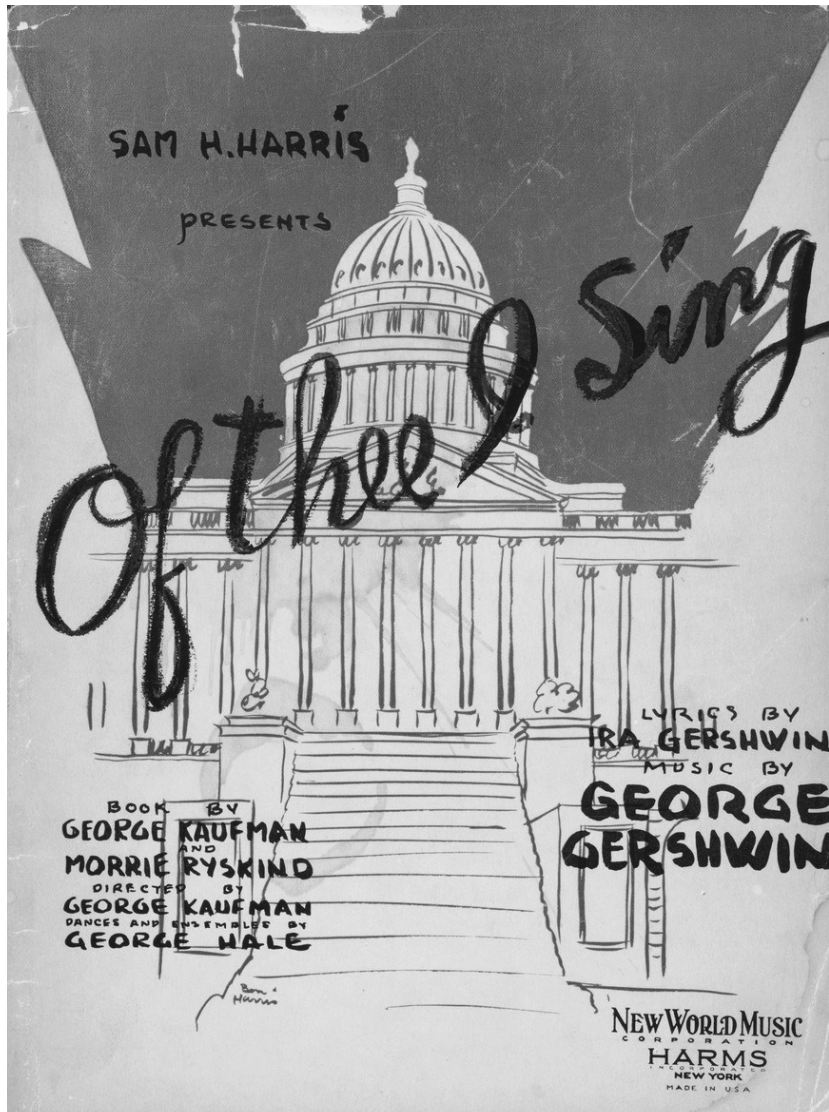


The Birth of Broadway



4. Anti-Depressants

March 11, 2025

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FOR THE MOST PART, THE GREAT DEPRESSION was not reflected on Broadway. Instead, the Great White Way featured upbeat shows such as the continuing sequence of *Ziegfeld Follies* or feel-good musicals like Cole Porter's *Anything Goes* (1934), which will be the featured work in the second hour of the class. In that same year, however, George S. Kaufman and the Gershwin brothers tackled contemporary politics in the satire *Of Thee I Sing*, and four years later another political satire, Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*, came head-to-head with real politics when Federal authorities shuttered the theater in which it was to open.

A. An Evening Out

Impresario **Florenz Ziegfeld II** made his name with the *Ziegfeld Follies*, a series annual extravaganzas that ran from 1907 into the 1930s and whose purpose in Ziegfeld's words was to "Glorify the American Girl." We have a rare rehearsal clip from 1931 plus a sequence from the 1945 movie whose glitz exceeds even Ziegfeld's own.

Newsreel: Ziegfeld Girls in rehearsal (1931)

Film: *Ziegfeld Follies*, "Bring on the beautiful girls" (Fred Astaire, 1945)

B. Political Spoofs, or not

We sample two shows that did take the contemporary political situation into account: **George and Ira Gershwin's** *Of Thee I Sing* (1934) to spoof it, and **Marc Blitzstein's** *The Cradle Will Rock* (1938) to attack it.

Gershwin: *Of Thee I Sing*, Madison Square Garden scene (CBS-tv 1972; Carroll O'Connor, Cloris Leachman)

Gershwin: *Of Thee I Sing*, Senate scene (Michele Lee, as above)

Although many subsequent productions have attempted to reproduce the conditions of the Blitzstein premiere, where the crowd trekked to a theater in Harlem, none have been recorded in usable video. So after a couple of short clips, we watch scenes from the 1999 **Tim Robbins** film *Cradle Will Rock*, about the events surrounding it and similar cases of censorship, including the destruction of the leftist murals painted by **Diego Rivera** for the Rockefeller Center in New York.

Blitzstein: “The nickel under the foot”
sung first by the composer, and then by Patti LuPone

Robbins: *Cradle Will Rock*, selected scenes
(Movie, 1999; Hank Azaria (Marc Blitzstein), Emily Watson (Olive Stanton / Moll), John Turturro (Aldo Silvano / Larry Foreman)

C. Anatomy of a Number

We take one number now generally included in *Anything Goes*, but written for another show, “It’s De-Lovely,” and discuss how its various elements work together: dialogue, lyrics, music, and dance.

Porter: *Anything Goes*, “It’s De-Lovely” (production as below, Nicole-Lily Baisden and Samuel Edwards)

D. Let’s Go to the Show!

In the second hour we watch all the remaining major numbers from Act One of *Anything Goes*, in the 2021 London revival choreographed and directed by **Kathleen Marshall**. It begins with a scene in which evangelist-turned-nightclub-singer (don’t ask!) **Reno Sweeney** tells Wall Street intern **Billy Crocker** how much he attracts her, even though he remains only a good friend.

Porter: *Anything Goes*, “I get a kick outa you” (Sutton Foster)

The action switches to the deck of the *SS American*. Billy has got himself on board to be close to the woman he does love, the heiress **Hope Harcourt**, who is traveling to England with her fiancé, an English

lord. What he does not yet realize is that the passport he has borrowed is that of the notorious gangster **Snake Eyes Johnson**, Public Enemy #1.

Porter: *Anything Goes*, “Travel / Bon Voyage” (company)

Knowing that Billy really loves Hope, Reno decides to help him, by boosting his confidence in one of Porter’s signature **list songs**.

Porter: *Anything Goes*, “You’re the top” (Foster, Edwards)

Billy and Hope meet and recall their first meeting. Their romantic duet was cut from the original production and not restored until now.

Porter: *Anything Goes*, “So easy to love” (Baisden, Edwards)

Meanwhile Reno teams up with **Moonface Martin**, another gangster though only Public Enemy #13. They sing a duet of Friendship that Porter also wrote for a different show, but is now routinely included in revivals.

Porter: *Anything Goes*, “Friendship” (Foster, Robert Lindsay)

Billy (as Snake Eyes Johnson) is apprehended, but the Captain makes him and Moonface guests of honor on the ship, conscious of the publicity value of having *two* gangsters on board. The apparent upending of conventional morality gives Reno the cue for the title song.

Porter: *Anything Goes*, “Anything Goes” (Foster, company)

In Act Two, Reno will fall for Hope’s English lord, thus leaving her free to marry Billy—though not without many complications along the way!

Marc **Blitzstein** (1905–64, *American composer*), George **Gershwin** (1898–1937, *American composer*), Ira **Gershwin** (1896–1983, *American lyricist*), Cole **Porter** (1891–1964, *American songwriter*), Florenz **Ziegfeld II** (1887–1932, *American impresario*)

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