

Comedy in Song



4. Two Annies

October 8, 2025

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WHAT ARE THE MAIN INGREDIENTS OF A BROADWAY MUSICAL? Music, obviously, but also Comedy and in most cases Romance. **Charles Strouse's** *Annie* of 1977 has fine music and some wacky comedy, but its overall mood is feel-good Sentiment, and romance of the traditional kind is almost entirely absent.

Annie is a story of an 11-year-old girl finding her independence in more ways than one. Three decades earlier, **Irving Berlin** wrote *Annie Get Your Gun* about a slightly older girl coming of age, finding her own independence and, yes, falling in love. For this earlier *Annie* is indeed a Romance, although it pretends otherwise, and goes out of its way to undercut any hint of sentiment.

Something happened in postwar Broadway to shift the axis of Comedy, realign Romance, and introduce Sentiment as a stage quality. By looking at examples spanning the gap between the two *Annies*, this class will try to work out how and why. *rb.*

A. Same Name, Different Show

We watch clips from the 1950 film of *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), as the basis for a number of comparisons about the treatment of young characters and Broadway's attitudes to Romance.

Strouse: *Annie* (1977), "Maybe" (film 1980; Aileen Quinn, *Annie*)

Berlin: *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), "Doin' what comes naturally" (outtake from 1950 film; Judy Garland, *Annie*)

Berlin: *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), "Doin' what comes naturally" (film 1950, Betty Hutton, *Annie*; George Sidney, *director*)

Berlin: *Annie Get Your Gun*, "You can't get a man with a gun" (Betty Hutton in the film as above)

Berlin: *Annie Get Your Gun*, “Anything you can do, I can do better” (Betty Hutton and Howard Keel in the film as above)

Youmans: *No, No, Nanette* (1925), “Tea for Two” (Nicholle McNiece and Andy McCalman, Ballarat Lyric Theatre, 1990)

B. Avoidance Strategies

Three songs from *My Fair Lady* (Lerner and Loewe, 1956), all having to do with love, marriage, or romance.

Loewe: *My Fair Lady*, “On the street where you live” (film 1964; Jeremy Brett, *Freddy*; George Cukor, *director*)

Loewe: *My Fair Lady*, “I’ve grown accustomed to her face” (film as above, Rex Harrison, *Higgins*)

Loewe: *My Fair Lady*, “I’ve grown accustomed to her face” (cover by Andy Williams)

Loewe: *My Fair Lady*, “Get me to the church on time” (film as above, Stanley Holloway, *Alfred P. Doolittle*)

C. It’s Showbiz!

A *Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (Stephen Sondheim, 1962), the last stand of Farce on Broadway.

Sondheim: *Forum*, “Bring me my bride” (film 1966; Loren Greene, *Miles Gloriosus*; Richard Lester, *director*)

Sondheim: *Forum*, “Comedy tonight” (Broadway revival 1996, with Nathan Lane)

Berlin: *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), “Show business” (film as above)

D. Out of the Depression

We shall watch clips from the first act of *Annie*, mostly in the 2021 staged-for-TV revival *Annie Live!*, but with a couple of scenes from the 1982 film for comparison.

Strouse: *Annie*, “It’s the hard-knock life” (film 1982, John Huston, *d.*)

Strouse: *Annie Live!*, “It’s the hard-knock life,” “Tomorrow,” Hooverville, and Warbucks mansion scenes (NBC 2021; Celina Smith, *Annie*; Taraji P. Henson, *Miss Hannigan*; Nicole Scherzinger, *Grace Farrell*; Harry Connick Jr., *Oliver Warbucks*)

Strouse: *Annie*, Mansion and Radio City scenes (film 1982; Aileen Quinn, *Annie*; Ann Reinking, *Grace*; Albert Finney, *Warbucks*)

Strouse: *Annie Live!*, “NYC” (2021 production as above)

Irving **Berlin** (1888–1989, *American composer and lyricist*), Alan Jay **Lerner** (1918–86, *American lyricist*), Frederick **Loewe** (1901–88, *German-American composer*), Titus Macchius **Plautus** (254–184 BCE, *Roman playwright*), Stephen **Sondheim** (1930–2021, *American composer and lyricist*), Charles **Strouse** (1928–2025, *American composer*), Vincent **Youmans** (1898–1946, *American composer*)

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