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.

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Cover photo: Jason Hiel (left) and Melinda Pfundstein in My Fair Lady, 2004.
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Synopsis: *My Fair Lady*

On a rainy London night, the crowds are leaving the opera at Covent Garden. Freddy Eynsford-Hill runs into flower girl Eliza Doolittle, spilling her flowers onto the muddy ground. While she is dressing him down for his clumsiness, phonetics expert Professor Henry Higgins, takes notes regarding her thick, cockney accent. Higgins attracts the attention of another linguist, Colonel Pickering. Since each has been seeking an opportunity to meet the other, it is agreed that Pickering will come to stay with Higgins.

Eliza, having saved a bit of money, comes to Higgins’s home in hopes of engaging his services for speaking lessons. Her accent is so dreadful that Higgins sees a challenge and accepts a wager with Pickering that he can teach her sufficiently to pass her off as royalty. Higgins takes Eliza into his home and the arduous refinement begins.

Alfred Doolittle learns of his daughter’s good fortune and shows up at the Higgins residence. He is not an outraged father demanding that his daughter be brought to him, he wants only compensation of a five-pound note, no more, no less. Higgins is amused at his moral reasoning and pays him off.

Higgins grills Eliza mercilessly. Finally, progress can be seen and Higgins decides to give her a brief “trial run” at the Ascot races.

The now-beautiful Eliza immediately wins Freddy’s heart and does quite nicely with her slow, measured speech. That is, until the races begin. The more excited she gets, the more she slips back into her cockney argot and finally shocks several of the ladies into a graceful faint with some encouragement shouted at her horse: “Move yer arse!”

Six weeks later, despite the setback, Higgins decides that Eliza is ready for the Embassy Ball. Eliza charms everyone quite completely, including the queen and the nefarious linguist, Zoltan Karpathy. After the ball, Higgins and Pickering congratulate each other profusely, but not a word of compliment is spent on the heartbroken Eliza, who confronts Higgins about his lack of caring. He dismisses her with his usual coldness.

Upon leaving, Eliza finds Freddy seated on the front steps of Higgins’s house, and he professes his love for her. She tells him in no uncertain terms how tired she is of words. “If you’re in love,” she sings, “show me!”

Eliza returns to her familiar Covent Garden. There, she finds her father being treated as royalty by pub proprietor and friends alike. Higgins’s recommendation of Doolittle as the most original moralist in England has led to a fantastic monetary windfall. Since he is now “respectable,” his lady friend demands that he marry her.

Higgins learns that Eliza has left and becomes desperate to find her. Finally, he locates her at his mother’s home. Mrs. Higgins has taken a definite liking to Eliza and defends her to her insensitive son. Higgins importunes Eliza to return, asking her if she has ever known him to treat anyone any better than he has treated her. She agrees that he treats everyone equally badly, and, unconvinced that he can ever change, she leaves.

That same evening, Higgins realizes how much he misses Eliza. As he listens wistfully to the recording of their first meeting in his home, Eliza steps into the room, lifts the arm from the machine, and recites the next sentence in her former cockney accent. “I washed me face and hands before I came, I did.”

She has returned.
Characters: *My Fair Lady*

Eliza Doolittle: A cockney flower girl from Lisson Grove, Eliza works outside Covent Garden. Her potential to become “a lady” becomes the object of a bet between Higgins and Pickering.

Henry Higgins: A British, upper class professional bachelor, Higgins is a world-famous phonetics expert, teacher, and author of “Higgins’ Universal Alphabet.”

Colonel Pickering: A retired British officer with colonial experience, Pickering is the author of “Spoken Sanskrit.”

Alfred P. Doolittle: Eliza’s father, Doolittle is an elderly but vigorous dustman.

Freddy Eynsford-Hill: An upper class young man, Freddy becomes completely smitten with Eliza.

Mrs. Eynsford-Hill: A friend of Mrs. Higgins, Mrs. Eynsford-Hill is Freddy’s mother.

Mrs. Higgins: Henry’s long-suffering mother.

Bartender: George works the Tottenham Court Road Pub.

Harry: Drinking companion of Alfred Doolittle.

Jamie: Drinking companion of Alfred Doolittle.

Mrs. Pearce: Henry Higgins’ housekeeper.

Mrs. Hopkins: A cockney woman of Tottenham Court.

Prof. Zoltan Karpathy: A bearded Hungarian, Karpathy is a former phonetics student of Henry Higgins who fancies himself impossible to dupe when it comes to identifying the origin of anyone’s speech patterns.

A Bystander

First Cockney, Second Cockney, Third Cockney, Fourth Cockney: Four men who form a Cockney quartet.

Butler: Henry Higgins’s household employee.

Footman: Henry Higgins’s household employee.

Lord Boxington: A friend of Mrs. Higgins, Boxington is an Ascot race patron.

Lady Boxington: The wife of Lord Boxington.

Flower Girl

Footman: An embassy employee

Selsey Man: A bystander outside Covent Garden

Various Servants, Maids, Stewards, Etc.
About the Playwrights:
Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe
By Rachelle Hughes
From Insights, 2004

My Fair Lady has often been touted as the “most perfect musical.” The already successful team of Alan Jay Lerner, lyricist and librettist, and composer Frederick Loewe produced the adaptation of the infamous George Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion starring Julie Andrews as Eliza Doolittle and Rex Harrison as Higgins. It was almost impossible for this 1956 Broadway show to fail. The winning combination of Shaw commentary, Lerner and Loewe musical genius, and Andrews and Harrison stage presence set box office records.

When Lerner and Loewe met in 1942, Lerner was busy writing radio sketches and other odd jobs in the musical entertainment industry and Loewe was struggling to gain attention for his work on musical plays such as Salute to Spring (1937) and Great Lady (1938). Then one day during lunch at the Manhattan’s Lamb’s Club, Lerner got the attention he had been craving and Loewe got the partner he needed. Loewe walked up to Lerner’s table. “You write good lyrics,” he said “Would you like to do a musical with me?” Lerner replied: “Yes, I happen to have two weeks off.”

The rest is musical theatre history. Their collaborations yielded a collection of musicals that generations of theatre-goers and classic film buffs continue to honor with the highest praises: Brigadoon (1947), Paint Your Wagon (1951), My Fair Lady (1956, film 1964), the film Gigi (1958) and Camelot (1960). Personal differences during the writing of Camelot caused them to end their collaboration but not their friendship.

The score and lyrics for My Fair Lady are among the most successful to emerge from American musical theatre. It is hard to resist such songs as “I Could Have Danced All Night,” “Wouldn’t It Be Loverly?” and “Rain in Spain.”

Alan Jay Lerner was born on August 31, 1918 in New York to a wealthy owner of a chain of dress shops (the Lerner Shops). Lerner’s musical education began with piano lessons as a child. He later studied at the Juilliard School of Music, the Bedales Public School in England, and Harvard University. Although he had an impressive educational background, Lerner had to work his way to the stars. He spent time as a journalist and radio scriptwriter before he met Loewe.

Along with his successful collaborations with Loewe, Lerner wrote the Oscar-winning screenplay for An American in Paris (1951). After Loewe’s retirement, Lerner’s collaborators included Burton Lane, Andre Previn, and Leonard Bernstein. But his greatest triumph would always be My Fair Lady which had a run of 2,717 performances on Broadway and 2,281 performances in London before it was filmed with Audrey Hepburn as Eliza. The Broadway cast album hit number one in the U.S. charts, selling over five million copies and staying in the top forty for 311 weeks.

Lerner had a knack for writing romantic lyrics; he also had a knack for romance: He married eight times (one colleague commented that “I never met a Mrs. Alan Jay Lerner I didn’t like”). Unfortunately, Lerner also had an addiction to amphetamines which he battled for over twenty years. In June of 1986 he lost his battle with lung cancer, yet he left behind a collection of legendary plays and songs that shaped musical theatre in his era.

Frederic Loewe was also destined for musical greatness from the moment he was born in Vienna, Austria in 1901 to a father who was a professional singer.

By age five Loewe was a child piano prodigy. At age seven he was composing his father’s
presentations, and at thirteen he became the youngest soloist to appear with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. At age fifteen, he wrote the popular song “Katrina” that eventually sold one million copies of the sheet music.

In 1924 Loewe came to America where he failed to find work in the classical musical scene. Instead he found himself playing piano in restaurants and bars, and doing other odd menial jobs throughout the country, including boxing, prospecting and cow punching. By 1936 he managed to find his way back to New York City where he started writing music for Broadway revues. But he received little acclaim. After hearing some of Alan Jay Lerner’s lyrics he boldly asked him to help him revamp the lyrics to “A Salute to Spring.”

Loewe retired to Palm Springs, California where he died in 1988. Loewe led an extraordinary life, sharing his gift of music with millions. With his death he continued to share his largesse. He left one-half of his musical royalties to the Desert Medical Center in Palm Springs. As partner Alan Jay Lerner once said, “There will never be another Fred Loewe.”

It could even be said that there will never be another musical writing duo like Loewe and Lerner. They gave us such a “loverly” time.
My Fairer Lady
By Christine Frezza
From Insights, 2004

The musical My Fair Lady is based, as everyone knows, on George Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion, written in 1916 and later turned into a successful film starring Wendy Hiller and Leslie Howard. Gabriel Pascal, the film’s producer, knew that the play would make a brilliant musical, and sought for two years to find a composer and lyricist who would attempt such a transformation; but he was turned down first by Noël Coward and then by Rodgers and Hammerstein, who gave up after struggling with the script for a year.

Two years after Pascal’s death, the team of Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe decided to undertake the project, and My Fair Lady opened on Broadway in March of 1956. Its run lasted for 2,717 performances, becoming the longest-running Broadway musical in history, easily outclassing the then-record holder, Oklahoma; it lasted through 1962 on Broadway and launched both national and international touring companies.

In 1964, George Cukor made My Fair Lady one of the most beloved movie musicals of all time, retaining the original Higgins and Alfred Doolittle (Rex Harrison and Stanley Holloway), but creating somewhat of a scandal by replacing Julie Andrews with Audrey Hepburn in the title role (the singing given to the popular Marni Nixon). Though Andrews had created the role and had a far superior voice, Hepburn was at this point more of a “star,” carrying a financial guarantee of the film’s success. Andrews got some of her own back, though; My Fair Lady won the best picture Oscar that year, as well as seven others including those for actor, director, costumes, and music; but Hepburn wasn’t even nominated for best actress. That year the award went to Julie Andrews for her title role in Mary Poppins.

One of the most prominent reasons for the musical’s popularity lies in the retelling of the Greek myth of Pygmalion, the sculptor who created a statue of Galatea, the perfect woman, brought to life by Aphrodite, giving rise to the many popular transformations of “clay” into perfection, as in Phantom of the Opera, and Petruchio’s “taming” of Katherina into a perfect wife in The Taming of the Shrew. In Pygmalion, Higgins is the sculptor and Eliza the clay which he molds into a pleasing and deceiving shape. However, the Eliza of My Fair Lady takes a more active role in her own transformation and at play’s end becomes a necessity for Higgins, who has “grown accustomed to her face.” Shaw didn’t want this romantic ending at all, despite describing his play as a romance in five acts: he says in the postscript to Pygmalion, “She will, if she marries either of them, marry Freddy. And that is just what Eliza did” (Pygmalion [Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1956], 116).

He goes on to explain that only Eliza’s speech had been improved; her business sense was still undeveloped, but she opened a flower shop and had a hard time of it because Freddy was a poor businessman. Pickering, the quiet unsung hero, saves them. However, the sparring between Higgins and Eliza continues in Shaw’s “sequel” and Alan Jay Lerner makes us think it will continue in My Fair Lady by his last line: “Eliza? Where the devil are my slippers?” (My Fair Lady [New York: Signet, 1956], 128). What gives the audience a different kind of joy in My Fair Lady than Pygmalion is, of course, its music, which enables a more complete transformation of Eliza and, eventually, the reluctant Higgins. The dryness of Shaw’s dialogue, when matched with the wit of Lerner’s lyrics and the cleverness of Loewe’s setting, result in a seamless and ever-pleasing production. According to Brooks Atkinson: “The great thing . . . is the uniformity of its skill: it brings as much enthusiasm to the intellectual elements of the story as does to the characters. . . It radiates some mysterious rapture and incandescence that are unique and enduring” (Atkinson, Brooks, “original notes for the movie soundtrack release of 1965,” cited at www.audrey1.com/articles/articles15.html).

The songs cover the entire spectrum of musical and lyrical genius: From the ballad “On the Street Where You Live” to the hope song “Wouldn’t It Be Loverly” which demands that Eliza’s dream be satis-
fied, from the comedy songs “A Little Bit of Luck” and “Get Me to the Church” to the irony songs “Just an Ordinary Man” and “Just You Wait” from the dance numbers “The Ascot Gavotte” and “I Could Have Danced All Night” to the plot songs “You Did It” and “The Rain in Spain” which leaves the audience breathlessly anticipating the necessary outcome —Eliza says it right!

The last song “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face” finalizes the transformation of spirit of not only Eliza, but of Higgins himself; it mirrors Freddy’s soaring “On the Street Where You Live” but in a quieter, more wistful vein—a recognition of what Higgins thinks he’s lost. Hearing this song the audience knows that Eliza will come back—she must come back for the reconciliation of these two hearts. Even Higgins’ last attempt to keep the upper hand by demanding his slippers gives way to the swell of the orchestra, whose demand for the happiest of endings will not be denied.