

DAMES AT SEA | I'M A FAN

Dames At Sea began its journey as a sketch, a parody of the old movie musicals of the 1930s, you know, where the hot-off-the-bus Midwest chorus girl arrives in New York, gets in a show and becomes a Broadway star. The music was by Jim Wise, and lyrics and script were by George Haimsohn and Robin Miller. It was expanded and in 1966 *Dames At Sea or Golddiggers Afloat* had its first production Off-Off Broadway at the Caffe Cino, a small coffee house with a small performance space. When the original actress playing ingénue Ruby, the choreographer, Don Price, recommended newcomer Bernadette Peters for the role. The show played 148 performances.

Two years later, the show, now expanded and with title shortened to just *Dames At Sea*, reopened, this time Off-Broadway at the Bouwerie on December 20, 1968 and was so successful that just a few months later it moved to the larger Theatre de Lys, playing a total of 575 performances. Audiences and critics fell in love with Bernadette Peters and loved the little pastiche of a show. Clive Barnes said, "The star is, I suppose, Bernadette Peters as the wholly sweetly small-town chorine who taps her way from the bus station to stardom in 24 hours." Walter Kerr in the *New York Times* said, "You'll find the show cheerful and ingratiating... Bernadette Peters is a real find... She is extremely funny, and endearing on top of that." When Peters left, subsequent Rubys were Loni Ackerman, Bonnie Franklin, Janie Sell, and Barbara Sharma. The show had many productions thereafter and Ms. Peters returned to her role a couple of times at various theaters.

In 1971, a television adaptation was done of the show, becoming an all-star

TV event spectacular on the Bell System Family Theatre on NBC. Airing on November 15, 1971 the cast featured Ann-Margret, Ann Miller, Anne Meara, Harvey Evans, Fred Gwynne, and Dick Shawn. They also added a full chorus of dancers doing full production numbers, thereby turning the TV version into the type of thing the show was spoofing. The TV version was produced by Joseph Cates and Martin Charnin, directed by Walter Miller and Charnin, and choreographed by Alan Johnson. Elliot Lawrence handled the musical direction and bigger arrangements. The one-hour special didn't break any viewing records and TV critic Rick Du Brow opined, "A disastrously heavy-handed adaptation of the stage musical."

Heavy-handed or not, the cast delivers delightful and fun performances. Ann-Margret is bubbly, Harvey Evans is charming, Ann Miller taps those feet like nobody's business, and Fred Gwynne and Dick Shawn are clearly having a grand old time. The bigger band sounds great and as these TV versions of musicals go, especially those cut down to one hour, it's fun. Most interestingly, this very same year saw the release of Mike Nichols' film, *Carnal Knowledge*, featuring a brilliant performance by Ann-Margret, one she received an Oscar nomination for.

This is the first CD release of the TV soundtrack, issued only heretofore as a promotional LP in mono. We had a mono tape of it, which is what was used for his CD.

A year later, another TV musical spectacular aired on CBS. *I'm A Fan* was a frothy look at sports and sports fans that starred Dick Van Dyke, Carol Channing, Rod Barry, MacIntyre Dixon, Lu Leonard, Brandon Maggart, Donna

McKechnie, Karen Morrow, and Mary Louise Wilson. The music was by LeRoy Holmes, a man primarily known as an arranger/conductor on many 1950s and 1960s LPs. The lyrics were by the brilliant Carolyn Leigh (Wildcat, Little Me, "Witchcraft"). The writer was Bob Ellison, the choreographer was Bob Herget, and the director was Clark Jones. No one seems to remember much about it and it certainly was not a huge ratings hit, but the songs are fun, especially Ms. Leigh's lyrics, which are, as always, smart and funny and clever. LeRoy Holmes' tunes are quite catchy.

While no actual TV soundtrack was released, there was a demo recording of all the songs, sung by a chorus, with Ms. Leigh providing some vocals. There can't really be enough Carolyn Leigh in the world, so it's nice to have this curio.

— Bruce Kimmel