

## **The History of Rodgers & Hammerstein's CINDERELLA**

CINDERELLA, the only musical written by Rodgers and Hammerstein for television, premiered live on CBS-TV on March 31, 1957 - 14 years to the day that Rodgers & Hammerstein's first collaboration, *Oklahoma!*, opened on Broadway.

CBS's presentation of CINDERELLA was prompted by the astounding success rival NBC had enjoyed previously with a television production of *Peter Pan* starring Mary Martin. CBS felt that with the right star in the right version of the right fairy tale, a little of that NBC pixie dust might rub off on them.

Unlike *Peter Pan*, which was a television version of a Broadway production, it was determined by CBS that their musical would be created specifically for the medium. In choosing their fairy tale, inspired casting may have helped in the decision: at the time, a radiant Julie Andrews was charming Broadway in an Edwardian Cinderella musical called *My Fair Lady*, and when CBS asked her to play Cinderella for them, she readily agreed. With ideal casting like that, the network had very little trouble getting Rodgers & Hammerstein involved. "What sold us immediately was the chance to work with Julie," recalled Rodgers in his autobiography. "It was right from the start."

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II prepared their version of CINDERELLA in a scant eight-month period. The story remained true to Perrault's original: "The traditional CINDERELLA has done very well," Hammerstein remarked. "Why should we trick her up? We wanted to do a musical version of the story that everyone remembers from childhood." Nevertheless, the script was embroidered with a few sly and witty touches that were uniquely Hammerstein, and the score featured such jewels as "In My Own Little Corner", "Do I Love You Because You're Beautiful?", "Ten Minutes Ago", "Impossible", and several of Rodgers' most enchanting waltzes and marches.

Joining Julie Andrews was a stellar cast that included Howard Lindsay and Dorothy Stickney as the King and Queen; Ilka Chase

as the Stepmother; Kaye Ballard and Alice Ghostley as the Stepsisters; Jon Cypher as The Prince; and Edith Adams as an atypical young and sensible Godmother.

Produced at a costly \$375,000, this was a sumptuous CINDERELLA that spared no expense. "Being ignorant of the medium," wrote Hammerstein of his first experience in television, "I wrote this show on the assumption we could do anything, and nothing has been refused me yet." CINDERELLA went through an unusually long (for television) rehearsal period, followed by two complete run-throughs (dubbed "the New Haven and Boston tryouts" by the authors).

On March 18, the cast went into Columbia Records studio where, under the supervision of Goddard Lieberson, they recorded the CINDERELLA score; the album was released in conjunction with the broadcast less than two weeks later. On Sunday night, March 24, Rodgers and Hammerstein appeared on "The Ed Sullivan Show", playing selections from CINDERELLA and urging viewers to watch "the same channel, same time, same place" one week hence.

And watch they did. CINDERELLA's broadcast, live on CBS-TV on Sunday night March 31, 1957 from 8 to 9:30 p.m., was viewed by 107 million people - the largest television audience to date (and representing more than half the country with a then population of 170 million)! Rodgers mused that for CINDERELLA to reach as large an audience on Broadway it would have to play to SRO houses for 110 years!

When they were writing CINDERELLA, Rodgers & Hammerstein intended to present the musical on stage the following season in an expanded, adapted form. Their plans did not materialize, but a London producer, Harold Fielding, saw in their CINDERELLA the potential for a splashy Christmas-time spectacle in the spirit of that city's annual holiday "pantos" (musical versions of children's tales). With a young ingenue, Yana, in the title role, and Tommy Steele in a cameo role, CINDERELLA opened at the London

Coliseum on December 18, 1958, and played through the holiday season.

CINDERELLA made an easy transition to the stage, and began appearing in theatres around the U.S. as early as 1961. With its stage success on track, CBS wanted to bring CINDERELLA back to television. The 1957 premiere had been phenomenally successful, but in the days before videotape it was doomed to one night only. So in 1965, CBS re-staged CINDERELLA, with Richard Rodgers serving as Executive Producer. While Joseph Schrank was brought in to revise the teleplay, the score remained intact, with the addition of a solo for the Prince, "Loneliness of Evening" (a ballad originally written for, and cut from, *South Pacific* in 1949).

The '65 CINDERELLA featured a cast as remarkable as the original: Ginger Rogers and Walter Pidgeon played the King and Queen; *Oklahoma!*'s original Ado Annie, Celeste Holm, played the Fairy Godmother; Jo Van Fleet was the Stepmother with Pat Carroll and Barbara Ruick as her daughters; and Stuart Damon played The Prince. A young Broadway star-to-be, Lesley Ann Warren, played Cinderella. Taped for broadcast, this CINDERELLA premiered on February 22, 1965, and was shown on CBS eight more times through February of 1974.

Rodgers & Hammerstein's CINDERELLA endures. The original 1957 version survives in a relatively crude but historically fascinating kinescope in the archives of the Museum of Television and Radio in New York City and Los Angeles; the 1965 remake can be seen frequently on The Disney Channel and Hallmark home video. Compact disc and audiocassette recordings of both performances are available on Sony Broadway.

Stage productions of CINDERELLA continue to thrive as well, including an acclaimed version presented by the New York City Opera in 1993, and again in 1995. In calendar year 1996, according to the R & H Theatre Library, more than 250 productions of Rodgers & Hammerstein's CINDERELLA were presented in the United States alone.

CINDERELLA made television history again when 60 million viewers tuned in to ABC-TV's "The Wonderful World of Disney", dazzling remake which aired November 2, 1997. Its all-star cast included Whitney Houston as the Fairy Godmother, singing and TV sensation Brandy in the title role, Bernadette Peters as the Wicked Stepmother, Whoopie Goldberg as the Queen, Victor Garber as the King, newcomer Paolo Montalban (plucked from the Broadway cast of *The King and I*) as The Prince, Jason Alexander as his Steward, with Veanne Cox and Natalie Desselle as the Wicked Stepsisters.