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by Michael Dale  Mar. 4, 2016
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Additionally, the company handles the performance rights to over 100 other musicals, including interesting selections such as CARRIE, FIRST DATE and THE COCONUTS.

But despite Chapin's, and other licensing companies', willingness to discuss revisions to suit the needs and ideas of individual directors, there are always cases that arise where legal action must be taken because of unauthorized changes.

In 2011, a Towson University production of RENT was ordered to restore the script to what Jonathan Larson (/people/Jonathan-Larson/) wrote after Internet chat and reviews made it public that the director had changed the ending. Last year a Kent State University director was criticized for casting a white actor as Dr. Martin Luther King in Katori Hall (/people/Katori-Hall/)'s THE MOUNTAINTOP, a move that wasn't made known to the author until after the production had closed.

But when Connecticut College audiences attend this weekend's revised version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1945 musical CAROUSEL, considered by many to be among Broadway's greatest examples of the art form, they can rest assured that director David Jaffe worked diligently with Chapin to make sure all his changes were approved.

"I've known David for years," says Chapin. "He and I, at different times, ran the National Theater Institute at The O'Neill Center. I directed him in a play at Connecticut College many years ago."

Adapted from Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnár's LILIOM, Rodgers and Hammerstein set CAROUSEL on the coast of MAINE in the late 1800s. Its central character, a Barker named Billy Bigelow, is a troubled man who hurts others with the mistakes he makes in life. Among them, it's mentioned that he's hit his wife, Julie. While the musical tells a tale of redemption, as society has become more aware of instances of spousal abuse and more open about the issue of violence against women, that aspect of CAROUSEL has become more of a focal point.

"They (Gilbert and Sullivan) were absolutely rigid about the way they wanted those shows done, and they're basically gone from the vernacular. I think in the years I've been here it's fair to say that the challenge is to engage current theatre artists to, in a way, possess the shows so they can feel engaged by them. If you're good to Rodgers and Hammerstein shows they're very good to you. It's amazing what you can discover."

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"You don't want Rodgers and Hammerstein to become Gilbert and Sullivan," says Ted Chapin (/people/Ted-Chapin/), President and Executive Director of the company that goes by the name Rodgers & Hammerstein (/people/Rodgers-%2526-Hammerstein/) (formerly known as the Rodgers & Hammerstein (/people/Rodgers-%2526-Hammerstein/) Organization).

Brittany Baltay and David Socolar as Julie Jordan and Billy Bigelow

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Jaffe had "some very real concerns about the aspects of CAROUSEL that are tricky for a modern audience. Especially a modern audience at a college. We talked about what that meant and I gave him my usual 'Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater.' Understand why the creators made the choices that they made and if there are things that you do feel would take a modern audience out of the play let's talk about it."

Chapin notes, "Molnár ended his play with the line 'Is it possible for someone to hit you...hit you real hard... and for it not to hurt at all?' and the Julie character says 'Yes, it's possible,' and the curtain falls. That's the end of LILIOM."

'I think Rodgers and Hammerstein honored what LILIOM was all about but put it in some perspective that that may not hold for everybody.'

So the New London-based college's production intends to look at that perspective in a way that modern audiences might. The musical will be bookended by scenes featuring Billy and Julie's daughter, Louise, now an adult, after an argument with the man in her life.

"We're setting up the context of what Louise is experiencing," says the production's choreographer, David Dorfman, whose company, David Dorfman Dance has performed worldwide. "The whole play is a reliving of her life. Things that she's been told about but never seen. It's not a matter of reliving an actual memory. It's a playing out in the space of an imagined experience."

Producing a musical with this subject matter on a college campus adds relevancy, as students around the country become more and more exposed to college-based organizations promoting awareness of violence against women.

Jaffe and the company's dramaturge have been discussing the production with Safe Futures, a local domestic abuse treatment center.

"We have had not only the actors, but also all the orchestra players talking about this," says Dorfman. It has been the ideal liberal arts school collaborative project. Every single person from our makeup to props person to crew member to the orchestra members to the actors to the lead dancers; they’ve either been asking questions or privy to these discussions."

Audience members (/people/Audience-members/) will be provided with program notes expounding on issues of domestic abuse. "I think we've done a comprehensive job of contextualizing where the play came from, why our interest rose about the play, and how our version is intended to relate directly to and to move an audience in New London in 2016," says Dorfman.

Part of the effort to relate directly to the audience is to change the setting to the college's local community of New London, and to adjust time so that Louise's scenes take place somewhere around the 1960s or 70s, but Dorfman believes the difference will not change the creators' original intentions.
"We are being so faithful to the play. We are doing our interpretation but it is so through and through CAROUSEL by Rodgers and Hammerstein. But partly due to our great relationship with Ted Chapin (/people/Ted-Chapin/) we are allowed to slowly massage character development so that it doesn't seem frozen and immobile for the audience. It feels like it still deals with those issues in a profound, but also a harsh way and also has the breadth of what we've learned over these decades."

Changes made to musicals in an effort to adjust to changing perspectives have always been a controversial topic among musical theatre lovers; some welcome revisions while others prefer the scripts remain as written. The Internet has certainly increased discussion about musicals that make statements, both classics and new works.

"I always say that art begins the conversation," says Dorfman. I don't think that any work of art, whether it's a painting, a dance, a piece of music, a play or a movie is so complete that it closes down the conversation. In fact, if it does, I'm suspicious of it."

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