# FROM *FIDDLER* TO *FALSETTOS*: JEWISH IDENTITY IN THE BROADWAY MUSICAL, 1961-2004

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Leigh S. Korn
From *Fiddler* to *Falsettos*: Jewish Identity in the American Broadway Musical

Number of chapters: 4, plus an introduction, conclusion, and appendix

Contribution of this thesis: This work is a contribution to the field of American Jewish culture and to the field of musical theater.

Goal of the thesis: The goal of this thesis is to explore how Jewish identity has been depicted in the Broadway musical, 1961-2004.

How thesis is divided: The first chapter gives a brief background of Yiddish theater through modern Broadway. The three subsequent chapters each focus on a different show.

What kinds of material were used: Primary sources included books on musical theater, scores, scripts, interviews, and sound and video recordings.

CONTENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Mark Kligman for his help in getting this thesis off the ground and his support throughout the process. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Carole Bailin for her insights, her encouragement, her enthusiasm, and her brilliant editing. This could not have been written without her.

# INTRODUCTION

As a future cantor, I am particularly interested in how Jews connect to Judaism. Of course, I look forward to working to connect with my congregants on a ritual, spiritual, and communal level. I am, though, particularly interested in how they identify "Jewishly" *outside* the synagogue. As a self-proclaimed pop culture aficionado, I saw this thesis as an opportunity to pursue my interests in American Jewish culture and my love of musical theater. For several years I have found myself drawn (for obvious reasons) to musicals with Jewish content. I am particularly interested in the significant roles Jews have had on Broadway as producers, directors, composers, authors, lyricists, and performers.

Though Broadway writers and producers of Jewish descent have dominated the field, rarely did we find them exploring Jewish identity in their works. Instead, we saw a lot of either overtly American shows like *Carousel*, *Oklahoma!*, *On the Town*, and *West Side Story*, or shows set in extra-American locales, like *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *My Fair Lady*. There was a shift, however, in the beginning of the 1960s and the Jewish-themed musical appears on the scene and flourishes. From the opening of *Milk and Honey* on October 10, 1961 through the opening of *Fiddler on the Roof* on September 22, 1964, five Jewish-themed musicals opened on Broadway, four of them quite successfully. Surely, Jews felt that American audiences were ready for shows with particularly Jewish content.

In the initial chapter of my thesis, I uncover the earliest form of Jewish theater in America: namely, Yiddish musical theater. I trace Yiddish theater's trajectory to its demise and the beginnings of mainstream American musical theater. I analyze five Jewish-themed shows that appeared between 1961 and 1964, and explore attempts made in the 1970s and 1980s to continue to bring Jewish life to the Broadway stage.

The main body of my paper focuses on three shows: *Parade*, *Caroline, or Change*, and *Falsettos* – each has a chapter devoted to it. There were, of course, countless other Jewish-centered shows I might have drawn on – Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret* and *Grand Hotel*, Charles Strouse's *Rags*, Bock and Harnick's *The Rothschilds*, and Ahrens and Flaherty's *Ragtime*, to name a few. There were also several biblically-inspired shows that could have been suitable for this paper – Alan Menken and Tim Rice's *King David*, Stephen Schwartz' *Children of Eden*, Richard Rodger's *Two By Two*, and Elizabeth Swados' *The Haggadah* and *Bible Women*. I opted to stay away from biblical stories since, while there is something inherently Jewish about all of them, they did not deal with the issue of contemporary Jewish identity. I ruled out other shows because they took place in foreign countries, and I preferred to focus on shows that were set in America. The three shows I settled on depicted Jewish life in America in three different eras: *Parade* examined life in Atlanta at the turn of the century, *Caroline, or Change* dealt with the tumultuous 1960s, and *Falsettos* took place in 1980s New York City. The shows are not presented in the order in which they were written, but rather in the order that their stories occur, presenting a chronological look at Jewish life in America in the twentieth century.

In examining these three shows I hope to explore the varied ways writers and composers have chosen to depict Jewish life on the Broadway stage. Further, I will consider the central issues of each show, and see how the non-Jewish issues concerning the characters are dealt with in light of their Jewish identities. I will analyze how the creators of these shows took what, on the surface, seems extremely "Jewish," and developed it in such a way to have mainstream appeal. I will look at the way music and lyrics influenced the Jewish content of each show. In addition, I will explore how Jewish ritual, such as the bar mitzvah ceremony in *Falsettos*, are universal metaphors for all audiences – Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Through this exploration, I hope to shed light on the successes and failures of Jewish-themed shows and how they have served as a conduit for Jewish identity in America.

# CHAPTER 1

# FROM SECOND AVENUE TO BROADWAY: A BRIEF HISTORY OF JEWISH MUSICALS

From the success of Yiddish theater to the opening of overtly Jewish mainstream musicals on Broadway, Jews established themselves on the stage over the last century. This chapter traces the evolution and development of distinctively Jewish shows as background for understanding the three shows that will be the focus of this thesis: *Parade*, *Caroline, or Change*, and *Falsettos*. The creators of each show, as we will see, opted for very different ways to depict Jewishness and Jewish identity in the medium of the musical. The Broadway stage eventually became a conduit for expressing contemporary Jewish identity.

## Yiddish Theater[1]

In the nineteenth century, Purim shpiels were the foundation for what would become a full-fledged theatrical genre: Yiddish theater. While others had written plays earlier, *Serkele* was the first Yiddish play produced professionally in 1862, marking the official beginnings of Yiddish theater as a commercial form. Abraham Goldfaden, now regarded as the "father of the modern Yiddish theater," starred in the show. Goldfaden was a rabbinical student in the Ukraine who ultimately abandoned his studies at the

[1] The main reference for this section and the next is the *Encyclopedia Judaica* article on theater.

seminary in order to create his own theater. Goldfaden authored an extensive repertoire of plays and discovered the actors to perform them. Nearly, all the leading Yiddish performers at some point passed through Goldfaden's theater, even those who immigrated to the United States. In fact, a handful even became his rivals. Generally speaking, the songs from his plays became popular as folksongs; indeed his work had the primitive quality of folk art.[2]

In 1883, a Russian edict prohibited Yiddish plays, sending Yiddish theater out of the empire while still in its formative years. Yiddish theater companies dispersed at first to neighboring areas where they could refine their art. It was not long, however, before they made their way to the West. The performers found a huge Jewish immigrant population in New York who longed for entertainment in their *mamme-loshn* [mother tongue] – an idealization of memories of the *alter heim* [old home]. According to the *Jewish Messenger* of October 1882, the first professional performance of a Yiddish play in the United States took place in New York City on August 18, 1882 and starred Boris Thomashefsky.[3]

Yiddish theater eventually achieved the acclaim of its creators' dreams. At first, the theater was established in this country on the *"zingen un tantsen"*, or "song and dance" formula. This relied largely on stock comedic characters and scenarios, often in American settings, and allowed the performers to largely improvise their performances. The allure of the Goldfaden play was soon lost, and producers opted instead for crude comedies and sentimental dramas to which they would add music and bill as melodramas.

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[2] *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "theater," 1065.

[3] Ibid., 1066.

Yet Yiddish theater in America did have another dimension. As producers and actors recognized the poor taste that motivated many of the popular shows, they worked hard to raise the performance level and literary quality of Yiddish theater. This occurred both by encouraging new Jewish writers and by translating works from other languages. Thomashefsky, in particular, was known for adapting Shakespeare, Goethe, and Zangwill for the Yiddish stage. Jacob Gordin became a leading playwright penning four plays a year during his eighteen years of involvement with Yiddish theater, supplying the genre with nearly 80 plays overall.[4]

By World War I, the Jewish population of the Lower East Side began to move away, and first-generation immigrants' descendants were growing up without Yiddish. Of course, this would have a profoundly negative impact on the continued success of Yiddish theater. In other words, the theaters that once lined Second Avenue were losing their audiences and closing down. Many Jewish actors and actresses made their way across the country to Hollywood. Several actresses of the Yiddish theater, such as Bertha Kalisch, Sophie Tucker, and Molly Picon, made their way onto the English speaking stage. Some of the Yiddish performers had a renaissance in the 1960s making their way through the hotel and resort circuit, largely in the Catskill Mountains, reviving their art and the material that had made them famous.

## The Beginnings of Musical Theater

Nowhere, however, did Jews involved in theater make their mark more than in musicals. The musical comedy had its roots in European operetta as well as vaudeville.

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[4] Ibid.

The musical originated in England and moved to the United States where it expanded and turned into the refined and well-structured form we have today. Florenz Ziegfield was one of the first Jews on the scene producing wildly popular musical revues known widely as *Ziegfield Follies*. It was through these revues, produced between 1907 and 1931, that the world was first introduced to the compositional talent of Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern, both Jewish composers. In the 1920s, many more up-and-coming Jewish composers and lyricists were first making their mark on theater. Composers such as Richard Rodgers and George Gershwin were collaborating with lyricists like Lorenz Hart, Oscar Hammerstein II, E.Y. Harburg, and Ira Gershwin. The team of Rodgers and Hart worked together to become one of the most prolific musical writing teams in the history of the American musical, creating and producing 27 musicals. George Gershwin himself, known also largely as an orchestral composer, wrote the music for more than 20 Broadway musicals, frequently collaborating with his brother Ira.[5] Morrie Ryskind, George S. Kaufman, and the Gershwin brothers collaborated on *Of Thee I Sing*, a satire on American politics, which would become the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1931. In 1937, Kurt Weill wrote *The Eternal Road*, a musical presentation of Jewish history, and the Gershwins were celebrated for their *Porgy and Bess* (1935). *Pins and Needles* (1937), a revue by Harold Rome presented by the heavily Jewish International Ladies Garment Workers, became a smash Broadway hit.[6] Rome would go on to write the Depression era period musical, *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*, which was one of the first shows to place a cast of Jewish characters on the Broadway stage.

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[5] The trend of prolific writing reversed in the 1930s as American musicals reflected the slump and Depression of the time.

[6] *Pins and Needles* was a politically charged revue performed entirely by union members.

The 1940s were a pivotal development period for the American musical thanks to two of its Jewish heavyweights, Rodgers and Hammerstein. In their *Oklahoma!*, they established a new form of musical comedy where the music was used to advance the story and assist in delineating characters. Until this point, songs were interruptions in the story's progression and simply an excuse to allow the performers to sing. They rarely helped tell the story, or share any new insight into the characters. The latter was done largely with the spoken dialogue. *Oklahoma!* was a grand success and was quickly followed by such shows as *Carousel* (1945) and *South Pacific* (1949), both by Rodgers and Hammerstein, as well as *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Brigadoon*, *Finian's Rainbow*, *Guys and Dolls*, and *Pajama Game*. All were created by Jews and all utilized the new form that critics and audiences adored. In fact, it seemed as though Jews had a near monopoly on the genre, as creators and as producers. John Bush Jones, retired professor of Theater Arts at Brandeis University, estimates that since the 1920s at least 90 percent of the book writers, lyricists and composers of Broadway shows were Jewish.[7]

It is significant to note, however, the absence of Jewish identity depicted through their works. While the creators of Yiddish musical theater had, at the very least, the language tying them to their Jewish heritage, these pioneers of musical theater steered clear of it. With very few exceptions (most of which were unsuccessful), these composers and lyricists avoided Jewish themes, characters, and history in their work. Presumably, this was neither an accident nor a coincidence.

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[7] John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Lebanon, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2003), 205.

One must consider the landscape for Jews during the first half of the century. Most of these Jewish creators[8] were either "fresh off the boat" or, at the very least, the first generation of their family born in America. Immigrants were striving hard to fit into the American landscape. Their priority was "becoming Americans." Thus, even if they may have been inclined towards Jewish material, the last thing they envisioned was depicting their Jewish identity on the Broadway stage. As "Jewish" as the city of New York was, this was no longer the era of vaudeville shtick and Ziegfield reviews. This was not the Yiddish theater. Yiddish theater died out largely because the audience too was opting out of the old Jewish ways. It was imperative for those in the Broadway world to create works that appealed to a mainstream audience and to prove themselves in this new landscape.

## Coming Out of the Jewish Closet

As Jews became more established as Americans, they only slowly began to feel comfortable wearing their Jewish identity on their sleeve. As Sheldon Harnick, lyricist for *Fiddler on the Roof* – undoubtedly the most successful Jewish show to take the Broadway stage – states,

> We had come through World War II and had a whole different attitude toward being Jewish than our parents. Before the war, even during it, my father would always tell me, 'Keep a low profile – fight for social justice, but keep a low profile.'[9]

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[8] I use the term creators to lump together composers, lyricists, book writers, producers etc.

[9] Jones, 206.

Anti-Jewish feelings had long been bubbling below the surface of American society, and these were multiplied exponentially as a result of the McCarthy hearings, the trial of the Rosenbergs, and the HUAC blacklists. Indeed, Jewish names (from both the Broadway and the Hollywood communities) filled the black lists. The anti-Jewish feelings that had operated subconsciously in American society were seeping into American life. It was not a ripe environment to bring Jewish material to the stage. However, the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel suddenly "swung the closet doors open" for all Jews, enabling them to be proud of their identity, religion, heritage, and traditions.

In post-war America, Jewish identity exploded into cultural venues of nearly every media. On November 17, 1954, the National Symphony performed the Ahavah Symphony by David Diamond, a work they had commissioned marking the national tercentenary. In 1956, Hollywood broke forth Jewishly as well. Like in the theater, Jewish studio moguls had long dominated Hollywood, but it wasn't until 1956 that *The Ten Commandments* was produced for the big screen. Meanwhile, in the literary world, a positive image of Jews emerged in society's eyes. In 1958, Leon Uris' *Exodus* appeared a best seller that became a blockbuster film just two years later. A year later, Philip Roth, an author whose career would come to concentrate on the American Jewish experience, published his first book *Goodbye, Columbus*. It was a novella and five short stories that depicted Jewish life in post-war America with warmth and humor. It was a huge success, garnering him the National Book Award for fiction. Jewish material made its way also to the world of the non-musical play. Paddy Chayefsky's *The Tenth Man*, a tale set in a Long Island Orthodox synagogue that depicts the attempted exorcism of a dybbuk from a

young woman who in truth is schizophrenic, was a great success with critics and general audiences.

It seemed, finally, time to bring Jewish consciousness and identity to the musical Broadway stage, and indeed, between the years 1961 and 1965, the Jewish-themed musical appeared on the scene in the form of five very different shows. Jewish creators were ready to express their Jewish identities.

### *Milk and Honey*

Producer Gerald Oestreicher decided to take a chance on an overtly Jewish show. He endeavored to increase audience size by tapping into the Jewish market, a mainstay for Broadway audiences. Jerry Herman, composer and lyricist, made his Broadway debut with *Milk and Honey*, which opened on October 10, 1961. Herman collaborated with playwright Don Appell in writing a show that celebrated the young State of Israel. The show was a risk for Oestreicher because it told the story of American Jews in Israel, both as tourists and as émigrés – material that did not seem like it would appeal to the masses.

Herman and Appell did believe in the classic formula of boy-meets-girl formula. The main storyline is a second chance at love between two middle-aged Americans in the Holy Land. Phil, a middle-aged businessman separated from his wife, meets a widowed Ruth while visiting his kibbutznik daughter Barbara and Israeli son-in-law David. Ruth is traveling with a group of Jewish-American women. Among them is Clara Weiss, played in the original Broadway production by Yiddish theater star Molly Picon.[10] In the meantime, Phil, enamored with Israeli life, buys property at his daughter and son-in-law's

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[10] Clara, along with many of the women, is looking to "form a marriage between the two cultures: male and female."

*moshav* [settlement] to build a house where he and Ruth might share a life together. Ruth becomes troubled when she discovers that Phil is still married and flees to Tel Aviv, only to change her mind again and return to him. Phil promises to travel to Paris, where his wife lives, and plead with her for a divorce. Ruth returns to the United States with the anticipation that Phil will be divorced soon and they will be together. The younger generation is not having it much easier. Barbara is homesick for the United States. David does not want to give up his beloved homeland, but eventually recognizes he may have to leave to please his wife. Only Clara ends up totally satisfied romantically when she meets Sol Horowitz, a widower from Jerusalem. The show received favorable reviews and ran for over a year, closing after 543 performances. It proved that Jewish musicals could make it on Broadway.

*Milk and Honey* broke ground in being the first mainstream Broadway show that presented Jewish characters that were proudly Jewish in a Jewish setting. It definitely appealed to the rising American Zionist feel among Jews in New York. The show depicts immense Israeli and Jewish-American pride. In fact, Jones suggests that the title song could almost serve as an unofficial Israeli national anthem:[11]

> This is the land of milk and honey.
> This is the land of sun and song and
> This is a world of good and plenty,
> Humble and proud and young and strong and
> This is the place where the hopes of the homeless
> And the dreams of the lost combine.
> This is the land that heaven blessed
> And this lovely land is mine.[12]

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[11] Jones, 208.

[12] Jerry Herman, *Milk and Honey*, book by Don Appell (New York: Edwin H. Morris, 1963), 64-65.

The show did not, however, shy away from Israelis' early social, political, and physical struggles. The American travelers encounter a young, disgruntled Israeli who sings the following lyrics, in counterpoint with the opening in the title song:

> The honey's kind of bitter and the milk's a little sour
> Did you know the pebble was the state's official flower?
> What about the tensions, Political dissensions?
> And no one ever mentions
> That the scenery is barren and torrid and arid and horrid
> How about the border when the Syrians attack?
> How about the Arab with the rifle in your back?
> How about the water? What there is of it is brine
> But this lovely land is mine.[13]

Jerry Herman writes,

> I wanted my flag-waving title song to have a darker side that would give it a ring of truth. I used Adi, a disgruntled Israeli, to contradict all those shiny, positive images. But notice, Adi still ends his tirade with "But this lovely land is mine."

Jerry Herman claims that he had no trouble writing in a "Yiddish idiom."[14] He says that in preparation for writing the show he "soaked in the Jewish flavor." Jack Gottlieb, in his book *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish*, observes that Herman's song "I Will Follow You" not only alludes to the famous biblical phrase of Ruth, but the melody hints at one setting of "Ani maamin," a Jewish credo song.[15]

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[13] Herman, 69-73.

[14] Jerry Herman and Ken Bloom, *Jerry Herman: The Lyrics: A Celebration* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 21.

[15] Herman did such a great job in capturing the essence of Jewish music and characteristics, that producer David Merrick felt that Herman's writing would be too "ethnic" to suit his vision for Hello, Dolly! (Al Kasha and Joel Hirschhorn, *Notes on Broadway: Conversations with the Great Songwriters* [Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1985], 177.)

### *A Family Affair*

*A Family Affair* was the first musical of 1962. The show had a book and lyrics by James and William Goldman and music by John Kander. The show was really a star vehicle for comedian Shelley Berman. In the show, Sally Nathan and Gerry Siegel, young Jewish lovers, would like to get married. The only things preventing them are feuding parental figures: Gerry's parents and Sally's legal guardian, played by Berman. The setting was far from Herman's Israel; it took place in Winnetka, Illinois. In his *American Musical Theater: A Chronicle*, Gerald Bordman calls the show nothing more than an extended Jewish joke.[16] The show did not connect with critics and audiences either. Despite wonderful performers, just eight weeks and 65 performances later, the show closed.

### *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*

The very same season that *Milk and Honey* and *A Family Affair* appeared, Broadway impresario David Merrick produced a show that even *he* had little faith in. On March 22, 1962 at the Shubert Theater, *I Can Get It For You Wholesale* – adapted by Jerome Weidman from his own novel with music by Harold Rome – opened on Broadway. Weidman's novel showed the dark side of the garment industry during the Depression. Though it was set in the 1930s, it was portrayed musically and literarily as a timeless story.[17] *Wholesale* takes a rather tough look at the cutthroat world of the

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[16] Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 681.

[17] Rome had become known for writing music for Depression-era revues, including the aforementioned highly-successful *Pins and Needles*.

garment industry. Borden likened it to the flashy *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (which had opened five months earlier) without its "wit and sunny disposition."[18] In *Open a New Window: The Broadway Musical in the 1960s*, Ethan Mordden describes it as "a musical comedy with darkish undertones."[19] The story is built around the cold, pushy, and unscrupulous Harry Bogen, a worker in the fashion industry aiming to rise to the top at any cost. The story opens with Harry breaking up a strike of garment workers and then duping his business partners. Despite the pleas of his (stereotypical) Jewish mother and his devoted girlfriend to act morally, Harry slowly digs himself into an amoral hole. Ultimately, Harry is left bankrupt (financially and morally) with only his mother and girlfriend to support him (financially and emotionally).

Audiences kept the show open for nearly 300 performances. Critics found the show rather unremarkable with one exception: a nineteen-year-old phenomenon named Barbra Streisand. In the role of Miss Marmelstein, an over-worked and overlooked secretary, Streisand stopped the show nightly. Though the show closed after nine months, Streisand went on to win the Tony award for this performance, and, as we will see, to have an integral role in the success of the next Jewish-American musical. *I Can Get It For You Wholesale* was an utterly "Jewish-centered musical"[20] starring a mostly Jewish cast. Unlike Milk and Honey, it focused neither on Jewish issues nor Jewish pride. Its Jewishness lived in the setting, the predominantly Jewish garment industry, and

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[18] Bordman, 682.

[19] Ethan Mordden, *Open a New Window: The Broadway Musical in the 1960s* (New York and Hampshire, England: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 88.

[20] Jones, 210.

in its characters – stereotypical Jews.[21] Rome's music also captured well the Jewish flavor. His "The Family Way," depicting strangers meeting over dinner, and "A Gift Today", about a young man becoming a Bar Mitzvah, are overtly Jewish. Sid Ramin's orchestrations also capture the Jewish spirit with wailing Klezmer clarinets. Despite its Jewish resonances – or perhaps because of them -- *Wholesale* closed after nearly a year.[22]

It is possible that *I Can Get It for You Wholesale* laid the groundwork for the casting of the next Jewish musical: the "very Jewish" Barbra Streisand had become an overnight success and placed her in good stead to be cast as the archetypal Jewish comidienne, Fanny Brice, in Isobel Lennert, Jules Styne and Bob Merrill's (book, music and lyrics, respectively) *Funny Girl.* Ironically, in casting *Wholesale*, Merrick asserted that Streisand was all wrong – in particular because of "those shtetl inflections!"[23] How wrong he was – her Jewish characteristics ultimately placed her at the top of list for the role of Fanny Brice.

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[21] Jones writes that the characterizations of Harry and his naïve and vulnerable mother and girlfriend were not especially flattering depictions of New York Jews in the Depression-era garment trade. A rather dispassionate treatment of Jewish characters was not the direction the Jewish musical was going, but some found it to be a "refreshing blast of reality". For others, perhaps this dark and ruthless depiction was more than they were caring to see at the theater.

[22] *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* outplayed *I Can Get it For You Wholesale* by 1, 116 performances.

[23] Mordden, 88.

### *Funny Girl*

Unlike the other shows discussed in this chapter, *Funny Girl* was a biography.[24] The story traced Brice's rise from burlesque to the star of Ziegfield's Follies, as well as her troubled marriage to the smarmy Nicky Arnstein and her choice of career over marriage once the relationship began to falter. The story really takes two paths: (1) a backstage tale of a Jewish nobody working to become a somebody in show business; and (2) a romance.

This show is of particular interest here because it is a Jewish-American musical about the life of a Jewish-American musical theater star. None of the songs or music made famous by Fanny Brice herself were used in this show, rather composer Jules Styne wrote several new songs in the style of Fanny Brice's showstopping hits, including the outstanding "Sadie, Sadie." The book by Isobel Lennart was, in the words of author historian Bordman "adequate, but unexceptional."[25] *Funny Girl* ultimately was a star vehicle for Streisand.[26] As Bordman asserts, subsequent productions of Funny Girl *sans* Streisand, "have shown the work to be sufficiently well crafted to make pleasant entertainment, but not the electrifying evening into which she transformed it."[27]

Nevertheless, *Funny Girl* played 1,348 times before it closed, making it the longest-running Jewish show discussed this far, and quite overtly Jewish at that. "Oy"

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[24] *Sophie*, a flop closing after just one week, opened on Broadway in 1963, telling the story of "The Last Red Hot Mama", Sophie Tucker.

[25] Bordman, 691.

[26] However, the show did run an additional eighteen months after Streisand left, with Mimi Hines in the title role.

[27] Bordman 691.

and "Oy vey" are peppered throughout Fanny's lyrics with other Jewish references included for comic relief. One example is when Brice is performing as Private Schwartz from Rock-a-way, "replete with stage-Yiddish dialect."[28] Further, in the classic love duet, "You Are Woman", Fanny offers:

> What a beast to ruin such a pearl
> Would a convent take a Jewish girl?[29]

Above all, the greatest Jewish value in the show was the Jewish aura surrounding the icon of Fanny Brice, and Streisand's dead-on portrayal, Jewish inflection and sensibility intact, "as the young Fanny moves away from her traditional Jewish roots toward cultural assimilation in the glittery world of show business."[30] In both Brice's and Streisand's lives, fame and fortune was far from traditional for a Jewish woman. However, both learned in their own inimitable ways to portray themselves as talented women without extricating their own Jewish identity.

### *Fiddler on the Roof*

*Fiddler on the Roof* opened on September 22, 1964 at the Imperial Theater and proved to be the biggest hit of the season. Based loosely on Sholom Aleichem's stories, the show had a book by Joseph Stein, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, and music by Jerry Bock. On the surface, the show seemed by far the "most Jewish" of any show produced to date. The story revolves around Tevye, a dairyman and devout Jew, living with his

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[28] Jones, 211.

[29] Isobel Lennart, *Funny Girl*, music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Bob Merrill (New York: Random House, 1964), 75.

[30] Jones, 211.

wife and five daughters in the Russian village of Anatevka, a cold, colorless shtetl. While performed entirely in English, the names, accents, inflections, humor, music, and dancing give the show a strong Jewish flavor.

*Fiddler on the Roof*'s greatest success was in tackling issues that concerned *all* Americans, not only Jews. It focused on issues such as family ties and communal structure. It developed universal messages that appealed to mainstream audiences.

The central plot of the story concerns Tevye and Golde's three oldest daughters and their desire to marry them off. Tzeitel is promised to the aging Lazar Wolf, a butcher, but her true love is Motel Kamzoil, a nebbish who makes a meager living as a tailor. Hodel is enamored with the radical socialist Perchik who is introducing her to the modern ways of Western society. Chava falls for Fyedka, a non-Jewish Russian soldier. Motel goes to Tevye to ask permission to wed Tzeitel. Eventually, Tevye accepts Tzeitel's love for Motel, and in turn, concocts a crazy dream to convince his wife that it is acceptable for his oldest daughter to wed outside of an arranged marriage. Perchik decides to propose to Hodel without asking Tevye for permission, along the way stirring things up by dancing with his intended at Tzeitel and Motel's wedding. They go to Tevye to ask not for permission, but for his blessing, which he ultimately grants. Unlike with Tzeitel and Hodel, Tevye cannot sanction Chava's desire to marry a non-Jew. She rebels and marries him anyway, at which point Tevye cuts her off from the family.

While clothed in Jewish apparel, as pointed out by John Bush Jones, it is the stories of generational differences that appealed to audiences[31] – Jewish and non-Jewish

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[31] Other examples of the generational divide include Rodgers and Hart's "Don't Tell Your Folks" from *Simple Simon*, or Lee Adams and Charles Strouse's "Kids" from *Bye Bye Birdie*. (Jones, 212.)

alike, but not in the serious way that *Fiddler on the Roof* did. Tevye's clashes with his three daughters raise serious issues of authority, changing culture, as well as family dynamics. At the time of its initial run, young people in America were likewise struggling with issues of power and authority. Indeed, the parallels between 1905 Anatevka and 1960s America are abundantly evident.

With all of its universal appeal, *Fiddler on the Roof* also, of course, is concerned with the survival of the Jewish people. It was the first Broadway show to deal blatantly with anti-Semitism.[32] In the show's opening Tevye implies that the Jews have learned to co-exist with the non-Jewish Russians, with whom they share neighborhoods. He even implies that there are few conflicts between Jews and gentiles:

> Then, there are the others in our village. They make a much bigger circle. His Honor the Constable, his Honor the Priest, and his Honor—many others. We don't bother them, and, so far, they don't bother us. And among ourselves we get along perfectly well.[33]

Yet, at the end of act one, at Tzeitel and Motel's wedding, "His Honor the Constable" and his men arrive with clubs in hand to destroy the affair. They overturn tables, throw pillows, smash dishes and windows, and even strike Perchik after a wrestling match over the wedding candlesticks. This confrontation influenced Tevye, and perhaps, as Jones notes, "...made people like Tevye necessarily suspicious of *all* gentile Russians, even decent men like Fyedka."[34]

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[32] It is not until 1998, with Jason Robert Brown's *Parade* (discussed later in this thesis), that the issue of anti-Semitism is dealt with head-on in a musical.

[33] Joseph Stein, *Fiddler on the Roof*, music by Jerry Bock, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick (New York: Limelight Editions, 1964), 7.

[34] Jones, 214.

The Jewish elements in Fiddler appealed to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences alike. The show closed on July 2, 1972 after 3,242 performances making it the longest running American musical of its day; it even broke the previous record held by Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* Its success was largely due to Bock's score. He relied heavily on traditional Jewish modes and rhythms as his foundation, integrating them into his already honed musical theater compositional style. The music depicted the essence of Jewish music: what the general public would characterize as at times mournful and at times celebratory, but always "ethnic" sounding. Jerome Robbins' choreography is also worthy of mention. Like Bock's score, it gave the allusion of Jewish dances (like the "bottle dance" at the wedding), even if their authenticity is questionable. As author Mordden notes, Robbins' contribution as choreographer/director "was not dances but a feeling that runs through the staging from its opening to its very end."[35]

It is important to note that *Fiddler on the Roof* did not simply pander to some false sense of Jewish ethnicity. In fact, Bock admitted that he drew on childhood memories in composing the score.[36] Composer and author Jack Gottlieb noted that many songs in the show, including "Sunrise, Sunset" and "To Life," melodically parallel traditional Jewish music and Yiddish folk songs. In content, too, like *Milk and Honey*, *Fiddler on the Roof* presents a traditional Jewish wedding, and then goes even further by depicting a traditional Shabbat meal, with Bock and Harnick's touching "Sabbath Prayer."

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[35] Mordden, 145.

[36] Jack Gottlieb, *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York in association with The Library of Congress, 2004), 49.

One can imagine that producing a show about a Jewish dairyman and his family's life in the shtetl was no easy task. Upon initial consideration Harold Prince, producer extraordinaire, turned down Bock, Harnick, and Stein. Prince felt there was too great a difference between Russian Jews and German Jews and could not imagine the appeal for the tale of Russian Jews on the Broadway stage. Eventually, Fred Coe, who had great success with non-musical plays, took on the task of producing the show. As the show went into pre-production, Coe had a good deal of trouble raising money for a show that depicted Russian-Jewish life at the turn-of-the-century, "complete with a pogrom."[37] Despite its rocky beginnings, *Fiddler* has become one of the classic musicals spawning countless national and international productions and four Broadway revivals.

## Jewish Shows after *Fiddler*

*Fiddler*'s success seemed to pique the public's interest in *Yiddishkeit.* At least, that's what some producers thought...and hoped. Although *Fiddler on the Roof* is the most explicitly Jewish of all the aforementioned Broadway shows, it had the most universal appeal.[38] The issues it dealt with were those of modern America. Interestingly, producers capitalized on its Jewish aspects and, consequently, a string of Yiddish and Israeli shows followed in *Fiddler*'s wake. None of them, though, could be considered a success. Yet they deserve our attention both for their sheer number (which demonstrates

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[37] Steven Suskin, Liner notes for *Fiddler on the Roof,* The Original Broadway Cast Recording, Broadway Deluxe Collector's Edition, RCA Victor 82876-51430-2, 2003, 1 compact disc.

[38] The widespread appeal was exemplified when the producer of Tokyo's production of *Fiddler on the Roof*'s asked Joseph Stein, "Tell me, do they understand this show in America? It's so Japanese!"

an exciting display of devotion to the Jewish art form), and the perception by producers, and financial backers of a potential audience.

The first of what would be many shows responding to *Fiddler*'s success was *Let's Sing Yiddish* (1966), a musical revue of Yiddish songs, folk tales, and humor. The first half is set in an old world shtetl; the second half takes place in Tevye's destination: America.[39] The show lasted 107 performances, proving that while Yiddish theater had all but disappeared, some interest remained. If *Let's Sing Yiddish* epitomized Yiddish theater, then *Hello, Solly!* captured the essence of vaudeville. Opening the very same season, *Hello, Solly* was a revue of sorts, each scene displaying a different performer's musical or comedic wares. The talent ranged from the celebrated Yiddish performer Mickey Katz (performing, among other songs, *Fiddler on the Roof*'s "Sunrise, Sunset"!) to comedians Larry Best and Michael Rosenberg, and the talents of a young girl billed only as Little Tanya, who wowed the audience with renditions of both cantorial music and *Funny Girl*'s "People." The show closed after only 68 performances. The final show to open in the 1966-67 season was yet a third Yiddish musical: *Sing Israel Sing*, which opened May 11 at the Brooks Atkinson Theater. The piece was centered on a kibbutz wedding. Unfortunately, the show was performed entirely in Yiddish and generated limited interest among the general theatergoing audience. The show closed after only two weeks. The producers decided to translate it into English to elicit mass appeal, but the English version, which apparently "lost a lot in the translation,"[40] closed after a mere week.

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[39] Sholom Aleichem's original story had Tevye winding up in Palestine!

[40] Jones, 219.

Despite the failure of these shows, producers carried on in their efforts to bring *Yiddishkeit* to the Broadway stage. The 1967-1968 season brought just one Jewish show, *The Grand Music Hall of Israel.* The show was an Israeli show that had been imported and was performed in English, Hebrew and Yiddish for a mere 64 performances. The following summer, Israeli composer Dov Seltzer's first musical on Broadway was the Yiddish-English *The Megilla of Itzik Manger.* An Israeli import, the show took the traditional Purim story of Esther and shifted it from Persia to a European shtetl; it played for two months. *The Grand Music Hall of Israel* made another appearance October 2, 1969 renamed *The New Music Hall of Israel.* It did not make much of an impression the second time around staying open for sixty-eight performances, barely outrunning its initial run. 1970 brought us two Yiddish shows opening within a month of each other. *Light, Lively and Yiddish* was a two-act musical performed entirely in Yiddish, save an emcee occasionally enlightening the audience with English explanations. *The President's Daughter* was a book show mixing English and Yiddish dialogue. *Light, Lively and Yiddish* performed eighty-seven performances, *The President's Daughter*, just seventy-two. The short runs of these two shows convinced producers and directors it was time to abandon Yiddish and its Old World culture. Indeed, no Yiddish review would appear on Broadway until 1986.

The absence of the Yiddish musical made way for the Israeli musical. Perhaps in response to the surge in Zionism following the Six-Day War, three shows from Israel graced the Broadway stage. The first was the most successful. *To Live Another Summer, To Pass Another Winter*, performed at the Helen Hayes (a theater normally designated for non-musical plays), opened on October 21, 1971. An entirely Israeli company, (including

a large dance corps) performed the show entirely in English (save a few Hasidic and Israeli folk songs). The "musical entertainment," as it was dubbed, was a sort of postcard from Israel, giving Americans the flavor of Israel, the pride of its residents, and a little bit of a history lesson along the way. The show ran for 173 performances, and released a cast album and a vocal selections songbook.

A second Israeli import opened November 22, 1971. *Only Fools Are Sad* (originally entitled *Ish Chasid Haya*) was based on old Hasidic stories and parables. Its music, not surprisingly, largely consisted of Hasidic songs.[41] The show had a similar run as *To Live Another Summer*, performing 144 performances. 1972 brought the entertainment unit of the Israeli Army to the Great White Way, with *From Israel with Love*. It was a musical revue in Hebrew featuring the music of the likes of Shlomo Carlebach and Naomi Shemer. It closed after just ten performances.

The late 1980s gave the Yiddish-English musical another go-around. The 1986-1987 season, the season that brought Broadway *Les Misérables*, also brought the lesser-known (then *and* now) and much less successful *L'chaim to Life*, a revue of both popular Yiddish music and Yiddish-Latin musical selections coming from the Jewish community of Buenos Aires. Four years later almost to the day, down the street from a revival of *Fiddler on the Roof* featuring Israeli star Topol, *Those Were the Days* opened on Broadway featuring Reform cantor Robert Abelson. This musical revue hearkened back to the heyday of Yiddish theater. The show was presented with Yiddish and English woven into each number in an effort for audiences to understand each song and scene.

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[41] It is interesting to note that the playbill noted that Yaacov Agmon produced the musical under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Israel, Mrs. Golda Meir.

Apparently it worked, as the show ran 126 performances, compared to *L'chaim*'s meager forty-two.

In hindsight in our own 21st century, we know that the greatest successes of Jewish-themed material appeared at the end of the twentieth century. They were, moreover, neither Yiddish nor Israeli novelty pieces. Rather, the greatest "American Jewish musicals" were, what John Bush Jones calls, "issue-driven" musicals.[42] That is to say, these musicals concerned a central issue, usually of a social or political nature, and explored it through Jewish characters and sensibility. In the following chapters, three such shows will be explored: *Parade* by Alfred Uhry and Jason Robert Brown, *Caroline, or Change* by Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori, and *Falsettos* by William Finn.

[42] Jones, 237.

## CHAPTER 2

## "'HOWDY!,' NOT 'SHALOM!'": ALFRED UHRY AND JASON ROBERT BROWN'S *PARADE*

> Ever more lives the dream of Atlanta,
> Ever more Her eternal Pride!
> Strong and sure is the dream of Atlanta
> When Her Brothers are unified!
> And the sound of Her Voice is clearer
> When Her People are proud and free!
> Not a star to the sky could be nearer
> Than my heart is, Atlanta, to Thee![1]

This song opens scene 3 of the 1998 musical *Parade*. The citizens of Atlanta sing these words as they watch with exhilaration the annual Confederate Memorial Day Parade. The parade provides a metaphor of celebrating a loyalty and unity among a group of people who took pride in their Southern heritage. Further, the parade serves as a marker of time throughout the show. Yet, in spite of its title and the celebratory opening, this musical is hardly about parades. The Confederate Memorial Day parade marches its way through the show, appearing in fact, three times by the show's end. Georgia's Governor Slaton pontificates at the opening of the show:

> Today we honor those who honored us fifty-some years ago. Those who gave life and limb for Georgia and suffered unimaginable degradations. But never defeat. The men of Georgia and the women of Georgia have

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[1] Jason Robert Brown and Alfred Uhry, "*Parade*," in *The New American Musical: An Anthology from the End of the Century*, ed. Wiley Hausam (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2003), 244.

> never been defeated... They have risen from the ashes of war with honor and courage and strength![2]

The producers of *Parade* juxtaposed festivity with tragedy, indroducing unexpectedly the horrific anti-Semitism of the South that led to the lynching of Leo Frank in 1913. Writer Alfred Uhry explains:

> the historical fact was that Mary Phagan was killed on the day of the parade. And Hal [Prince] ran with that metaphor, and it was a great metaphor. We only tied it – that was one of the last things I wrote, was the very end of the show when Lucille says, 'It's Memorial Day again.' They already had the parade, but I think what made it work for everybody was to realize that there were three successive Memorial Days in the show. That was a good example of a wonderful collaboration. While Hal didn't write anything, he just kept talking about it. 'This parade and that parade and another parade ...' It all came to land right.[3]

*Parade* is a retelling of a very unfortunate chapter in American (Jewish) history. In 1913, Leo Frank, a Jewish accountant and manager of a pencil factory, was accused of murdering Mary Phagan, a thirteen year-old girl who worked in the same factory in Atlanta. Frank was eventually convicted and sentenced to hang. To some, the Frank case was the single most significant anti-Semitic trial in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Telushkin p. 405). Indeed, anti-Semitism was so strong in the second decade of the twentieth century, that even in the segregationist South, a Jewish man was convicted on the basis of the testimony of a black man alone.

A collaboration between the Pulitzer Prize award-winning playwright Alfred Uhry and the young up-and-coming composer Jason Robert Brown, *Parade* is not

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[2] Ibid., 244-245.

[3] Alfred Uhry and Jason Robert Brown, interview by Thomas Cott, 27 January 1999, Platform #8, transcript, Lincoln Center Theater's Platform Series, New York, available from http://www.lct.org/calendar/platform_detail.cfm?id_event=33968332; Internet; accessed 22 November 2004.

included in this thesis because of its strong Jewish content. Rather, *Parade* is noteworthy because of its treatment of anti-Semitism. In this chapter, I will explore how the show's themes are related to anti-Semitism, and I will draw attention to the power of anti-Semitism in the segregationist South at the turn of the century. In addition, I will consider the question of "what or where is home?" for the Jews. Are the Jews of the South strangers in a strange land? I will study the central characters in the story and examine how they are reflected against the backdrop of anti-Semitism. How did politics, for instance, play into the anti-Semitic developments surrounding the Frank case? Further, I hope to explore the ways in which the "mob mentality" depicted in the show ties into prejudice in general and anti-Semitism in particular. Finally, I will place this show within the context of my larger thesis: depictions of American Jews on the Broadway stage.

The combined efforts of a Jewish director, Jewish author, and Jewish composer writing about a dark chapter in American and Jewish history make this show especially noteworthy. Perhaps there had been no greater collaboration of such "heavy hitters" who happened to be Jews since Sheldon Harnick and Jerry Bock collaborated with Joseph Stein on *Fiddler on the Roof*. *Parade* began as a collaboration between Alfred Uhry and the great Broadway director Hal Prince. Prince originally invited Stephen Sondheim to work with Uhry, who had already gained notice for his works on Southern Jews. When Sondheim turned him down, Prince turned to twenty-three year old Jason Robert Brown, whom Prince's daughter Daisy had "discovered" performing in a piano bar in

Manhattan.[4] After five years of development, readings in Philadelphia and New York, and a workshop in Toronto, the show opened December 17, 1998 at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater.

Indeed, Leo Frank's true-life story had all the makings of a stage play or musical. Leo Frank was a Jew born in Texas but raised in Brooklyn. He relocated to Atlanta to manage a pencil factory. It is in Atlanta that he met his wife Lucille, whom he married in 1910. In 1913, Mary Phagan, a thirteen-year old employee of the National Pencil Factory was found murdered in the basement of the factory. Police began to suspect Newt Lee, the night watchman, as they found blood on his shirt. However, before too long, suspicions turned towards Leo Frank. He was, after all, an outsider targeted by the media with rumors that he was an "immoral womanizer."[5]

The heart of the prosecution's case was the testimony of Jim Conley,[6] a black janitor who had lied repeatedly to investigators about many facts concerning the case. Ultimately, Frank was convicted of murdering Mary Phagan and sentenced to hang. Two years later, while Frank awaited execution, the governor of Georgia, John Slaton, became convinced of Frank's innocence and commuted his sentence.[7] Despite the commutation,

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[4] Barry Singer, *Ever After: The Last Years of Musical Theater and Beyond* (New York: Applause Theater & Cinema Books, 2004), 176.

[5] Russell Aiuto, "The Case of Leo Frank," *Crime Library: Criminal Minds and Methods*, [on-line]; available from http://www.crimelibrary.com/notorious_murders/not_guilty/frank/1.html; Internet; accessed 1 November 2004.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 405.

the people of Atlanta would ultimately take justice into their own hands. In reaction to the governor's action, a mob of anti-Semitic Georgians kidnapped Leo Frank and lynched him.[8]

Although Uhry and Brown's rendering of Frank's story adheres closely to the historical facts, there are occasional variations, seemingly for dramatic reasons. I believe, however, the accuracy of the story told in the musical is far less important than the overarching message and characterizations. The concept of being a stranger in a strange land is a central theme that feeds directly into the anti-Semitism Leo Frank faced in the South. The anthropologist and theater expert Andrea Most writes in her book *Making America* that Jews wrote on issues such as this to depict their own Jewish identity without blatantly displaying it. In other words, Jewish musical theater composers and authors found subtle ways to depict their own feelings of being a perpetual outsider. For instance, they commonly portrayed strangers coming to new towns in their Wild West musicals, an experience similar to an immigrant just landing in America. Characters like Ali Hakim in "Oklahoma" were prototypes for the immigrant as outsider.[9] Likewise, the theme of prejudice, as in *South Pacific*, addressed feelings of anti-Semitism in America. Of course in *Parade* Jewish identity is not disguised by another ethnicity; it takes center stage.

In *Parade*, Uhry and Brown employ a *Jewish* stranger, and the prejudice experienced is specifically and explicitly anti-Semitism. In the musical we find that both

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[8] Picture postcards of Leo Frank's body swinging from a tree sold for decades in the South.

[9] Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 107.

lyrics and speech express Leo Frank's alienation. He is a Jew from Brooklyn residing in Atlanta, the hometown of his wife Lucille. Not only does he not fit in, but he has strong disdain for the kind of people living in this foreign community:

> These people make me tense.
> I live in fear they'll start a conversation...
> These men belong in zoos
> It's like they never joined civilization[10]

While he has no direct interaction with other Jews in the show (besides his wife), his words show that he feels alienated even from his co-religionists:

> The Jews are not like Jews[11]
> I thought that Jews were Jews but I was wrong[12]

Frank's wife is of no help at all in this regard. She does not understand why Leo talks and behaves in such a way that sets him apart from other Atlantans, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. As they argue:

> Leo: Don't be such a *meshuggeneh!*
> Lucille: Why do you use words like that?
> Leo: Because they're Jewish words and I'm Jewish.
> Lucille: Well, I am, too, but it doesn't mean I have to speak a foreign language.[13]

Leo in his frustration muses that he "can't understand how God created you people Jewish and southern at the same time."[14] The line's humor belies its significance. For Leo (and for many Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century), a Jew was easily

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[10] Brown and Uhry, "*Parade,*" 245.

[11] A similar disconnect between Jews in the North and Jews in the South occurs in *Caroline, or Change*, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

[12] Brown and Uhry, "*Parade,*" 246.

[13] Ibid., 243.

[14] Ibid.

defined through behavior, lifestyle, practice, belief and even appearance. Leo has woken up to the reality that there is in fact more than one way to be Jewish.[15] Certainly, New York audiences resonated with Leo's assumptions, living as they did in such a heavily Jewishly populated area. In the South, in contrast, Leo does not even receive support from his own (Jewish) community. When he calls for his attorney, Nathan Rosenblatt, he is met instead by Luther Rosser, a non-Jew, who claims he can represent Leo better. As Rosser explains, "A drunk shouldn't defend another drunk. A Jew shouldn't defend another Jew."[16] The mere fact that his attorney is likening alcoholism to Judaism does not bode well for the kind of defense he is going to receive.

Part of Leo's discomfort with the South is related to the absence of "at-homeness" there. Home is a place of comfort to Leo, where he can be "back with people who look like I do, and talk like I do, and think like I do."[17] In the song "How Can I Call This Home?" he sings that "Home calls, and I'm free of the southern breeze, free of magnolia trees and endless sunshine!" Yet that home is far away in the North, and as much as he longs for it he now lives in Atlanta with a wife "who would prefer that [he] say "Howdy!," not "Shalom!"[18] For Leo, however, the South is "surreal"[19] and as the

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[15] Leo's own degree of "religiosity" is in question as he is doing accounting on a Saturday during Pesach: "God all the noise and on *yontiff* yet." (Brown and Uhry, "*Parade*," 250.)

[16] Brown and Uhry, "*Parade*," 270.

[17] Ibid., 245.

[18] Even after Leo's death, a reporter is surprised that Lucille has remained in the South. She remarks, "I'm not leaving home...I'm a Georgia girl. I will always be." (Brown and Uhry, "*Parade*," 340-341.)

[19] Brown and Uhry, "*Parade*," 247.

Confederate Memorial Day Parade passes by, he simply feels "trapped inside the land that time forgot!"[20] His own prejudices against the people here are an interesting juxtaposition to the anti-Semitism he soon will face.

In the end, though, while Frank's Jewish identity is important to the story, its real significance is in connection to the larger theme of anti-Semitism, a theme first explicitly mentioned only in scene 12 of the first act. There are, however, allusions to the anti-Semitic charge earlier in the act. One example is Frank's own discomfort with being a Jew in his own home. If he is uncomfortable, one can only imagine how the public must feel. Another instance relates to Mary Phagan, the girl who will be murdered. When she approaches Frank for her pay, he cannot seem to find her name in his payroll book. Finally, he realizes he has the spelling wrong: "Ah. Not Fagin as in Dickens..."[21] This remark is an allusion to Fagin, the Jewish character in Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist – a character who is rather unsavory. Many critics have regarded Fagin as one of the more anti-Semitic representations in mainstream English literature. A final and chilling example of an anti-Semitic reference is when Hugh Dorsey, the District Attorney who is investigating and trying the Mary Phagan case, ultimately narrows the suspects down to Leo Frank and Newt Lee, the African-American night watchman. His final choice is clear as he concludes that "hangin' another Nigra ain't enough this time. We gotta do better."[22] What could be "better" than hanging a black man? It is hanging a Jew.

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 252.

[22] Ibid., 267.

In the show, the impetus for anti-Semitism derives from two main sources: the media and politics. The news media in this show are represented by Britt Craig, an opportunistic reporter who jumps on the possibility that a Jew might be the culprit in this most heinous of murders. The fact that authorities are questioning Leo allows Craig the opportunity to portray "one little Jew from Brooklyn" with "fangs," "horns," and "scaly, hairy palms!"[23] in the *Atlanta Georgian.* People very quickly come forward to share their stories – none of which are actually true – about this reprehensible Jewish man in their community. In his efforts to make "big news,"[24] Craig has stirred the community into a frenzy over this stranger in their midst.

The other guilty offender in the media is Tom Watson, publisher of the *Jeffersonian*, a paper that, according to Watson, "speaks for every right-thinking Christian voter in this state."[25] Upon meeting at Mary Phagan's funeral, the Governor of Georgia is quick to write off Watson as "a buffoon," but his wife Sally intuits that "that man is dangerous."[26] Her instincts are correct. Watson's character comes off as an amateur evangelist, stirring up the religious sentiments that fuel much of the anti-Semitism of the Atlantans depicted in the play. Outside the courthouse, newspaper in hand, he purports to come to Atlanta "with a message from the Lord!"[27] He frequently likens Frank to the anti-Christ and the devil. He and a local fiddler preach to the crowds

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[23] Ibid., 269.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 266.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 279.

of the demise of society due to the immoral behavior of the sinning Jew and insinuate that this is just the beginning. Their language is foul and condemning:

> People of Atlanta stand together on this day
> I have come to Atlanta with a message from the Lord!
> People of Atlanta swear that someone's gonna pay!
> I have come to see the devil
> Get his just and true reward!
>
> People of Atlanta,
> Better bow your heads in shame
> There's a man who came
> And spit on your fine city's name!
> People of Atlanta,
> All are victims of this crime!
> It is time now![28]

Between Craig and Watson, the locals adopt a mob mentality, screaming in unison "Hang the Jew!" and "Make 'im pay!"[29] during Frank's trial.[30] The media play a large role here in making this story larger than life.

The other factor influencing Leo's fate is the politics and machinations of those involved in the trial: Governor John Slaton, District Attorney Hugh Dorsey, Judge Roan, and Luther Rosser. Each distorts the legal system so as to cause, in the end, an unfair trial for Leo Frank. In the musical, we first become acquainted with Dorsey as the man who introduces Governor Slaton as speaker at the Confederate Memorial Day Parade. The notes tell us that Dorsey is "in his forties, intense, driven, a man on the way up."[31] After a press conference regarding the Phagan case, we next see Dorsey in Slaton's

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[28] Ibid., 279-280.

[29] Ibid., 295.

[30] Mary's mother, unable to speak his name, can only address Frank as "Jew!" from the witness stand. (Brown and Uhry, "*Parade*," 290.)

[31] Brown and Uhry, "*Parade*," 259.

office. Slaton is being pressured by his constituents regarding children working in factories. He is pressuring Dorsey to make sure he gets a conviction in this case. Slaton warns him that the people will not keep Dorsey in office long if he lets this case get away from him. He begins by pressuring Newt Lee into confessing, but when he knows that he is getting nowhere, he targets Leo Frank. Although he has no evidence, he must convict. When Officer Starnes challenges him on this, Dorsey replies:

> You want evidence? Look at those clothes and that big fancy talk!
> You want evidence? Look at him sweatin' from every pore!
> Can't you see him just standin' there watchin' that little girl bleed?
> He smells of it.
> He stinks of it.
> What more do you need?[32]

He knows that he does not have an eyewitness,[33] but instructs Starnes that he better go find one.

To that end, Dorsey makes a shady deal with Jim Conley, the custodian at the pencil factory. He lets Conley know that he is aware that he is an escaped convict and that he best cooperate if he does not want to return to jail. Needless to say, Conley quickly agrees to whatever Dorsey wants to hear. Ultimately, Conley's "eyewitness" testimony provides the evidence to convict Leo Frank.

Judge Roan is another character who exudes obvious prejudice. Judge Roan is described as "an unwell and elderly southern gentleman...pushed on in a wheelchair by

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[32] Ibid., 268.

[33] In 1982, sixty-nine years after the trial, an eight-three-year-old white man, Alonzo Mann, confessed that he had seen Conley dragging the girl's body down the stairs into the factory's basement on the day of the murder, but he had been forbidden by his mother from getting involved. (Telushkin, 405.)

his nurse."[34] This qualification enlightens us to the fact that Frank is not going to be tried before a young cracker-jack judge. Rather, Judge Roan is a debilitated man lacking the energy to keep order in a courtroom that is contaminated by the commotion of the biased, prejudicial onlookers in the galley. It would seem that Dorsey is truly ruling the courtroom, whipping the galley and the jury into a frenzy with his rhetoric. Finally, there is Luther Rosser. Sent by Leo Frank's attorney to represent him, Rosser is sorely unequipped to try the case. One even suspects Rosser of anti-Semitic sentiments. His actions give the audience ample reason to be suspect of his true motives: his aforementioned comment about a Jew not representing another Jew, his efforts to instruct Leo how to dress, act, even eat ("Potato salad, that's always a good one. Jews do eat potato salad, don't they?"),[35] and his negligent representation of his client (never once does he question a single witness.)

In the end, however, Roan and Slaton turn themselves around and attempt to bring justice to the case, and even to Leo Frank. Seemingly close to death, Roan writes a letter to the Governor acknowledging that his ruling was most likely unfair and unjust:

> And maybe I was wrong.
> Maybe what was "obvious: then
> Would not have been for long,
> But I would not delay...
>
> So before I leave this world behind,
> I have to speak my mind.
>
> With hatred in the air,
> How is any man to know
> What is or isn't fair.
> I left it up to Fate.

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[34] Brown and Uhry, "*Parade*," 280.

[35] Ibid., 273.

> It now may be too late...
> They'll be calling out to you, Gov'nor
> You will know what's right to do.[36]

Slaton, in fact, does do the right thing after receiving the Judge's letter and a visit from Lucille Frank. He commutes Frank's sentence from execution to life in prison, and relocates him to an unnamed prison for his own safety.

Religion crops up again in Slaton's final address. After Slaton does his own questioning of witnesses in Mary's murder trial, he makes a rather poignant speech motivated by his sense of moral right based on religious history:

> I have an announcement to make: Leo Frank is no longer a prisoner in the Fulton Tower. At five o'clock this morning, he was removed to another prison location, which will not be disclosed at this time. Two thousand years ago, another governor washed his hands and turned a Jew over to a mob. Ever since then, that governor's name has been a curse. If today another Jew went to his grave because I failed to do my duty, I would all my life find his blood on my hands...I have decided to commute his sentence.[37]

Indeed, though he realizes that commuting Frank's sentence will spell certain disaster for his political career, he feels obligated to do so on religious grounds. Using the Bible to justify one's civil motivations is powerful. Likening himself to Pontius Pilate and Frank to Jesus is most powerful imagery, reinforcing the religious dimension of the show. While Slaton is citing religious scripture to execute justice, Watson uses religious rhetoric to rile up the masses:

> Will you beg for the Jew's reward
> Or walk with us at the side of the Lord?
> Put your soul in the devil's hand?

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[36] Ibid., 314.

[37] Ibid., 327-328.

Well, where will you stand when the flood comes?[38]

The religious hatred being spewed by the crowds gets more and more vicious as they march toward the governor's mansion yelling, "Hang the Yankee lover!":[39]

> See them laugh when an angel dies!
> See them tell all their Jew-loving lies!
> But they'll run on the Judgment Day!
> Someone's gonna pay when the flood comes![40]

Ultimately religious hatred and bigotry bring the show to its painful climax. A small gang kidnaps Leo Frank from his prison cell and lynches him themselves. Religion once again comes into play as we see Leo Frank in the noose just before the table is kicked out from under him. He finds it within him to speak the profession of faith traditionally spoken by any Jew before their death:

> *Sh'ma Yisroel, Adonai elohainu, Adonai echod.*
> *Baruch sheym k'vod malchuso l'olam va'ed.*[41]
> [Hear O Israel, The Lord is our God, The Lord is one
> Blessed is His glorious kingdom forever and ever.]

This horrific moment proves to be powerful for any audience member, but the recitation of the Sh'ma only heightens the emotional experience for any (knowledgeable) Jew in attendance. Even more remarkable is that he sings the words to the tune of "The Old Red Hills of Home" the Confederate patriotic anthem sung at the opening of the show. While the significance of the tune is not immediately evident, it is, I submit, Leo's last revenge on these Southern Jew-haters. Frank deliberately distorts their song of Confederate pride

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[38] Ibid., 329.

[39] Ibid., 330.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 340.

by singing it with the most sacred words of his Jewish faith. It is an evocative moment indeed.

Significantly, *Parade* treated anti-Semitism blatantly – like no other Broadway musical before it. Of course, the most famous treatment of anti-Semitism in a musical is that found in *Fiddler on the Roof.* In *Fiddler*, though, the anti-Semitism is incidental to the main story of Tevye and his daughters. *Parade*, in contrast, puts anti-Semitism center stage, both literally and figuratively. Leo's trial is the main attraction, while Leo and Lucille Frank's relationship is a mere sub-text. In the end, Parade's attention to anti-Semitism may have cost it its life, so to speak; it had only a short run. As John Bush Jones explains:

> It's hard to argue with *Parade*'s powerful depiction of deep-seated bigotry, but it's equally unclear how its treatment of the issue resonates with any specific contemporary relevance beyond the general and obvious irrationality of prejudice and its often horrific consequences.[42]

In other words, *Parade* couldn't universalize Jewish bigotry. It couldn't make anti-Semitism relevant and meaningful to a mainstream (non-Jewish) audience. Nonetheless, the show received critical acclaim and even earned Tony Awards for Alfred Uhry (Best Book of a Musical) and Jason Robert Brown (Best Score of a Musical). Yet even with all of its accolades, a dark musical depicting a horrific moment in American history was not what musical theater audiences wanted to see at the turn of the 21st century. The show closed after only eighty-five performances.

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[42] Jones, 353.

## CHAPTER 3

## "WHERE EVERY JEW'S A MACCABEE": TONY KUSHNER AND JEANINE TESORI'S *CAROLINE OR CHANGE*

The relationship between African Americans and Jews is central to the story of *Caroline, or Change*. In the liner notes of the cast recording of the show, Lynne Tillman claims that the "special and vexed relationship between Jews and blacks in America"[1] is brought to light in this show in several different ways.[2] In this chapter, I will first examine the identities of each of the characters. I will examine how the interactions between certain Jewish and black characters affect the storyline simply because of their racial and religious identities. Finally, I will look at the important role music plays in defining the differences between these groups and how ultimately the music itself provides its own resolution to the conflicts in the show.

*Caroline, or Change* is primarily a character study. It does not fit into the conventional form of the musical: a straightforward plot and ending resolution. Rather its story centers on a handful of characters whose interactions drive the play forward. Therefore, to understand the essence of the show, one must first get a sense of the characters therein. The story is centered on Caroline, a 39-year-old black maid working

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[1] Lynne Tillman, Liner notes for *Caroline, or Change*, Original Broadway Cast Recording, Hollywood Records 2061-62436-2, 2004, 2 compact discs.

[2] Because the only non-Jewish characters (with the exception of the inanimate ones) are black, this inherently raises some Jewish vs. Christian issues as well.

for a Jewish family in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Caroline is a divorced mother of four children, the oldest of whom is serving in Vietnam. At a salary of $30 a week, she can barely support her family. After her youngest, Joe, was born, she left her abusive husband. Now she works every day at the Gellmans. Her chores include cooking, cleaning, laundry, and occasionally care of eight-year-old Noah.

Noah is the son of Stuart and Betty Gellman, a professional clarinetist and professional bassoonist, respectively. The musical opens after Betty has passed away from lung cancer, a result of smoking. The bereaved Stuart has become a distant father, spending nearly every minute practicing clarinet and giving lessons to make a living. Stuart has remarried one of Betty's best friends, Rose Stopnick, an Upper West Side (New York) Jewish woman who is eagerly but only gradually adjusting to Southern life. In her northern Jewish eyes even synagogue life is different, as she puts it, "the temple...has Sunday night bingo just like the goyim."[3] Rose longs to be a mother figure to Noah, who does nothing but reject or ignore her attempts at affection and authority.

Noah is a rather precocious child who has taken a real liking to Caroline. We learn that Betty was quite fond of Caroline as well and that same feeling has been passed on to Noah. While he frequently seems to be in Caroline's way, pestering and bothering her, the audience recognizes Caroline's soft spot for Noah.

Noah's three grandparents represent the older generation of Southern Jews. Grandpa and Grandma Gellman, it seems, have lived their adult life as assimilated Jews in Louisiana. They are proud of their Jewish identity, but Jewish observance is not a factor in their day-to-day life. Grandpa Stopnick, Rose's father, is a hard-working

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[3] Tony Kushner, *Caroline, or Change*, music by Jeanine Tesori (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004), 25.

retailer who only makes an appearance in the second act and represents a New York Jewish socialist perspective.

While Noah's family is central to the plot, Caroline's plays a role as well. Caroline's daughter is sixteen-year old Emmie, a typical teenager far more concerned with her social life than with her responsibilities or loyalty to her mother. Emmie's involvement in the emerging civil rights movement of the early 1960s runs through the musical. Emmie's younger brothers are Jackie, 10, and Joe, 8, for whom candy and comic books are of the utmost importance.

Kushner cleverly introduces inanimate characters into the show who act as commentators on the goings-on, a "Greek chorus" of sorts. The Washing Machine, Radio, Dryer, Bus, and Moon are each represented by one or more actors. This is staged by positioning the singing actors in close proximity to their inanimate counterparts. Each provides commentary on the action and even occasionally interacts with the human characters in the show.

The principal theme of the show is embedded in the title: change. Kushner plays on both meanings of this word – change that jingles in the pocket, as well as change as a process of modification and evolution that occurs in an era as tumultuous as the 1960s. Noah, we learn early on, has a propensity for leaving change from allowance in his pockets. Caroline, or course, finds this money, when she does laundry, and leaves the coins in an old bleach cup for Noah to retrieve. Upon discovering this game of lost-and-found, Rose, whose father always emphasized the value of money, determines to change Noah's bad habit. To that end, she enlists the help of Caroline. As she sings:

> We have to
> teach Noah

we have to teach Noah
to mind his money;
to handle change!
So listen, I need you to help me to teach him.
From now on if you find
change in his pockets
when you do the washing,
just keep it, just keep it,
If he leaves it it's yours.[4]

Kushner's wordplay on the word "change" is obvious in this lyric. Noah must learn to handle the change in his pocket as well as the change in his life. Noah is dealing with a new family structure. Noah has not only lost a mother, but also the principal authoritarian in his life. Rose's desire to enlist Caroline to teach Noah to handle change comes across as a desire to teach him financial responsibility. However, inherent therein is Rose's own desire to help Noah deal with all of the changes. When he can come to terms with her maternal role, she will finally be at peace with the place she has taken in the Gellman household.

Despite Rose's intentions, Caroline hears only Rose's desire for her to take the pennies and nickels Noah leaves in his pockets. Her invitation offends Caroline initially. Her concern is not to discipline Noah and she suggests that Rose ought to "give him a whupping."[5] Caroline will not "take pennies from a baby."[6] At the same time, though, Caroline knows how much even a handful of change could change her own finances. She wants to provide well for her children -- to eat well and even to enjoy the toys and candy that other kids have. For instance, her son needs to go to the dentist and she is tired of

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[4] Kushner, 49.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

stuffing the meat with bread to make it go further. Moreover, Christmas is coming and she knows how expensive buying gifts will be. So she succumbs to the plan. Caroline begins to take home the change she finds in Noah's pockets. This seemingly small act forms and ultimately brings the tension in the Gellman household to a head and the musical to its climax.

The musical culminates during the holiday season when, of course, Caroline is most in need of money and the Jewish identity of the Gellmans is brought to the forefront of their lives. Rose is having a Chanukah party for the larger extended families. She has asked Caroline to bring along Emmie and Dottie, Caroline's friend, to help cook and serve. Rose's father has flown south to celebrate Chanukah with his daughter and her family. The opening song of this scene is on the surface a clever parody, but tells us a lot about the Gellmans' and Stopnicks' Jewish identity. The older generation, Grandma and Grandpa Gellman and Grandpa Stopnick, begin by singing a parody of the familiar Chanukah tune, "Oh Chanukah, Oh Chanukah":

> Chanukah oh Chanukah,
> oh Dreidel and Menorah!
> We celebrate it even though
> it isn't in the Torah![7]
> Talmud barely mentions it,
> the way they kept that candle lit;
> sages in their colloquies
> say bupkes [nothing] bout the Maccabees[8]

This older generation is an educated group of Jews. Their knowledge of Chanukah, which extends beyond the commonly known symbols, is impressive especially for the

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[7] The story of Chanukah is included in the book of Maccabees, a book not included the Hebrew Bible.

[8] Kushner, 81.

Gellmans of the gentile South. Attesting to her good New York religious education, even Rose chimes in:

> You may think it's December
> but Noah, dear, remember,
> tonight is Kislev Twenty-Five![9]

The grandparents go on to reiterate how wonderful it is that they are celebrating Chanukah "especially in America."[10] They suddenly break from their Chanukah tune into a rousing chorus of "America, the Beautiful." Interspersing their lyrics with Jewish sentiments:

> America America God shed His grace on thee,
> Where every Jew's a Maccabee
> And crown'd thy good with brotherhood...[11]

For the grandparents' generation, their Jewish identity is inextricably linked to their American identity. They are first, or at the most second, generation Americans. They value the life they have in America and also understand and truly prize the religious freedom they have come to love in this country. Every Jew IS a Maccabee, fighting for his/her religious rights and the right to practice as he/she sees fit for him/herself.

It is most noteworthy that while Noah lights the menorah and recites the blessing, the family stands together singing Mi Chamocha. This song, which the Israelites joyfully sang after escaping from Pharoah's persecution, is an unusual choice. It is part of the liturgy and not at all typical Chanukah repertoire. Why would they sing it on Chanukah? There are a couple of possible explanations. First, there is the story that the Maccabees

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[9] Ibid., 82.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

got their name from the first letter of each of the words, *Mi Chamocha Baeilim Adonai* – Who is like you God among the Gods? After likening themselves to the Maccabees, could it be that they are hearkening to the legend of how the Maccabees got their name? I think the meaning behind this deals more with the source of this text. The Jews sang this text when they were finally free from slavery, and presumably religious persecution. The words are inspired by the joy coming from their sense of freedom. In this case, on this Chanukah in Louisiana in 1964, it seems that the Gellmans and Grandpa Stopnick are conjuring up the feelings of the Israelites escaping from Egypt. These Jews like the ones in the book of Exodus are still celebrating their feelings instilled in them by their own parents, presumably immigrants to this country who viewed America as a promised land of its own. These Jews are not only Maccabees. They are also Israelites. They sing *Mi Chamocha* in celebration of their freedom in the United States, no longer slaves to religious persecution.

Race, too, weaves its way into the Chanukah scene. While dinner is being prepared Grandpa Stopnick is talking with the Gellmans and getting rather worked up about the situation with "negroes" in the South:

> The South is in a mighty frenzy...
> Wait and See!
> The old world's ending!
> Negroes marching!
> Change is coming!
> Down with filthy capitalist chazzerim! [pigs]...
> Just like we predicted back in the '30s,
> all the Negroes got to do now
> is stop this nonsense about nonviolence![12]

[12] Ibid., 84-85

Once again, mention of change is made. Grandpa Stopnick, however, is specifically speaking of change of great social magnitude, not coins. The Gellmans, however, assure him that "Negroes in Louisiana aren't like in Mississippi, not as mad as Alabama."[13] They would much rather focus on the joy of Chanukah then get caught up in Grandpa Stopnick's political tirade. His revolutionary views are startling to the Gellmans. He sees himself as a poor worker:

> Waiting for the revolution,
> For the fight against oppression,
> For the worker to take over,
> For the poor to rise in fury.[14]

Further, he sees that it is the "Negro" who has the opportunity to take the lead in this revolution if they would just be active and forget Martin Luther King's plea for non-violence. No one at the Chanukah party wants to talk about socialism and politics. No one, that is, until Emmie begins serving food and hears Grandpa Stopnick rattling on about his opinions. She takes great offense:

> I think it's a Negro thing,
> a Southern thing,
> a Christian thing,
> Mister, you don't understand
> how Dr. King has got things planned.[15]

Grandpa Stopnick rebuts:

> Oh Jews can be nonviolent too.
> There's nothing meeker than a Jew!
> Listen girlie, we have learned:
> nonviolence will get you burned.[16]

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[13] Ibid., 85.

[14] Ibid., 89.

[15] Ibid, 90.

Emmie is caught up in Dr. King's teaching and is convinced that "what we're trying's already working! Segregation's already dying!"[17] Grandpa Gellman writes off her opinions to youthful optimism. They start singing at each other simultaneously, clearly demonstrating the passion and fury in their opinions:

| EMMIE: | GRANDPA STOPNICK: |
|---|---|
| I'd like to know how | |
| some guy just off a plane | Is that so? |
| marchin in to explain | Why's it so impossible to know, |
| guess you seen it all plain | white or Jew or Negro, |
| from the air? | if the boss's boot's in your face— |
| It our | What do you do? Shed a tear? |
| Affair. | Keep lying there? |
| Now our resistance | A face knows it's no footrest |
| start to make a difference | regardless of religion or race! |
| here come your "assistance."[18] | |

Emmie is furious that Mr. Stopnick would have the *chutzpah* to attest to know what's best for blacks in the South at the time. Her fevered arguing eclipses Grandpa Stopnick's point that this is an issue for all people of any religion or race. This argument seems to foreshadow the approaching encounter between Caroline and Noah.

Ultimately, Grandpa Stopnick gives Noah a twenty-dollar bill and a heady sermon about the value of money. Of course, the audience immediately grasps where that twenty-dollar bill will end up. What the audience cannot foretell is the powerful exchange that takes place between Caroline and Noah. After the fact, Caroline finds the twenty-dollar bill in Noah's pocket, and when Noah arrives home from school to retrieve it, it is too late. It is Caroline's money now, and now she can "buy real presents for

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 91.

Christmas...and take [her] boy to the dentist."[19] Noah throws a tantrum, three times screaming "I HATE YOU!"[20] In his juvenile anger he taunts Caroline:

> There's a bomb!
> President Johnson has built a bomb
> special made to kill all Negroes!
> I hate, hate you, kill all Negroes! Really! For true!
> I hope he drops his bomb on you.[21]

The foreboding sounds of a low tympani roll and an ominous bassoon tell the audience that this is a comment with incredible weight to it. In her own anger, Caroline responds:

> Noah, hell is like this basement,
> only hotter than this, hotter than August
> with the washer and the dryer and the boiler
> full blast, hell's hotter than goose fat,
> much hotter than that.
> Hell's so hot it makes flesh fry.
> And hell's where Jews go when they die.[22]

Of all the references to change in the show, this is clearly the most pivotal. Both Jews and blacks have uttered the unspeakable. Caroline leaves Noah his twenty dollars and her job. She returns to work only a week later in order to reconcile speaking her "hate to a child."[23] She makes peace with herself with prayer by attending church because "only God can hear what [her] heart [means] to state."[24] She finds peace for herself in her relationships.

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[19] Ibid., 103.

[20] Ibid., 104.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 116.

[24] Ibid., 115.

The show has provided the audience with two pairs of contesters: Grandpa Stopnick vs. Emmie, and Caroline vs. Noah. In each case you have one Jew and one black, one older generation and one younger generation. Grandpa Stopnick and Emmie represent intelligent and fervent positions on either side of the debate. Although Caroline and Noah are each less articulate and less mature, their sentiments reach a passionate climax.

Composer Tesori's brilliant use of ethnically identifiable music gives the characters an added dimension. The score plays a large role in bringing out the dichotomy between the two groups: Jews and blacks. Most of the music in the score falls into one of three categories: 1) simple recitative, 2) gospel and Motown influences, and 3) Jewish or Klezmer style. Nearly all the music sung by the black characters finds its roots in gospel and R&B sounds. The Washing Machine rocks to R&B rhythms provided by her washing cycles. The Bus' big number is a soulful spiritual announcing the death of JFK. Three black women play the Radio, reminiscent of the black girl groups popular in the 1960s. Musically, one of the most memorable moments in the show is after Caroline's climactic soliloquy in the second act "Lot's Wife." It is an emotional, heartrending piece akin to the fervent gospel improvisations one has heard in a black church in the South. The Radio comes in and sings "Salty Teardrops," a Motown-inspired ballad with pop-style lyrics, which echoes Caroline's sentiments:

Salty
Salty
Salty
Salty teardrops
Teardrops
Teardrops
I been spillin salty teardrops in the ocean...
I'm lookin for answers Lord

High above, in the clouds
Askin you tell me now
How long?
How long?
This been goin on?[25]

Of the three main shows discussed in this thesis, this is the only show to pull music styles outside of the traditional musical theater genre into the mix. By singing in their respective genres, each character conveys his/her emotions and communicates with other characters. Even the music contributes to the gap between differing generations and races.

In contrast, we find fewer, though still pronounced, Jewish and klezmer influences used by the Jewish characters, especially in the second act. Stuart, being the clarinetist he is, uses the classic klezmer clarinet sound to evoke happy emotions among the family, in particular at Chanukah time. While klezmer music itself was not particularly popular at the time, by the 1960s Jewish music was readily identified by the modes used in klezmer music. Indeed, Jewish tunes that were popular among the secular public, like Hava Nagila and Bei Mir Bistu Shayn contained the modes found in Jewish liturgical and folk music.

Two other examples of musical distinction are worthy of our attention. After Caroline and Noah's confrontation, Noah in his fear reverts a children's song to express his feelings about the situation:

And the next day day day Caroline stayed away-way-way
And she didn't come back back back and she didn't come back back back
And the next day day day Caroline stayed away-way-way
And she didn't come back back back and she didn't come back back back

[25] Ibid., 120-121.

> On the third day day day Caroline stayed away-way-way
> And she didn't come back back back and she didn't come back back back[26]

This musical and lyrical device puts Noah's coping strategies in perspective. He is, after all, just a child. His words were harsh and direct, but it is not clear that he had the maturity to realize the impact of his statement. His true childish nature comes out in this setting. The second unique musical iteration is that of the Moon. In the scene following the Chanukah party, Caroline has reprimanded Emmie for speaking out of turn with Grandpa Stopnick. Emmie lashes back by saying that her mother is a poor example – a maid who does and says simply whatever will keep herself in good stead with her employer instead of speaking her mind. As Caroline, Dottie, and Emmie wait for the bus, Kushner and Tesori provide a poignant quartet between the Moon, Emmie, Rose, and Stuart. Emmie begins singing of her desires to be on her own and have her own TV, telephone, and house. Stuart sings of his feelings of being so distant from both his son and his new wife. Rose, too, is feeling Stuart's distance, feeling rather unloved. The unifying element between all of these sentiments is the Moon. She sings a mournful tune without words...only repeatedly intoning the words "Dona, dona..."[27] Her words and her tune are reminiscent of a Chassidic nigun – a Jewish melody sung without words. Its meaning and emotion is inherently derived from the performance style and the melody. The Moon, depicted as an elegant black woman with a beautiful headdress and fan, is singing music reminiscent of a Jewish folk melody. This is a striking use of Jewish

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[26] Ibid., 106

[27] Sholom Secunda published a song "Dona Dona" in 1943, which became one of the most widely sung Yiddish songs, performed in both Yiddish and English.

music paired with an African American singer that ties together Emmie's anthem and Stuart and Rose's laments.

Holiday music also plays a role in setting the mood and scene. In the opening scene of the second act, the Radio is singing a song reminiscent of Christmas hits by the Supremes. Tesori uses familiar tunes like *Jingle Bells, Angels We Have Heard On High,* and *I Saw Three Ships,* sometimes with alternative lyrics to evoke feelings of the Christmas season. At the Gellman's Chanukah party, after a long Klezmer improvisation, the family breaks out into Kushner's lyric set to the familiar Chanukah tune "Oy Chanukeh, Oy Chanukeh" (Oh Chanukah, Oh Chanukah).

While the music helps to differentiate between both race and religion, I believe it provides a subtle and beautiful resolution to much of the conflict found in the characters' experiences. In fact, a simple musical leitmotif runs throughout the show. *Caroline, or Change* opens with Caroline humming tune to herself. It is not a familiar tune but certainly possesses an inherently mournful quality. Tesori's use of simple humming early on gives the audience an insight into a sad character whose emotions pour out through the music she has within. We soon learn that the tune that she is humming is the R&B sounds of the Washing Machine. The Washing Machine's tune is accompanied by a grooving percussion line establishing a funky ostinato[28] that accompanies Caroline through her daily chores. Masterfully, this same tune returns at the end of the show as Caroline has returned to work. Noah is finally opening himself up to Rose's attempts to be in his life, and as she is putting him to bed she implores Noah: "Listen your Daddy's

[28] An ostinato is a short musical pattern that is constantly repeated throughout a piece of music.

clarinet."[29] Stuart is elsewhere in the house playing a tune of his own, a slow Klezmer melody, and yet the tune is familiar. The tune is Caroline's humming melody and the Washing Machine's agitation cycle tune from the opening of the show. Through all the conflicts between Jews and Christian blacks found in the show, there is a poignant resolution that whether it is Caroline's humming or Stuart's noodling on his clarinet, the emotions conveyed by their music are the same. The accompaniment adds a different flavor to their tune, but despite all of their differences they have "melodies" in common. The show ends with Caroline and Noah speaking across the night from their respective homes. They speak that eventually they can grow to be "friends" again. While the show does not conclude with an overt resolution, this use of music is an especially settling and agreeable conclusion to a story full of conflict and unrest.

[29] Kushner, 122.

# CHAPTER 4

## "FOUR JEWS IN A ROOM BITCHING": WILLIAM FINN'S *FALSETTOS*

Unlike Tesori's *Caroline, or Change*, the Jewish dimension in William Finn's *Falsettos* does not derive from the musical style found in the score. Finn instead chooses to rely on language and thematic material to convey his Jewish material to his presumably largely-Jewish New York theater audience. In this chapter, I will explain how Finn's own Jewish identity informed the Jewish identity of his characters in his show *Falsettos*. To take the most illustrative example, as we will see, his use of the bar mitzvah is not simply a theatrical device but rather an opportunity to depict a transformation occurring in all of the characters, and perhaps in turn, the audience as well. The bar mitzvah – the prototypical religious coming of age ceremony — is an allegory for, collectively and individually, the comings of age of the characters in the show. In fact, growing up is a central theme of the show, not only for the bar mitzvah boy Jason, but, more important, for his father, Marvin. The self-identification of the characters as Jews drives their actions and the audience's perceptions of them. Ultimately, we will see that each character's Jewish identity is, in fact, reflective of the Jewish identities of young Jews at the time that the show occurs, circa 1980. Indeed, the Jewish characterizations and Jewish subject matter bring Finn's show to life.

The details relating to William Finn's upbringing shed light on the inclusion of Jewish material in his plays. He was born on February 28, 1952 in Natick, Massachusetts, a suburb twenty miles outside of Boston, to a family of Russian-Jewish descent.[1] He grew up as a Conservative Jew, regularly attending religious school and observing Jewish holidays (JAI). A guitar – a bar mitzvah present – prompted his interest in composition, and while music became an important part of his life, it was not at the expense of Judaism. After he became bar mitzvah he went on to tutor children in Hebrew, and attended a Jewish high school program in Boston. These early experiences instilled in Finn a definitive pride in being Jewish, which is alive to this day. In an interview with the Jewish Archives of the New York Public Library, he expounds,

> You know, it's funny about Jewish things. Whenever I like something, I think they're Jewish. Like I always thought *Long Day's Journey into Night* was the great Jewish play. You know, people I liked. I thought Frank O'Hare and Walt Whitman were the great Jewish authors. My lover of many years, I've always thought—he's Italian—I've always said he was Jewish. And it's a trait that people find very irritating in me. But things that I like are always Jewish...[2]

As a student at Williams College, Finn majored in literature and American civilization. He actually flunked all of his music courses because, in his own words, "they were too early in the morning...I couldn't wake up."[3] He did, however, remain active in the musical community at Williams College, writing three short musicals and eventually

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[1] Linda Rapp, "Finn, William," *glbtq: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, & Queer Culture* [on-line]; available from http://www.glbtq.com/arts/finn_w.html; Internet; accessed 30 October 2004.

[2] William Finn, interview by Ruth Simon, 30 June 1993, oral histories box 215 no. 7, transcript, American Jewish Committee Oral History Collection, New York Public Library, New York, N.Y.

[3] Ibid.

receiving, upon his graduation in 1974, the school's Hutchinson Fellowship for Musical Composition, an award that Stephen Sondheim likewise received.

After a year studying music at the University of California at Berkeley, Finn plunked down roots in New York City in 1976 to pursue a career as a musical theater composer. Within two years, he was on his road to success when on December 8, 1978, *In Trousers* opened at Playwrights Horizon. The show had developed largely in his own living room. Finn would invite actor and singer friends to his home to read through his script, which allowed him to hear his work and fine-tune the production. This led to workshops of the show at Playwrights Horizon, a theater company only then beginning to produce musicals. *In Trousers* focused on the psychology of Marvin — a thirtyish, Jewish married man — and the women in his life. Whenever Marvin couldn't cope, he would regress to his fourteen year-old self. The sung-through show takes the audience from Marvin's lusting after his high school English teacher to the relationship with his wife, and finally to his revelation that he is leaving his family for a male lover. While *In Trousers* was far from a commercial success, it established the character of Marvin in Finn's literary repertoire, and he would go on to write two additional shows to complete the "Marvin musicals".[4]

William Finn would finally receive the acclaim he deserved when his next two one-act musicals – *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland* – were produced as one show on Broadway. At the suggestion of producers Barry and Fran Weissler, *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland* became respectively Acts 1 and 2 of *Falsettos*, Finn's first

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[4] Andre Bishop, Liner notes for *March of the Falsettos/Falsettoland*, Original Cast, DRG Records 22600, 1981, 2 compact discs.

production on the Broadway stage.[5] *March of the Falsettos* picked up where *In Trousers* left off with Marvin juggling his lover, his ex-wife who has become enamored with Marvin's therapist, and his son. Marvin is a rather self-absorbed character who, until the end of the show when he is left seemingly abandoned by everyone in his life, seems unwilling to compromise own dreams despite the pain it causes others in his life.

> Well, the situation's this –
> It's not tough to comprehend;
> I divorced my wife,
> I left my child
> And I ran off with a friend.
>
> But I want a tight-knit family.
> I want a group that harmonizes.
> I want my wife and kid and friend
> To pretend
> Time will mend
> Our pain.[6]

*Falsettoland* takes place two years after *March of the Falsettos* ends. Jason, Marvin's son, is preparing to become bar mitzvah. Trina, Marvin's ex, and Mendel, Marvin's psychiatrist, have established a home together and are raising Jason. Whizzer, Marvin's lover, has reentered his life, and all seems well until Whizzer comes down with a strange illness that "has no name."[7] The climax occurs towards the show's end when Jason decides his bar mitzvah needs to be at the hospital with Whizzer, dying of AIDS, surrounded by those who love him. *Falsettos* opened April 29, 1992 at the Golden

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[5] Though the show is sung-through with music and lyrics by Finn, the show credits a book by Finn and James Lapine.

[6] William Finn and James Lapine, *Falsettos*, music and lyrics by William Finn (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1995), 15.

[7] Ibid., 124-125.

Theatre to positive reviews. The show was nominated for seven Tony Awards that season, winning the coveted "Best Book of a Musical" and "Best Original Score" awards.

Finn's Jewish identity is nowhere more evident than in *Falsettos*. Although Judaism is not the centerpiece of the show, the characters' Jewish identities are integral to the story and the plot. In fact, there is no overture; rather the male characters open the production with the singing of "Four Jews in a Room Bitching:"

> Four Jews in a Room Bitching
> Four Jews in a room plot a crime.
> I'm bitching, He's bitching.
> They're bitching. We're bitching
> Bitch Bitch Bitch Bitch
> Funny Funny Funny Funny
> Bitch – Bitch –
> Bitch Bitch Bitch Bitch all the time.[8]

Finn's matter-of-fact lyrics tell it like it is. The lyrics not only repeatedly identify our characters as Jewish, but (stereotypically) associate their behaviors with Jews whether they are "bitching," "itching for answers," "stooping to pray," or simply "talking like Jewish men."[9] We understand that all the characters are Jewish (even Whizzer emphatically identifies himself as "half-Jewish")[10] and that their neuroses are somehow linked to their Jewish identity. In one interview, Finn explains that

> everyone was so offended by 'Four Jews in a Room Bitching'... First of all, they were offended because they said, "It's not about Jews, it's about gays." But I think the fact is I always saw it as

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[8] Finn, *Falsettos*, 9.

[9] It is important to note that the opening number of *Falsettos* was of course also the opening number to the one-act musical *March of the Falsettos*. There is very little overtly Jewish about *March of the Falsettos*, with the weight of the Jewish material found in *Falsettoland*. Despite this, Finn is quick to inform us of their Jewish identities, bringing that part of each character to the forefront of our perceptions.

[10] Finn, *Falsettos*, 10.

> about family, the new American family and the new Jewish family. So I always saw it as a very Jewish show. But with "Four Jews in a Room Bitching" what I was trying to do, without being too cute, and I think some people may respond that maybe it is a little too cute, is I was just trying to clear the cobwebs away. I didn't want you to think you were seeing *Fiddler on the Roof*, and I think after "Four Jews in a Room Bitching," there's no worries there. So what I was trying to do with "Four Jews in a Room" was just say, "This is what you're going to see a show about: modern Jews and how Jews live in the modern world." So that's why I did it, and that's why people should not be offended. I think it's a perfect opening to that show. That's all.[11]

Act one continues to tell the story of the deterioration of all Marvin's relationships: that of his ex-wife Trina, his psychiatrist Mendel, and ultimately his lover Whizzer. At its core, however, the play focuses on Marvin's relationship with his son Jason, a boy struggling with fears of growing up gay like his father. Amid all of the ailing relationships in his life, we see Marvin struggling to grow up himself so that he can, in turn, help Jason grow up. Nowhere is this clearer than in the closing song of act one:

> Kid, be my son.
> What I've done to you is rotten.
> Say, I was scared.
> I kept marching in one place...
> I loved you. I love you.
> I meant no disgrace.
> This here is love
> When we're talking face to face...
> I've made my choice.
> But you can sing a different song.
> Watch, as you sing,
> How your voice gets much lower.
> You'll be, kid, a man, kid...
> Sing for yourself
> As you march along.[12]

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[11] Finn interview.

[12] Finn, *Falsettos*, 85-86.

Marvin's ballad of advice beautifully sets up what will occur in act two as Jason turns thirteen – the Jewish religious age of maturity.

In act two, the Jewish elements truly come to life. The second act opens with Mendel, the Yiddish-named psychiatrist, informing us almost immediately that "one bar mitzvah that is scrupulously planned"[13] is in store for us. Indeed, true to Mendel's word, the bar mitzvah ceremony becomes the focus of nearly everything that happens in the second act. In the opening number of act two, immediately following the prologue, Jason is practicing for his blessings for his bar mitzvah service, while his parents kvell:

> This is the year of the child.
> When he spreads out his wings
> There's music in his heart,
> His life's about to start
> His body's going wild.
> My child.[14]

In contrast, Mendel recalls that his "bar mitzvah was a miserable occasion, the cause for such abrasion in my family."[15] While Marvin and Trina argue over "who's gonna cater?"[16] (Cordelia, one of Jason's godmothers, "a lesbian from next door"[17] and kosher caterer is delving into "nouveau bar mitzvah cuisine."),[18] Mendel cynically insists,

> This is so much crap.
> Throw a simple party.

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[13] Ibid., 88.

[14] Ibid., 95.

[15] Ibid., 96.

[16] Ibid., 94.

[17] Ibid., 97.

[18] Ibid.

Religion's just a trap
That ensnares the weak and the dumb.
Stop with the prayers.[19]

Jason's voice is notably absent from the commotion over his own bar mitzvah ceremony. He simply pipes in "they're more excited than they should be."[20] Finally, only after every adult has weighed in on Jason's bar mitzvah celebration, we find Jason philosophizing on the "miracle of Judaism"[21] which he concludes is intricately tied to which girls he plans to invite to his bar mitzvah ceremony and party.

It is clear that Jason's bar mitzvah is much more than a centerpiece for the action surrounding Marvin's life and Whizzer's illness. A bar mitzvah ceremony is shrouded in symbolism dealing with coming of age – one of the main themes of the musical as alluded to above. Interestingly enough, it is our protagonist, Marvin, whose immaturity pervades the first act, who berates his family members at the beginning of the second act:

It's about time don't you think?
It's about time to grow up, don't you think?
It's about time to grow up and face the music.
It's about time.[22]

Indeed, it is time to grow up, especially for Marvin himself. The show in many ways is a grand bar mitzvah for all. The characters are all adults, but each in his or her own way has a lot of growing up to do. Marvin throughout the show is dealing with the issues of

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[19] Ibid., 95.

[20] Ibid. 98.

[21] Ibid., 100.

[22] Ibid., 90.

"want[ing] it all."[23] He longs for "a tight-knit family" and yet is not willing to accept much responsibility for his family's current situation. Mendel, a workaholic and neurotic therapist, struggles with his role as new husband and stepfather to one of his patient's sons. Dr. Charlotte is on the brink of discovering that the mysterious illness killing off her patients at the hospital is AIDS; and Cordelia is trying to find her role in life: while her partner is saving lives, she saves only chicken fat. The whole cast is coping with the reality of this new disease that "spreads from one man to another."[24] Everyone is struggling with the issues of love and relationships. Jason is not only turning thirteen, but is learning to deal with divorce, especially when, among other things, his father is an out-of-the-closet gay man.

The occasion of the bar mitzvah provides insight into the magnitude of such an event for a thirteen-year-old boy. Jason's initial struggle concerning his invitation list expands to include whether or not his pals "will laugh at [his] father and his friends."[25] He later becomes frustrated and quite angry about how everyone is handling the bar mitzvah:

> Everybody's yelling about the bar mitzvah.
> What's so upsetting?
> It's a celebration where I get presents
> But everybody's yelling and everybody's ruining it.[26]

It is not uncommon for children of divorce to feel responsible for what is happening between their parents. Jason's own sense of responsibility emerges as he

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[23] Ibid., 16.

[24] Ibid., 144.

[25] Ibid., 100.

[26] Ibid., 117.

wonders, "What have I done that they'd ruin my bar mitzvah?"[27] Finally after his parents cannot stop arguing about whether to invite the Applebaums[28], Jason proclaims, "Stop! I don't want a bar mitzvah."[29] His parents, in their self-absorbed way inquire, "How do you think WE feel about that?"[30] Finally, as the date approaches, Trina asks Jason whether or not he will have a bar mitzvah. Jason, with uncharacteristic maturity, responds with his own profound questions:

> Can't we wait till Whizzer gets better?
> Can't we wait till he's out?
> That's what bar mitzvahs should be all bout.
> Good friends close at hand...[31]

From the show's start, Marvin and Trina made decisions related to the bar mitzvah. Now, at the most difficult of times, as Whizzer lays deathly ill in the hospital, the decision to have the bar mitzvah is thrust upon Jason. He is suddenly forced to grow up, to become a bar mitzvah before our eyes. Jason turns to God for a solution. He does not think that he and God "have ever really spoken,"[32] but is not shy about asking for a miracle:

> Do this for me and I'll get bar mitzvahed
> In exchange for:
> Could you please make my friend stop dying?
> I am not naïve. It won't be easy,

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[27] Ibid.

[28] In the original one act *Falsettoland*, they argue about round tables vs. square tables.

[29] Finn, *Falsettos*, 118.

[30] Ibid., 119.

[31] Ibid., 137.

[32] Ibid., 143.

But if you could make my friend stop dying,
God,
That'd be the miracle of Judaism.[33]

Ultimately, Jason decides the most appropriate thing to do is to go through with the bar mitzvah service and reception, but to hold them in Whizzer's hospital room...moments before his death.

Musically, with a very few exceptions, there is nothing particularly Jewish about the music in *Falsettos*, though occasional references to Jewish music can be found. Mendel, in one of his manic frenzies, breaks into a chorus of the traditional seder song Dayenu seemingly in an attempt to catch Jason's attention and enable him to open up. Occasionally too, Finn's use of traditional Jewish modes seem to foreshadow something particularly Jewish, for example, as in the accompaniment preceding Cordelia's kosher catering presentation. In fact, Jason chants his Torah portion to Finn's musical composition, not traditional Torah cantillation.

Finn's use of contemporary theater music seems particularly apropos in light of changing trends in synagogue and other Jewish music, The age-old question of "what is Jewish music?" has become more and more difficult to answer. With Jewish folk composers such as Debbie Friedman and Jeff Klepper, pop Jewish phenoms Rick Recht and Danny Nichols, and the Broadway and Hollywood sounds of the liturgical music of Michael Isaacson and Meir Finkelstein, we can no longer instantly identify synagogue music as inherently Jewish. We no longer need the Jewish modes and Israeli flavor that was utilized so brilliantly in *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Milk and Honey*.

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[33] Ibid.

In closing, it is interesting to consider the context for the characters' Jewish identity. Their identities are reflective, I believe, of Jewish identities among the 30-something set in the last 25 years. These people are Jewish above all because they identify themselves as such. As contemporary Jews, one's Jewish identity does not need to stretch beyond one's own self-envisioning. One need not belong to a temple nor be religiously observant to identify as a Jew. This is especially true in New York City, the center of American theater. Clearly, the kind of Jewish life these characters led was one that could instantly resonate with the general Jewish theater-going population. The show opens with the main characters proclaiming their Jewish identities, if for no other reason than to give us an idea of how they categorize themselves. Finn points out the characters' Jewish identities an entire act before the bar mitzvah, the most overtly Jewish element of the show. Trina is emotionally distraught over the way her life and her family's lives are working out. I believe Trina's perspective is key. She sings:

> I was sure growing up I would live the life
> My mother assumed I'd live.
> Very Jewish, very middle class, and very straight.
> Where healthy men stayed healthy men
> And marriages were long and great.[34]

This brief passage speaks volumes about the characters. The adults in *Falsettos* are most likely first generation Jews born in this country. They are the product of hard-working parents who envisioned only the best for their children; certainly, they hoped that the next generation's lives would be better than their own. They possessed time-honored values and conventional goals for what their children would and could (and should) achieve. The family structure was quite simple and straightforward; no one ever questioned that.

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[34] Ibid., 130-131.

Yet here we have an example of the glaring realization that this is far from where their lives are going. In *Parade*, or even in *Caroline, or Change*, the Jewish characterizations are somewhat tied to something more largely historic or contemporary to the times. Here, Jewish identity can stand alone without a historical backdrop.

Besides honestly confronting tired stereotypes of the Jewish family, Finn pushes the envelope on what was then a new and devastating social issue affecting Jews and non-Jews alike: AIDS. In fact, *Falsettoland* was the first, and at the time only, professionally produced musical to treat the subject of AIDS successfully.[35] This is to say that the musical was successful, as well as how the AIDS epidemic is treated therein. In act two of *Falsettos* we see that Whizzer's health is fading. During regular racquetball games with Marvin, the athletic Whizzer has trouble keeping up with his partner's game. Indeed, by the second game, later in the act, Whizzer, after stopping mid-game, can barely catch his breath. Moreover, we see Dr. Charlotte observing a strange development among gay men:

> Bachelors arrive sick and frightened
> They leave weeks later, unenlightened.
> We see a trend, but the trend has no name.[36]

Life in 1981 is clearly more complicated than anyone could have foreseen. Trina is doing all she can as she is

> Holding to the ground as the ground keeps shifting.
> Trying to keep sane as the rules keep changing.
> Keeping up my head as my heart falls out of sight.[37]

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[35] Some years later, Rent would also achieve success in this area.

[36] Ibid., 124-125.

[37] Ibid., 131-132.

Finn emphatically doesn't shy away from the feelings that everyone is feeling as they are dealing with the changing family structure and the beginning of the devastation of the AIDS epidemic.

The source of *Falsettos*' Jewish identity lies in the deep-seated Jewish identity of the writer. This goes beyond the old adage that writers and composers should "write what they know." In the case of *Falsettos*, Finn's own Jewish-identity is so deeply rooted in his own psyche, that it is nearly impossible for him to detach that piece of him from his work. Why does Finn's assertion of particularistic Jewish identity hold such universal appeal? Through Finn's writing, we can see that the Jew can be depicted through psychological and sociological dramatic characterizations, and not through caricatures or seemingly canned musical devices. In 1964, *Fiddler on the Roof* was able to take what seemed on the surface to be Jewish issues and present them with widespread appeal. Twenty-seven years later, William Finn has achieved the same goal: *Falsettos* has taken the uniquely Jewish occasion of bar mitzvah and presented in such a way that mainstream audiences can identify with and understand it.

# CONCLUSION

Attempts at Jewish musical theater aimed almost exclusively at Jews have ultimately failed. The beginning of the century provided Jewish audiences with the joys of Yiddish theater. This was a media designed and performed for a very specific audience. The rather particularistic appeal was inextricably linked to the Yiddish language and the connection that Yiddish-speaking audiences had with their *mamme-loshn* [mother tongue]. Those involved in creating and performing these works were playing to the audience's passion for nostalgia. By creating theater that had a limited audience and, therefore, limited appeal, this was a style that was destined to fade away, which it surely did. Later in the twentieth century producers attempted to revisit the genre by mounting productions of Yiddish musicals and revues. Others attempted to play into rising Zionist passions in the 1970s by importing Israeli musicals for the Broadway stage. Neither faction was successful. They were seemingly playing into the record-breaking success of *Fiddler on the Roof.* They thought if a Jewish show based on folk stories by a popular Jewish author could become successful, surely there would be interest in all things culturally Jewish. They had missed the point of the success of *Fiddler.*

*Fiddler on the Roof* achieved its success not because of its Jewish material, but rather because of the universality of its story and its message. The show is cast in distinctly Jewish modes and culture, but it tells a story that everyone could relate to, not

only Jews. Audiences enjoyed Zero Mostel's ethnically infused performance as Tevye and Jerome Robbins Jewish and Russian inspired choreography. In 1965, however, it was the messages of changing families and young people forging their way in a changing world that appealed to the masses. The Yiddish and Israeli shows were, by definition, marketed to a very limited audience. These shows were perceived as exotic novelties by the public and had neither star power nor appealing subject matter to the non-Jewish public. Further, the amount of Yiddish speakers was on a steep decline, so even among Jews there was a lack of interest in these shows. The way that musical theater creators were tapping into one's Jewish identity was changing.

Many musical theater creators reached new heights by weaving their characters' Jewish identities with topical social issues, historical backdrops, and social mores. Uhry and Brown's *Parade* tackled the issue of anti-Semitism in the South at the turn of the century. *Caroline, or Change* deals with the social changes in the early 1960s and the beginnings of the civil rights movement. It deals with issues facing African-Americans and Jews at that time. Even more important, writer Tony Kushner brings Jewish and African-American relations and conflicts to the forefront. *Falsettos* took on homosexuality and the onset of the AIDS epidemic and set it all against the backdrop of an impending bar mitzvah. The creators of these shows have infused their own Jewish identities into their works, providing their Jewish characters with a central theme or issue not necessarily related to Judaism whatsoever.

One can see the success of these trends by looking at the runs of these shows. *Caroline, or Change* enjoyed a sold-out run off-Broadway before moving to the Broadway stage. *Falsettos* also had a healthy run on Broadway, and was followed by a

national tour. *Parade*, on the other hand, played for less than three months. Despite receiving critical acclaim, audiences seemed to lack interest in this story of anti-Semitism. Of the three shows discussed here, *Parade*'s story deals quite specifically with Jewish issues, in ways that the other two shows do not. *Parade* is an issue-driven musical with anti-Semitism as its principal issue. Perhaps its message was not universal enough.

Unlike *Parade*, *Falsettos* was able to adapt its Judaism for a wider audience. William Finn took that which is particularly Jewish – a Bar Mitzvah – and use it as an allegory for the idea of growing up and coming of age. While audiences could not help but be aware of the characters' Jewish identities, this did not pre-occupy their interest in the characters lives. Lucille and Leo Frank's lives and problems were so tied into their Jewish identities that perhaps there was not anything for a non-Jewish audience to relate to. Could a New York audience in 1998 relate to the bigotry portrayed in this show? Further, did musical theatergoers have an interest in seeing such a dark show complete with lynching of a Jew? Parade played a paltry eighty-five performances before it closed. *Caroline, or Change* played nearly twice as long; *Falsettos* enjoyed a run of 487 performances.

Success has clearly been found in Jewish musicals that are issue-driven and strive for universal appeal. Jewish composers, lyricists, writers and producers still pervade the Great White Way. Jewish composers continue to explore their ethno-cultural backgrounds and new Jewish material is being written and performed both on and off-Broadway. 2004 brought *The Immigrant* to Dodger Stages in New York City, telling the story of a Jewish immigrant making his way at the turn of the century, not on the Lower

East Side, but instead in Galveston, Texas. *Fiddler* is currently in its fourth revival[1] on Broadway.[2] Two different musicals baring the same title, *Masada* – both based on the infamous 73 BCE rebellion against the Roman takeover of a Jewish fortress which ended in the suicide of nearly 1,000 people – are currently courting producers for Broadway runs. The Jewish-themed musical is alive and well. Creators continue to hone their skill at incorporating their own Jewish identities and their desire to depict Jewish material, with stories and music that will appeal to a widespread audience – Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

[1] There has been a revival each decade since the initial run closed in 1972.

[2] Alfred Molina, the first non-Jewish Tevye on Broadway, was criticized, by New York Times reviewer Ben Brantley for his "apologetic" and "uneasy" performance. Brantley also commented on the lack of Jewish flavor in this Anatevka referring to it as a "McShtetl". Nearly a year after opening, acclaimed Jewish musical theater performer, Harvey Fierstein, took over in the lead.

## APPENDIX

## PRODUCTION INFORMATION AND PLOT SYNOPSES

### ***Parade***

*Parade* was commissioned and developed by Livent (U.S.) Inc. It received its world premiere at Lincoln Center Theater in New York City, beginning previews on November 12, 1998, opening on December 17, 1998, and closing on February 28, 1999, after playing thirty-nine previews and eighty-four performances.

*Parade* was produced by Lincoln Center Theater (under the direction of André Bishop and Bernard Gersten), in association with Livent (U.S.) Inc. *Parade* was directed by Harold Prince. The set was designed by Riccardo Hernández, costumes by Judith Dolan, lighting by Howell Binkley, sound by Jonathan Deans, musical supervision and direction by Eric Stern, orchestrations by Don Sebesky and Jason Robert Brown, choreography by Patricia Birch; the assistant choreographer was Rob Ashford, the production supervisor was Clayton Phillips, the assistant to Harold Prince was Brad Rouse, the musical theater associate producer was Ira Weitzman, the general manager was Steven C. Callahan, the production manager was Jeff Hamlin, casting was by Beth Russell and Mark Simon, the director of marketing and special projects was Thomas Cott and the director of development was Hattie K. Jutagir. Production photographs were taken by Joan Marcus; illustration and poster design was by James McMullan.

The original cast (in order of appearance) was as follows:

YOUNG SOLDIER ..... Jeff Edgerton
OLD SOLDIER ..... Don Chastain
AIDE ..... Don Stephenson
ASSISTANT ..... Melanie Vaughan
LUCILLE FRANK ..... Carolee Carmello
LEO FRANK ..... Brent Carver
HUGH DORSEY ..... Herndon Lackey
GOVERNOR SLATON ..... John Hickok
SALLY SLATON ..... Anne Torsiglieri
FRANKIE EPPS ..... Kirk McDonald
MARY PHAGAN ..... Christy Carlson Romano
IOLA STOVER ..... Brooke Sunny Moriber
JIM CONLEY ..... Rufus Bonds, Jr.

J. N. STARNES ..... Peter Samuel
OFFICER IVEY ..... Tad Ingram
NEWT LEE ..... Ray Aranha
PRISON GUARD ..... Randy Redd
MRS. PHAGAN ..... Jessica Molaskey
LIZZIE PHAGAN ..... Robin Skye
FLOYD MACDANIEL ..... J.B. Adams
BRITT CRAIG ..... Evan Pappas
TOM WATSON ..... John Leslie Wolfe
ANGELA ..... Angela Lockett
RILEY ..... J. C. Montgomery
LUTHER ROSSER ..... J. B. Adams
FIDDLIN' JOHN ..... Jeff Edgerton
JUDGE ROAN ..... Don Chastain
NURSE ..... Adinah Alexander
MONTEEN ..... Abbi Hutcherson
ESSIE ..... Emily Klein
MR. PEAVY ..... Don Stephenson
ENSEMBLE ..... Adinah Alexander, Duane Boutte, Diana Brownstone, Thursday Farrar, Will Gartshore, Abbi Hutcherson, Tad Ingram, Emily Klein, Angela Lockett, Megan McGinnis, J. C. Montgomery, Brooke Sunny Moriber, Randy Redd, Joel Robertson, Peter Samuel, Robin Skye, Don Stephenson, Bill Szobody, Anne Torsiglieri, Melanie Vaughan, Wysandria Woolsey

SYNOPSIS:

ACT I: A young Confederate soldier in Marietta, Georgia, 1862 is saying goodbye to his love as he prepares go to battle. He is replaced by his older self in 1913 as the city of Atlanta prepares to celebrate Confederate Memorial Day in 1913. Lucille Frank is preparing a picnic for herself and her husband, Leo, but he has too much work to do at his pencil factory. He is from the North and finds no reason to observe this holiday. Mary Phagan, a thirteen-year-old, is also on her way to the factor to pick up her pay. She is met on the streetcar by young Frankie Epps who invites her to go out with him that night. As Leo works, Lucille reflects on how her life has turned out. Mary arrives and Leo pays her, and she leaves his office.

Mary Phagan has been found dead. While her mother and sister are in the streets looking for her, the police are interrogating Newt Lee, the factory's night watchman. Britt Craig, a local reporter, is frustrated with the lack of important news happening in the city...until he hears of Mary's murder. Leo is brought in for questioning and is subsequently arrested. At Mary's funeral, the governor of Georgia, John Slaton, tells District Attorney Hugh Dorsey that child labor is becoming a contentious issue and Leo must be convicted.

Publisher and Christian activist, Tom Watson, supports the decision, because Leo is Jewish.

Dorsey begins questioning the witnesses, and "suggesting" what they might say at Leo's trial. At the same time, Britt Craig and the other reporters in the city are having fun with such a big story, playing to the anti-Semitic tendencies of the community. Craig tries to approach Lucille to hear her perspective, but she puts him off. In jail, Leo is visited by attorney Luther Rosser. Leo's own attorney felt it would not look good to have a Jew represent another Jew and sent Rosser in his place. Leo quickly deems that Rosser is incompetent. Lucille visits Leo to tell him that the stress of all the attention is too much, and she has decided to go out of town. He begs her to stay for fear of how it might look if his wife did not attend the trial.

The trial begins with an angry mob out side the courthouse, led by Tom Watson, demanding justice against Leo. Dorsey makes his opening statement and Frankie Epps then testifies about his conversation with Mary saying how afraid she was of Leo. Other girls who work at the factory testify that Leo would often look at them "funny" and sometimes invite them up to his office. Newt Lee also testifies that Leo would look at the girls funny. Mary's mother takes the stand to speak about her daughter. Jim Conley gives a dramatic account of how he helped Leo move Mary's body after Leo had killed her. This riles up the onlookers in the gallery. Rosser remains silent throughout all of the testimony. His strategy is to have Leo speak directly to the jury after the testimony. Leo delivers his statement, but after the closing statements, the jury finds him guilty.

ACT II: Leo's appeal is denied, and he is sentenced to death. Even though a year has passed, public interest in Mary's murder remains high. Leo decides he must take action himself. While in prison, he fires his lawyer and begins to study law and write letters to important people. As a result people nationwide start to pay attention. Newt Lee, Jim Conley, and other members of Atlanta's black community comment on how the situation would be different if Leo were not white.

Leo is upset that Lucille finally granted an interview to Britt Craig. She tells Leo that she was only trying to help and tries to convince him that he needs her help. She goes to the governor's mansion during a party and manages to speak with the governor about her husband's case. Shortly thereafter Governor Slaton receives a letter from the Judge Roan, the judge at Leo's trial, who expresses his misgivings about how he conducted the trial. Governor Slaton decides to reopen the case. Leo is thrilled with this news and finally concedes that he does need Lucille.

Lucille and Governor Slaton question the factory girls and Newt Lee and find that Dorsey coached them into their testimonies. The governor then talks to Jim Conley and becomes convinced that he too is lying due to autopsy evidence that contradicts Jim's testimony. Governor Slaton decides to commute Leo's sentence to life in prison.

This decision does not go over well with many in the South, especially those led by Tom Watson. Public uproar is so great that the governor is forced to retire. Leo is moved to a

different prison, and Lucille is allowed to visit him there and they, finally, have the picnic she had planned so long ago. They realize how much they truly love each other, and share a moment of intimacy.

Shortly afterward, Leo is roused in the middle of the night by a small but angry group of men, who decide to take it upon themselves to carry out Leo's original sentence. Leo refuses to lie and say that he committed the crime, and so they hang him.

Leo's wedding ring is returned to Lucille, who, despite everything, will stay in Georgia...her home.

## ***Caroline, or Change***

*Caroline, or Change* premiered in November 2003 at The Public Theater (George C. Wolfe, Producer; Mara Manus, Executive Director) in New York City. It was directed by George C. Wolfe. The scenic design was by Riccardo Hernández; the costume design was by Paul Tazewell; the lighting design was by Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer; the sound design was by Jon Weston; the hair design was by Jeffrey Frank; the choreography was by Hope Clarke, the orchestrations were by Rick Bassett, Joseph Joubert and Buryl Red; the music supervisor was Kimberly Grigsby; the music director and conductor was Linda Twine; the production stage manager was Lisa Dawn Cave.

On May 2, 2004, The Public Theater's production of *Caroline or Change* opened on Broadway at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre with the same artistic team. It was produced by Carole Shorenstein Hays, HBO Films, Jujamcyn Theaters, Freddy DeMann, Scott Rudin, Hendel/Morten/Wiesenfeld, Fox Theatricals/Manocherian/Bergère, Roger Berlind, Clear Channel Entertainment, Joan Cullman, Greg Holland/Scott Nederlander, Margo Lion, Daryl Roth, Zollo/Sine, in association with The Public Theater, and with support from Helen and Peter Bing and Theatre Development Fund.

The Broadway cast was as follows:

CAROLINE THIBEDEAUX.....Tonya Pinkins
THE WASHING MACHINE.....Capathia Jenkins
THE RADIO.....Tracy Nicole Chapman, Marva Hicks, Ramona Keller
NOAH GELLMAN.....Harrison Chad
THE DRYER.....Chuck Cooper
GRANDMA GELLMAN.....Alice Playten
GRANDPA GELLMAN.....Reathel Bean
ROSE STOPNICK GELLMAN.....Veanne Cox
STUART GELLMAN.....David Costabile
DOTTY MOFFETT.....Chandra Wilson
THE MOON.....Aisha de Haas

THE BUS.....Chuck Cooper
EMMIE THIBODEAUX.....Anika Noni Rose
JACKIE THIBODEAUX.....Leon G. Thomas III
JOE THIBODEAUX.....Marcus Carl Franklin
MR. STOPNICK.....Larry Keith

SYNOPSIS:

ACT I: Caroline, a thirty-nine-year-old black maid, is doing laundry in the basement of the Gellman's house, in St. Charles, Louisiana. The basement is her retreat in the house and she talks with the Washing machine and the Radio about her unsatisfactory life. Noah comes down to the basement. He clearly adores Caroline. He helps Caroline light her cigarette; this is part of their daily ritual. Noah goes upstairs and Caroline puts the clothes in the Dryer, a miserable experience because the Dryer's heat is unbearable. We learn from Caroline (and the Radio's commentary) that she is divorced and has four children (her oldest, Larry, is in Vietnam.) The Gellmans pay her thirty dollars a week, but it is just not enough.

Rose Stopnick Gellman, Noah's stepmother, is trying hard to be Caroline's friend, offering her food to take home to her family. Grandma and Grandpa Gellman sing of Noah's mother who died from "smoking too many cigarettes." Caroline explains to Noah that God made cancer as a test for his mother, and his mother's death is Noah's test. Stuart, Noah's father, explains that they don't believe in God. Grandma and Grandpa Gellman sing that when Betty, Noah's mother, died, Stuart married Rose, a friend of Betty's. They clearly miss Betty, but are happy that Rose is there to help raise Noah.

Rose calls her father in New York. She is feeling very out of place both in the South and in her own home.

Caroline is waiting for the bus with her friend Dotty Moffett, who also works as a maid. Dotty has started night school and has been changing her dress and demeanor to fit in at the college. Caroline is disgusted with her behavior. Dotty tries to explain that things are changing, but Caroline will not hear of it. Dotty tells Caroline that the courthouse statue honoring Confederate soldiers was stolen. The Moon, in agreement with Dotty, sings of change. The Bus is late, but eventually arrives with the news of John F. Kennedy's assassination. At the Gellman house, Rose berates Noah for leaving change in his pockets. Noah hates Rose and misses his mother. Rose informs him that from now on Caroline can keep any change that she finds in his pockets when she does the laundry.

Caroline is at home waiting up for her daughter Emmie. Emmie was out having fun with friends and has missed her curfew. Caroline is very angry with her because she is late and because she is hanging out with a crowd that Caroline does not care for. Caroline stays on the porch dreaming of all the things she would change in her life if she could create her own laws.

Rose tells Caroline of her plan to teach Noah a lesson about minding his money.

Caroline says she could not possibly take Noah's money. Stuart decides to give Noah an allowance. Caroline starts finding money in Noah's pockets, which she leaves in the bleach cup in the laundry room. It stays there a week until the temptation becomes to strong and she starts pocketing Noah's change, as per Rose's instructions. She brings a quarter home to each of her children, and they dream of what they will spend it on. The boys want to know where their mother got the extra money from, but Emmie sings them a tall tale about a boy who asked too many questions and died. They all sing and laugh and play together.

ACT II: It's Christmas, and Caroline is realizing how much the extra change is going to help her at this season. She also remembers back to the relationship with her husband who beat her until she finally fought back and "beat him black and blue." She is still feeling terribly conflicted about taking Noah's money. Rose comes to the basement at the height of Caroline's anger, and Caroline lashes out at her. Rose asks Caroline if she can have Emmie and Dottie come to the house for their Chanukah party.

At the Chanukah party, the Gellmans and Rose's father, Mr. Stopnick, are celebrating, dancing to Stuart's clarinet playing, and lighting the Chanukah candles. In the kitchen, Caroline, Emmie, and Dottie are working hard preparing the food. Mr. Stopnick is talking with Grandma and Grandpa Gellman about the situation with blacks in the South. He is getting very worked up; he wishes the blacks would quit their non-violent approach and finally fight back. As Emmie brings out the food, she and Mr. Stopnick get into a heated argument. She has been listening to the preaching of Martin Luther King, Jr. and is trying to convince Mr. Stopnick that non-violence is the only way. Caroline hears the argument and sends Emmie back to the kitchen. She is furious that she would speak that way to "white folks." Emmie tells her mother how she refuses to sit back and take it from white people. She does not want to be like her mother – a maid. She is embarrassed by her mother's job. Caroline slaps her and leaves the house. Dotty warns Emmie she better respect her mother. Mr. Stopnick gives Noah a twenty-dollar bill for Chanukah, but not without first giving him a histrionic lesson about the value of money. As she waits for the bus, Emmie dreams of the day when she will have her own house with all of the amenities, and she will not have to take the bus anymore. Meanwhile, Stuart realizes that he is growing more and more distant from his son, and how desperately he misses Betty. Rose, too, is feeling Stuart's distance. Emmie apologizes to her mother.

The next day, Noah is at school and realizes that he left his twenty-dollar bill in his pocket. He hurries home to get to his laundry before Caroline does. Unfortunately he is too late. She has found the money and is taking it home. Noah begs her to give it back. He tells Caroline he hates her and that President Johnson is going to drop a bomb and "kill all Negroes!" Caroline gets very quiet and then tells Noah that, like all Jews, he is going to hell. She leaves.

Rose returns home to find Caroline is gone. Noah will not say what happened, but Rose finds the twenty-dollar bill in the bleach cup and is suspicious. To protect Noah, Mr. Stopnick claims that he must have left the money in his pocket. Rose is beside herself

that she cannot get along with Noah, and now Caroline, who she tried to befriend, has left. Caroline does not return for a week. Rose calls Dotty to find out where Caroline is. Dotty meets Caroline outsider her house on Sunday morning, as Caroline is on her way to church. Caroline is quite distraught that she spoke such hateful things to a child. She feels terrible about her recent run-ins with both Noah and Emmie. She goes to church to pray about it. She delivers a very intense soliloquy asking God to help her get through her life in a time of such great change.

She returns to work at the Gellman's. Noah finally allows Rose to put him to bed and they have their first real conversation. Noah and Caroline talk across the night about becoming friends again.

In the Epilogue, we learn that Emmie was at the courthouse with a group of people the night that the statue was stolen. She is part of the changing face of black youth. She realizes that she is proud of her mother and all that she has done to provide for her family.

***Falsettos***

The Broadway production of "*Falsettos*" opened at the John Golden Theatre on April 29, 1992. It was directed by James Lapine, and produced by Barry and Fran Weissler; Alecia Parker was the associate producer. The set was designed by Douglas Stein, the costumes by Ann Hould-Ward, and the lighting by Frances Aronson. Musical arrangement was by Michael Starobin, musical direction by Scott Frankel, and sound design by Peter Fitzgerald. The Stage Manager was Karen Armstrong, and the Production Supervisor was Craig Jacobs.

The cast was as follows:

MARVIN ..... Michael Rupert
WHIZZER ..... Stephen Bogardus
MENDEL ..... Chip Zien
JASON ..... Jonathan Kaplan
JASON (Wed. & Sat. matinees) ..... Andrew Harrison Leeds
TRINA ..... Barbara Walsh
CHARLOTTE ..... Heather MacRae
CORDELIA ..... Carolee Carmello

SYNOPSIS:

ACT I: The show opens with the singing of "Four Jews in a Room Bitching" by the four men of the show. The song alludes to the neuroticism and unstableness of the characters. Marvin tells the audience that he divorced his wife, left his child, and took a male lover. He knows that the situation is difficult for everyone, but he just wants a tight-knit family.

He does not want to acknowledge the pain he has caused everyone; he just wants everything to be perfect. Trina goes to see Mendel, Marvin's psychiatrist, who is flirting shamelessly with her. She recalls when Marvin came out to her, and the impact it had on her family. Mendel is a workaholic who never married, but is finding himself quite attracted to Trina.

Marvin is living with his lover, Whizzer. They are truly opposites and are constantly bickering. Yet, they seem to revel in this aspect of their relationship. Marvin visits Mendel to discuss the problems in his relationship with Whizzer. He also recognizes that coming out of the closet has had an impact on his son. Jason is distraught that his father is a "homo" and wonders if he might become gay also. Trina and Marvin try to convince to see a psychiatrist, but Jason feels he is too smart to see a psychiatrist. They beg him to go. He wants to speak to Whizzer first. Whizzer convinces him to see the psychiatrist. We learn that while everyone has his or her own problems, Marvin is truly at the center of everyone's strife. Trina is having a nervous breakdown.

Mendel pays a house call to Trina and Jason, first for dinner, and then for therapy with Jason. Mendel's techniques are strange and ultimately Jason comes turns the tables and plays therapist to Mendel. Jason questions Mendel's intentions toward his mother. Ultimately the scene ends with Mendel proposing to Trina. She accepts.

Marvin is beside himself that his family has come to this. He has incredible disdain for Mendel moving in on his family. He feels Trina has become self-absorbed. He cannot cope with his "tight-knit family" falling apart. Trina sings of how crazy and unstable all the men in her life are acting. The men sing (in falsetto) as a response, showing that they, in fact, have a lot of growing up to do.

Marvin is teaching Whizzer how to play chess, a game he used to play with Jason. Tensions rise in the game and it is clear that their relationship is falling apart. Whizzer feels like he has been dragged along into Marvin's life. As long as he plays the part of the loving "housewife" everything is fine, but he cannot take it anymore. At the same time, Mendel and Trina are establishing a stable home life together with Jason. Whizzer has reached the end of his rope, and packs his things and leaves Marvin. Marvin is alone. He loses control when he receives Trina and Mendel's wedding invitation. He screams about how Trina has ruined his life. Trina and Whizzer commiserate about how they were both the victims of Marvin's selfishness. Marvin loses it and slaps Trina's face. Trina and Whizzer both try to resolve things with Marvin. Jason tries to make sense of everything. Finally, Marvin realizes the only person who will love him unconditionally is Jason, and he tries in earnest to patch things up with him.

ACT II: Two years have passed. Marvin and Trina have called a truce. Trina is still with Mendel, and Marvin is without a psychiatrist and without a lover. He does have two very good friends, Dr. Charlotte and Cordelia, Jason's godparents, a lesbian couple that lives next door. Marvin realizes it is time to finally grow up.

Jason is preparing for his bar mitzvah service. His parents are overjoyed that their son is

"becoming a man." They are very preoccupied with the details of the reception. Jason is preoccupied with which girls he will invite to his bar mitzvah. Everyone shows up to watch Jason play baseball, including Whizzer, who know expected to see. Feelings rekindle between Marvin and Whizzer.

Mendel is working to balance his professional life and his personal life. Cordelia is delving into kosher cooking, while Dr. Charlotte saves lives at the hospital. Marvin and Whizzer are back together and enjoy the afternoon playing racquetball. Whizzer is clearly the better player.

Marvin and Trina continue to argue about bar mitzvah details. Jason in his frustration with his parents declares that he does not want a bar mitzvah, but his parents will hear nothing of that. Mendel is convinced that it is normal for Jason to feel this way (after all, "everyone hates his parents.") In the meantime, Marvin is so happy that he and Whizzer are back together. He is very much in love.

Dr. Charlotte has noticed a new trend at the hospital that men are coming in very sick, and nobody knows what is wrong with them. Whizzer and Marvin play racquetball again, but this time Whizzer can barely keep up with Marvin, nearly collapsing at the end of the game. Trina is astounded at how her life has turned out, and she is doing all she can to keep herself grounded. Whizzer, in the meantime, as been checked into the hospital, and everyone shows up to try to cheer him up, and make him better.

Finally, Marvin and Trina tell Jason it is his decision whether he has a bar mitzvah. He wants to wait until Whizzer gets better. He cannot decide what to do, so he talks to God, and tells God if he makes Whizzer better, he will have his Bar Mitzvah.

As Whizzer is coming to terms with the fact that he is going to die, everyone shows up in his hospital room. Jason has decided to have the bar mitzvah there. Cordelia has brought food and they have the service in the hospital. As Whizzer is about to pass, Marvin reflects on the amazing partner Whizzer has been to him.

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