The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival's stages.

Insights is published by the Utah Shakespeare Festival, 351 West Center Street; Cedar City, UT 84720. Bruce C. Lee, communications director and editor; Phil Hermansen, art director.

Copyright © 2011, Utah Shakespeare Festival. Please feel free to download and print Insights, as long as you do not remove any identifying mark of the Utah Shakespeare Festival.

For more information about Festival education programs:
Utah Shakespeare Festival
351 West Center Street
Cedar City, Utah 84720
435-586-7880
www.bard.org.

Cover photo: Brian Vaughn as Professor Harold Hill in The Music Man, 2011.
The Music Man

Contents

Information on the Play

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Playwrights</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scholarly Articles on the Play

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making Yesterday Worth Remembering</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Synopsis: The Music Man

In July 1912, fast-talking traveling salesman “Professor” Harold Hill comes to River City, Iowa, a town hesitant of letting strangers in, especially ones trying to sell something. Harold calls himself a music professor, selling band instruments, uniforms, and the idea of starting a boy’s band with the local youth.

Harold decides he must “create” a situation of concern for the citizens in order for them to buy into his idea of starting a boy’s band, with himself as the leader. He convinces them that the arrival of the new pool table in town is “trouble,” and will only cause corruption of the city’s youth. The way to fight this, of course, is with music and a band.

Families begin to pay money to order instruments and uniforms, and, in return, Harold begins to teach the boys his revolutionary “Think System”: in order to learn the music, simply think about the melodies of the music in order to learn to play it.

Marian Paroo, the local librarian and part-time piano teacher, is not so easily convinced. She tracks down information to incriminate Harold and prove he is a fraud. She is ready to hand it over to the mayor, when she has a change of heart, seeing her younger brother come out of his shell by the arrival of his new instrument for the band.

Marian and Harold begin to see more of each other and their relationship develops. Then as the city is preparing to celebrate the Fourth of July, a rival and vengeful salesman, Charlie Cowell, arrives to expose Harold and convince the townspeople to arrest him.

Will Harold avoid trouble of his own? Will the boy’s band succeed? Do Harold and Marion end up making music of their own together? Enjoy this delightful piece of Americana that includes such memorable songs as “Ya Got Trouble,” “Seventy-Six Trombones,” “The Sadder-But-Wiser Girl,” “Lida Rose,” “Marian the Librarian,” “Pick-a-Little,” and “Til There Was You.”
Characters: *The Music Man*

**Prof. Harold Hill:** A dynamic con man and traveling salesman, Prof. Hill comes to River City, Iowa, and creates a hysteria about the “trouble” of the new pool table in town in order to sell band instruments and uniforms. He promises to form a wholesome boy’s band, though he can’t read a note of music. His main ambition, besides fleecing the good citizens of their cash, becomes trying to win over the local librarian, with whom he eventually falls in love.

**Marian Paroo:** A sometimes stuffy librarian and piano teacher, Marian sees through Harold’s charade and sets out to expose him as a fraud, but inevitably falls for him.

**Winthrop:** Marian’s lisping younger brother, Winthrop’s excitement about the boy’s band is part of the reason behind Marian’s transformation.

**Mrs. Paroo:** Marian and Winthrop’s charming Irish mother.

**Mayor George Shinn:** A blustery politician and mayor of River City.

**Eulalie Mackecknie Shinn:** Mayor Shinn’s peacock wife, she is easily won over by Prof. Hill when he appoints her the head of the “Ladies’ Auxiliary Society for the Classic Dance.”

**The Barbershop Quartet:** Four bickering school board members (Olin Britt, Oliver Hix, Ewart Dunlop, and Jacey Squires).

**Pick-a-Little Ladies:** Eulalie’s gossipy friends, The Pick-a-Little Ladies include Alma Hix, Mrs. Squires, Maud Dunlop, and Ethel Toffelmier (the “pianola” girl).

**Marcellus:** Harold’s old friend and former partner, Marcellus is now a resident of River City. He has given up his con man ways and is dating his boss’s niece, Ethel Toffelmier.

**Amaryllis:** Marian’s young piano student.

**Tommy Djilas:** The town troublemaker, Tommy is secretly dating the mayor’s oldest daughter, Zaneeta. Harold makes him assistant bandleader.

**Zanetta:** The mayor’s oldest and slightly daffy daughter.

**Charlie Cowell:** A traveling anvil salesman, Cowell tries to expose Harold as an imposter.
The Man of Music Behind The Music Man

By Marlo Ihler

On May 18, 1902, the Willson family of Mason City, Iowa, welcomed a fourteen-and-a-half pound baby boy, the largest baby born in the state at the time. It was an auspicious beginning of a lifetime of impressive achievements for Robert Meredith Willson, award-winning American composer, conductor, songwriter, author, and playwright (John C. Skipper, Meredith Willson: The Unsinkable Music Man [Mason City, Iowa: Savas Publishing Co., 2000], 1).

As the youngest of three children born to a lawyer father and schoolteacher mother who also taught piano, Willson was a bright, musical youth who learned to play the flute and piccolo exceptionally well. In his first memoir, There I Stood with My Piccolo, he describes his love of band music as a young man: “I hung around the bandstand in the summertime and practically passed out when they played ‘Custer’s Last Stand’. . . . Naturally I wanted to play in the band someday, and that got me dreaming about [John Philip] Sousa’s band and show business” ([New York City: Doubleday, 1948], 5).

At seventeen, he left his beloved hometown to attend what is now the Juilliard School in New York City. Only two years later he was following his dream of playing and touring with John Philip Sousa’s band. By the time he was twenty-two, he was playing under Arturo Toscanini’s direction in the New York Philharmonic, as well as playing with the New York Chamber Music Society (http://www.imdb.com).

By the early 1930s, a career shift took Willson to California to work in radio, starting in San Francisco and moving to Hollywood a few years later. He would stay in radio for the next twenty-five years, music directing and participating in some of the most beloved radio shows of the time.

During the 1930s and ’40s, he also composed numerous orchestral works and film scores. For the latter, he received two Academy Award nominations for his work on Charlie Chaplin’s The Great Dictator (1940) and William Wyler’s The Little Foxes (1941) with Bette Davis.

During World War II, he served as a major in the U.S. Army, and used his talents as the head of the Music Division of the Armed Forces Radio Service (http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist/willson.html). Following the war, he continued songwriting while concurrently working as the music director of NBC’s radio and television networks (http://www.songwritershalloffame.org).

By the early 1950s, Willson’s wife and Broadway producer friends had suggested that he try his hand at writing a musical comedy about his boyhood home. What resulted was the immensely successful and critically acclaimed The Music Man, a story of a traveling con man who tries to swindle a small town into signing up their sons for his boys’ band, guaranteeing to teach them to play. The setting for the musical was based on his hometown of Mason City, Iowa, and many of the characters are based on his own family and friends. He called it “an Iowan’s attempt to pay tribute to his home state” (http://www.imdb.com).

The Music Man, directed by Morton Da Costa, opened on Broadway in 1957 and won eight Tony Awards, including Best Musical and Best Actor for Robert Preston’s performance of con man Professor Harold Hill. It also won a New York Drama Critics Award and the first ever Grammy for the original cast album. It ran for 1,375 performances over next five years (www.ibdb.com).

Numerous songs from the musical are renowned, such as the ever-invigorating “76 Trombones,” the barbershop standard “Lida Rose,” the sweet “Goodnight, My Someone,” and the teasingly humorous “Marion the Librarian.”

In 1960 Warner Brothers purchased the film rights for $1 million. In 1962 the film version of The Music Man, starring Robert Preston and Shirley Jones, and again directed by Morton Da
Costa, premiered in Willson’s hometown to a crowd of nearly 100,000. The event included more than 100 marching bands, festivities, and the entire cast of the film on hand to celebrate the occasion.


The show enjoyed other reincarnations since the original in 1957. In 1980 it had a short-lived Broadway revival with Dick Van Dyke as Harold Hill. Another revival in 2000 was much more successful, starring Craig Bierko as Harold Hill and Rebecca Luker as Marion. This production received eight Tony Award nominations and ran for 699 performances. There was also another film version made in 2003 starring Matthew Broderick as Harold Hill and Kristin Chenoweth as Marion (www.ibdb.com).

But despite these successes, the route to get there was a different story in and of itself. With his usual Iowa stubbornness, Willson resisted the idea of writing the show in the first place. He talked about starting the process in his second memoir, But He Doesn’t Know the Territory: The Making of Meredith Willson’s The Music Man: “So, one day, without giving the matter too much thought, I wrote ACT ONE, SCENE ONE on the empty paper, not, of course, to show these people that I could write a musical comedy but to show them I could not. And for the next six years I was way out in front. . . . ACT ONE, SCENE ONE. . . . The fifth word was the sticker” ([New Y ork City: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1959], 16).

He obviously harnessed his talents as a writer and composer, and went on to create other award-winning Broadway musicals, such as The Unsinkable Molly Brown” (1960) and Here’s Love (1963), a story based on Miracle on 34th Street. He also composed two symphonies and over 400 individual songs, many of which have become standards, such as “May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You,” “It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas,” “Pine Cones and Holly Berries,” and “My Wish.”

His writing talents weren’t isolated to music. In addition to his other two memoirs, Willson wrote a third entitled Eggs I Have Laid (1955); a musician’s help book, What Every Musician Should Know (1938); a novel, Who Did What to Fedalia? (1952); and a novelization of The Music Man (1962).

Some of Willson’s other accomplishments include being inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1982, having a residential hall at Julliard named in his honor, and posthumously receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Ronald Reagan in 1987.

After an amazing life full of music, a diverse career, and abundant successes, Willson passed away from heart failure on June 15, 1984, in Santa Monica, CA, at the age of 82.

Meredith Willson and The Music Man: Making Yesterday Worth Remembering

By Lawrence Henley

At more than fifty years of age, The Music Man has withstood the test of time by anyone’s measure. Despite its lack of glamour or a serious theme, the show belongs on any credible top-ten list of most
beloved Broadway musicals from the pre-1970s era (Broadway’s “classical period,” if you will). Even with today’s propensity for expletives and violence in entertainment, the inordinately wholesome The Music Man remains a ticket-sales colossus. It has been through multiple revivals, two film versions, and endless television references and parodies. Undeniably, the show is a theatrical staple found in all sectors of American theatre: Regional? Local? Educational? Community? Eventually, they all produce The Music Man.

Why is a huge cross-section of theatre audiences so perpetually endeared to this musical? Is it because The Music Man takes us back to a more carefree, forgotten world of passenger trains, shady footbridges, barbershop quartets, fragrant picnic parks, ice cream socials, and the patriotic marching music of John Phillip Sousa? Could it be the flawless, hopelessly upbeat and richly textured score? What about the amazing rat-a-tat-tat rapid-fire lyrics, or the liberal use of musical devices such as contrapuntal combo-melodies and syncopated rhythms? Or, perhaps, it’s the wonderful “lost-to-history” references to turn-of-the-last-century products like Bevo (an early “near-beer”), Cubebs (“medicinal” cigarettes), Sen-Sen (a masking agent for “tell-tale” breath), and Cap’n Billy’s Whiz Bang (a racy post-World War I comic book)? And, is it possible to go into Disneyland and avoid hearing Iowa Stubborn, Wells Fargo Wagon, and Lida Rose (rhetorical question there, it is not possible)?

All of these can be considered as we sort through the great composers of the best pre-Hair era musicals. It’s completely unsurprising to find the names Sondheim, Berlin, Rodgers, Hammerstein, Hart, Lerner, Loewe, and Loesser on such lists, but alongside these please add the name Willson. “Willson,” you say? “With two L’s?” Well, I grant you, the unlikely story of how a clean-shaven, bespectacled piccolo player from unremarkable Mason City, Iowa found himself in this elite company requires explanation.

The reality, of course, is that the late Meredith Willson (1902–1987) was more than a small-town musician who hit the jackpot on Broadway (1957’s The Music Man and 1964’s The Unsinkable Molly Brown). Willson was born in 1902, and the sights, sounds, and people of his “River City” and small town Iowa would remain with him all his life. In The Music Man, 1912 Mason City has been frozen in time, and through his genius that world becomes real for generation after generation. All of the places and faces we love in The Music Man sprang forth from Willson’s wistful memories of the “hailstone and Sarsaparilla belt.”

After the marching band days of his Iowa youth, Willson at seventeen journeyed to New York for classical training at the Damrosch Institute (Juilliard), becoming principal flute and piccolo in the great Sousa’s own band, and then for the New York Philharmonic under the legendary Leopold Stokowski. In his spare time, Willson began to “moonlight” as a bandleader, composer, and arranger in the burgeoning new mass media of radio, television, and film. Eventually, he became a celebrity through variety shows and commercials. Later, when Willson and his second wife, Rini, moved to Hollywood, his fame was sufficient to author a top-selling 1948 autobiography, And There I Stood with My Piccolo.

In their New York days, “Mere” (as he was known to friends) and Rini both loved Broadway shows, and Mrs. Willson would consistently chisel at her husband to write one. Eventually, he acquiesced, encouraged by networking with fellow songwriters like Frank Loesser. He knew how much cash the creator of a hit musical could generate over time. The gifted but salaried composer figured that, if he could snare himself a Broadway hit, financial independence would be his.

Through his memoir and broadcast fame, Willson landed on the radar screen of two of Broadway’s hottest producers, Cy Feuer and Ernie Martin. Blazing hot from Guys and Dolls, the duo would eventually follow their smash with Can-Can, The Boy Friend, and How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying. Via Willson’s book, Cy and Ernie had zeroed in on a potential theme for a new hit show: a lighthearted throwback to a simpler time full of brass bands, candy kitchens, and 4th of July
After giving The Music Man its name (the original title was The Silver Triangle), Cy and Ernie eventually lost interest in the project. During their four-year collaboration (1951-55) Willson’s music flourished, yet the development of the show’s book proved exceedingly tough. By 1955, Willson had written enough music to fill two musicals, but after two-dozen rewrites the story still wasn’t concise. Nonetheless, through Feuer and Martin, he gleaned invaluable insight on how to birth a hit musical.

Feuer and Martin asked Willson to work with them on a new project, which he “Iowa stubbornly” rejected. Betting all of his marbles on The Music Man, he tapped a colleague, Franklin Lacey, to help streamline the cumbersome book. Undaunted, Willson rang up Most Happy Fella producers Kermit Bloomgarden and Herb Greene who were immediately enchanted by Willson’s audition. They offered to produce it on the spot. Music Man finally opened on December 19, 1957 at the Majestic Theatre. An instant critical and financial smash (eight Tony Awards), it ran through April 15, 1961 for a colossal total of 1,375 performances.

With today’s epic stories and overwhelming technology on Broadway, it seems a real reach to think of Meredith Willson’s work as groundbreaking and innovative, but from a musical standpoint it really was.

Introducing The Music Man’s signature tune as a lilting waltz sung by the female lead (Goodnight, My Someone), he wasted almost no time in resurrecting that same great melody as a show-stopping march, this time sung by the male lead (Seventy-Six Trombones). Then, later, he reprised both tunes in the same song while reversing the roles! Willson also used the device of rhymed verse (sans melody) that mimicked an accelerating and decelerating train (Rock Island). Then, he inserted groundbreaking stage rap (Ya Got Trouble). The medley Lida Rose/Will I Ever Tell You interwove two superb melodies and several voices in counterpoint (Marian the Librarian with The Buffalo Bills barbershop quartet). He then repeated this technique with the novelty Pickalittle/Talkalittle blended with the drinking standard Good Night Ladies.

The show’s famed love ballad (Till’ There Was You) earned Willson more money than all of the show’s royalties combined after being recorded by The Beatles. The Fab Four wanted something in their repertoire that would appeal to parents and critics. They performed Till’ There Was You as the second song in their historic American debut on The Ed Sullivan Show and also for Queen Elizabeth II in 1963’s Royal Variety Show. Today, Sir Paul McCartney owns the publishing and performance rights to Meredith Willson’s music catalog.

Equally crucial to The Music Man are Willson’s unforgettable characters: the winsome Marian Paroo, an inscrutable intellectual who doubles as a lonely piano teacher; Winthrop, Marian’s sad, adorable and linguistically-challenged kid brother; the buffoonish Mayor Shinn and his pompous wife, Eulalie MacKecknie Shinn; Charlie Cowell, the hard-tack anvil salesman hell bent on revenge; and, above all, Professor Harold Hill, the ultimate flim-flam man who, in the end, is rehabilitated by Marian’s love and tenderness.

It would be criminal for any discussion of The Music Man to omit mention of two legendary individual performances. Tribute must be paid to the late, great Robert Preston (Harold Hill) and also to Barbara Cook (Marian), still thought of by many as Broadway’s ultimate female voice.

Robert Preston Meservey (1918-1987) was a gifted Hollywood heavy relegated to countless B-grade Westerns and detective shows. Tired of “Tinseltown,” Preston moved to New York, seeking a better platform for his considerable stage talents. Willson, despondent after striking out in L.A. with movie stars Danny Kaye, Dan Dailey and Gene Kelly, turned to Director Morton “Tec” DaCosta. Tec’s sage advice was to fly back to New York and hear Preston’s callback audition, the show-stopping Ya Got Trouble. Within seconds, he proved to be Professor Hill personified. Preston’s electrifying stage and film performances in The Music Man were unforgettable, and it
remains difficult for anyone who saw them to conceive of anyone else playing the role.

Despite the fact that some may view The Music Man as nothing more than a happy show loaded with novelty and nostalgia, its legacy has proven that it is much more than that. Audiences, critics, producers, performers, music educators, Iowans, and ex-Beatles alike continue to embrace it. Is it possible that Meredith Willson was using the “Think System” on all of us?