

The Birth of Broadway

11. Musical Alchemy

IT IS A FEAT OF TRUE MUSICAL ALCHEMY to take subjects so full of pain and horror as the expulsion of the Jews from Russia and the rise of the Nazi party and incorporate them into Broadway musicals designed to entertain. We first see this in *The Sound of Music* (1959), as the dramatic finale to a Cinderella romance that returns to the operetta tradition with which this course started.

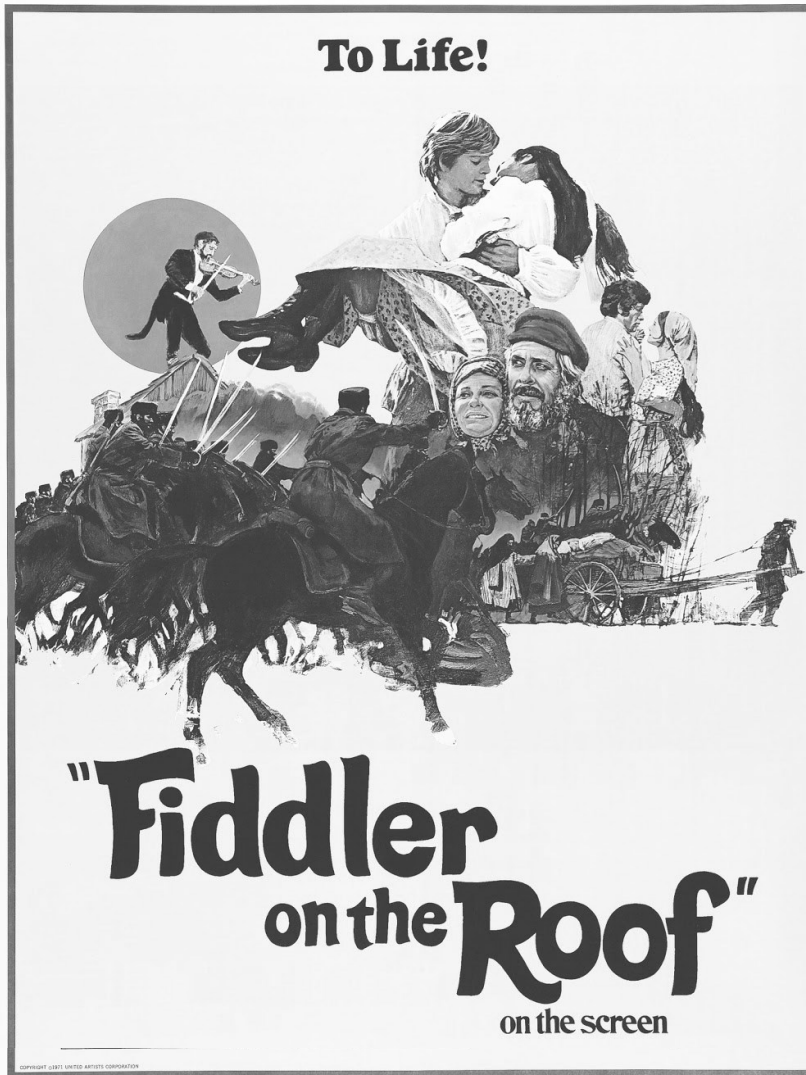
Despite radical differences in style, both *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964) and *Cabaret* (1966) bore deeply into their tragic subjects, the one with warm humanity, the other with edgy satire. Both deal with inflection points in history when old assumptions must change. Both ask what moral qualities enable some to survive these changes, while others look on and do nothing. Both move the Broadway musical into uncharted new territory, and both have been preserved in iconic films of unusual power. *rb.*

A. Under the Shadow

THE SOUND OF MUSIC (1959) was the final collaboration between **Richard Rodgers** and **Oscar Hammerstein II**. The book by **Howard Lindsay** and **Russell Crouse** was based on the memoirs of **Maria von Trapp** as dramatized in a German film a few years earlier. In 1965, the musical became a film directed by **Robert Wise**.

Maria, originally hired as governess to the children of widowed Captain von Trapp, has married the Captain and trained the entire family as a singing group. As a former naval officer, the Captain has been ordered to report to the German navy but, being opposed to the Nazi regime, he has arranged for their escape into Switzerland, following a final performance at a folksong festival in Salzburg.

Rodgers and Hammerstein: *The Sound of Music*, Salzburg concert (film 1965; Julie Andrews, *Maria*; Christopher Plummer, *Captain*)



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April 29, 2025

B. Species of Sleaze

Joe Masteroff's book for CABARET was based upon the 1951 play *I Am a Camera* by **John van Druten**, which in turn derived from the 1939 novel *Goodbye to Berlin* by **Christopher Isherwood**. **Harold Prince**, who produced the show on Broadway in 1966, brought in **John Kander** and **Fred Ebb** as composer and lyricist. The 1972 film by **Bob Fosse** makes deep changes to the original, but is an icon in its own right.

The setting is Berlin in 1931, in the waning years of the Weimar Republic. A young English writer, Brian Roberts, becomes involved with the American Sally Bowles, a cabaret singer. Their story and others play out against the background of the rise of the Nazi party in the outside world, all commented upon by satirical numbers in the cabaret.

Kander and Ebb: *Cabaret*, beer-garden scene, opening, gorilla song, and closing (film 1972; Joel Grey, *Emcee*; Michael York, *Brian*; Liza Minnelli, *Sally*; Helmut Griem, *Maximilian*; Mark Lambert, *uncredited voice-over in beer garden scene*)

Kander and Ebb: *Cabaret*, finales to Acts I and II (Sam Mendes stage production; Alan Cumming, *Emcee*; other performers not known)

Bock and Harnick: *Fiddler on the Roof*, opening, tavern scene, and wedding (film 1971; Topol, *Tevye*; Norma Crane, *Golde*; Paul Mann, *Lazar Wolf*; Rosalind Harris, *Tzeitel*; Leonard Frey, *Motel*; Paul Michael Glaser, *Perchik*)

Jerry **Bock** (1928–2010, *American composer*), Fred **Ebb** (1928–2004, *American lyricist*), Bob **Fosse** (1927–87, *American choreographer and director*), Oscar **Hammerstein II** (1895–1960, *American lyricist*), Sheldon **Harnick** (1924–2023, *American lyricist*), Norman **Jewison** (1926–2024, *Canadian filmmaker*), John **Kander** (1927–, *American composer*), Joe **Masteroff** (1919–2018, *American writer*), Sam **Mendes** (1965–, *British director*), Jerome **Robbins** (1918–98, *American choreographer and director*), Richard **Rodgers** (1902–79, *American composer*), **Sholem Aleichem** (Solomon Rabinovich, 1859–1916, *Yiddish writer*), Joseph **Stein** (1912–2010, *American playwright*)

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C. Everyone's Anatevka

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF (1964) is an adaption by **Joseph Stein** of stories by the Yiddish writer **Sholem Aleichem** about the dairyman Tevye. The music and lyrics are by **Jerry Bock** and **Sheldon Harnick** respectively, with **Jerome Robbins** as the choreographer and original director. The 1971 film was directed by **Norman Jewison**.

The setting is Anatevka, a fictional *shtetl* (Jewish settlement) in Russia at the turn of the 20th century. Tevye celebrates the old traditions of his community, even though the marriage ambitions of his three eldest daughters pose an increasing challenge. All this is set against brewing tensions between the Jews and their Gentile neighbors.