

Classical Broadway

A note on the reissue

It's been twenty-two years since I produced this CD for my then label Bay Cities. I hadn't quite become what I call a real record producer - that would happen a year later in 1993. But this was just prior to that journey, when I was still a neophyte and feeling my way. Listening to it now, two decades-plus later, I think it sounds pretty good, especially in this fresh mastering we've given it. The music is, of course, amazing and really interesting from four incredible Broadway composers, three of whom are happily, at the time of this writing, still with us and two of whom are still actively composing. Sadly, Cy passed away several years ago, and Harvey pretty much retired and is living in Tomball, Texas. I was lucky and blessed to have worked with all of them many times subsequent to this recording, the latest of which was the complete studio cast recording of *And the World Goes Round*. My love and admiration for all four gentlemen knows no bounds. They were/are not only wonderful composers, but wonderful and warm people, too. So, if you're new to this album, sit back and enjoy the classical side from four of Broadway's best.

— Bruce Kimmel/2014

All too often in show business, creative individuals are well known for one or (if they're lucky) two facets of what may actually be a wide-ranging and diverse career. Composers are no different than actors when it comes to typecasting. While they may be famous for their music for a popular medium (movies, TV, the theater), many tunesmiths have also written music for the concert hall — works that, for one reason or another, have remained unknown and, for the most part, unheard. Now, with *Classical Broadway*, we bring you premiere recordings of concert works by four composers, each of whom is a household name along the Great White Way. So, house lights down. Curtain up. Welcome to *Classical Broadway*.

Cy Coleman *New York Sketches*

One of Broadway's most prolific composers, Cy Coleman is best known for his hit scores for *Little Me*, *Sweet Charity*, *On the Twentieth Century*, *City of Angels* and *The Will Rogers Follies*. A celebrated keyboard prodigy during his youth, his classical training gave way to pop and jazz influences during his teens. Coleman became a fixture on Manhattan's nightclub circuit, playing jazz piano before becoming a songwriter and theater composer of renown in the 1950s and 1960s. Long before he wrote Frank Sinatra's hit song "Witchcraft" (with lyricist Carolyn Leigh) or started on Broadway with *Wildcat*, he composed this trio of piano preludes. Written in the late 1940s, they were first published in 1950.

The composer described *New York Sketches* as "an assignment" from a New York publisher who had heard his piano sonatas and suggested that he compose a new work a la George Gershwin's famous 1926 preludes. "At that time, they called everybody to do Gershwin," Coleman remembers. Coleman wrote them over a summer in Montecello, New York, effectively creating musical descriptions of daytime, twilight and nighttime in the city. Although he recalls an excitement about their publication ("they put my name all over the cover — it was as if I'd been writing for years"), Coleman admits that "I really didn't take them seriously, because I was asked to do them in a particular style. But when I listen to them again today," he adds, "I rather like them."

Charles Strouse *String Quartet No. 1;* *Sonata for Two Pianos*

Charles Strouse burst onto the Broadway scene in 1960 with as big a hit as a young composer could ever hope for: *Bye Bye Birdie*. Since then, he has written some of the theater's finest scores, including *Applause*, *Annie* and *Rags*. The Strouse string quartet dates from 1955, long before his theatrical success, when the composer was supporting himself primarily as a jazz pianist. "I was playing in cabarets and cocktail lounges," he recalls, "and had started to get experience in jazz and popular music. Before then, my training had been only academic, classical. I started not only to like it, to feel that I had a gift for jazz, but it seemed to me to do that thing that American composers often do, which is to put into their music what was part of their lives rather than just part of their training."

Strouse discovered that the literature for string quartet contained few works with jazz elements. "It just seemed that it would be fun to write something that had what I felt at the time was real jazz phrasing," he says. "That might be one contribution that I could make, in a sense, to the literature." Describing his approach, Strouse says, "There were certain jazz figures that I heard, that were very much in the air. It seemed to me that they could be developed in a way that was not merely improvisation. I tried to take those, structure them more and use them developmentally; in other words, to not indulge myself in a riff and let it go away, but to try and keep the spirit of that riff under the control of the composer — to maintain some of the verve, some of the smokiness of jazz. It's something that everyone from Ravel to Milhaud has tried to do."

The duo-piano sonata was composed between 1948 and 1950 and is dedicated to Strouse's parents. Its composition marked a turning point in the young composer's life, for midway through the piece Strouse decided that the theater was to be his calling. Strouse, who had been studying with Arthur Berger and Aaron Copland in New York and Nadia Boulanger in Paris, had completed two movements when he was offered a composition fellowship at the prestigious MacDowell Colony. He turned it down to work as a rehearsal pianist at the summer stock festival Green Mansions in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York. "It was a very significant move in my life," Strouse recalls. "It was slave labor. I played ten hours a day and made \$75 for the whole summer, but to put it mildly, I got hooked — on audience approval, the glamorous people, the girls, and everyone loving it so. It's a very different world than the world of serious music." After that summer, he finished the sonata, "in my own time," Strouse says. "But it was at that period of my life that I decided that the theater was not only inviting but that after experiencing it I couldn't give it up."

John Kander *Three Poems by Lucile Adler*

John Kander arrived on Broadway with the musical *A Family Affair*, which he wrote with the Goldman brothers, William and James. But it was his partnership with lyricist Fred Ebb that produced such legendary scores as *Flora*, *the Red Menace*, *Cabaret*, *Zorba*, *Chicago* and *Woman of the Year*, as well as songs for the films *Funny Lady* and *New York, New York*.

Soprano Carol Vaness asked Kander to write three songs for a concert tour in 1987. The composer chose three poems by a close friend and cousin, Santa Fe resident

Lucile Adler, which she had written at the end of her husband's life. For that reason, Kander characterizes the songs as "very personal" to both poet and composer. About them individually he says, "I really wanted the first song, 'Plaisir,' to be a burst of joy. The second, 'You,' is calmly romantic and reflective, almost like a love song. The third, 'The Last Day,' is where the trio of songs is heading. It's a kind of anthem."

Both Kander and Adler grew up in Kansas City, Missouri, and the composer says that when he listens to "The Last Day," it "sounds very Missouri to me. Although I didn't intend it, there's also something very Midwestern about that song. The poems are complex. I wanted to marry that poetry to music."

Harvey Schmidt *Monteargentario:* *Seven Dances for Solo Piano*

Harvey Schmidt has the distinction of having composed the longest running musical in theater history, the immortal *The Fantasticks*. But he also composed two of Broadway's loveliest scores, *110 in the Shade* and *I Do! I Do!*, all written with his longtime collaborator, Tom Jones.

Schmidt composed this collection of short piano pieces during the fall and winter of 1964 and the spring of 1965. While working on the score for *I Do! I Do!*, he was living in a rented villa overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea about 100 miles north of Rome — more specifically, as the title attests, the Argentario promontory which, in Schmidt's words, "emerges suddenly and majestically from the Italian coastal waters." The composer recalls: "Along the rocky coast were remnants of old and new harbors hidden away among the tiny sand beaches and the crevices and grottos of the high cliff walls. Primitive pathways and unpaved roads wound up and down past the occasional Saracen tower, abandoned fort or convent, or red-tile-roofed farmhouses surrounded by vineyards and olive groves. As I worked at the piano each day, I began to be fascinated by the many exotic names dotting the large antique map on the wall above me. I soon developed the habit of taking a break in the late afternoon and driving to a different location named on the map to see what was there, and as a mental exercise and change of pace from my work on the show, composing a corresponding theme in my head."

Schmidt was inspired by the long-ago presence of Greeks, Etruscans, Romans, medieval forces and attacks by marauding French, Spanish and North African invaders. "Evidence of these ruins and remains were scattered everywhere," he says. "Though it might often be no more than a mound of dirt or a pile of stones, one somehow could feel all of these influences still at work. Wherever I might wander, there were always magnificent views of the dark cobalt blue sea, occasionally accompanied by distant bells from a flock of sheep at sunset. In the gathering dusk, I would return home, sit down at the piano and record the theme I had heard in my head that evening."

— Jon Burlingame/1992