

CARNIVAL

LOVE MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

On April 21, 1961, Broadway audiences and critics fell head-over-heels in love with the new musical *Carnival*. Produced by David Merrick and adapted from the MGM film *Lili* by Michael Stewart (from the screenplay by Helen Deutsch, itself adapted from a Paul Gallico short story entitled *The Man Who Hated People*), the show was directed and choreographed by Gower Champion and had a tuneful and memorable score by Bob Merrill. According to Merrill, unlike most musicals whose paths are fraught with endless pitfalls, the road for *Carnival* was unusually smooth from conception through opening – by Merrill's account the first tryout performance in Washington was so well received that the town's major critic showed up at the theater to read his love-letter review to everyone.

Making a musical of the film *Lili* seemed like a natural. It was a musical sort of film to begin with, with the enchanting song "Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo," and some dream ballet sequences. David Merrick, having seen the smash hit *Bye Bye Birdie*, the show Champion had directed and choreographed, which had featured a book by Michael Stewart, hired both to do those same chores on *Carnival*. Champion's work was especially clever, inventive, and highly theatrical. *Carnival* was one of the first shows to open without an overture and without a curtain, just a bare stage onto which actors arrive to assemble a circus setting during the opening music. Anna Maria Alberghetti made a winsome Lili, and Jerry Orbach, making his Broadway debut, was the bitter, lonesome, crippled puppeteer Paul. Also in the company were James Mitchell, Kaye Ballard, Pierre Olaf, as well as some wonderfully emotive puppets, Carrot Top, Horrible Henry, Marguerite, and Reynardo the Fox. The critics raved – in the *Daily News*, John Chapman wrote that *Carnival* was "enchantment from the moment the houselights go down." And so it was, pure enchantment, despite its darker elements – it ran on Broadway for 719 performances, and had a best-selling original cast recording (which debuted at number one on the *Billboard* chart) and "Love Makes The World Go Round" became a much-sung song, covered by many of the popular singers of the time. *Carnival* was nominated for seven Tony Awards, winning two (one for Alberghetti – in a tie with Diahann Carroll – and one for Will Steven Armstrong's scenic design). The show had a successful national tour, as well.

It was a no-brainer that such a successful show would receive a London production, and so it did in 1963, opening at the Lyric Theater in February, after playing short engagements in Leeds and Glasgow. Champion's staging was recreated by his long-time associate, Lucia Victor, and the cast included Sally Logan, Michael Maurel, Bob Harris, Shirley Sands, Francis de Wolff, Reg Lever, along with James Mitchell

recreating his Broadway role. Just prior to opening, the original London cast recording was made, in hopes that the show would repeat the success it had on Broadway. Alas, that was not to be the case – the show ran only thirty-four performances. Why London didn't embrace the show is anyone's guess.

The London cast album is a delight, and features a few little bits not found on the Broadway cast album. Merrill's words and music shine – it's just a wonderful score, musically and lyrically. Merrill began his songwriting career in the pop world, writing such hits as "If I Knew You Were Comin' I'd Have Baked A Cake" (with Al Hoffman and Clem Watts), "Mambo Italiano" (recorded by Rosemary Clooney), and his huge hit novelty song "(How Much Is) That Doggie In The Window." He also wrote a chart-topper for Jimmie Rodgers, the infectious "Honeycomb." He made his Broadway debut as composer and lyricist with *New Girl In Town*, a musical version of Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie*, which starred Gwen Verdon. He stuck to O'Neill for his second Broadway show, *Take Me Along*, based on *Ah, Wilderness*, and provided an absolutely great score. Then came *Carnival*, and it was three terrific scores in a row.

In 1964, Merrill was back on Broadway but this time writing lyrics only for what would become his biggest hit, *Funny Girl*. That show's score, written with composer Jule Styne, yielded a huge hit song, "People," for the show's star Barbra Streisand, and several of the other songs also found long and fruitful lives – "Don't Rain On My Parade," "You Are Woman," "Who Are You Now?," and "The Music That Makes Me Dance." After that, it was back to writing both music and lyrics, this time for what everyone hoped would be a hit musical version of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Sadly, rather than the hoped-for smash, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was one of the most troubled musicals to ever try and wend its way to Broadway. When it finally limped in, it played exactly four preview performances and closed before opening. But Merrill wasn't going to let a little flop rain on his parade and a year later he was back with *Henry, Sweet Henry*, a musical version of the novel and film, *The World of Henry Orient*. It was another non-starter, although it managed to eke out 80 performances. However, his scores for both *Tiffanys* and *Henry* are filled with wonderful numbers.

In 1971, Merrill once again teamed up with Styne, this time providing the lyrics for *Pretty-belle*, starring Angela Lansbury, and reuniting Merrill with his *Carnival* director, Gower Champion. It was another troubled show that didn't even make it into New York, closing in Boston. But a year later, Merrill and Styne were back with *Sugar*, the musical version of Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond's *Some Like It Hot*. *Sugar*, with its toe-tapping score, wonderful direction and choreography (by Gower Champion), and rollicking performances (Robert Morse and

Tony Roberts, along with Elaine Joyce and Cyril Ritchard) did make it into New York after a tortuous tryout and it was a success, running over five-hundred performances. In 1978, Merrill wrote music and lyrics for *The Prince Of Grand Street*, starring Robert Preston – sadly, it, too, closed in Boston. After that, Merrill would only be represented with a new show on Broadway once – in 1993 – when he provided additional lyrics for Jule Styne's score to *The Red Shoes*. For that show, he wasn't even credited as Bob Merrill – he used the name Paul Stryker, alongside the show's official lyricist, Marsha Norman.

They don't make 'em like Bob Merrill anymore. His scores, especially those for which he provided both music and lyrics, are just fun to listen to in a way show songs sometimes aren't anymore. They're real old-fashioned Broadway tunes – some pretty, some touching, some hilarious, some exciting – and a simple listen to *Carnival* will be ample proof that Merrill was a major talent.

When I was growing up, I was always excited to see a new original cast album release. But early on, I saw there was this other alternate universe out there, of cast albums from elsewhere. I first became aware of this phenomenon with *The Most Happy Fella* and *Flower Drum Song* (both of which had their London cast albums issued stateside by Angel Records), as well as the London cast album of *Bye Bye Birdie*. I began to seek out those recordings and frequently I ended up loving them more than the originals. Sometimes they'd include extra material, too, which was always fun. Eventually, I, like many collectors, even branched out to foreign language recordings (Columbia was especially wonderful with *My Fair Lady*, which seemed to have been done in many languages). Some of these wonderful recordings have found their way to CD, albeit in very limited releases. But some have languished in the vaults of the companies that did them, so it's a real treat to unearth some of these and make them available for the very first time.

Carnival was mastered from the original album master tapes housed at EMI in the UK. Interestingly, some of the song titles are slightly different on the London recording and we've opted to use those so that we match the way they were listed on that original LP jacket.

Carnival has had any number of productions over the years, from summer stock to Encores! in New York. And each and every time it's done it captivates as it always has.

— Bruce Kimmel