

LEVI! (A New Musical)

Original Cast Recording

THE LOS ANGELES CITY COLLEGE THEATRE ACADEMY,
KRITZERLAND ENTERTAINMENT AND A. SCOTT BULLITT

PRESENT

LEVI!

A New Musical Revue

Directed by Bruce Kimmel
Choreography by Kay Cole

Music and Lyrics by
Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman

Book by
Larry Cohen and Janelle Webb Cohen

Musical Direction Richard Allen
Orchestraions by Lanny Meyers
Production Stage Manager Maggie Marx
Associate Producer Joanna Erdos

The Cast

Charlton Brio Kyle Brogmus Eugene Thomas Erlikh Paola Fregoso Rachel Frost Marc Ginsburg
Bedjou Jean Elza Kim Prisca Kim Tristen Kim Kole King Christina McGrath
Shawna Merkley Hadley Belle Miller Connor Clark Pascale Anastasia Perevozova
Justice Quinn Savannah Rutledge Brianna Saranchock James Singleton
Trenton Tabak Sabrina Torres Jesse Trout Scotty Vibe

Scene Design	Lighting Design	Sound Design
Tesshi Nakagawa	Derek Jones	Austin Quan
Costume Design	Additional Material by	Graphic Design
Morgan Grimes	Bruce Kimmel	Doug Haverty

Special Thanks to our Indiegogo contributors, including: Jeffrey R. Beck, Cindy Dellinger, Annette Jessel, Nathan B. Kinney, Fred Landau, Debra Mann, Heather Marsden, Robert J. Sherman, Rudolph Wolowiec

THE CAST

Levi Strauss	Marc Ginsburg *
Sarah	Rachel Frost
August, etc	Kole King
Karl, etc	Eugene Thomas Erlich
Streetwalker, etc	Paola Fregoso
Offical, Peddler, Miner	Christina McGrath
Woman, etc	Shawna Merkley
Young Girl	Hudley Belle Miller
Stafford, etc	Connor Clark Pascale
Aunt Frieda, etc	Anastasia Perevozova
Miner, etc	Justice Quinn
Servant, etc	Savannah Rutledge
Tam Lee, etc	Brianna Saranchock
Goodman, etc	James Singleton
Miner, etc	Trenton Tabak
Immigrant, etc	Sabrina Torres
Howard, etc	Jesse Trout
Jacob	Scotty Vibe
Old Willie, etc	Charlton Brio
Cowboy, etc	Kyle Brogmus
Policeman, etc	Bedjou Jean
Tim Sang	Eliza Kim
Su Lin	Prisca Kim
Han Chow	Tristan Kim

**Member of Actor's Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States*

ACT ONE

The Streets Are Paved With Gold/Opportunity>Welcome To The U.S. of A.
Levi, Immigrants, Officials

Business is Business
Streetwalker

Seven Beautiful Children
Levi

LEVI!
Strauss Family

We Know Why
Levi & Sarah

Like a Man
Han Chow, Su Lin, Tam Lee, Tim Sang

Happy Love
Sarah

Opportunity! (Reprise)
Gold Prospectors, Levi

- INTERMISSION -

ACT TWO

Pay Dirt
Miners

The Streets Are Paved With Gold (Reprise)
Levi

Great American Friend
Su Lin, Han Chow, Tam Lee, Tim Sang

LEVI! (Reprise)
Levi and Miners

Like A Man (Reprise)
Su Lin & Levi

The Dream I Must Not Dream
Su Lin

Business Is Business (Reprise)
Stafford & Howard

So Many Empty Rooms*
Sarah

Look How It Adds Up
Levi

Finale
Levi, Sarah & Company

It would seem nigh unto impossible to produce a new Sherman Brothers musical in the year 2017 but sometimes nigh unto impossible things happen and dreams come true. To be truthful, it was a new musical in the sense that it had not only never been produced, it hadn't even had a reading. The musical was and is called *Levi!* It was written in the very late 1970s, optioned by a producer who made sure there was a lot of press about it. Not only did it have a score by one of the most legendary song-writing teams in history, it had a book by the cult screenwriter/director, Larry Cohen, who had, a few years earlier, unleashed the world's first mutant killer baby movie, *It's Alive*. His then wife, Janelle Webb Cohen, co-wrote the book. Certainly the life of Levi Strauss was interesting – coming to America as a penniless immigrant and finding the greatest success imaginable and truly finding the American Dream. But the producer could never rustle up the money to produce it. Back in those days, workshoping a musical was a fairly new thing, begun by Michael Bennett with *A Chorus Line*. Most musicals back in the late 1970s still weren't doing that, and none were doing what these days has become an endless succession of readings, workshops, labs, that sometimes go on for years.

The 1980s were difficult for the Sherman Brothers and the heart-break of *Levi!* sitting unproduced was, well, heartbreaking. That original producer was gone, but apparently it was optioned again, but still nothing happened. The authors reworked it, shuffled things around, changed some music and lyrics here and there,

but still nothing. It was a huge disappointment for the brothers and the Cohens, but they went on with their lives – the brothers still turning out some wonderful songs, and Larry Cohen continuing to make some wacky and completely unique and entertaining cult films.

Flash forward to October of 2016. We were issuing a CD called *Unsung Sherman Brothers*, which consisted of songs from three unrealized projects of the late 1960s. It was a thrill to do it, and Richard Sherman was delighted to finally have the material released as it showed off his and brother Robert's brilliance at their finest. One day Richard called and said, "I have this other project from a while ago that I'd like you to read and hear." He came over an hour later with two scripts and a demo from *Levi!* We listened to the demo together and the songs were wonderful. He asked me if there was any way for me to put together a reading of the show so that he and Larry could finally hear it out loud. Of course I said I could, and told him I'd read it that weekend, which I did.

Larry and Janelle's script had wonderful things in it, but it was occasionally convoluted and unwieldy in its structure. As good as some of it was, I could see why it hadn't been produced if this was the script the money people had been reading. I called Richard and told him that he, Larry, and I should sit down and talk about what I felt the problems were. And so we convened at Jerry's Deli in Studio City. Larry and I got along instantly and Richard, of course, was already one of my

dearest friends. Larry asked me to be very candid and I was. I told them I thought there was a wonderful musical hiding within this script, but that there were changes needed to be made to actually make it producible and to make the structure stronger, and to focus the strengths of the script. I was especially vocal about the opening of the show, which I felt was very wrong and didn't work at all. They agreed to do whatever I felt was necessary, and I agreed on the spot not to do a reading, but to do a full production at Los Angeles City College, my alma mater. I've been going back there to direct musicals on and off for forty-six years and my intention was to do *Bells Are Ringing* in 2017 – in 2014 I'd done a critically acclaimed production of *Li'l Abner* there and I'd always wanted to do *Bells Are Ringing*. But I put that aside and told Leslie Ferreira, the chair of the Theatre Academy, that instead we'd be doing the world-premiere of a brand new Sherman Brothers musical. He was thrilled – we were all thrilled.

I made lots of notes on the script and in January of 2016 began sending them to Larry, while discussing the score and how it would function with Richard. But Larry was having an incredible year – a new documentary on his life and career was being finished (*King Cohen*) and he was traveling a lot being feted at various festivals all over the country. So, nothing was happening. Richard called Larry, they conversed, and Larry called me and gave me his blessing to just go ahead and rewrite and revise the script as I saw fit, which was really gracious of him

– he simply didn’t have the time, and he hadn’t thought about this material in decades.

And so I set about doing a revision – starting with the opening, which I completely rethought in terms of its structure and how it functioned – getting that right was the key for me. Once I got that done, the rest was just cutting, shaping, adding a few things here and there for clarity, and simplifying the cast size and production needs. Once I was finished, I gathered together some actor pals and we did a private, informal reading at my house, with Richard and Larry in attendance. Our musical director, Richard Allen was there playing the piano. The actors read the new, revised script, Richard Allen played, and I sang the songs, with Richard Sherman boisterously joining in quite often. I’ve been involved in a lot of readings of new musicals, and I have never had one go as smoothly and well as this one. There were laughs, tears – genuine, not just for show – and Richard and Larry were ecstatic about it. Larry gave me a wonderful compliment by saying he couldn’t tell what was his and what was mine – I’d very carefully written any new material in the voice and style of what he and Janelle had done. I felt there were still a few problems to address, but overall I knew we could happily go into rehearsal with what we’d just done.

And so, Richard Allen and I began working on the musical arrangements, making little arrangement adjustments here and there to make the songs flow well. In act two there was a scene between Levi and his lost

love that ended with a beautiful line of dialogue and a blackout, after which Levi had to appear in the next scene instantly and there was no way to stage that and make it work. And the end of the scene with the beautiful line was crying out for a song and having a song for our leading lady there solved all the problems. Since I knew exactly what it needed to say, I wrote Richard Sherman a lyric, using the scene’s last line, “So many empty rooms” as its title. I sent it to Richard and literally two hours later he called and played me his beautiful melody and we had our song.

And so, after four weeks of rehearsal, we had the world-premiere of a new Sherman Brothers musical and it really could not have gone better. The audiences loved the show – the same laughs and tears we’d had at the reading were there at every performance. We had a great set, beautiful costumes, terrific orchestrations by my long-time collaborator Lanny Meyers, wonderful lighting and sound – and a great performance by our leading man, Marc Ginsburg, who was simply born to play Levi Strauss. The cast was otherwise made up of mostly students, two younger kids, and a couple of alumni, and everyone did a great job. On opening night, I had Richard Sherman to my left and Larry Cohen in back of me – at the end of act one, both were sobbing, finally seeing their beautiful baby come to life, and at the end of act two the cast introduced them after the curtain call to a standing ovation – not an obligatory one but a hugely heartfelt one.

The story of Levi Strauss resonates today in a way it didn’t

back when the brothers and Larry and Janelle had written it. It is more timely and relevant now than ever in its story of immigrants being given a chance to make good, in its depiction of horrible racism, and in its depiction of an honest, principled who made the world a better place. But what really makes the show work is its great humor and having characters you genuinely get to know and care about. Oh, and those Sherman Brothers songs. I can tell you, there wasn’t one person in any of our audiences that didn’t leave humming the show’s anthem and theme, “Opportunity.” In fact, the score is classic Sherman Brothers, filled with catchy, hummable tunes and lyrics that illuminate character and story. It’s a big, old-fashioned musical, the kind you don’t see much anymore – with a musical’s most important attribute: Heart.

— Bruce Kimmel