHE MUSICALS

The pasticcio, Kislan states, is "a dramatic work for which the writer, producer, or arranger selected music from the compositions of famous composers to win over the audience with a distinguished and popular musical program." He cites The Beggar's Opera as a famous example. John Gay in 1728 borrowed from other composers--a practice both popular and proper in the eighteenth century.[1]

The Federal Theatre Project did four such pastiche musicals, as they will be called in this study. Two appeared in the Northwest, and two played in New York.

Whitman says that the FTP did "revues which used assorted talents," and that vaudeville entertainers worked on FTP payrolls, especially in its early days.[2] She points out that many of those vaudeville performers were not stars but rather supporting vaudevillians.[3] The shows used traditional songs and regional talent. They were written

---

[1]Kislan, p. 16.

[2]Whitman, p. 46.

[3]Ibid., p. 17-18.

and arranged to give jobs to as many as possible. Discussion of the two shows in the West and then of the two in New York may offer a valid framework for examining the original FTP pastiche musicals, and may determine the extent to which these musicals realized the FTP's goals of relief, relevance, and regionalism.

1. Timberline Tintypes

Timberline Tintypes played for eight non-continuous performances to 1,699 people from August 12 to September 3, 1938.[1] One performance was given at the Timberline Lodge (built by WPA workers),[2] and the other seven at the WPA theatre in Portland, Oregon.[3] The script is the only one in this study not found at George Mason University, but rather at the National Archives. Flanagan says it was "tossed off" by Yasha Frank,[4] and it was considered also by Lavery and by the production notebook to have been written by Frank.[5] The script itself leaves the authorship in doubt. In red pencil at the top of the script is the following: "Written by Portland Project and produced there, 8-12 to

---

[1]Lavery, The Flexible Stage, Appendix; Timberline Tintypes, Production Notebook, George Mason University.

[2]Flanagan, p. 297.

[3]Production Notebook.

[4]Flanagan, p. 300.

[5]Lavery; Production Notebook.

9-10 '38" (p.1).[1] The program indicates that Frank was not the only writer:

Arranged by Mr. Yasha Frank	
Stage Direction	Miss Margaret Barney
Dialogue	by Mr. Mason Moltzner
Dances Directed	by Mr. Jack Biles
Research	Mr. Charles Olsen.[2]

Though the production notebook and other sources cite only Frank as the author, the script and the program suggest otherwise. Perhaps he arranged the material developed by the members of the Portland FTP.

Timberline Tintypes cannot be easily classified. The production notebook claims that the musical is a "farce-melodrama" based on popular entertainment given by "legit" troupers to a group of loggers and tavern frequenters in early Oregon. It is set "in an early Oregon dance hall," [3] and has two scenes. Using "'bits' of a popular appeal of a bygone period,"[4] the show combines songs with melodrama and vaudeville entertainments, including caricatures of loggers, old-timers, and other people of the Northwest.

Timberline Tintypes is a pastiche musical because its songs had already been popular in America. The following songs are sung: "Father, Dear Father, Come Home

---

[1] Page numbers in parentheses refer to Timberline Tintypes, Archives, General Correspondence of the National Office, Box 364.

[2] Timberline Tintypes, Program, George Mason University.

[3] Production Notebook.

[4] Ibid.

With Me Now," "Bertha's Buxom Beauties," "Flory Dory Double Octette" (1900),[1] "Bird in a Gilded Cage" (1900), "Every Little Movement" (1910), "Grand Old Flag," "Daring Young Man on a Flying Trapeze" (1868), "Hearts and Flowers" (1899), and "While Strolling Through the Park One Day" (1868). The spectacular "Flory Glory Double Octette" (also known as the "Floradora Sextet") receives the following treatment in the script: "Eight couples in a big production number perform the classic flirtation piece of the '90's" (p.14).

Traditional dances include a can-can, a cakewalk, and a dance described as follows:

> This is the typical well-dressed city slicker and his pretty little partner; he in tight pants, yellow button shoes, derby hat; she, a vision in swishing silks--the inevitable vaudeville team which opened all bills. (p.13)

The regional director of the Northwest FTP said in a letter to Flanagan that his region consisted of "a peculiar medley of talents."[2] The variety format of Timberline Tintypes molded itself easily around the talent available in the region. "The variety show was the backbone of western show business," Flanagan said,[3] and this show had variety.

---

[1]Publication or copyright dates appear in parentheses, from Julius Mattfeld, Variety Music Cavalcade (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962).

[2]Guy Williams to Flanagan, Dec. 28, 1935, Archives, Central Files, 211.2; Williams refers specifically to Seattle.

[3]Flanagan, p. 271.

Evidence of the use of local talent appears also in the other variety acts. For instance, a character named Birdy Jorgenson, who never appears again, enters without forewarning and performs birdcalls. Jugglers, who also enter without warning, have just exited. A "bucking contest" in which lumberjacks race to saw a huge log takes place, as does a staged knife fight, and a trapeze act. The songs can be varied to accommodate local talent. The production notebook lists the songs as "suggested music,"[1] and the script leaves the cakewalk song open to choice: "Name of no. to be filled in " (p.17). Timberline Tintypes seems indeed to have been made to display the talent available to the Portland project.

Timberline Tintypes opens with Snuse bragging to an Old Timer, a Roughneck, and some loggers, that he, along with five hundred other men, once had a job oiling Paul Bunyon's watch. This American tall tale sets the tone of the American frontier. After variety acts already mentioned, a black porter sings the show's first song, although neither the lyrics nor title for this song are in the script.
This subservient but entertaining black character suggests the place of the black man in the Northwest: he later says, "Yassah, Boss" to a white man (p.9). The entertainment continues with Reginald Actmore and his wife, Priscilla Dainty, ham actors of the nineteenth century who put on a melodrama

---

[1]Production Notebook.

in pseudo-Shakespearean verse. Little Mary pleads vainly with her father to forgive her and accept her illegitimate child. A torch singer tantalizes with her "dark and mysterious young beauty" (p. 14). Other characters include a gambler, a waiter, a professor, and an opera house manager.

Salvation Nell appears in a scene of pathos with an elemental form of social comment. The bum, named Old Barrel-house, orders a drink, recites "The Face on the Barroom Floor," then suddenly falls dead. Salvation Nell kneels at his side, and everyone sings "Bringing in the Sheaves" (p. 7). This may seem an innocuous lesson on the evils of drink, but its shocking placement underscores the message; in an otherwise light-hearted show, the scene stands out by virtue of its seriousness.

The production of Timberline Tintypes employed many different kinds of performers and reflected characteristics of its region. The text of the show contains little social comment but is rather intended for entertainment purposes. Using the talent available in the region, this old-fashioned "hilarious" [1] vaudeville romp of "rip-roaring fun"[2] continued, Flanagan says, a tradition of regional drama which the Project had begun in the Northwest with the Living Newspaper Flax.[1]

---

[1] The Labor New Dealer, Aug. 26, 1938, Production Notebook.

[2] Herbert L. Larson, The Morning Oregonian, Aug. 25, 1938, p. 4.

[3] Flanagan, p. 300; Mathews, p. 144.

2. Tapestry in Linen

Flax and Tapestry in Linen had the same purpose: to present the history of the Oregon flax industry. Both played in the Second Annual Flax Festival at Mt. Angel, Oregon. But while Mathews refers to Flax as "a musical Living Newspaper"[1] and Flanagan does not list Flax at all in her appendix, Tapestry in Linen calls itself "a Musical Drama in the technique of the Living Newspaper."[2] The distinction seems to be arbitrary; even Flanagan's and Lavery's classification of Tapestry in Linen as a musical seems questionable, since the script calls for only one song.

Two performances of Tapestry in Linen took place, on August 14 and 28, 1937, to a total audience of six hundred eight people at the Flax Festival.[3] The script was written by Shotwell Calvert. While a voice on a loudspeaker tells the history of the flax industry in Oregon, there are short actions onstage, monologues, dances, and some music. An old woman shows how to weave flax, an Indian dancer shows in movement how to grow it, and other dances celebrate the flax industry. Flax was important to Oregon: the state had, says Flanagan, one of the few places in the

---

[1] Mathews, p. 154.

[2] Tapestry in Linen, George Mason University.

[3] Lavery, The Flexible Stage, appendix.

country where long-fiber flax could be produced.[1] Similar to other Living Newspapers, as O'Connor and Brown consider the show, Tapestry in Linen shows "how a region's resources are depleted and the small farmer is driven out by giant businesses that own both the land and the industry."[2]

Neither songs nor music are clearly specified in the script. That the music was "arranged" by Bonnie Replogle [3] suggests that it did not originate with the show. Only one song is clearly mentioned in the script, but no title or lyrics appear: the Manhattan Four do a routine, accompanied by a singer and an accordion. The rest of the music in the show accompanies dances and dialogue. Floradora girls do a dance, and other dances include a tango and a hoedown complete with hillbillies.

Though no cast list appears in the script and no production notebook exists, the number and size of the dances suggest that a large chorus was used. Relevance in Tapestry in Linen ties in with regionalism. Exploitation of the farmer was an issue important to many at the time. That the farming was of flax focuses the relevance on the Oregon region. And regionalism shows itself further in the musical's use of local talent playing characters of Oregon's frontier past.

---

[1] Flanagan, p. 298

[2] O'Connor and Brown, pp. 13-14.

[3] Tapestry in Linen.

3. Melodies on Parade #1

The first FTP pastiche musical in New York opened July 9 and closed September 18, 1937.[1] The card catalogue at the Lincoln Center Theatre Collection says the songs were written by "various composers of the Nineties." Both Flanagan and the script itself credit the writing to Hans Brune Myer,[2] suggesting that he arranged the material. Melodies on Parade #1 (abbreviated here as Melodies 1) has much in common with the pastiches of the Northwest. One critic called it "a revue featuring old-time songs";[3] the script contains no dialogue, a few dances, and only one new song. The variety format evident in the pastiches of the Northwest reappears here.

The Master of Ceremonies enters after an overture of old songs and announces that there will be a party. The script describes what happens next: "Actors off-stage start singing and Playing Latest Song possible to obtain at Date of Opening of Show."[4] Melodies 1 then consists primarily of old songs: "Oh Susannah"(1948),[5] "When You and I Were Young, Maggie" (1866), "Just One Girl" (1898),

---

[1] Flanagan, p. 391. No other source provides production information.

[2] Ibid.; Melodies on Parade #1, George Mason University.

[3] "Stage News," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Aug. 3, 1937, p. 6.

[4] Melodies on Parade #1.

[5] Publication or copyright dates in parentheses from Mattfeld.

"The Band Played On" (1895), "Where Did You Get That Hat?" (1888), "Daisy Bell" (1892), "My Gal's a Highborn Lady" (1896), "Where the River Shannon Flows" (1905), "Down Where the Wurtzberger Flows" (1902), and "Sweet Adeline" (1903).

A "Colored M.C." announces a "super-splendiferous aggregation." A cakewalk contest follows: the orchestra uses a medley of cakewalk tunes, including the "Mumblin' Mose," "Brooklyn Cakewalk," "Smokey Mokes," "Whistlin' Rufus," "Georgia Camp Meeting," and the "Kerry Mills cakewalk."

The M.C. at the party loosely connects the songs and dances. Characters mentioned include Grand Dad and the Colonel, but no descriptions appear of these or any other characters. None of the characters receives much development: they sing or dance, but the variety format leaves little room for complex character delineation.

Melodies 1 supplied jobs for many unemployed performers. Though no cast list appears in the script and no production notebook or program exist at the FTP Research Center, the number of songs (even more old songs come in the second act) and the variety of cakewalk dances suggest that the show employed a relatively large number of people. No social comment appears; the show is simply entertainment. How many performances were given to how many people is unknown, but its two-month run indicates it was fairly popular. Regionalism is that of New York, the melting pot of

of Irish, German, Southern, Western, small town and country. One skit represents the Big City itself: an Anna Held routine, using the song "I Just Can't Make My Eyes Behave," from the 1906 A Parisian Model. That musical played for 179 performances in New York,[1] a long run for its time; the number would be familiar to many New Yorkers of the thirties.

4. Melodies on Parade #2

The last pastiche musical listed by Flanagan which has an available script is Melodies on Parade #2 (Melodies 2). The book and some of the lyrics (which do not appear in the script) were written by John LaTouche.[2]

Melodies 2 opened August 16 and closed September 10, 1938, according to Flanagan. In a series of short scenes which connect songs, Melodies 2 has characteristics in common with the other pastiche musicals.

First, the show uses songs from America's past, including the following: "Say Au Revoir, but Not Goodbye"

---

[1]Ewen, New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), p. 406.

[2]Flanagan, p. 391; Melodies on Parade #2, George Mason University. LaTouche's contributions to American musical theatre include the lyrics for "Ballad of Uncle Sam" (in Sing for Your Supper, the FTP revue which will be discussed in the next chapter), the lyrics for Cabin in the Sky (1940), the book and lyrics for the winner of the 1954 Drama Critics Circle Award, The Golden Apple, and some lyrics for the musical Candide.

(1893);[1] "There's a Tavern in the Town" (1883); "The Man That Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo" (1892); "The Bell of Avenoo A" (1895; the script spells "Avenue" correctly); "Arrah, go on, I'm gonna go back to Oregon" (1916; the script calls it "Arroah Go Wan"); and "The Spaniard Who Blighted my Life" (1911). Melodies 2 calls for two songs used in other pastiches: "While Strolling Through the Park One Day" (in Timberline Tintypes) and "Oh, Susannah" (in Melodies 1).

Second, Melodies 2 shows characters from the American frontier. Desperate Dick of Cut-Throat Corners is a rustler in love with Clementine, but Lester from "Chicagie" will soon marry her, and Sukie loves "Dear Desperate" Dick. Others include Chief Giggling Buzzard (burlesqued by an "Irish Character Man dressed as Indian"), cowboys who sing "Oh Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie," Indian dancers, and the medicine-show doctor, "a pompous W.C. Fields character." Uncle Jasper points out the typically American characteristics of the show in a speech about the struggles of the pioneers. All nationalities come together in America, says Uncle Jasper, "all being one thing-- An American." There are songs about old-country ancestors: Mike sings "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" (1912),

---

[1]Publication or copyright dates in parentheses from Mattfeld; songs listed are from Melodies on Parade #2.

a German schoolteacher sings "Shnitzelbank," and Tony sings "Che chi da ne alla mia." All unite in what Uncle Jasper calls "a real American song"--"Turkey in the Straw" (1834).

Little is indicated about characters, other than what their names and songs reveal. Names and costumes hint at characters, but little development of characters exists and they remain stereotypes. But the show gave employment to people with specialized talents. For instance, Banjo Wallace enters and plays--what else?--his banjo, and there is an Oriental who plays a character named Ah Sid, who trips up his "l"'s and "r"'s.

Relevance to the issues of the day does not play a major part in Melodies 1. Uncle Jasper has the one significant exception on hearing that Chicago has "crooked politics." He gives serious, sage comment that seems out of place in this otherwise light-hearted show: people come and go, he says, "where there's money to be had and power. But someday the people will change that too." This social comment resembles the element pointed out in Rabkin about Chalk Dust: an otherwise apolitical show expresses the optimistic air which characterizes much leftist didactic drama, but the social comment seems to be imposed upon the show, and not an integral part of it.[1]

The regional aspects of Melodies on Parade #2 resemble those of Melodies 1 but differ from those of the

---

[1]Rabkin, p. 109; see p. 19 above.

Northwestern pastiches. Timberline Tintypes and Tapestry in Linen use characters from rural regions, but the shows were performed in rural regions. The two New York pastiches, on the other hand, use characters typical of rural regions of America, but the shows were presented in what is perhaps the most urban of cities. The resulting simple view the New York pastiche musicals (primarily Melodies 2) have toward those in rural regions reveals itself in the stereotypical characters presented.

The four original pastiche musicals, therefore, fully realized the FTP's goal of supplying relief employment. The exact number of people employed is not known, but the variety of material, and the variety of people used to perform that material, suggest that a significant number of cast members were employed. Relevance seems not to have played a primary part in the pastiches; forming jobs was the main goal. The regionalism is that of the Big City melting pot, which includes many regions.

FTP's original musicals include more than pastiches, however. Revues and book musicals are also part of the FTP's contribution to American theatre. Examination of revues and book musicals of the Federal Theatre will help determine how they fulfilled the FTP's goals.

CHAPTER FOUR

REVUES

The second major category for which scripts are available is revues. Like the pastiche musicals, they use skits and music that supply work for many kinds of performers. But the revues have two major differences which facilitate placing them in a separate category. First, each has original music, written specifically for that particular show. Second, each revolves around a unifying theme, technique, or idea, although none tries to tell a story. While Engel says the revue, with its mixture of musical numbers, sketches, and routines "is difficult to characterize precisely,"[1] Ewen points out that the revue comes from the "fantasia" section of the minstrel shows and that the revue "is nothing more than vaudeville in fancy dress."[2] Kislan describes the distinguishing characteristics of the revue:

> In a revue, a single unifying force organizes the variety of elements into a cumulative sequence of ascending theatrical peaks designed to service the concept of the show. The force can be a man (Florenz Ziegfeld), an idea (unionism), or an organization (the Theatre Guild).[3]

---

[1] Engel, p. 16.

[2] Ewen, The Story of America's Musical Theatre, pp.4 and 58.

[3] Kislan, p. 79.

In the case of FTP's original revues, the unifying device, other than a theme or idea, often takes the form of a narrator, such as a Master of Ceremonies or a television announcer (long before there was television).

This thesis examines seven original FTP revues. Discussed in chronological order, each revue will be analyzed in order to assess its realization of FTP's aims of relief, relevance, and regionalism.

1. Follow the Parade

The earliest original FTP revue opened in Los Angeles, which seems appropriate because the distinctive stamp of Los Angeles's FTP was its musicals, says Holcolmb.[1] Flanagan as well points out the penchant of the California units for musicals:

> If Federal Theatre had ever wanted to produce a cycle of plays epitomizing its own projects, New York would have been staged as a Living Newspaper, Los Angeles as a musical comedy, the south as a folk play, and Chicago as melodrama.[2]

Follow the Parade is one of a "series of distinctive revues" done in Los Angeles by Gene Stone and Jack Robinson.[3] It opened on April 12 and closed August 2, 1936, and gave

---

[1] Robert Holcomb, "The Federal Theatre in Los Angeles," California Historical Society Quarterly 41(June 1962): 136.

[2] Flanagan, p. 134.

[3] Lavery, The Flexible Stage, p. 128.

eighty performances to a total audience of 38,230.[1] Stone and Robinson are not the only people credited with writing the show. The production notebook credits Stone and Robinson with the book, lists music and lyrics by Jack Dale and Stone, and gives credit to Eda Edson as the author and director.[2]

Edson had previously worked in vaudeville as a conductor.[3] She wanted a large revue in Follow the Parade which would be employment for many vaudevillians out of work and which would be entertaining and important to all. She describes how the show emphasized the fact that the actors were unemployed and needed to work:

> The show will be in two parts. First the prologue where in the living room of the boarding house, the actors will talk about wanting to do a show. The second half in a musical revue / where the actors / will be--doing the show. In this way the production will be a departure from the typical musical revue in that the comedy and satire will concern itself with one of the most important events of the day--unemployment--and, in fact all topics that concern the world at the present time.[4]

---

[1] Lavery, The Flexible Stage, appendix; Lavery also lists a Dallas production of 12 performances from July 22 to August 2, 1939, and a Tampa production playing from May 23 to 30, 1938.

[2] Follow the Parade, Production Notebook, p. 1, George Mason University.

[3] Irving Kolodin, "Footlights, Federal Style: The Astonishing Story of the Federal Theater," Harpers Monthly Magazine 173(Nov. 1936): 628.

[4] Edson in O'Connor and Brown, p. 146.

Follow the Parade's poster calls it "a musical revue as modern as tomorrow,"[1] and the production notebook calls the show a "topical satirical musical revue," with two acts and a prologue and 16 scenes, using 126 characters (76 male and 50 female).[2] The premise of the musical which Edson described--that of depicting out-of-work vaudevillians giving a show--gives the revue a double unity.

First, a unifying theme of the show involves vaudeville which is socially significant. The production notebook states that Follow the Parade tries to restore vaudeville "by a new type of presentation," one in which the "comedy is a commentary on topics that concern the world at present."[3] Second, the idea that "a television announcer gives the show continuity"[4] unifies the presentation of the show with a modern technique. In fact, the idea of connecting vaudeville acts with television was in itself, says Edson, "an innovation, because--you know, it was 1935 [when the show was conceived] and television had not as yet come into practical use."[5]

---

[1] Follow the Parade, Poster, George Mason University.

[2] Production Notebook, p. 1.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Edson in O'Connor and Brown, p. 146.

Kolodin calls the show "part topical revue, part circus, part dramatic show,"[1] pointing to its variety of elements.

Edwin Schallert said that Follow the Parade was a hit.[2] Critic John Rosenfeld said the Dallas production was "a flattering tribute to the operators of Uncle Sam's first theatre."[3] Variety called it "the first big original revue" of the FTP, and challenged the movies to give as much quality entertainment for only fifty cents.[4] That Follow the Parade helped to restore some life into vaudeville seems clear: Grace Kingsley commented that the show was evidence that vaudeville may not have died but instead "will come back, but under a new name and in a different form."[5] A Dallas reviewer claimed that the show "is the Federal Theatre realizing both aims of a two-point program": forming work for vaudevillians and presenting modern-style entertainment.[6]

---

[1] Kolodin.

[2] Edwin Schallert, in Burns Mantle, 1935-36, p. 26.

[3] John Rosenfeld quoted in Flanagan, p. 95.

[4] Variety quoted in Flanagan, p. 278-79.

[5] Grace Kingsley, L. A. Times, July 5, 1935, in "Semi-monthly Letter of the Federal Theatre Project" I (August 2, 1935), Flanagan Papers, 20,311.

[6] Dallas Morning News, Aug. 15, 1936, "Semi-monthly Letter" VI(August 15, 1936), Flanagan Papers, 20,374.

Although "individual acts formed the backbone of the show,"[1] each act and song and dance comments on issues important to the day.[2] After a prologue in which Moe Kornblum decides to produce a show about performers "out of the parade" because of the competition from radio and movies, the vaudeville performers themselves do a series of vaudeville acts. On opening night, which occurs right after the prologue, the following acts are presented: "Round the Globe by Television," in which the announcer introduces dances from around the world; a skit parodying movie actresses; a vaudeville drunk act by "Limberlegs" Edwards; dances parodying the poetry of Gertrude Stein, radio amateur hours, and modern "slanguage"; black dancers showing the evolution of the "St. Louis Blues" from its jungle roots to a futuristic version; a take-off on the alleged luxury of men in prison; a satire of the publicity hounding the Dionne quintuplets; and a large production number with jugglers, magicians, and acrobats. Follow the Parade uses many vaudeville talents to laugh at modern life.

More serious social comment appears in a dance from a skit called "Crazy House Suite." An absent-minded princess, an insane composer, and a war-crazed former army officer are introduced to the audience by an asylum superintendent as some of his strangest cases. The army officer

---

[1] O'Connor and Brown, p. 147

[2] The following two paragraphs from Production Notebook.

"commands his whittled wooden soldiers to drill," in an anti-war dance, but the soldiers black out from exhaustion, leaving "human" dancers to complete the maneuvers. This is the most serious social comment in the show; the mad commander treats soldiers as puppets rather than people. The rest of the revue is a light-hearted laugh focused on American life.

2. O Say Can You Sing

Chicago made its contribution to original FTP revues with O Say Can You Sing (hereinafter referred to as O Say), which opened on December 11, 1936, and gave 191 non-continuous performances before closing August 21, 1937. The musical also opened in Tampa with a cast of Florida FTP workers on June 13, 1937, and ran for eleven non-continuous performances before 4,016 people until July 11.[1] A satire on the FTP itself, the show had music written by Paul Charig and the book and lyrics were by Ray Golden and Sid Kuller. The show's setting is described as "the Federal Theatre in action throughout the United States" and contains 27 scenes in 2 acts.[2] Two hundred fifty rehearsed the Chicago production for four months,[3] costing $55,042, which Whitman says "is low for a musical," and in its final

---

[1] Flanagan, p. 391; Lavery, The Flexible Stage, appendix.

[2] O Say Can You Sing, Production Notebook, p. 1, George Mason University.

[3] Production Notebook.

month, O Say began to return money to the treasury.[1] "Hilarious and earthy," says Lavery, the show went back and forth "between burlesque and satire."[2] With a "quickly shifting plot," says the Tampa Morning Tribune, the show "gave the senate the razzle-dazzle for trying to put Uncle Sam out of show business."[3] The Tampa Daily Times states O Say had a "propaganda theme attempting to justify the Federal Theatre Project."[4]

O Say's large casts and production crews clearly fulfilled the Project's relief function. The synopsis in the production notebook carries a special note at the bottom of the page: "This is the largest musical revue in recent theatrical history."[5] The Tribune noted that both the Latin and American units joined to form "the largest professional theatrical ever put on in Florida."[6]

Critical reaction to O Say was not glowing. Flanagan considered the show to be a bit vulgar and "not

---

[1]Whitman, p. 51. The Florida cast numbered 125, according to Tampa Morning Tribune, June 13, 1937, Production Files, George Mason University.

[2]Lavery, p. 128.

[3]Tampa Morning Tribune, June 14, 1937, Production files.

[4]Tampa Daily Times, June 14, 1937, Production files.

[5]Production Notebook.

[6]Tampa Morning Tribune.

relieved by wit."[1] Lloyd Lewis felt the three-hour show to be just "all right": it was "strong on dancing, long on gaiety and short on humor."[2] Ashton Stevens liked the singing and dancing but disliked the talking; the lines of the major character, Secretary of Entertainment Hamfield, "cried out, or, I should say, stank out for immediate burial."[3] But, as Flanagan says, these and other "fair to adverse" reviews were to be expected:

> They thought it was too loud and lavish, which it was. It was distinctly not a critics' show. It was a people's show.[4]

The plot of O Say concerns Augustus Q. Hamfield, the new Secretary of Entertainment of the United States, and his efforts to establish a Federal Theatre amid personal and professional conflicts. The plot is scanty: Hamfield goes before the Supreme Court to vindicate himself and his theatre from charges of unconstitutionality. He is accused of Communism because one of his actors uses the Moscow Art Theatre method. His funds are withheld by a budget director angry because his wife was not hired by the Federal Theatre. The idea was a bright one, claims Stevens,

---

[1] Flanagan, p. 139.

[2] Lloyd Lewis, Chicago Daily News, December 12, 1936, Production notebook.

[3] Ashton Stevens, Chicago Evening American, December 12, 1936, Production notebook.

[4] Flanagan, p. 140.

but the show "got terribly tarnished by the treatment."[1] But although thin, the plot links many scenes from Federal Theatre productions which "weave in and out."[2]

There are dances by Grace and Kurt Graff, and Berta Ochsner, and tap routines by Sammy Dyer and Hazel Davis. "Renaissance" (danced by the Graffs) uses stylized courtly movements to dissonant music, evoking the "decadent atmosphere" of the court of Borgia. "Night After Night" (also danced by the Graffs) shows two young lovers by the nighttime sea. "The Gambolero" is a large production number, a dance with a Latin mood and tempo. Other dances[3] include "Grandma's Goin' to Town" by Dyer and Davis, in which the Negro company of Chicago's Project "attained tempo and grace."[4] Other dances by Dyer and Davis include "In Your Hat" using ladies of the ensemble, and "I Could Go For You," using an even larger ensemble. Ochsner's dances include "The People's Choice," a Hollywood parody dance called "Colossal Pictures," and "Fugitive Rhythm," "in which a young farmer who applied for work on the WPA agricultural project was assigned by mistake to a percussion ballet."[5]

---

[1] Stevens.

[2] Production notebook.

[3] The dances are listed in O Say Can You Sing, Program, George Mason University.

[4] Flanagan, p. 139.

[5] Ibid.

O Say Can You Sing supplied many jobs and entertainment that spoke with humor to an issue concerning those in the Project, if not all those in the audience. There is little evidence of regional concerns. Since it succeeded in Tampa as well as in Chicago, with only slight modifications to accommodate the different casts, O Say's point-of-view seems national, not regional.

3. Revue of Reviews

Opening in Los Angeles on January 14 and giving sixty-one performances to 28,624 people before closing on March 28, 1937, was Revue of Reviews.[1] " A Musical Review of the Magazines in Two Installments,"[2] this was the second musical for the Los Angeles unit written by Stone and Robinson, with music and lyrics by Stone. In two acts with twenty-one scenes, it had 206 characters (93 male and 113 female,) although, according to the production notebook, "the same people double in more than one scene when necessary."[3] It has a loosely-established story which supplies a framework for satirical songs, skits, and dances parodying magazines popular at that time.

---

[1]Flanagan, p. 391; Lavery, The Flexible Stage, appendix.

[2]Revue of Reviews, Program, George Mason University.

[3]Revue of Reviews, Production Notebook, p. 1, George Mason University.

Some of the songs in the show come from other sources and are obviously not original with this show: "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and "Stars and Stripes Forever" in a scene called "Madame President"[1] which parodies Woman's Home Companion; "Man on a Flying Trapeze" (which is also in Timberline Tintypes) in a parody of Physical Culture Magazine; "Silver Threads Among the Gold" (1873)[2] in a skit based on Popular Song Review; that skit then uses a medley of twelve tunes including "After the Ball" (1892) and two others used also in Timberline Tintypes--"Mother was a Lady" and "Every Little Movement."

Gene Stone wrote several original songs. "Buy Our Magazines," also called "We're Working Our Way Through College," is sung by eight young men selling the magazines which introduce each skit. "It's a Small World After All" comes in a boy-meets-girl scene involving a travelogue.[3] "Advertising Song," sung by four men dressed as copy writers for National Advertising Magazine, has as its main idea that ad writers are the "real dictators of this

---

[1] Songs listed are from the Production Notebook, pp. 1-4.

[2] Publication or copyright dates in parentheses from Mattfeld.

[3] This song should not be confused with one by Richard M. and Robert B. Sherman, the 1963 title song of the Walt Disney record, It's a Small World, Walt Disney Productions, 1964.

nation."[1] "Swing Tune" allows for a dance by the "line girls and the dance trio." "Rhythm of the Breeze" is set by patter explaining that "this is the song the audience is supposed to whistle as it leaves the theatre."[2] And "It's Time for You to Fall in Love" uses the cover of Love Stories Magazine to show a boy and a girl in a park,[3] "beginning to court," as the Times puts it, while still "in the cradle."[4] A number of songs may have been written by Stone, but he is given no specific credit for them in the production notebook. They include: "Kings of Harlem," "Xmas Night in Harlem," and "Curly Top."

Gene Stone, the song writer and co-libretticist, claims in a recent interview that the Los Angeles project had "carte blance" in choice of material, that in general Los Angeles's project was less political than New York's, more concerned with entertainment than with politics. Yet, Stone mentions that many thought Myra Kinch's "Workers' Dance," for which E. A. Montano wrote music and for which he is given no credit in the program, was Communistic.[5]

---

[1]Production Notebook, p. 2.

[2]Ibid., p. 3.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Los Angeles Times, January 15, 1937, Production notebook.

[5]Gene Stone, Transcript of Interview, July 21, 1977, pp. 10,13, and 26, George Mason University.

And despite Stone's claim, evidence exists for some form of censorship in California: the character of Communist Earl Browder was eliminated from the San Francisco production of Triple-A Ploughed Under.[1] And Revue of Reviews did not escape the censor either, though perhaps for commercial rather than political reasons: the program revisions explain that "True Confessions and Time Magazine have been withdrawn from the program."[2]

Holcomb states that Stone and Robinson "introduced the combination of musical comedy and vaudeville in Revue of Reviews and Ready! Aim! Fire!"[3] Vaudeville reflected the times, says Stone, claiming that in the FTP, "vaudeville and modern, all these disparate, quite different things" merged into one form of entertainment.[4]

As in Follow the Parade, Stone and Robinson have used in Revue of Reviews their own brand of "musical vaudeville," as Holcomb calls it.[5] A prologue establishes the basic premise, and the show ties together some old and new songs, some skits, and some dances illustrating that premise. The variety of acts provided employment for a

---

[1] Whitman, 100; see p. 22 above.

[2] Program.

[3] Holcomb, pp. 140-1.

[4] Stone, Transcript, pp. 5 and 11.

[5] Holcomb, p. 143.

large number of performers.

Social comment in Revue of Reviews includes the "Workers' Dance" already mentioned. In a skit about Dance Magazine, the "ridiculously formalized" "Workers' Dance" is prefaced by a parody of dances by Mary Wigman and Kurt Jooss.[1] Many other aspects of life receive satirical comment: women in politics, advertising, health nuts who disapprove of those who catch colds,[2] child stars in Hollywood, wooden soldiers marching to the commands of a dictator, and a contest about breeding race horses (based on a real-life contest)[3]--all are satirized in song, dance, or skit. Humor tempers the comment. Modern life is laughed at, but is not sharply criticized.

4. Swing Parade

The fourth original FTP revue presented was Swing Parade, which opened in San Francisco on April 15 and ran for fifty continuous performances to 28,600 people before closing on July 20, 1937.[4] With music by Nat Goldstein

---

[1] Los Angeles Evening News, January 15, 1937, production notebook.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid. A Toronto dealer thought up the idea of a contest to breed horses.

[4] Lavery, The Flexible Stage, appendix; Swing Parade was subtitled Swingtime in Springtime, and it ran in Oakland from July 17 to July 20, 1937.

and lyrics by Richard Melville and Del Foster, Swing Parade was either written (as the program says) or arranged (as the production notebook says) by Melville, Gene Stone, and Max Dill (who also directed).[1] It had a three-scene prologue followed by two acts. According to the production notebook, the show employed "over 100 men and women, plus carpenters, electricians, property men, stage-hands, musicians."[2]

Max Dill, in his "Director's Report," explained the main purpose of Swing Parade:

> This musical revue was built to provide a vehicle for members of the San Francisco Vaudeville Unit. . . . a problem which we had to contend with at all times /was/ to produce a musical revue and make up with novelty and color for the complete lack of performers with any knowledge or experience of musical comedy work.[3]

The problem of supplying relief and the fact that the show solved it is clear, and "can be evidenced by the fact that Swing Parade ran for eight weeks," said Dill, and had at the time "played to more business than any Federal Theatre production in this or any other city."[4]

---

[1] Swing Parade, Program; Production notebook, p. 1, George Mason University.

[2] Production Notebook, p. 1.

[3] Dill in Production Notebook, p. 7.

[4] Ibid.

The goal of employing vaudevillians hindered continuity; all those variety acts needed to be connected. The synopsis in the production notebook states the method used: a television announcer keeps all the various acts "held together by a slender thread of continuity to make sense and give excuse for action."[1] This attempted to solve a problem which, Dill says, "is always present when vaudeville performers are called on to carry a production." Following a plot line through the show prevents it from becoming "a series of disconnected vaudeville bits."[2]

Gene Stone had a hand in writing Swing Parade, and his distinctive imprint is on the show. Similarities to Follow the Parade abound: a television announcer introduces the acts, and Moe Kornblum (yes, the same Moe Kornblum) is the producer. He produces a variety musical with vaudevillians from a boarding house. Like Follow the Parade, in Swing Parade Negroes dance, luxury prisons are mocked, a drunk enters now and then, quintuplets sing a song, and in "Toyland" wooden soldiers do their "famous drill dance."[3] Like all the other revues discussed thus far in its humorously satirical barbs about modern life, Swing Parade most resembles in structure the Los Angeles musicals. The prologue sets the basic premise, then helps connect the various acts.

---

[1]Production Notebook, p. 1.

[2]Dill, p. 7.

[3]Production Notebook, p. 3.

The social comment is humorous, pointed at the foibles of human beings in society. The revue format lends itself to light-hearted satire. But again, a dance contains the most powerful anti-war statement, as it did in the other revues. A drill dance by wooden soldiers marching to a dictator's commands contains an anti-war theme. Apparently the threat of war prompted the authors to make a more serious statement as a warning, treating the theme of war somberly rather than with the less serious tone of the rest of the show. However, since dances have no words, any statement is subject to various interpretations, and is thus less direct and less open to criticism.

5. Two-A-Day

The next year Stone and Robinson incorporated vaudeville talent in a show which had as its theme the history of vaudeville itself. Two-A-Day opened in Los Angeles on October 29, 1938 and gave sixty-seven performances to 47,190 people before closing on May 14, 1939. Lavery also notes that the show ran in San Francisco from May 18 to June 28, 1939 for thirty-seven performances to 38,460 people.[1]

---

[1]Flanagan, p. 392; Lavery, The Flexible Stage, appendix; Archives, General Correspondence of the National Office, Box 75, lists the following opening and closing dates, number of performances, and audience attendance: Los Angeles: 1/1/39-4/1/39, 67, 47,198; Los Angeles: 10/28/38-12/31/38, 26, 19,157; Hollywood: 10/30/38-11/26/38, 20, 19,811.

Lavery described it as "A Cavalcade of Vaudeville," which was "heart-tugging."[1] The production notebook has a bibliography of "research material compiled by Ralph Hopkins."[2]

Like the other Stone and Robinson revues, Two-A-Day consists primarily of vaudeville routines. But this time the show traces the history of vaudeville in America.

At that time Gene Stone was supervisor of vaudeville in Los Angeles for the FTP. In a "memo from author," he tells of the difficulties in putting the show down on paper:

> This script is as complete as we can furnish. Due to the nature of this production the script is merely a framework to be filled in with vaudeville acts and specialties. The material used in the actual vaudeville acts is owned by the various performers and cannot be included in any general script . . . .
>
> What I am trying to bring out is that with this particular show it is impossible to have one master script which will hold good for productions in various cities. Someone will have to take the script as it is and adapt it to fit local conditions.[3]

Stone and Robinson had thus put together a show that not only could be but had to be adapted to different regions. The order and content of the acts would depend on the talent available, thus serving the aims of relief and regional topicality.

Flanagan says that in this show "many headliners were playing parts which they had originated in other days,"

---

[1] Lavery, pp. 127-8.

[2] Two-A-Day, Production Notebook, George Mason University.

[3] Stone, "Memo from Author," November 28, 1938, Production Notebook.

but that, rather than being nostalgic, Two-A-Day had a forward thrust and was "an apotheosis of one form of theatre talent and an illustration of its possible future."[1] Two-A-Day attested to a continued interest in vaudeville. Schallert called it "rare as old wine."[2] It was apparently not all that rare, however. During its run in San Francisco, three other vaudeville programs--the Ziegfeld Follies of 1939, the Ice Follies, and a double bill featuring Sally Rand--were playing concurrently with Two-A-Day. They were "four of the largest vaudeville shows to ever appear in San Francisco at one time."[3]

Two-A-Day was designed to fulfill the FTP's relief goals no matter where it was produced. The premise of the show--tracing vaudeville's history--was clearly relevant to the performers who were part of that history. That it gave so many performances despite the competition attests to the entertainment it gave to audiences. Regionalism is taken into account by the authors; each region would have to modify the show to fit local demands.

6. Sing For Your Supper

While Sing For Your Supper remains one of the most famous of FTP's musicals because of the adverse publicity

---

[1]Flanagan, p. 291.

[2]Schallert in Mantle. 1938-39, p. 25.

[3]Charles P. Teevin, Director for Northern California, to J. H. Miller, June 1, 1939, Archives, Federal Theatre Project Records for California, 651.3122.

generated for the FTP, sources disagree about when it opened. Flanagan claims it opened on March 15, Buttitta says April 15, and Lavery, Mantle, and Salem say it opened on April 24, 1939. All agree, however, that it closed on the last day of the Project's existence, June 30, 1939.[1] Lavery says Sing For Your Supper (hereinafter called Sing) gave sixty performances in New York, while James M. Salem claims it gave only forty-four. Perhaps the difficulty in determining the opening date results in part from its long rehearsal period of eighteen months.

Sing almost equals The Cradle Will Rock in its political consequences. It was called a "musical revue" in the program and a "topical musical revue" on a poster.[2] Sing is one of two original FTP musicals to have been criticized in Congress, according to Flanagan, who notes that The Machine Age also received Congressional comment.[3] Representative Clifton A. Woodrum, head of the Congressional appropriations committee investigating the

---

[1] Flanagan, p. 391; Buttitta and Witham, p. 209; Lavery, The Flexible Stage, appendix; Mantle, 1938-39, p. 481; James M. Salem, A Guide to Critical Reviews: Part II (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrown, 1976), pp. 443-4; O'Connor and Brown avoid the dispute and list both a March and an April opening date.

[2] Sing For Your Supper, Program, George Mason University; O'Connor and Brown, p. 184.

[3] Flanagan, pp. 390 and 433.

FTP, said of Sing:

> If there is a line in it or a passage in it that contributes to the cultural or educational benefit of America, I will eat the whole manuscript. . . . It is a trashy kind of stuff.[1]

Sing was charged by witnesses in Congressional committees and by Congressmen with lewdness and waste and leftist politics. The show, state O'Connor and Brown, "seemed to epitomize what the [Dies] Committee (and later, Congress) deplored about Federal Theatre: inefficiency, extravagance, and political satire."[2]

Both Flanagan and Lavery criticize the quality of the show: Flanagan calls it "interminable,"[3] and Lavery says it was "slicker and in the end not half so satisfactory" as O Say Can You Sing, and "pretentious and a little on the ponderous side."[4] Although she did not appreciate the artistic merit of Sing, Flanagan surely realized its importance to the FTP as a whole in the eyes of Congress and the country. George Kondolf, the head of the New York project, had said in a Policy Board meeting that "we should keep

---

[1]Clifton A. Woodrum, Congressional Record, 76th Congress, 1st Session (1939), p. 7,166, quoted in Mathews, p. 277.

[2]O'Connor and Brown, p. 185.

[3]Flanagan to Herbert Biberman, March 22, 1939, quoted in Mathews, p. 262.

[4]Lavery, The Flexible Stage, p. 128.

[Sing] off Broadway,"[1] and in January of 1939 he "reluctantly" postponed the opening of the show, which Mathews says was understandable but had "disastrous consequences" because it fueled further charges of boondoggling by opponents of the New Deal.[2] By April 19, 1939, four days before what the majority of sources consider to be the opening, Flanagan still concerned herself with modifying the show so that it would "avoid the danger of playing right into the hands of the Congressional Committee."[3] She realized what Sing stood for. No longer a "local project," it had taken on national significance. "It is at the present time the narrow thread on which the fate of the entire Federal Theatre hangs." A successful production, she continued, could "turn the tide of Congressional wrath."[4] The tide did not turn, however; Congress ended the Federal Theatre Project in part because of the extravagances and satire of Sing For Your Supper.

"The revue began only with the conviction that the time had come for the Federal Theatre to try its hand at a

---

[1]George Kondolf in Summary of Policy Board Meeting, April 13, 1938, p. 37, Flanagan Papers, 21, 119.

[2]Mathews, p. 248.

[3]Flanagan to George Kondolf, April 19, 1939, Flanagan Papers, 21,117.

[4]Flanagan to Morris Ankrum, April 19, 1939, Flanagan Papers, 21, 117.

musical," O'Connor and Brown point out.[1] Morgan Himelstein also calls Sing the FTP's "first musical revue,"[2] and Robert Sour, lyricist and associate producer of Sing, claims that it was the only musical produced by the FTP.[3] Surely, each refers to FTP musicals produced in New York City, but even that is not true: The Machine Age and Swing It both opened earlier. Ned Lehac, a composer for Sing, notes that full-fledged rehearsals for the show began in November of 1937,[4] a year-and-a-half before it finally opened. If the show was conceived earlier than April of 1937, when Swing It opened, then perhaps it could be considered the first FTP musical in New York.

While Rabkin says it was "a singularly unsuccessful musical,"[5] Flanagan says that it was popular,[6] and composer Ned Lahac appreciated the "fairly good notices."[7] Things

---

[1]O'Connor and Brown, p. 185.

[2]Morgan Y. Himelstein, Drama Was a Weapon (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. 108.

[3]Robert Sour to Karen Wickre, June 29, 1977, George Mason University.

[4]Ned Lahac, Transcript of Interview, June 1977, Side 1, p. 7, George Mason University.

[5]Rabkin, p. 105.

[6]Flanagan, p. 352.

[7]Lehac, Side 2, p. 19.

"moved along at a snail's pace," O'Connor and Brown state, because the FTP in New York "had neither the stars nor the experienced writers on hand for such an undertaking."[1] Songs were slow to materialize. There were few "core personalities" to write for and eventually the best skits and the best songs were lost to private enterprise:[2] Lavery points out that Max Gordon's Sing Out the News (which opened in September of 1938, more than a half-year earlier than Sing)[3] had many sketches which were originally in the FTP musical.[4] Lehac recalls lining up writing talent from the writers' and musicians' projects, but that there was "not much in the way of professional theatrical composers," few having had any theatrical or song-writing experience.[5]

Sing uses the same theme as O Say: Uncle Sam producing a musical. But Sing is more satiric. Its humor is more biting and ironic. Mantle found it to be a "left-wing revue" which "boldly challenged Broadway competition."[6] The name of the show seemed to Robert Sour to be

---

[1]O'Connor and Brown, p. 185.

[2]Ibid.; Flanagan, p. 347.

[3]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 511.

[4]Lavery, The Flexible Stage, p. 129.

[5]Lehac, Side 1, p. 3.

[6]Mantle, 1938-39, p. 4.

"an apt title for a Federal Theatre musical," and he mentions that Rodgers and Hart had a hit song of the same title in The Boys From Syracuse in 1938.[1] But singing for their supper was what the performers were actually doing, and the songs and skits they performed increased the wrath of Congress.

The show opens backstage at the Federal Theatre,[2] where Uncle Sam arrives because he had heard (from Mr. Dies, of the Special House Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities) that the government was running a theatre. The title song, which opens the show, calls for the FTP to "do your labor or class play."[3] This premise allows for much ribbing of the Federal Theatre and of this show. The next song is "At Long Last," a joke on the long rehearsal period, in which the cast sings, "For four score and seven ages / We've looked at pages."[4] At the World's Fair, its chief administrator Mr. Whalen sings David Lesan's and Turner Bullock's "Peace at Any Price," and then calls someone a Communist because he

---

[1]Robert Sour, Transcript of Interview, October 31, 1977, George Mason University.

[2]Unless otherwise noted, scenes described are from Sing For Your Supper, George Mason University.

[3]Robert Sour and Ned Lehac, "Sing For Your Supper"; the song titles which appear are from the Program, George Mason University.

[4]Robert Sour and Lee Wainer, "At Long Last."

had used the word "party."[1] Mr. Watts, Mr. Wong, and Mr. Wright do a skit called "We Didn't Know It Was Loaded," in which they sing of the world's double-edged inventions which have caused as well as solved problems (movable type led to both the Gutenberg Bible and yellow-journalism).

"Opening Night"[2] by Sour and Wainer is a Negro cakewalk song with special dancers and the entire Negro ensemble. The program sets the scene:

> Outside the Casino roof Garden, 9th Avenue and 34th Street, April 22, 1900, at the opening of "Clorindy," the first all-Negro musical attraction in New York that was not just a minstrel show. The cakewalk is supposed to have been first introduced in this production.

"Ping Pong on the Pacific" by David Lesan comes next, parodying an incompetent Admiral Stuffit. "A Tisket A Tax It"[3] contains three songs; one of these, "Oh Boy Can We Deduct," has a sharp satire in Cole Porter Style:

> It wasn't
> Capital that the Capitol put Capital up a tree.
> . . . . . .
> Form a holding company in Canada
> And a corporation in Brazil.
> . . . . . .
> It's delicious
> It's delightful
> It's delovely
> It's deductible.[4]

---

[1]Flanagan, p. 240, states that the FTP presented Health plays at the World's Fair.

[2]The script here differs from the program. This description follows the order in the script. Here is further evidence that the show was constantly changing.

[3]Program; the script calls it "A Tisket, A-Tasket."

[4]Robert Sour and Lee Wainer, "Oh Boy Can We Deduct."

"Legitimate" is next, by John LaTouche (of Melodies #2) and Wainer, in which a young woman explains how she tried to break into legitimate theatre, but did not make it until she began working in a "fackery" (to rhyme with Thackeray). The factory had a theatre, and she became a professional actress--a pointed reference to those who became professionals by being in the Labor Stage's Pins and Needles.

"The Last Waltz," with music composed and arranged by Alex North, was written to be performed by the Modern Dance Group. Male dancers followed orders of a sinister figure in military fashion. This resembles the "wooden soldier" dances of the West Coast revues.

Charlotte Kent wrote "We Go to the Theatre to be Amused." Ridiculing those who disapprove of social comment in the theatre, a chorus of men and women claim that relevance isn't necessary any more to be successful. Neither audiences nor actors want social comment any more "because a girl's no more a girl the day she smells her first committee."[1] "Young Man with a Horn," by Sour and Wainer, is a tribute to the real power of the artist. A man tries to play notes on a horn that the horn will not play; he seems not to care about payment or appreciation, but is simply concerned with striving for higher goals.

---

[1]Charlotte Kent, "We Go to the Theatre to be Amused."

"Papa's Got a Job" ends the first act. Lehac wrote the music, and the lyric credits go to Robert Sour and Hector Troy. Hector Troy was actually Harold Rome (whom O'Connor and Brown cite as co-lyricist),[1] according to Lehac. The fame he had gained from Pins and Needles suited Rome, and he did not want to be connected with the Federal Theatre. He had written the first part of the song, then had decided not to finish it. "So Rome dallied while we burned," quips Lehac, who finished the song himself.[2]

In "Papa's Got a Job," Trudy rushes home to her family, about to be evicted from its apartment, to sing that her father has gotten a job working for the WPA. The job is important, not the kind of job; the song glorifies the WPA as a human institution in a time of great economic stress. Night after night, Papa was lifted up by the cast members in celebration of his new job, which allows his family to remain. On the last night of the show, also the last night of the whole Federal Theatre, the producer froze the action and announced that at midnight Papa would no longer have a job. After the show, the audience joined the cast in singing "Auld Lang Syne."[3]

Act Two begins with "Get that Lucky Feeling" and "Lucky" (neither of which is in the program). Both are

---

[1] O'Connor and Brown, p. 186.

[2] Lehac, Side 1, p. 12.

[3] O'Connor and Brown, p. 187.

songs about everyone's dream of winning the sweepstakes. "Imagine my Finding You Here," by Sour and Lehac, is an ironic song to be performed by two young lovers who are revealed to be working, unbeknownst to each other, as dispensors in a Nedick's fountain.

"Perspiration," by LaTouche and Wainer, is the ultimate social opera by a fictional WPA composer named Marmaduke Schnock. Mentioning the fact that Orson Welles and the Mercury Theatre are "putting theatre through a striptease" (a not-at-all-veiled reference to the lack of scenery in productions of A Cradle Will Rock), this opera is first called "Sweat," until the composer changes the title: "There is no censorship on WPA," he announces, and then says that "the new title is 'Perspiration.'"[1] Taking place in Struggletown, with Mr. Bankbook and Mr. Zipper the union man, the skit is an obvious take-off on The Cradle Will Rock, complete with a strike by musicians and stage-hands.

"Pop's a Cop in Jersey City,"[2] with lyrics by Irving Crane and Phil Conwit, and with music by Lehac, contains jokes about the conflict a girl has because her young man is in the union and her father is a policeman who dislikes unions. "Code for Actors," is a farcical scene of a

---

[1] LaTouche and Wainer, "Perspiration."

[2] According to the script; the program calls it "Her Pop's a Cop."

wife with lovers at home while her husband works at the factory.

LaTouche and Wainer ridicule the attitudes of many who believe that WPA workers are loafers in "Leaning on a Shovel." The workers describe themselves, with prideful tongue-in-cheek:

> We are the leisurely playboys
> Of industry,
> Those famous little boys
> Of Franklin D.
> . . . . . .
> At home we always linger
> And read Karl Marx
> If you don't believe us--ask the Dies Committee.

They sing ironically that they have built playgrounds, roads, and schools just by leaning on a shovel. If they can get things finished that way, they sing, "Hurray for leaning on a shovel!"[1]

The finale of Sing For Your Supper is "The Ballad of Uncle Sam"[2] by LaTouche, with music by Earl Robinson. This song became famous as "Ballad for Americans." Paul Robeson sang it in recitals and on radio. In 1940 the Republican Party -- believe it or not -- used it as their Convention theme song. Backstage at the Federal Theatre (as in the opening) Trudy sees Uncle Sam. She realizes that he symbolizes all Americans; despite the differences among Americans, and perhaps because of those

---

[1] LaTouche and Wainer, "Leaning on a Shovel."

[2] The program mistakes the title, and thus do many other sources, as "The Ballade of Uncle Sam."

differences, all Americans stand for the same things. From the "patriotic spouting," and "out of the uncertainty and doubting," Americans will always stay united.[1] A stirringly patriotic song, it left large audiences cheering every night.[2] That such a patriotic song ended the show is ironic, since Sing, as a symbol of the Federal Theatre, helped in the FTP's downfall.

Sing For Your Supper requires the detailed treatment found here. The cast included many unemployed actors who rehearsed for eighteen months. If people leaned on shovels, they at least got paid, thus achieving FTP's major goal. However, the long rehearsal period may have been detrimental because the actors often got bored. Will Lee, an actor in Sing who left for another job, notes how much that inability to open a show must burn up creative energies.[3]

Social comment in Sing is everywhere. The effect of the social comment is evident, as the show was criticized in Congress for its subversion and inefficiency. Sing was too weak a thread to sustain the fate of the whole Federal Theatre. Criticism aimed at Sing armed the FTP's opponents.

Regionalism plays a strong part in Sing. Most of the scenes take place in New York City, using locations

---

[1]LaTouche and Robinson, "The Ballad of Uncle Sam."

[2]Flanagan, p. 352.

[3]Will Lee in O'Connor and Brown, p. 187.

such as a Nedick's coffee stand and the World's Fair. In this respect, the show resembles most the Northwest pastiche musicals, which took place only in Oregon, and differs most from the West Coast shows which used scenes from around the world. This show was more polished, and as Lavery said, "slicker." The smooth veneer of Sing helped it succeed in the city known for theatre, New York.

7. Television?

Again the television motif shows itself in Television?, a musical revue by the Florida FTP in Tampa. The drama of the ages unfolds before the eyes of the audience, as an announcer puts it. Opening on June 18 and running until June 30, 1939 (when the FTP shut down), Television? is a satire on show business which obviously did not have much of a chance to succeed, being forced to close after only two weeks.[1] The television of the title shows the announcer who moves the show from scene to scene. This modern invention becomes again a major technique in an original FTP musical.

Some old songs are used: "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" (1910)[2], "Dixie" (which is a "Medley of Southern Airs in Swingtime") (II,1), and "Peg o' My Heart in Swingtime." (12) New words are added to some old tunes: "Lilly

---

[1]Flanagan, p. 392; page numbers in parentheses from Television?, George Mason University.

[2]Dates in parentheses from Mattfeld.

the Sexpot," a Fanny Brice-type comedy song, to the tune of "Ta-Rah-Boom-De-Aye" (I,19), and "Brains in My Head," (I,20) to the tune of "Rhythm in my Soul." New songs all make fun of show business or its difficulties: "Highway to Hollywood" (I,25); "The Forgotten Girls" (I,20); "Three Little Judges"; "Television Girl," a production number with dances, choruses, and quartettes; "Everyday" (II,3-15), in which an actress complains about how tough show business is; and "Picture Me in Pictures," an actress's wish to be famous (II,17).

Dances include a "Dance of the Secretaries," which is not in the script; a ballroom scene, in which the ensemble sings "I Love to Dance the Polka" (I,9); an "Executive Ballet," which,the script explains, uses recitative (I,18); and a production number finale with a wedding march (II,23).

How many people the show employed is not known. Perhaps if the show had not closed so soon, it might have fully satisfied the FTP's relief requirement. No relevance to the ills of society is expressed, just the struggles of getting into show business. One number, called "The Florida Number" (II,2), uses the members of the cast who are "darkies." Although this number appears in a television take-off on Gone With The Wind called "Gone in a Flash," the use of the word "darkies" in the stage directions suggests an unfortunate element of the region's past.

All of the FTP original revues revolved around the performers, in most cases vaudevillians. The revue form seemed to accommodate itself easily to the various performers, allowing shows which were mostly vaudeville to express some sentiments about the society of the time. All of the shows attempt to establish a regional base for their FTP units.

While the revues and pastiches used a variety format, the Federal Theatre Project's book musicals used relief performers in shows which tried to tell a story. These book musicals will be examined to determine the extent to which they achieved, or failed to achieve, the FTP's aims.

CHAPTER FIVE

BOOK MUSICALS

The last category is the book musical, which unifies songs, dances, acting, and dialogue to enhance dramatic conflict, describe situations, or develop character. Almost all musicals can be called book musicals insofar as a book, albeit scanty, does exist. But the characteristic which differentiates the book musical from the pastiche or the revue is "integration,"or as Richard Hasbany describes it, "narrative, musical, and choreographic coherence."[1] Kislan states that each element in an integrated book musical fits perfectly and functions dramatically to propel the book forward.[2] Margaret M. Knapp describes integrated musicals as those "in which songs and dances were carefully woven into the action of a well-developed and logical plot." She notes that most historians and critics have "insisted that the most notable achievement of the modern musical has been its ability to integrate song, dance, and story into a single artistic whole."[3] Though each of the musicals

---

[1] Hasbany., p. 120.

[2] Kislan, p. 143.

[3] Margaret M. Knapp, "Integration of Elements as a Viable Standard for Judging Musical Theatre," Journal of American Culture, pp. 112-3.

studied in this chapter may not be fully integrated, each tries to tell a story and each uses songs between or during scenes, songs which to some extent help carry the story, with its characters and situations and ideas, forward. Each musical realizes to some extent the goals of the FTP. I will examine texts and performance data to determine how the original book musicals achieve FTP aims.

1. The Campus Widow

The earliest original FTP book musical was The Campus Widow. It opened in Boston on February 7 and gave thirty-four performances to 10,995 people before closing on December 8, 1936.[1] The book was written by T. S. Senna and the music by William Curtis. The Campus Widow travelled throughout Massachusetts, playing for instance in Springfield on June 24,[2] and at the Mount Park Casino in August, where both audience and entertainers got more enthusiastic as the show progressed.[3] The Campus Widow was mistakenly called The College Widow in one review, perhaps because of its resemblance to a play by George Abe. The College Widow was the basis for the 1917 musical

---

[1] Lavery, The Flexible Stage, appendix.

[2] "Semi-monthly Letter of the Federal Theatre Project," I (July 1, 1936), Flanagan Papers, 20,274.

[3] Transcript Telegram (Holyoke, Massachusetts), August 6, 1936, in "Semi-Monthly Letter," VII (September 1936), p. 5, Flanagan Papers, 20,311.

Leave It to Jane by Bolton, Wodehouse, and Kern. Like the Kern and Abe shows, The Campus Widow satirizes college life.[1]

A poor chorus girl named Kate needs a stand-in father to impress her fiance, an Italian count who thinks she is a millionaire.[2] A sub-plot involves Billy Potts, whose father wants to send him to another school; Billy introduces his father to the beautiful widow on the condition that he, Billy, can marry Kitty. Billy's father then becomes infatuated with the widow. Kitty also introduces her father to the widow, and he, like Billy's father, falls for the widow. Soon both fathers compete for the widow's attention. Farcical scenes result as both fathers woo her and as the children try to keep the fathers ignorant of each other's presence. The fathers discover each other, and a duel results. The patient widow endures all of this because Kitty and Billy have agreed to help her catch and marry the professor. In the end, all ends happily: the fathers duel only with vaudeville word patter and are thus unharmed, though still single. The count turns out to be John Smith, so that he and Kate, whose plight has been almost ignored since the beginning of the show, can now get married. Billy and Kitty can now get married, of course; their fathers agreed in order to meet the widow. The absurdity continues: three other couples are matched in the end.

---

[1] Ewen, New Complete, p. 295-6.

[2] References to the script from The Campus Widow, George Mason University.

All this farce seems designed to give roles to vaudeville entertainers on FTP relief rolls. For instance, the stage directions after the opening scene call for the girls to "do chorus and dumb-bell routine." The dumb-bell routine apparently requires no description; it is a standard juggling act. A "walk this way" routine leads to a typical sight gag. A play on words results in confusion: Billy says, "I love her, Father," which Mr. Potts mistakes for "I love her father." Ertensay, who always carries a butterfly net, enters and exits periodically throughout the show. He does a vaudeville routine with a Dr. Trimmer, fumbling with a bottle of liquor until they break it and can drink its contents. The final battle between the fathers also uses vaudeville word patter.

The Massachusetts unit of the FTP employed many vaudevillians. Mathews states that "the Boston Project, consisting of some six hundred members, over half of whom were elderly vaudevillians, was purely a relief affair."[1] Putting on the show must have been difficult, high quality always second to supplying jobs. New England's assistant regional director, George F. Whitcomb, wrote to Lester Lang, assistant national director, that

---

[1]Mathews, p. 223.

some of the performers on FTP payrolls were demanding a professional rate[1] despite "the fact that they are, perhaps, shall we say, 'played out' and no longer possess the faculty of 'quick study.'"[2]

Hiram Motherwell, the regional director for the East from October 1935 to April 1936, puts in clear unequivocal terms the limitations of the Eastern project: "No experiments for New England!"[3] Flanagan says of most of the Eastern vaudeville productions that, while "not employing new methods, they were clear-cut, competent, briskly staged" productions.[4]

The Campus Widow, in light of FTP goals, turned out to be successful. The variety of vaudeville acts used suggests that its relief function was satisfied.

Relevance, a commitment to social comment, does not enter into The Campus Widow. Absent are the type of superimposed comments about society which adorned many of the other musicals. Employment and entertainment were its purposes and objectives.

---

[1]Lang to Whitcomb, December 7, 1935, Archives, Central Files, 211.2, responded that there were three categories of theatre workers: Professionals, who can do creative and interpretive work; Skilled, those with other skills of recognized merit; and Intermediate, those having a limited degree of skill, or who are apprentices.

[2]Whitcomb to Lang, December 3, 1935, Archives, Central Files, 211.2.

[3]Motherwell quoted in Flanagan, p. 224.

[4]Flanagan, p. 229.

Regionalism shows only in a few places in the script and manifests itself by ribbing local communities. For instance, to the question of where oblivion is, the answer comes: "Somewhere in Revere." An insult levied reveals another jab: "Your face will protect you, even in Everett."

2. The Machine Age

Running in New York City from April 30 to May 29, 1937,[1] The Machine Age is the second of FTP's original book musicals. William Sully wrote the book and lyrics, with music by Bert Reed and additional lyrics by Darl MacBolye. Frank Merlin, the head of the vaudeville unit in New York, directed the show, while Sully directed the dances and the ensemble.[2]

Flanagan calls The Machine Age "a vaudeville review /sic/. . . on the not too subtle theme of mass production of hill-billy orchestras."[3] While she lists this as an original musical, Flanagan decides to place The Machine Age in the category of comedies, calling it a "satire" in her listing of the twenty-nine original FTP productions criticized in Congress.[4] It was considered at the time to be

---

[1]Flanagan, p. 391.

[2]The Machine Age, Poster, George Mason University; Brooklyn Citizen, April 29, 1937, Flanagan Papers, 20,324.

[3]Flanagan, p. 200.

[4]Ibid., p. 432.

"The WPA Federal Theatre's first major musical comedy."[1] The poster advertises the show as follows: "The Conveyor Belt in Show Business!! Come and see a shiny new show roll on stage every three minutes."[2]

The poster description suggests that The Machine Age might simply be a vaudeville show. Louis Sheaffer called it "a number of venerable vaudeville acts frightened together by a ghost of a story."[3] Another reviewer felt that it had "a dead level of rather stale vaudeville," for its three hours.[4] However, despite its conveyor-belt-of-entertainment concept, The Machine Age uses songs and dances to enhance a dramatic story. The other reviewer was willing to grant that the show, though "pretentious," was "conscientiously wrought."[5] The Machine Age tries to combine vaudeville talent with a satirical story about mass production of entertainment. It succeeds. It succeeds also in satisfying the major FTP goals of providing relief, giving relevant comment on the society of the day, and reflecting the region in which it was produced.

---

[1] Photograph, P327-NY-Bld-O, negative 377-2, George Mason University.

[2] Poster.

[3] Louis Sheaffer, Times Union (Albany, New York), May 1, 1937, Archives, General Correspondence of the National Office, FTP Vassar College Press Clippings, Box 117.

[4] Brooklyn Citizen, May 1, 1937, Archives, Box 117.

[5] Ibid.; Flanagan Papers, 20,324.

McDougle is the president of Colossal Amusement, Inc.[1] He announces to the press that he is going to mass produce variety shows. In "Gentleman of the Press," the newspaper reporters sing that they are "the power that is behind the power behind the press," and then McDougle shows them around the show business factory (I,2-5).[2] Not only does McDougle want to mass produce shows, but he also wants the shows to star hillbillies. The hillbilly is America's National Character, he says; we should all become Billy-conscious in order to "wipe out the last remaining traces of depression" (I,13). McDougle shows the reporters an automatic laughing machine which inspires writers and increases production (I,16), prefiguring the laugh-tracks on modern television shows. "The Mass Production Chorus," which the ensemble sings periodically throughout the show, declares that "if you want to start them talking what's the method you must use / Mass Production, it will get you in the news" (I,17).

McDougle then shows the reporters the scenery department's backdrop, which, according to the stage directions, "shows Times Square on a winter day with people getting a handout from a food kitchen." McDougle's trusty crony

---

[1] O Say Can You Sing also mentions Colossal Amusements; see page 58 above.

[2] Page numbers refer to The Machine Age, George Mason University.

Von Kronberg explains:

> . . . the title of this scene is Prosperity Lane. Period 1929 under the Vacuum Administration. Note the people standing in line getting a hand out from the food kitchen. Look real close and you can see prosperity around the corner.(I,16)

News of McDougle's mass-production of hillbillies travels quickly, however, and soon he is deluged with protests from Krumsky, of the Worldwide Volga Boatmen Association (I,39), the hillbillies of Russia (I,56). He is accused of swindling (I,23), and he is kidnapped by the racketeer Marchazie (I,43). Those are not all his troubles: Olga, "that terrible Polack" he met on the Albany train,wants to marry him (I,20-2).

McDougle tries to avoid the pesty Olga, appease Krumsky and his boatmen, and clear himself of swindling charges. The Colossal Amusement employees rehearse their acts.

Mr. and Mrs. Trent,social leaders of Park Avenue, stop by to hire entertainment for a garden party. Servants at the Trent's later sing "When the Clock Strikes Eight," in which they rejoice that when they are off work, they can say "nuts" to their employers (I,28).

At the garden party, the niece Diana dances, Olga (disguised as a servant) tries to find the hiding McDougle, Ann and Theresa Carter perform their specialty, and there is an undescribed radio scene (I,30-3). After the garden

party, the butlers dance, lie to Olga about McDougle's whereabouts, and perform a second specialty (I,35-6). Later, at a block party for the Italian Ambassador, three vaudeville teams perform specialties that also are not described in the script (I,41).

The scene shifts to the nightclub owned by racketeer Marchazie, whose gunmen kidnap McDougle, and who is in the process of being persuaded by Olga to put hillbillies in his nightclub. Later, the hillbillies sing to an audience forced to stay by henchmen (I,43,44, and 49). Back at the factory, where Krumsky's men had earlier sung "McDougle Stop Production" to the tune of "Volga Boatman" (I,13), auditions commence. Boris, one of the Boatmen, sings, to a tune heard earlier, "Kogda ja vernus v gory k moey devushka," a piece of pseudo-Russian gibberish (II,3).

By opening night of the long-awaited Colossal show, McDougle returns by surprise; his kidnapping and the other attempts to stop him had just been publicity gimmicks. The "show" comes off with a flourish. A mountain theme carries a song about bootleg liquor called "Old King Corn." A song and dance to "Swingtime in the Hills" capitalizes on the swing craze and combines it with hillbilly music, and two young lovers whose families are feuding sing a love song (II,38-41).

After the "show," McDougle makes a veiled reference to the Federal Theatre. Colossal Amusements has

succeeded, he says, with plants in Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, and New Orleans. With those plants, he continues, and including the radio programs they put on, Colossal will make over two million dollars annually (II,45). This ending suggests a parallel between McDougle, with his theatre factories, and the FTP, with its "plants" in many U. S. cities.

At least twenty-five former vaudevillians worked for the FTP in The Machine Age, and it ran for close to one month. The relief function of the FTP seems to have been satisfied, because the musical was written to accommodate vaudeville talent. The many specialty dances also allowed for various talents, including Spanish dancers and one specialty which the script labels as unassigned (I,52). McDougle is even given alternate lines in one scene (I,25), suggesting again the adaptability of the show.

Relevance in The Machine Age takes many forms. The most obvious of these derives from the show's premise: the absurdity of trying to mass produce theatre makes ironic comment on mass production in general, and on the Federal Theatre and its attempts to employ performers in particular.

Other aspects of American society attract the show's satire. The scene shop backdrop of prosperity mentioned earlier suggests that prosperity can be found only by looking very hard, and even then it will be just a painted-on affluence.

Capitalism is satirized: some women capitalists complain about how much they have to care for the poor, in "Widows and Orphans":

> I've given up my Paris home for a 17 room flat. . . .
> We've fired servants right and left . . . (II,7)

Comment about Roosevelt's troubles with the Supreme Court appears in a song titled, "McDougle is a Scoundrel and He's Out to Wreck the Nation." This Gilbert-and-Sullivan-type song by the judges has the ensemble singing that "They'll protect the Constitution if they keep the nation broke" (II,24-6). The judges reply that "any reference to greed is un-American" (II,27).

The Machine Age also shows some cosmopolitan attitudes. Ridiculing hillbilly orchestras might have been repulsive in a less sophisticated region; the New Yorker's idea of country-bumpkins condescends and laughs at them. Stage directions at the beginning of the "show" presented by Colossal Amusements have the scene taking place "in Carnegie or Town Hall" (II,29). The region is implicit in locations mentioned: Park Avenue (New York City) and Albany (New York State).

3. The Cradle Will Rock

Although Marc Blitzstein's The Cradle Will Rock was never officially produced by the FTP, any study of the Project's musicals would be incomplete without discussion of this production, a Federal Theatre show in spirit if not in fact. Cradle remains the only original FTP musical to have

been voted on, says Burns Mantle, for the Drama Critics Circle Award.[1] Mordden claims it was the only one to sport an original cast album.[2]

The opening date was set for June 16, 1937. On June 11, a letter to Flanagan from Ellen Woodward, the national administrator for the four arts projects, gave the following orders: "This is to inform you that, effective immediately, no openings of new productions shall take place until after the beginning of the coming fiscal year, that is, July 1, 1937."[3] Flanagan calls it "obviously censorship under a different guise."[4] Orson Welles, the director for the Project who had, with John Houseman producing, put on the famous "Voodoo" Macbeth for the FTP in New York, went to Washington. He stated that he and Houseman would put the show on by themselves, and was told that FTP would no longer support the show.[5] Houseman has said that he and Welles just wanted to put on a good show and that they had no political motive. Richard France in his

---

[1] Mantle, 1937-38, p. 473.

[2] Mordden, p. 164.

[3] Woodward to Flanagan, June 11, 1937, quoted in Mathews, p. 123.

[4] Flanagan, pp. 202-3.

[5] Ibid., p. 203.

book on Welles's contributions to the theatre claims that they had already decided to leave the FTP and that Cradle gave them a ready-made audience--the organized left. "Houseman and Welles managed to turn a rather routine government directive into an act of official censorship," he claims.[1]

The rest of the story is lengendary.[2] After a preview of Cradle on June 14 at the scheduled theatre, the Maxine Elliott, federal officials padlocked the theatre. With a borrowed piano and no sets or costumes, the cast and crew moved up to the Venice Theatre with the opening-night audience. The cast and musicians were enjoined not to perform on stage or in the orchestra pit, so Blitzstein himself played the piano on stage, and the actors stood up from seats in the house and sang their parts. France suggests that the evening's events were not entirely unplanned, and that Welles and Houseman had engaged in "myth-making."[3] The publicity surrounding the defiant opening boosted the careers of Welles and Houseman: they soon formed the Mercury Theatre, which presented Cradle on Sundays for a month beginning December 5, 1937, before moving

---

[1]Richard France, The Theatre of Orson Welles (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977), p. 100-1.

[2]The story is most recently retold in New York Times, May 1, 1983, Section 8, pp. 6 and 18.

[3]France, p. 102.

it to Broadway's Winsor Theatre on January 3, 1938, where it stayed for four months and proved profitable.[1] "The insurgents who disobeyed orders were, of course, fired from the Project and deprived of their precious pay," says Emory Lewis.[2] But many of those original cast members did not seem to mind, as they went on to appear in the Mercury Theatre production.

The Cradle Will Rock could be called a "play in music," or a "satiric operetta," as Atkinson and Whitman have labelled it.[3] Lehman Engel, first conductor for the show, says, "the French would call it opera comique."[4] Krutch considers it to be "something like a cantata."[5] Flanagan hints at the undefinable quality of the show: it is "music + play equaling something new and better than either."[6] Mathews evaluates Cradle's significance:

> It was the first serious musical drama written in America which provided a new vernacular for the man in the street--an achievement, . . . that made truly indigenous opera possible.[7]

---

[1] Ewen, New Complete, p. 99.

[2] Emory Lewis, p. 55.

[3] Brooks Atkinson and Albert Hirshfeld, The Lively Years, 1920-1973 (N.Y.: Associated Press, 1973), p. 120; Whitman, p. 104. The script also calls it a "play in music."

[4] Engel, p. 148.

[5] Joseph Wood Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918: An Informal History (N.Y.: Random House, 1939), p. 283.

[6] Flanagan, p. 201.

[7] Mathews, p. 122.

One of Cradle's most enduring characteristics is its absence of scenery, costumes, or intricate lighting. "By separating the play from its scenery and decor," Atkinson says, "the Federal Theatre did more than a conventional production could ever have done."[1] But it was an accident: Welles had planned elaborate scenery, which was discarded when the show was forced to move. Lavery considers the "simple oratorio approach" the closest thing to a new form of musical theatre begun by the FTP, but he realizes that the new form resulted by mistake. "The accidental form of the premiere became the permanent envelope for the piece."[2]

"The only aspect of the work that's dated is Mark's /sic/ excessive love of unions," Houseman said recently. "Actually, the play's only message is that a town run by a boss is not a good town. It's really that simple."[3] But Cradle was not alone in its pro-labor stance. John O. Hunter says that "in the middle 1930's there probably were more plays written on unionism than on any other single subject."[4] Blitzstein himself said that Cradle is

---

[1]Atkinson, p. 121.

[2]Lavery, The Flexible Stage, p. 130.

[3]Houseman quoted in N.Y. Times, p. 18.

[4]John O. Hunter, "Marc Blitzstein's The Cradle Will Rock as a Document of America, 1937," American Quarterly, XVIII (Summer 1966), p. 230.

"only incidentally about unions" and that his concept of work and the middle-class is more important.[1]

Cradle achieves its effects through ten scenes and eight locations, all dealing with some form of prostitution. Blitstein had played the song "Nickel Under the Foot" for Brecht, who suggested he write a whole musical about figurative prostitution.[2] Blitzstein thus emphasizes the element of prostitution throughout the show.

Scene One opens with Moll describing her poverty as a street walker; she gets propositioned, and is taken to jail because she will not submit to a policeman's advances. The Liberty Committee members, sent by capitalist Mr. Mister to protest a speech given by a unionist, are mistakenly arrested as radicals because one of them uses the word "revolution" (as in "Daughters of the American") (23-34).[3]

For the rest of the show, which takes place primarily in night court, the members of the Liberty Committee "are shown to be more contemptible prostitutes than the girl because they are willing to sell even their souls for money," claims Gagey.[4] And in the next scene, Druggist tells Moll

---

[1]Goldstein, p. 190.

[2]Ewen, New Complete, p. 98.

[3]Page numbers refer to Marc Blitzstein, The Cradle Will Rock (N.Y.: Random House, 1938).

[4]Gagey, p. 161.

that the Liberty Committee is in the same profession as she because they all sell out to Mr. Mister (40-1). Each scene, according to Smiley, "works as a discovery, revealing the relationship of one or more of the characters to the capitalistic Mr. Mister."[1] Mr. Mister has sent orders to protest unionism: in Scene Two the Liberty Committee sings in barbershop fashion, "We don't want a union in Steeltown," and they call Steeltown the "cradle of the Liberty Committee" (39).

Scene Three shows Reverend Salvation before the First World War, recounted by Druggist who has called Salvation a "habitual prostitute since 1915" (44). The Reverend accepts a bribe from Mrs. Mister, who, in "Hard Times," urges him to encourage his flock to remain at peace with Germany for business reasons. He then preaches "Thou shalt not kill" in his sermon (45-6). Another bribe prompts him to "simply answer both yes and no," as Mrs. Mister puts it: he then preaches, "Thou shalt not--um" (47-8). Finally, she urges him to support a war to help the economy: he preaches, "Thou--shalt--" (49).

Scene Four has a light-hearted song by the boorish and sluggish Junior Mister and the vacuous Sister Mister called "Croon Spoon," lampooning hack songwriting (52-58). Editor Daily, who Druggist says is a "pimp" (51), meets

---

[1] Smiley, p. 134.

with Mr. Mister and insists that "All my gift of prose'll / Be at your disposal" (59). In "Freedom of the Press," both sing that news can be colored for whichever side pays the most (59-61). Mr. Mister then suggests that they investigate and frame young Larry Foreman, who organizes unions. Since Mr. Mister has bought out Daily's paper that morning, Daily agrees to help his new boss frame Foreman. For more money, he'll even write a manifesto for the Liberty Committee and give Junior a job in Hawaii. Junior dreams of all the women he will meet in "Honolulu" (61-73).

Druggist explains in Scene Five how he allowed his son to be killed because of Mr. Mister. To keep from losing his store, Druggist had stayed quiet as a young couple was killed in an explosion and then framed for the explosion. Druggist's son intervened and was killed along with the couple (75-86). Blitzstein's most lovely and innocent song, and thus the most tragic, then occurs in this scene. The "Gus and Sadie Love Song" has them sing of their dreams that the pregnant Sadie will have a boy (82-5). That they die shortly after adds a poignant touch to the show.

Scene Six has the artist Dauber and the violinist Yasha, both of the Liberty Committee, doing what Engel describes as "pure end-man minstrel show,"[1] in which

---

[1]Engel, p. 148.

each claims to receive more money from Mrs. Mister. Blitzstein in his stage directions makes clear the minstrel show atmosphere of the scene: the music is to play a "vaudeville vamp-till-ready" and they both sing "a patter song" about their subsidization by Mrs. Mister (87-8). They both make fun of the rich, yet state their reasons for fawning on them: the rich may be "damned low" and have "no feeling," but they do have money (90). They then sing the hilarious "Art for Art's Sake," which acts as Blitzstein's condemnation of art without a social purpose (96).

Scene Seven shows Moll again in "Nickel Under the Foot," the centerpiece of the show. Moll explains how easy it is to "stand on someone's neck while you're takin" in order to survive, and that "if you're sweet, then you'll grow rotten" (97-102). This scene has the first entrance of the play's hero, Larry Foreman. He is described as "engaging" and "confident" (104), and he ridicules the fear that his handing out of leaflets instills in the Liberty Committee (106). He sings "The Cradle Will Rock," about the inevitability of "onions" growing throughout the land and of the inability to stop that growth (107-112).

Scene Eight shows Mr. Mister urging President Prexy of the University to extend the military tactics course. Professors Mamie, Trixie, and Scoot practice speeches for students about the military course (116-122). Trixie, who teaches Elementary French and coaches the football team,

cheers, naked from the waist up, praising military tactics and uniforms: "Soivice stripes--epaulettes-- / Silver shoit maybe--attababy!"(123). The Silver Shirts, William Dudley Pelley's American Nazi organization, seem to these educators under the thumb of Mr. Mister to be a harmless side effect of military thinking, not a serious fascist threat.

Scene Nine has Mr. Mister coercing Dr. Specialist to claim that Joe Walker, hurt at the factory because he preached unionism, was actually drunk. Joe's sister, Ella Hammer, sings "Joe Worker," a call to workers to protest the violence and oppression of anti-unionists (132-7).

The last scene returns to night court. The workers are voting at headquarters on whether or not to form a union. Mr. Mister tries to bribe Foreman to help him form a company union under the control of management, but Foreman does not give in. The show climaxes with the knowledge that the boilermakers, roughers, rollers, and other workers will unite, causing Mr. Mister and the Liberty Committee, the "cradle," to rock and fall (138-150).

Cradle gains its power through a clear story and a strong and evident point-of-view. Some unusual aspects of its structure require discussion. First, the hero does not appear until the second half of the show. Blitzstein shows the evil side in the first half, the problem, and then in the second half he shows the noble side, the solution. Smiley makes another observation regarding the show's

structure: "It presents a rising line of intensity of a lyric type rather than the traditional line of a story--conflict, crisis, and climax."[1] Krutch concurs, saying that the "savage cumulative absurdity" of Cradle is a major asset.[2]

The cast of over thirty rehearsed Cradle and were paid with FTP funds. The goal of supplying jobs to unemployed performers was achieved, until, of course, the unofficial opening. Cradle could use unemployed vaudeville performers with limited musical theatre experience because of its reliance on vaudeville and minstrel-show techniques.

The social and political relevance of Cradle is clear to anyone, and the bitterness of Blitzstein's comment, colored by mocking humor, irked those in Washington. The opening, scheduled only two weeks after the tragic CIO march on Republic Steel in Chicago, where men and women had been killed, made the subject of unionism a touchy one for a government-sponsored theatre.[3]

Written in New York and performed by New Yorkers, Cradle has little regionalism. Its Steeltown setting gives it a more universal quality, acceptable and relevant to everyone. There is no condescension towards rural areas. Hard-bitten urban characters represent not just New Yorkers,

---

[1]Smiley, p. 135.

[2]Krutch, p. 284.

[3]Mordden, p. 164; see p. 14 above.

but anyone from industrialized, depersonalized places.

4. Swing It

Swing It opened in New York at the Adelphi Theatre on July 22, 1937, and ran for ninety-three non-continuous performances to 41,587 people before closing on May 11, 1938.[1] The book-writer was Cecil Mack, who with Milton Reddie wrote the lyrics. Eubie Blake wrote the music. Swing It is one of the few copyrighted FTP musicals; the score was copyrighted in 1937 and Mills Publishing Company bought the rights.[2] Although Lavery does not place an asterisk by this show in his appendix, as he does to all the other original shows, both Flanagan and George Mason University's FTP collection consider this to be original.

An "all-Negro musical comedy" in which "music dominates,"[3] Swing It was Broadway's only musical to open in the summer of 1937.[4] Critical reaction was uniformly unfavorable: the New York Sun called it an "undistinguished

---

[1]Flanagan, p. 391; Lavery, The Flexible Stage, appendix. Bordman in American Musical Theatre, p. 504, says the show ran for only nine weeks; Mantle in 1937-38, p. 447, says there were only sixty performances.

[2]Swing It, p. 1, George Mason University; Billboard, August 28, 1937, Flanagan Papers, 20,325.

[3]New York Amsterdam News, April 30, 1938, p. 17.

[4]G/eorge/ R/oss/ , New York World Telegram, July 23, 1937, p. 8.

hodge-podge," Billboard said it was a "turkey," and the Brooklyn Citizen thought the show was "scrambled" with vaudeville acts and "irrelevant production numbers."[1]

Mordden, who mentions Swing It, along with A Hero is Born, as one of two FTP musicals to open in the 1937-38 season, suggests at least part of the problem: it was, "like the earlier black shows half-revue, half book show."[2] Arthur Pollack agrees, and further describes the problem of the libretto: Cecil Mack's book, "like too many books for Negro musical comedies, gives too much time to little scenes between two characters at one time and neglects to advance the story."[3] Part of the problem with the book was explained in Variety:

> / Swing It / was first a revue, but it was discovered that many bits were outmoded and later use of some numbers would have required royalties too high for a relief show budget.[4]

These problems with the book caused one critic to say it was "aimless" and at fault for "some dull half hours."[5]

About a Mississippi riverboat which moves to Harlem, Swing It is a loose take-off on Showboat.

---

[1]H. B., New York Sun, July 23, 1937, p. 10; Billboard, July 1, 1937; Brooklyn Citizen, July 23, 1937, Flanagan Papers, 20,325.

[2]Mordden, p. 166.

[3]Arthur Pollock, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, July 23, 1937, p. 7.

[4]Variety, July 21, 1937, Flanagan Papers, 20,325.

[5]Brooklyn Citizen, July 23, 1937, Flanagan Papers, 20,325.

The Brooklyn Citizen critic mentions the "regulation cotton'-pickin' and Old-Man-River scenes, which are alright as these things go."[1] Written in Southern Black dialect (e.g.: "Git on wid you," and "'cause if yo' foot slip"),[2] Swing It concerns the rivalry between Captain Jake Frye of the steamboat "Liza Jane" and Nate Smith of the "Susan Belle." Frye has just won a steamboat race for the first time in four years. Smith's anger at losing increases when Mr. Ginger Brown, a booking agent, offers to take Frye with his boat and entertainers to Harlem. While Smith gathers evidence to prove that the Mississippi does not reach Harlem, Frye and his mate Gabby gather more entertainers. In the second act, Frye and his company arrive in Harlem broke and disillusioned. They manage to get another boat from Gabby, who suggests that a tripple wedding might bring in business. Smith and his crew arrive soon, however, and try to stop the show, but Gabby skillfully manages to help the captains resolve their differences, and all ends happily.

Negro spirituals open the show, sung at high noon on the levee: "Can't Be Did No More" and "Gimme My Dancing Shoes." "The Liza Jane and Susan Belle," an ensemble

---

[1] Ibid.

[2] This synopsis from Swing It, and Production Notebook, George Mason University.

song, tells about the race four years ago when Frye's Liza Jane rotted and sank. The news that the Liza Jane won this race surprises everyone.

Ginger Brown arrives with his proposition. A cynic about love, he sings "What Do I Want With Love," which gives his attitude about romance:

> Kiss and start.
> Lovers part.
> Broken heart.
> Such foolishness is not happiness.

Rusty and Dusty, two comedy characters who enter periodically, have a fight because a policeman wants to arrest them for "fragrancy." Mrs. Frye objects to the plan to take the Liza Jane to Harlem, and a group of stevedores sing "We're the Roustabout Romeos."

Scene Two involves Mayme, former paramour of Frye, who wants to get money back from Ginger. They plan to get money by having her renew her affair with Frye. Scene Three shows preparations for auditions, while Smith tries to prove that they cannot get to Harlem by sailing up the Mississippi. Frye sings "Blah, Blah, Blah," in which he complains about his wife: "That woman takes the pleasure out of joy."

Sunflower Lane is the setting for Scene Four, in which Bob and Sadie, whose father fears she will go to Harlem, sing "Ain't We Got Love?" Scene Five contains songs and dances in a cabaret. The sixth scene takes place in the

Cockroach Cafe: four "singing waiters render a number," a dancer taps, and Gladys sings "Green and Blue," a gentle blues song, because she has just gotten fired for being late. The scene ends with Gladys being kidnapped, a black-out, and a gunshot.

Rusty and Dusty do more comedy on a country road in Scene Seven. In Scene Eight, a plantation song called "By the Seat of Your Brow" claims that "who works the hardest reaps the spoils." Scene Nine shows Frye and Smith arguing,and Scene Ten opens on the ship,where every-one sings "Captain, Mate, and Crew." The sheriff enters, charges Frye with kidnapping Old Smith's daughter Gladys, and takes him off to jail. The rest sing "Farewell, Dixieland," a promise to return to the land they love, done as a blackface minstrel song.

Act II opens with a production number on the stage of the Liza Jane in Harlem, "We're the Sons and Daughters of the Sea." Gabby, using malapropisms, opens Scene Two, and then two stewards advertise the showboat and its coming triple wedding in "Trilly on Down." In scene II,3, the "Levee Ladies" stage a sit-down strike because they were promised a star spot. Scene II,4 shows Smith entering to stop the show, and Gabby and Mayme, now betrothed, sing of their future in "Buggin' and Muggin'."

Smith sings "Down with Frye" in scene II,5, and a crewman sings "I Praise Sue," a lyrical glorification of

nature's beauty. Gabby in this scene comes up with the solution to Smith's jealousy at Frye's "success": Smith will gain half-interest in the show if he gives money to it.

The rest of the show consists of production numbers and short scenes: "A Symphony and Rhythm" dance number, a short Rusty and Dusty scene, a jungle scene (with the songs "Jungle Swing" and "Jungle Love," an anthem and a dance), a comedy dance, and then a final production number called "Swing Wedding."

If the story of Swing It seems scattered and incomplete, the fault lies with its authors. The conflict and resolution of the main plot never really develop. Gabby's solution to the problem resembles a deus ex machina device. The subplots, of which there are many, receive only periodic treatment. Swing It appears to have been a vehicle for its entertainers and for the Eubie Blake score, comprising swing tunes modified by what Bordman suggests is a more "pastel" feeling.[1]

The show employed many in the New York Negro unit. The story managed to serve the songs, dances, and comedy, but was not necessary to the entertainment. The varied acts comprise the bulk of the show.

Social relevance does not enter into Swing It; it is entertainment only. Absent are the superimposed social and

---

[1]Bordman, American Musical Theatre, p. 504.

political comments evident in many of the other original FTP musicals.

Regionalism in Swing It takes a peculiar form: a myopic view of Southern plantation existence, a view which holds that work will result in reward, a view which glosses over the harsh realities of slave existence and the life of Southern blacks after slavery. The view of black show business life is similarly unrealistic: all the characters do is sing and dance and get married. Show business for blacks in the South and in Harlem could not have been that easy. Swing It aimed to succeed with white audiences as well as black ones, and perhaps the fairy-tale view of black life intended to succeed in cosmopolitan New York.

A final note is required about a hint of racism in Swing It. Steve, a white gambler, fears being eaten by a whale. "Don't worry," a sailor says, "whales don't like white meat." Further racism is revealed when a Chinese man is called a "chink."

5. Ready! Aim! Fire!

Stone and Robinson are again the authors of the last musical discussed in this study, Ready! Aim! Fire! (R!A!F!). Clair Leonard wrote the music for this book musical, which opened in Los Angeles on October 22, 1937, running for fity-eight performances before 33,368 people,

and closing on January 9, 1938. The Tampa FTP unit also produced it from March 6 to 26, 1939, for twenty-one performances to 3,317 people.[1] Stone says R!A!F! is "a book musical with a plot."[2] Called a "Musical Comedy (satire on war)," R!A!F! has thirty characters (24 male and 6 female) and a chorus, has two acts with eighteen scenes, and is set "anytime."[3] The production notebook makes the following claim: "This is an original production, conceived and developed by project workers on project time."

Critical reaction to R!A!F! generally contained praises for the show. Schallert says that it was "especially well performed."[5] Mathews calls the show "less sophisticated and subtle" than most Broadway shows, but performed with expertise.[6] Flanagan gives her opinion in Arena:

> /~ Ready! Aim! Fire! ~/ was funny and uninhibited. It had less sophistication and certainly less subtlety than we expect in New York. It lacked the ceramic finish, the hard glaze of a Broadway show. Instead it possessed zest and ebullience which Broadway often sacrifices for smartness.[7]

---

[1] Flanagan, p. 391; Lavery, The Flexible Stage, appendix.

[2] Stone, Transcript, p. 8.

[3] Ready! Aim! Fire!, Production Notebook, p. 1, George Mason University.

[4] Ibid., p. 51.

[5] Schallert in Mantle, 1937-38, p. 30.

[6] Mathews, p. 156.

[7] Flanagan, p. 282.

The L. A. Times called the show "a rollicking satire on war" which "has verve, humor, whimsy, freshness, novelty, lively music and dances, pretty girls and a fine male chorus--in short, all the qualities needed to make a hit with the public." It goes on to mention the large cast and smooth ensemble work.[1] The L. A. Daily News offers some advice on how to improve the show: with "a more deft integration of its many scenes, a little re-writing of some of the slow spots and some judicious cutting of over-long sequences," it says, R!A!F! would be a "first-rate little musical comedy."[2]

R!A!F! uses a strong story which satirizes the war-like attitudes of dictatorial European nations, and it facilitates the many vaudeville routines of the FTP performers. Set in the mythical country of Moronia, whose "Pink Shirts" are about to make war with the "Purple Pants" of Berzerkia, their ancient enemy, the musical shows a country trying to ferment a war. Placards urge men to join the army, and "save the Homeland from Berzerkia" (3).[3] A rousing song called "Join the Army" claims that "a war is like a holiday" (3), and that a true Pink Shirt "will die

---

[1] L. A. Times, October 23, 1937, Production Notebook, p. 46.

[2] (L. A.) Daily News, October 25, 1937, Production Notebook, p. 46.

[3] Page numbers in parentheses will refer to Ready! Aim! Fire!, George Mason University.

for the flag if it kills him!"(4).

Peace strikers respond by marching and singing "Strike against War":

> You march and march--
> Then march some more;
> Your back is breaking
> Your feet are sore
> You don't know what
> You're fighting for
> You only know
> It's a hell of a war. (6)

Platitude-spouting Dictator Schmaltz of Moronia discusses with his capitalistic advisor Krupenheimer, the power behind the dictator, the problem that "those damn pacifists" pose in stirring the people up against war (9). "It's communism-- that's what it is," says Krupenheimer (8). "Our forefathers went out and got shot first and asked questions afterward. . . . That's patriotism" (9).

The cabinet members enter and sing "The Ministers' Song," which describes their job:

> Yes, we've come to have our say--
> And also to get our pay. . . .
> . . . . . .
> We don't ever disagree,
> We just wait
> For Schmaltz to vote--
> And then vote the same as he. (11)

A short minstrel routine follows, with two ministers playing as Mister Bones and Rastus (12). The King enters; a "stooge," he eats bananas throughout the meeting (13). The ministers complain, in "The People Refuse to Get Shot," about the fact that techniques they have used before to stir up a war do not seem to be working anymore (15-16).

Franz, the young American-educated, sporty hero, enters looking for a football which the ministers have just humorously mistaken for a bomb (18). Franz suggests that they find a song--similar to World War One's "Over There"--which would arouse the people. He suggests that they hire Harry Hinkle and Bugs Magee, American song-writers (20-23).

The scene shifts to the studio of Hinkle and Magee, singing "Shack in Hackensack," a song the stage directions say "is reminiscent of at least twelve other popular melodies" (24). Their agent Sam is threatening to quit, prompting them to sing their imitation of a Shirley Temple song, "You Make My Heart Go Hippity-Hop," to make him stay. Before Sam can leave, a messenger delivers a telegram from Moronia offering them $10,000 to write a song that will start a war within two weeks (28).

A "motion picture montage" shows a streamline train, an ocean cruiser, a battalion of planes, and a kaleidoscopic effect of all of them before revealing Hinkle and Magee and Sam hitchhiking into Moronia from its outskirts (30). A maypole dance welcomes them, during which drunken soldiers sing "Drinking Song" in praise of Alka-Seltzer (31 and 34a-d). Schmaltz sings a patter song called "A Holiday, a Happy Day" because Hinkle and Magee have arrived (32). A specialty fencing drill interrupts Sam's plea for more money for his clients (33).

Meanwhile, in Berzerkia, Dictator Borsht, "a short pompous individual," sends secret agent Sonya to steal the song from Moronia (35-8). Sonya and Louise, the Princess of Berzerkia's royal family, who spies for excitement and not for money, cannot find the song in the songwriters' room. Sonya goes downstairs to distract Hinkle and Magee while Louise continues to search (39-41). Franz enters, and Louise pretends she is the maid (41-44). He sings "No More War (in my Heart)" (44-44a), a love song, and they exit to talk, falling all the while in love (45-6).

Magee, Hinkle, and Sonya re-enter, a bit tipsy. Falling prey to Sonya's charms, the songwriters retrieve the song from its hiding place and sing it. "Fight, Moronia, Fight" is a rousing, football-cheer song (46-51). While Harry is out of the room, Sonya tells Magee that she wants to thank him, and that a custom in Russia (this, by the way, is the first reference to Russia) is to close eyes when kissing. They kiss, Harry's eyes closed, and Sonya steals the prized song (53-4).

The Berzerkians change the song to "Fight, Berzerkia, Fight," and play it on the radio (55). Hinkle, Magee, and Sam end up in jail until they can come up with a new song for Moronia (56). With only ten minutes to go before they must write a song or be executed, Magee cannot manage to write a new lyric because of the pressure. Without artistic inspiration, he says, he cannot possibly produce,

and they are taken off to be executed (56-60).

At the execution, a tap dance formation with rifle drills, pantomine shooting, and other military ceremonies introduces the scene. The stage directions suggest the authors' attempts to integrate this action: "Action should be worked out with business so that number does not seem like unrelated specialty" (61). A marksman demonstrates his skill before the execution, doing a mirror shot, a between-the-legs shot, and a shot into the air which brings down a half-dozen ducks (63-4).

As the Americans line up to be shot and hear the Captain call out orders to the firing squad, Magee gets his inspiration and sings "Ready! Aim! Fire!":

> When the shirts advance
> The Purple Pants
> Have no chance. (65a)

Armed with such a sure-fire song, Dictator Schmaltz declares war on Berzerkia.

Act II opens with the Krupenheimer Radio Hour, in which "Go the Krupenheimer Way"[1] urges Moronian soldiers to buy Krupenheimer gas masks and uniforms:

> For the gas will smell like roses
> If you smell the Krupenheimer Way. . . .
> . . . . . .
> If you've got to die, old timer,
> Wear a smile for Krupenheimer
> And die the Krupenheimer Way! (68)

---

[1]According to the Program, George Mason University; the script titles the song, "Three Krupenheimer Kuties."

Franz has become an actor on this program, all the while missing Louise; he plays a soldier dying the Krupenheimer way with Krupenheimer products, as reports of Moronia's victories come in (69-72).

As incentive to encourage men to enlist in Moronia's army, Gypsy Nora Lee and her Red Hot Mamas will entertain them (73-75). After Professor Litach performs his famous disappearing card trick, Gypsy Nora and her girls sing "We're the Girls from Blinsky's," a comedy strip-tease:

> We did the bumps
> For all the chumps
> Back in the U.S.A. . . .
> . . . . . .
> How we squirm this
> Epidermis
> When we start to sway. (75a)

Men enlist promptly and pile inside to see the rest of the strip-tease (76).

Two short scenes at this point make the power of Krupenheimer quite clear. First, he manipulates two marionettes resembling Schmaltz and Borsht, making them sing and dance (77). The next scene "utilizes the dance form and will be presented by the Concert Group," say the stage directions. A satirical dance shows the speeding up of production in the Krupenheimer factory due to the war (78).

As Moronia and Berzerkia fight, Louise longs for Franz, but she knows they can never be together because they are on opposite sides of the war (79-80). But Franz

enters, disguised as a butler; he removes the disguise and professes love for Louise (80-83). But Dictator Borsht also has his eyes on Louise, so Franz returns to Moronia (84).

Moronia and Berzerkia wage war not only on the battlefield but also on radio by urging their men to fight, their national songs play on radio to both sides (89-95). Franz, when he realizes that both sides can hear both broadcasts, sings the gentle, friendly song he had sung to Louise, "No More War (in my Heart)," and the men all stop fighting (95).

After the war is over, Moronia and Berzerkia merge, and since both Schmaltz and Borsht have fled, Magee and Hinkle become "King Harry, the eighth and King Bugs, the eighth and a half" (98). However, they receive an offer to write the songs for the Shuberts' next musical, Swing Time in the Trenches (100-1). They return the crown to King Leo, but a collection agency demands the crown in payment for war debts. Magee and Hinkle suggest that Franz rule the country. Franz accepts and announces that Louise will be First Lady and Leo will be Vice-President. (King: "What does a vice-president do?" Magee: "Nothing." Harry: "You're perfect for the job.") (104-105). With a reprise of "No More War," the show ends; a mythical Europe is at peace, and the songwriters are beginning a successful career.

This detailed explanation of Ready! Aim! Fire! reveals several aspects about the show. First, the satire is pointed directly at the threat of war in Europe and those who encourage it. Though placed in mythical countries, Schmaltz's Pink Shirts resemble both Germany's Brownshirts and Italy's Blackshirts, and act as a warning to those who sympathize with Pelley and his American Silver Shirts. Borsht and his Purple Pants resemble Russia; that Sonya mentions her Russian background makes the parallel even clearer.

Second, the satire uses farcical vaudeville techniques to ridicule with broad humor and bright spirit, rather than with the sardonic bitterness evident in The Cradle Will Rock. More like a farcical Marx Brothers movie than one with a serious message, R!A!F! never treats its characters realistically. War and the foolishness of those who start wars are laughed at by the authors from the beginning. Their seriousness is evident, but farcical wit tempers it.

Third, while R!A!F! is the most developed original FTP musical in its characters and in its linear plot (unlike Cradle's cumulative method of story-telling), the show still fails to integrate the songs into the story. Pal Joey, for instance, should be labeled a musical which is only half integrated. Many of Pal Joey's songs are set in a nightclub and are treated as performances. Still

others are part of the story; remove them and the sense of the scene would be lost. In Oklahoma!, all of the songs merge with the scenes and action. Remove the songs, and the scenes would not make sense. Oklahoma! is thus considered to be fully integrated. Ready! Aim! Fire! makes no attempt to integrate in that way. Each song is referred to as a song by the characters, and each could be removed without diminishing the dramatic content. Never does a song swell up from the emotions of the characters without first being announced as a song. Even the military march which the authors wanted to integrate with the action is, nevertheless, a performance, part of the pomp and circumstance of an official royal gathering.

R!A!F! supplied employment to many on relief rolls; its variety of material attests to that. The relevance of the war theme to the people at that time is evident, and it would translate into terms acceptable to audiences today. Regionalism is taken into account in this show only insofar as local people were employed. That the show takes place in a mythical Europe (or Africa or Asia or South America) allows the show to achieve a certain universal quality, limited to no region and no time.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The original musicals of the Federal Theatre Project surveyed in this study all achieved, in some measure, the aims expressed by Flanagan and her other administrators--the musicals served a relief function of supplying jobs, they tried to present theatre which was relevant to the needs of workers and audiences, and they encouraged theatre which was native to their particular region of the country. But while the FTP original musicals fulfilled those functions of relief, relevance, and regionalism, they often did so at the expense of each other and of artistic quality.

The pastiche musicals emphasized the FTP aim of supplying jobs, more than the goals of relevance and regionalism. They all put people to work. But relevance in the pastiches was limited. In the New York pastiches, relevance to the concerns of the day was almost non-existent, and only Tapestry in Linen of the Northwest pastiches attempted to deal with an important concern of Oregon life. Regionalism showed most obviously in the Northwest pastiches-- all the characters

are from Oregon -- while the New York pastiches showed the idea of that city as a melting pot by using characters of various races and nationalities.

The revues achieved the three FTP aims more effectively than the pastiches. Relief was their primary aim, yet they stressed relevance more than the pastiches did. However, the regionalism was diffuse, emphasizing national rather than regional concerns.

The book musicals achieved the relief goals, and regionalism was often overshadowed by the attempt to present relevant ideas. While the revues focused their social comment on life at the time -- magazines, vaudeville, and the FTP itself -- the book musicals, such as The Cradle Will Rock and Ready! Aim! Fire!, emphasized political issues -- unionism and war.

Each musical reached to some extent the FTP's aims, but often the goals conflicted with each other so that seldom were the goals achieved in equal measure. As Rabkin points out, perhaps the FTP was unable to reconcile its relief commitment with its commitment to presenting relevant theatre.[1] Similarly, supplying jobs and presenting relevant theatre also overshadowed the goal of encouraging regional drama. As Mathews puts it, the FTP was "thrice-damned," as a New Deal program, as a relief

---

[1]Rabkin, p. 123.

measure, and as an artistic venture, and it suffered from the contradictions resulting from its varied aims and purposes.[2]

While these goals seemed to conflict, all three goals limit the effectiveness of the shows today. The pastiches, for instance, in an effort to supply jobs, are principally nostalgic recreations or parodies of songs of the past. They would not have much chance of succeeding with an audience of today. Of the revues, Sing For Your Supper might appeal to audiences today with its wit and ironic humor, but its limited theme--the WPA--has little interest today to most theatre-goers. O Say Can You Sing has the same limitation.

The Cradle Will Rock is the most effective theatre piece of the FTP original musicals; recent productions attest to its success today. Despite its limited theme of unionism, but rather because of its expression of the universal need for man to feel that he can conquer adversity through cooperation, Cradle will endure as a significant piece of American drama.

Ready! Aim! Fire! seems able to transfer best to today; its anti-war theme and broad humor have a universal appeal. However, its vaudeville style limits the show's appeal to that of a period piece. Although the vaudeville

---

[1]Mathews, p. 305.

style works better than in other Stone and Robinson shows, Ready! Aim! Fire! lacks the wild abandon of a powerful farce or the polish of a Broadway show. The production of musicals faced another problem--money. Only four-tenths of one-percent of all FTP monies could be spent on royalties. This made production of new plays with high quality difficult. According to Flanagan, commercial producers could spend five percent of their money on royalties, and she says that "there is no doubt in the world that this difference explains to some extent our difficulty in obtaining new material of the proper calibre."[1] She specifically points out that royalty restrictions limited the FTP's choice of musicals.[2]

Lavery explains that new songs could make it more easily as successes in nightclubs, since in the FTP there was never an assurance of a substantial advance or even of a long run. Further, there was no way to protect the material if a private manager wanted to buy it. The bigger musicals were thus out of reach of the FTP.[3] Two-A-Day actually was bought, by William Anthony McGuire and Lew Cantor, the rights being purchased from the FTP,[4] but Stone and Robinson got none of the money, having sold the

---

[1]Flanagan, Transcript of Policy Board Meeting, April 13, 1938, p. 20, Flanagan Papers, 21,119.

[2]Flanagan, Arena, p. 263.

[3]Lavery, The Flexible Stage, p. 126.

[4]"News of the Stage," N.Y. Times, January 6, 1939, Section L, p. 24.

show to the government at the standard rate.[1]

Problems that this government-sponsored theatre had with payment of royalties and with how much it could spend need further scholarly study, to determine the effect that the FTP's financial situation had on the production of plays. Other problems of the FTP warrant detailed examination as well. For instance, the problems posed by union restrictions, by the hiring of non-relief personnel, and by local control of the regional projects warrant further study.

The FTP as a whole made many significant contributions to American theatre by bringing legitimate plays to many places which had previously not had much professional theatre, says Joseph Mersand.[2] Gagey admits that the FTP's artistic accomplishments did not equal the ventures of the commercial stage, but he stresses the Project's achievements in developing the Living Newspaper, in experimental drama, in Negro theatre, and in drama of social significance.[3] Lavery feels that the FTP helped new playwrights,[4] and both Stone and Edson feel the FTP boosted their careers.[5]

---

[1] Variety, May 10, 1939, Archives, General Correspondence of the National Office, Box 122.

[2] Joseph Mersand, The American Drama Since 1930 (N.Y.: Modern Chapbooks, 1949), p. 175.

[3] Gagey, p. 168.

[4] Lavery, Interview Transcript, p. 25.

[5] Stone, Interview Transcript, p. 18; Edson, Summary of Interview, p. 2.

But the significant contribution of FTP's original musical theatre was lessened because of the difficulties involved in achieving the Project's aims.

But in spite of or even because of those difficulties, Stone and Robinson were able to develop the "vaudeville musical," the perfection of a form aspired to by most of the FTP original musicals because they were trying to incorporate vaudeville talent in a way that would be entertaining to audiences. Lavery suggests that the most important element of FTP musicals was their variety of content and depth of research.[1] The Cradle Will Rock provided proof that a socially-relevant musical could deal with an important theme effectively and still be humorous and entertaining. But the other FTP musicals are seldom remembered; few receive notice in books about American musicals. Perhaps, as Lehac believes, Sing For Your Supper would be considered a "landmark" of American musicals had the FTP continued.[2] But the spirit of experimentation infected the musicals as it did most of the other new FTP plays, according to Lavery: the musicals were "ready to try anything--once."[3] And, although the

---

[1]Lavery, The Flexible Stage, p. 130.

[2]Lehac, Interview Transcript, pp. 11 and 12.

[3]Lavery, p. 127.

contribution of the FTP to American theatre may be what Rabkin calls "not very impressive,"[1] the musicals did succeed somewhat by the Project's own standards. Achievement of those standards may have limited the value of the musicals as enduring works of American musical theatre, but the musicals helped fight, as did the whole FTP, for what Flanagan called "a free theatre as one of the many expressions of a civilized, informed, and vigorous life."[2]

---

[1] Rabkin, 123.

[2] Flanagan, p. 367.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Atkinson, Brooks, and Hirschfeld, Albert. The Lively Years, 1920-1973. New York: Associated Press, 1973.

Athearn, Robert G. The American Heritage New Illustrated History of the United States. Vol. 14. The Roosevelt Era. New York: Dell, 1963.

Block, Anita. The Changing World in Plays and Theatre. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1939.

Bordman, Gerald. American Musical Comedy: From "Adonis" to "Dreamgirls." New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

_____. American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Buttitta, Tony, and Witham, Barry. Uncle Sam Presents: A Memoir of the Federal Theatre, 1935-1939. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

Cahn, William. A Pictorial History of the Great Comedians. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1957; reprint ed., 1970.

Clough, Shepard B.; Bradenburg, David J.; Guy, Peter; Pflanze, Otto; Payne, Stanley G. A History of the Western World: 1715 to the Present, 2nd ed. Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1969.

Craig, E. Quita. Black Drama of the Federal Theatre Era. Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.

DiMeglio, John. Vaudeville U.S.A. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973.

Engel, Lehman. The American Musical Theatre. New York: Macmillan, 1975.

Ewen, David. New Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970.

_____. The Story of America's Musical Theatre. New York: Chilton, 1968.

Flanagan, Hallie. Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1940; reprint ed., 1965.

Flexner, Eleanor. American Playwrights, 1918-1938: The Theatre Retreats from Reality. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938.

France, Richard. The Theatre of Orson Welles. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977.

Gagey, Edmond M. Revolution in American Drama. New York: Columbia Press, 1947; reprint ed., Freeport; New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.

Goldstein, Malcolm. The Political Stage: American Drama and Theatre of the Great Depression. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Kislan, Richard. The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theatre. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1980.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. The American Drama Since 1918: An Informal History. New York: Random House, 1939.

Laufe, Abe. Broadway's Greatest Musicals. New York: Funk and Wagnall's, 1977.

Lavery, Emmet. The Flexible Stage: The Federal Theatre in Profile. Unpublished manuscript, at the Library of Congress Federal Theatre Project Collection at George Mason Uniersity Libraries, Fairfax, Virginia; (Flanagan cites this book as published by Samuel French, 1941.)

Mantle, Burns. The Best Plays of 1935-1936; 1936-1937; 1937-1938; 1938-1939; 1939-1940. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1936-1940.

Mathews, Jane De Hart. The Federal Theatre, 1935-1939: Plays, Relief, and Politics. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967.

Mersand, Joseph. The American Drama Since 1930. New York: Modern Chapbooks, 1949.

Mordden, Ethan. Better Foot Forward: The History of American Musical Theatre. New York: Grossman, 1976.

O'Connor, John, and Brown, Lorraine, eds. Free, Adult, Uncensored: The Living History of the Federal Theatre Project. Washington, D. C.: New Republic Books, 1978.

Palmer, R. R., and Colton, Joel. A History of The Modern World. 3rd ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968.

Poggi, Emil John. Theatre in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968.

Rabkin, Gerald. Drama and Commitment. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1964.

Smiley, Sam. The Drama of Attack: Didactic Plays of the American Depression. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1972.

Smith, Bill. The Vaudevillians. New York: Macmillan, 1976.

Toll, Robert C. On With The Show: The First Century of Show Business in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Vaughn, Robert. Only Victims: A Study of Show Business Blacklisting. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1972.

Wecter, Dixon. The Age of the Great Depression, 1929-1941. New York: Macmillan, 1948.

Wittler, Clarence J. Some Social Trends in W.P.A. Drama. Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 1939.

Whitman, Willson. Bread and Circuses: A Study of Federal Theatre. New York: Oxford University Press, 1937.

DISSERTATIONS

Korn, Marjorie Susan. "'It Can't Happen Here': Federal Theatre's Bold Adventure." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri at Columbia, 1978.

Kreizenbeck, Alan D. "The Theatre Nobody Knows: Forgotten Productions of the Federal Theatre Project, 1935-1939." Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1979.

Mardis, Robert Francis. "Federal Theatre in Florida." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1972.

Miller, M. Lawrence. "Original Federal Theatre Protest Plays, 1936-1939: The New Deal Contributions to the American Drama of Social Concern." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1968.

Ross, Theophil Walter, Jr. "Conflicting Concepts of the Federal Theatre Project: A Critical History," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri at Columbia, 1981.

ARTICLES

Hasbany, Richard. "The Musical Goes Ironic: The Evolution of Genres," Journal of American Culture I (Spring 1978): 120-136.

Holcomb, Robert. "The Federal Theatre in Los Angeles," California Historical Society Quarterly 41 (June 1962): 131-47.

Hunter, John O. "Marc Blitzstein's 'The Cradle Will Rock' as a Document of America, 1937," American Quarterly 18 (Summer 1966): 227-33.

Knapp, Margaret M. "Integration of Elements as a Viable Standard for Judging Musical Theatre," Journal of American Culture I (Spring 1978): 112-19.

Kolodin, Irving. "Footlights, Federal Style: The Astonishing Story of the Federal Theater," Harper's Monthly Magazine 173 (November 1936): 621-31.

"Unemployed Arts," Fortune (May 1937): 108.

Interviews found in Library of Congress Federal Theatre Project Collections at George Mason University Libraries

Edson, Eda. Studio City, California, 30 May 1976.

Engel, Lehman. New York City, 23 October 1976.

Lavery, Emmet. Encino, California, 5 January 1976.

_____. Encino, California, 17 October 1977.

Lehac, Ned. New Paltz, New York, June 1977.

Sour, Robert. New York City, 31 October 1977.

Stone, Gene. Santa Monica, California, 21 July 1977.

Major Resource Centers

National Archives, Record Group 69, Records of the Works Progress Administration.

Library of Congress Federal Theatre Project Collection at George Mason University Libraries, Fairfax, Virginia.

Papers of Hallie Flanagan, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York City Public Library, Lincoln Center.