

SPLASHBACK

THE FIRST COMPLETE HISTORY OF NORTHWESTERN'S DOLPHIN SHOW

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1939-1963

DIVING IN:

The Original Dolphin Show

In 1939, a highly motivated group of Northwestern undergraduate men interested in developing their swimming talents formed an elite squad called the Dolphin Club. When the opportunity to compete in a Florida swim contest arose in 1940, the Dolphin Club hosted a swim carnival at Patten Pool (now Patten Gymnasium) to fund their trip. The carnival-fundraiser was a rousing success, as was the competition, so the event was revived annually over the next few years, growing in both popularity and spectacle.

The Dolphin Club's 1944 offering, a Hawaiian-themed extravaganza, was given a name, *Wela Kahau*, and The Dolphin Show, in its original all-singing, all-swimming form, was born. Directed by Ronnie Trumble, the highlight of *Wela*



Poolside hula dancers in *Wela Kahau* (1944)



Members of the 1949 Dolphin Club

Kahau was extensive, synchronized water ballets executed by nine volunteer coeds in the style of Esther Williams and Billy Rose's *Aquacade*. Despite the success of *Wela Kahau*, World War II – and pioneering director Ronnie Trumble's term in the Navy – forced The Dolphin Show to take a two-year hiatus.

Returning triumphantly in 1947, *Howdy Padhner* was a wild, wet Western, complete with costumes, settings, and a poolside orchestra. Like Northwestern's already well-established Waa-Mu Show, early Dolphin Shows featured student-written songs and sketches – all performed in the pool – in addition to legendary synchronized sequences and water relays. The show was dedicated to Sergeant Howard Jaynes, Jr., former captain of the 1943 Northwestern swim team, who was killed in action in 1944 while serving as a paratrooper in France.

1948's *Mr. Dolphin Goes To Town* set the show in New York City and featured dazzling diving acts, while *Hey Rube*, the 1949 circus-themed show, included a fire dancing number and fluorescent bathing suits provided by Jantzen, the

iconic swimwear line and longtime Dolphin Show costuming partner. *Hey Rube* featured original music by Sheldon Harnick, whose lyrics for *Fiddler on the Roof* would eventually win him a Tony Award. In 1949, the newly formed Lorelei Club, an all-female swim group, joined the Dolphin Club as co-producers of the annual Dolphin Show. Each group was given equal representation on the Dolphin Show Executive "Showboard."

Look Out Below, the 1950 show, was described as simply "everything – music, water follies, romance, comedy, all rolled into one." Crowd-pleasing specialties included an innovative waterfall curtain, dazzling use of black lights, glycerin bubbles, a chorus of mermaids, and an opening night complete with searchlights. *Jambalaya*, The Dolphin Show's New Orleans-inspired 1951 effort, was featured on television and in *Life* magazine. The Mayor of New Orleans wrote to the show to say that his city was eager to help the production in any way possible. *Jambalaya* starred Inga Swenson, who went on to star in Broadway's *110 in the Shade* and on the long-running sitcom *Benson*.

Although previous Dolphin Shows had been presented in January, *Aqua-Quest*, a world tour by water, took place in November 1951. The Dolphin Show continued delighting audiences in the fall for a fully decade until it returned to its original early winter timeslot in 1961. *Neptune's Memoirs* (1952) involved a complex plot in which King Neptune lost and regained his memory and featured a memorable man-made underwater waterwheel.

New Fins of '53 was a splashing success due to particularly striking sets and costumes, as was 1954's *Bottoms Up*, a storybook revue featuring beloved fairy tales and children's story characters. By the early 1950s, The Dolphin Show had reached incredible popularity with nearly 300 students auditioning for less than 50 roles. The circus theme of 1949 returned in 1955 with *Fanfare*, which once again filled Patten Pool with trapeze artists, elephants, clowns, and majorettes. 1956's *The Swimming Game* featured a segment parodying *Good News* and a sensational Aztec sequence.

Out to See was Dolphin's 1957 Space Age tribute to Sputnik. 1958's *Water Colors* involved a countess visiting an artist whose works came to life through aquatic ballet and sketch comedy. The 15th Annual Dolphin Show, *Splashing Good Time* (1959) set the show at a mountain resort, while *Wonderland Revisited* brought the story of *Alice in Wonderland* underwater in 1961. Producer Roy Pinchot, '62, remembers "rave reviews and sell out crowds," as well as a more story-centered departure from Dolphin's earlier revue-style presentations. Carla Harms, '63, assisted with costumes for *Wonderland Revisited* and recalls, "We didn't know they would be dried over steam heat after they were worn; they shrank a lot." 1962 brought Dolphin's take on Homer's *The Odyssey* to Patten Pool with *Aquassey*, and 1963's *Fogg-Bound* marked the end of an era: based on *Around the World in Eighty Days* by Jules Verne, it was the last student-written Dolphin Show.



A The Atlantis Court in *Look Out Below* (1950) **B** A land-bound rehearsal for *Aqua-Quest* (1952) **C** The famous Aztec self-sacrifice sketch from *The Swimming Game* (1956) **D** The cast of *Jambalaya* (1950) sings the finale, "Meet Me at the Mardi Gras" **E** Karin Stephen as Alice in *Wonderland Revisited* (1961) **F** An underwater shot from *Jambalaya* **G** The girls of *Out to See* (1957)

1964-1969

FISH OUT OF WATER:

Less Dolphin, More Show

A far cry from the fundraising carnival it once was, by 1964, The Dolphin Show had outgrown its roots as an aquatic revue and its team sought to make a splash with meatier material. For the first time since the show's inception, the six Dolphin Shows produced between 1964 and 1969 did not seek to raise money for the swim team, nor were they fanciful student-



written works. Instead, Dolphin began to produce innovatively restaged revivals, employing two distinct casts, referred to as the "land cast" and "water cast," that performed simultaneously both in and out of the pool to put over well-known musicals by the likes of Gilbert and Sullivan and Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Dolphin first looked to operettas by Gilbert and Sullivan, producing *The Mikado* (1964), *Scheherazade* (1965), and *The Gondoliers* (1966), before finally turning to Broadway for amphibiotic stagings of *Bye Bye Birdie* (1967), *Carousel* (1968), and *South Pacific* (1969). Peter Sloss, '64, had a hard time remembering when he performed in *The Mikado*: "Senior moment, or the lingering effects of breathing chlorine for a week," he jokes.

While these productions were successful, musical theatre in and around a pool could only go so far, so the show "lost its fins and moved to dry land," as Nancy Sellars, '68, who played the "land" Scheherazade, describes it.



TOP The "land cast" in rehearsal for *South Pacific* (1969) **MIDDLE** The synchronized "Carousel Ballet" from *Carousel* (1968)
BOTTOM LEFT Cast members strike a pose in *The Mikado* (1964) **BOTTOM RIGHT** The aquatic "Shriner's Ballet" in *Bye Bye Birdie* (1968)



A Helen Bennett leads the cast of *Mame* (1970) **B** Emma Rosenthal in *Carousel* (2008) **C** Gerald Kroeger and Stewart Figa in *Fiddler on the Roof* (1978)
D Suzie Plaksin and Christy Noonan in *Gypsy* (1979) **E** Deborah Tranelli (center) with Debra Dickinson and Emily Grinspan in *Company* (1974)
F *Once Upon A Mattress* (1977) **G** Bryan Dunbar and Beth Lichtenstein in *Sunday in the Park with George* (1992) **H** Danielle Gaines and cast in *The Wizard of Oz* (2009) **I** Leslie Jackson and Tommy Wells in *Ragtime* (2011) **J** The cast of *Anything Goes* (1987)

1970-

YES WE CAHN:

Dolphin Dries Off

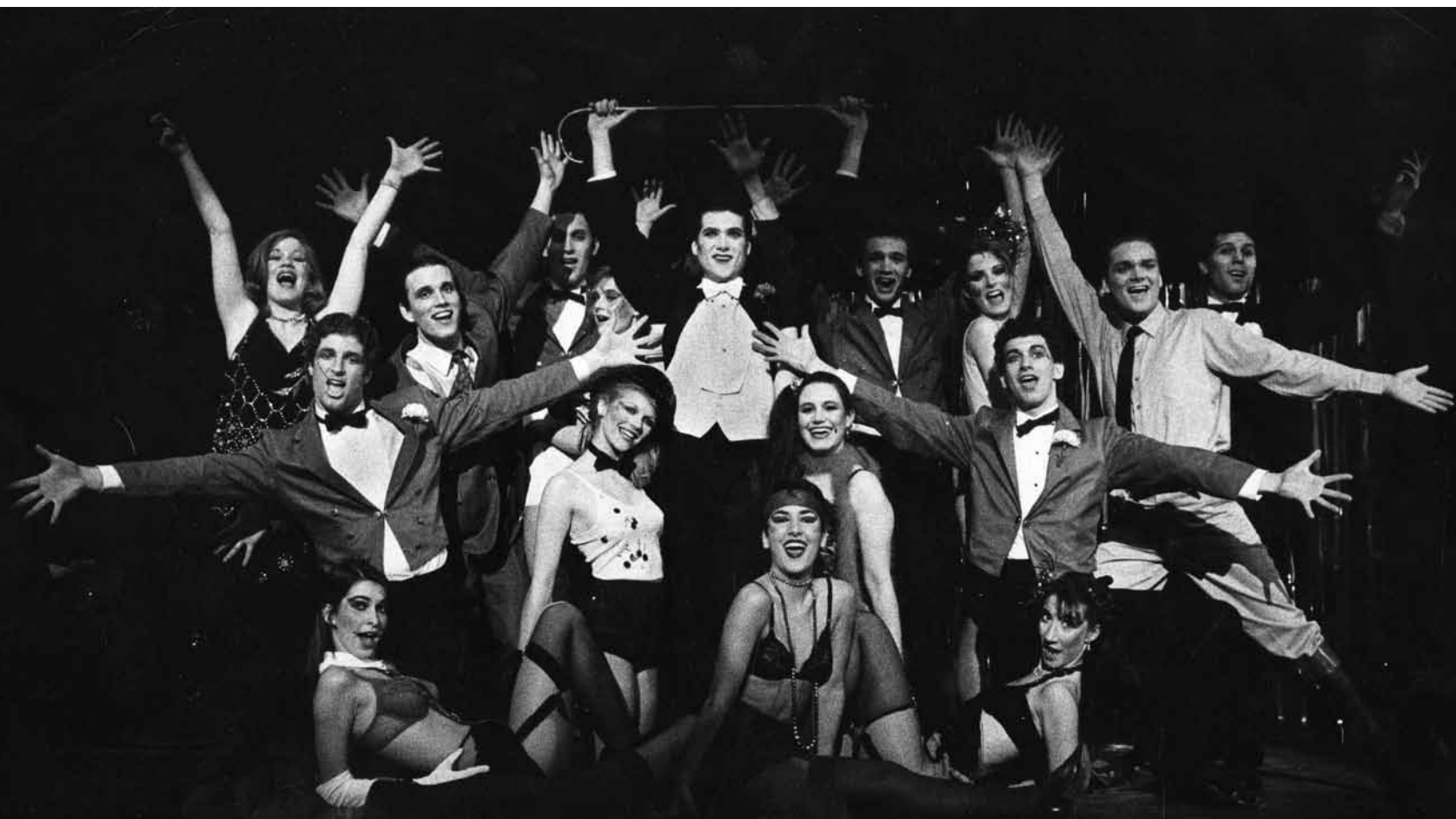
Determined to bring full-scale Broadway revivals to Northwestern's student theatre community, The Dolphin Show kept its name – a cause of lasting confusion – but moved to its current home in Cahn Auditorium in 1970 with a production of *Mame*. In a program note, 1970 Dolphin Show Co-Chairman Robert E. Nissen cites “the vital need of a new theatrical form at Northwestern.” Before faculty emeritus Dominic Missimi's creation of the Music Theatre Certificate Program in 1991, the Dolphin Show was one of the only outlets for student involvement in traditional musical theatre on Northwestern's campus. “At the time I was at Northwestern, there was no musical theater department,” remembers Deborah Tranelli, '77, who performed in Dolphin Show productions of *Company* in 1974 and *Anything Goes* in 1975, and is best known for her role as Phyllis on TV's *Dallas*.

Jason Moore's *Big River* (1992)

“I truly believe directing these shows had a huge influence on my career,” says Victoria Bussert, '84, who directed *Cabaret* (1983) and *West Side Story* (1984). She has since directed over 200 musicals worldwide and currently heads the Music Theatre Department at Baldwin-Wallace College. When asked about directing The 50th Annual Dolphin Show, *Big River*, by *The Daily Northwestern* in 1992, then-actor Jason Moore replied, “The greatest thing about being a director is you get to play all the roles.” Since Dolphin, Moore

has served as the resident director for the original Broadway production of *Les Misérables* and received a Tony Award nomination in 2002 for his direction of *Avenue Q*. Other notable Dolphin Show alumni include Academy Award-winner Warren Beatty, *Friends*' David Schwimmer, *Spin City*'s Richard Kind, and former Miss America Kate Shindle.

The Dolphin Show is both a revered Northwestern tradition and an unparalleled opportunity for Northwestern students to produce full-scale, professional quality musical theatre. Shows have ranged from Golden Age favorites like *Gypsy* (1979, 1995, 2004) and *Guys and Dolls* (1976, 1986, 1999) to contemporary masterworks like *Sunday in the Park with George* (1993) and *Parade* (2010). Now, as we celebrate the show's 70th anniversary with *42nd Street*, Dolphin boasts a team of over 150 dedicated undergraduate students from diverse academic backgrounds, continuing to make The Dolphin Show an integral part of the Northwestern University experience. While no longer an aquatic spectacular, The Dolphin Show continues to make a splash and will do so for years to come.

“Willkommen” from Victoria Bussert's *Cabaret* (1983)

DOLPHIN, THEN AND NOW

- 1939 The Dolphin Club is founded
- 1940-1943 First Dolphin Club fundraisers
- 1943-1944 *Wela Kahau*
- 1944-1946 Canceled due to WWII
- 1946-1947 *Howdy Padhner*
- 1947-1948 *Mr. Dolphin Goes to Town*

- 1948-1949 *Hey Rube*
- 1949-1950 *Look Out Below*
- 1950-1951 *Jambalaya*
- 1951-1952 *Aqua-Quest*
- 1952-1953 *Neptune's Memoirs*
- 1953-1954 *New Fins of '53*
- 1954-1955 *Bottoms Up*
- 1955-1956 *Fanfare*
- 1956-1957 *The Swimming Game*
- 1957-1958 *Out to See*
- 1958-1959 *Water Colors*

- 1959-1960 *Splashing Good Time*
- 1960-1961 *Wonderland Revisited*
- 1961-1962 *Aquassey*
- 1962-1963 *Fogg-Bound*
- 1963-1964 *The Mikado*
- 1964-1965 *Scheherazade*
- 1965-1966 *The Gondoliers*
- 1966-1967 *Bye Bye Birdie*
- 1967-1968 *Carousel*
- 1968-1969 *South Pacific*
- 1969-1970 *Mame*
- 1970-1971 *Sweet Charity*
- 1971-1972 *Man of La Mancha*
- 1972-1973 *A Funny Thing Happened...*
- 1973-1974 *Company*
- 1974-1975 *Anything Goes*
- 1975-1976 *Guys and Dolls*
- 1976-1977 *Once Upon A Mattress*
- 1977-1978 *Fiddler on the Roof*
- 1978-1979 *Gypsy*
- 1979-1980 *Mame*
- 1980-1981 *Wonderful Town*
- 1981-1982 *Little Me*
- 1982-1983 *Cabaret*
- 1983-1984 *West Side Story*
- 1984-1985 *Mack and Mabel*
- 1985-1986 *Guys and Dolls*
- 1986-1987 *Anything Goes*
- 1987-1988 *Evita*
- 1988-1989 *The Best Little Whorehouse...*
- 1989-1990 *My One and Only*
- 1990-1991 *A Little Night Music*
- 1991-1992 *Big River*
- 1992-1993 *Sunday in the Park with George*
- 1993-1994 *Meet Me in St. Louis*
- 1994-1995 *Gypsy*
- 1995-1996 *City of Angels*
- 1996-1997 *Kiss Me, Kate*
- 1997-1998 *Sweeney Todd*
- 1998-1999 *Guys and Dolls*
- 1999-2000 *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*
- 2000-2001 *The Secret Garden*
- 2001-2002 *Damn Yankees*
- 2002-2003 *Evita*
- 2003-2004 *Gypsy*
- 2004-2005 *How to Succeed in Business...*
- 2005-2006 *On the Town*
- 2006-2007 *Into the Woods*
- 2007-2008 *Carousel*
- 2008-2009 *The Wizard of Oz*
- 2009-2010 *Parade*
- 2010-2011 *Ragtime*
- 2011-2012 *42nd Street*



Richard Samson, Michelle Nicastro, and Eric Gilliland in *Little Me* (1982)