

Morton DaCosta's production
of Meredith Willson's

'the MUSIC MAN'

Perspective: ROBERT PRESTON

By Linda Harris

Imagine The Music Man without Robert Preston as Professor Harold Hill! It almost happened.

First some background. While appearing in "Idiot's Delight" at the Pasadena Community Theatre, Robert Preston was spotted by a talent scout and signed to a motion-picture contract with Paramount. His first major role was in Cecil B. DeMille's *Union Pacific* (1939) playing Barbara Stanwyck's husband.

"I'd get the best role in every B picture and the second best in the A pictures," he later recalled. Important parts in *Beau Geste* (1939), *Northwest Mounted Police* (1940) and *This Gun For Hire* (1942) found him supporting Gary Cooper, Alan Ladd and other major stars of the 40's.

Preston served in the Army Air Forces during World War II, then returned to Hollywood and resumed making films. He came east in 1951 to replace Jose Ferrer on Broadway in "Twentieth Century," and remained in New York, quickly establishing himself as a particularly versatile theatrical actor. 'At all times,



he is efficient, inventive and a help to the authors," the critic Walter Kerr wrote of his work. Preston remarked, "The critics all came to see the Hollywood actor fall on his butt, I guess. Just the fact that I didn't got me decent notices."

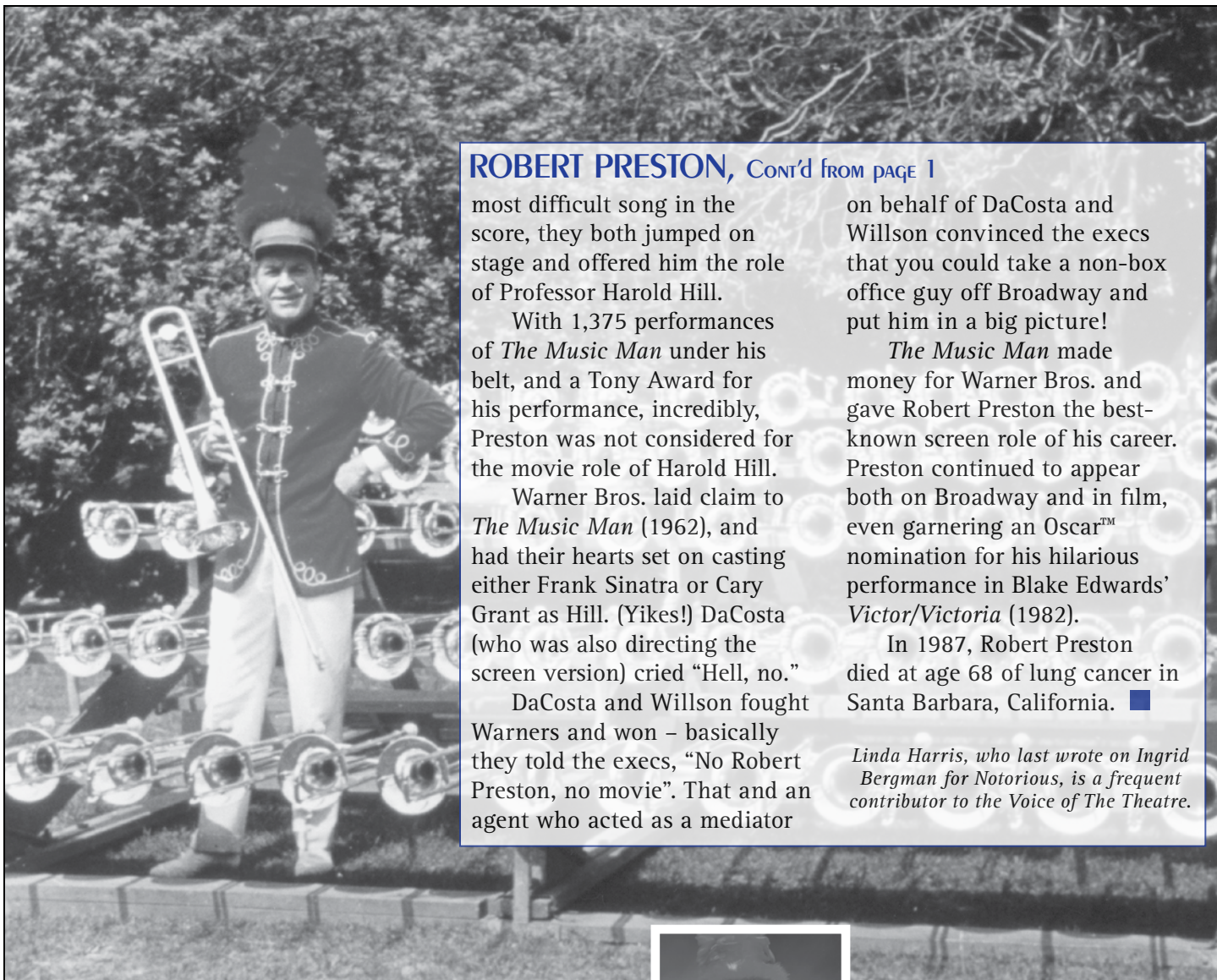
In 1951, stage producers Martin and Feuer suggested that Meredith Willson write a musical comedy about his Iowa boyhood. With his common touch it was sure to be a hit they said. Seven years and thirty revisions later, he finally got what turned out to be, *The Music Man*, which Willson said was "An Iowan's attempt to pay tribute to his home state."

Willson's producers approached Milton Berle, Art Carney, Danny Kaye, Phil Harris and Ray Bolger was to play the brass, fast-talking con man – Professor Harold Hill – they all turned it down. But Morton DaCosta, who directed the show, had seen Preston in summer-stock shows and had been impressed. "Preston has energy and he has reality," the director observed. "He's an actor who can project himself larger than life".

Preston auditioned for DaCosta and Willson and after they heard him sing "Trouble," considered the

"Preston has energy and he has reality," the director observed. "He's an actor who can project himself larger than life".

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



ROBERT PRESTON, CONT'D FROM PAGE 1

most difficult song in the score, they both jumped on stage and offered him the role of Professor Harold Hill.

With 1,375 performances of *The Music Man* under his belt, and a Tony Award for his performance, incredibly, Preston was not considered for the movie role of Harold Hill.

Warner Bros. laid claim to *The Music Man* (1962), and had their hearts set on casting either Frank Sinatra or Cary Grant as Hill. (Yikes!) DaCosta (who was also directing the screen version) cried "Hell, no."

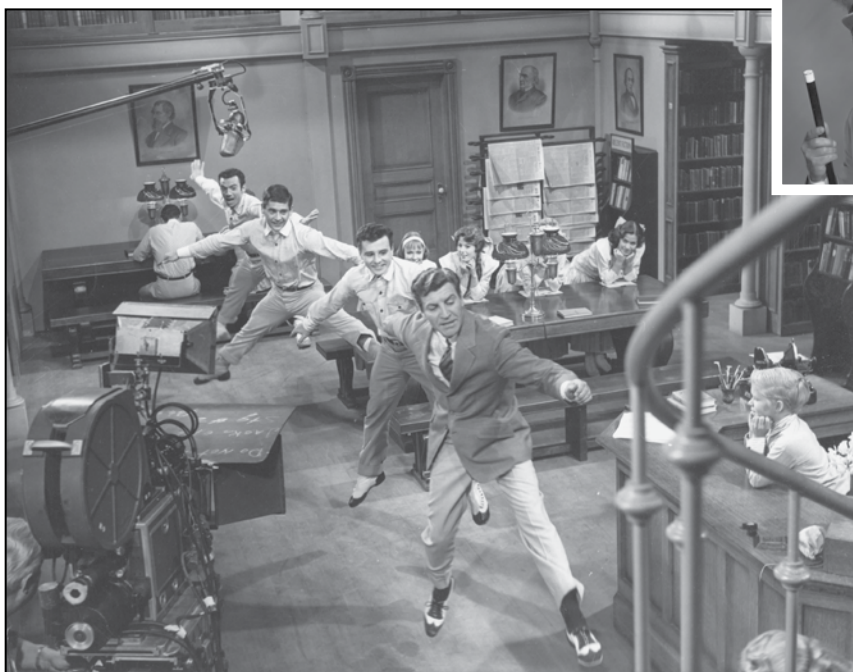
DaCosta and Willson fought Warners and won – basically they told the execs, "No Robert Preston, no movie". That and an agent who acted as a mediator

on behalf of DaCosta and Willson convinced the execs that you could take a non-box office guy off Broadway and put him in a big picture!

The Music Man made money for Warner Bros. and gave Robert Preston the best-known screen role of his career. Preston continued to appear both on Broadway and in film, even garnering an Oscar™ nomination for his hilarious performance in Blake Edwards' *Victor/Victoria* (1982).

In 1987, Robert Preston died at age 68 of lung cancer in Santa Barbara, California. ■

Linda Harris, who last wrote on Ingrid Bergman for Notorious, is a frequent contributor to the Voice of The Theatre.



Show business seems to have been destined for Shirley Jones from the very beginning. Her mother, the wife of a Pennsylvania brewery proprietor, named her only child after Shirley Temple, a top film star of 1934, the year Jones was born. Shirley demonstrated her strong vocal talents right from the start. By the time she was five years old she was singing church solos to great acclaim. Her parents decided to nurture their daughter's natural gifts by providing vocal training with coach Ken Welch in nearby Pittsburgh.

By the time Shirley graduated with honors from high school in 1952, she had appeared in numerous school stage productions and had even won a state-wide singing contest. Soon after she was chosen as Miss Pittsburgh which led to her placing second as Miss Pennsylvania for that year's Miss America contest. This was followed by a handful of stage productions for the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera including *Lady in the Dark* and *Call me Madam*. But it was a brief vacation in the summer of 1953 that gave Miss Jones her big break.

Stopping over in New York City on her way to attend a Junior College in New Jersey, Miss Jones learned that her old vocal coach, Ken Welch, had arranged for her to audition for theatrical agent Gus Schirmer. Schirmer was so impressed with what he heard and saw that he immediately arranged another audition with a casting director representing Rodgers and Hammerstein. That audition led to yet a third audition directly for Broadway's biggest musical writing team of the time. With her wholesome good looks and strong



vocal talents, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein thought Miss Jones would be ideal for the part of Laurey in their upcoming film version of *Oklahoma!* and immediately signed the 19 year old to a seven year contract.

With her wholesome good looks and strong vocal talents, Rodgers and Hammerstein thought Miss Jones would be ideal for Oklahoma...

To increase Miss Jones professional experience, Rodgers and Hammerstein cast her in the chorus of *South Pacific* followed by a small role in *Me and Juliet*. By the time *Me and Juliet* began its road tour later that season Miss Jones was promoted to leading lady.

Following a successful Hollywood screen test, Shirley was finally cast as Laurey in the film version of *Oklahoma!* (1955). This critically acclaimed production introduced the big screen Todd-AO process to the movie-going public and also starred Gordon MacRae, Gloria Grahame, Rod Steiger and Charlotte

Greenwood. Shirley's performance in the film garnered numerous favorable reviews. Miss Jones has since also played the role of Laurey on stage in Paris, Rome and throughout the US in summer stock.

Rodgers and Hammerstein re-teamed Miss Jones and Gordon MacRae for their moving 1956 film version of *Carousel*. The part of Julie won Shirley the choice cover spot on *Life* magazine which proclaimed the young starlet "a show business phenomenon." Following the release of *Carousel*, Miss Jones married musical comedy singer Jack Cassidy whom she met while rehearsing for a stage version of *The Beggar's Opera* in Cambridge, Massachusetts. With this venture she became the step mother of David Cassidy, Jack's son from a previous marriage. The newlyweds embarked on their own night club tour and appeared together on television and in summer stock. During this time Shirley appeared in two more films: *April Love* (1957) with Pat Boone and *Never Steal Anything Small* (1959) opposite James Cagney. But it was her performance in a "Playhouse 90" television drama entitled *The Big Slide* that led actor Burt Lancaster to suggest her for the role of prostitute Lulu Bains in his upcoming film version of *Elmer Gantry* (1960). This risky "good girl" to "bad girl" change of pace paid off. Not only was it met with great critical acclaim but it also resulted in Miss Jones winning the Oscar™ for best supporting actress that year.

After appearing opposite James Stewart in the western *Two Rode Together* (1961), Shirley was back

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



Technicolor – 1962 – 151 minutes

Warner Bros.

Print courtesy of Warner Bros. Studio

Cast

Robert Preston	Harold Hill
Shirley Jones.....	Marian Paroo
Buddy Hackett.....	Marcellus Washburn
Hermione Gingold.....	Eulalie Mackechnie Shinn
Paul Ford.....	Mayor George Shinn
Pert Kelton	Mrs. Paroo
The Buffalo Bills	Jacey Squires, Ewart Dunlop
	Olin Britt, Oliver Hix
Timmy Everett	Tommy Djilas
Susan Luckey.....	Zaneeta Shinn
Ronny Howard	Winthrop Paroo
Harry Hickox.....	Charlie Cowell
Charles Lane	Constable Locke
Mary Wickes.....	Mrs. Squires
Sara Seegar.....	Maud Dunlop
Adnia Rice	Alma Hix
Peggy Mondo.....	Ethel Toffelmier
Jesslyn Fax	Avis Grubb
Monique Vermont	Amaryllis
Rand Barker	Duncan Shyball*
Charles Alvin Bell.....	Police Officer*
Jeannine Burnier	Jessie Shyball*
Shirley Claire	Amy Dakin*
Natalie Core.....	Truthful Smith*
Ronnie Dapo	Norbert Smith*
Roy Dean	Gilbert Hawthorne*
William Fawcett	Lester Lonnergan*
Percy Helton	Train conductor*
Patty Lee Hilka	Gracie Shinn*
Rance Howard.....	Oscar Jackson*
Delos Jewkes.....	Harley MacCauley*
Ray Kellogg	Harry Joseph*
Ann Loos.....	Stella Jackson*
Robert Lyons.....	Band member*
Therese Lyon.....	Dolly Higgins*
Ted Mapes	Townsmen*
Penelope Martin	Lila O'Brink*
Natalie Masters	Farmer's wife*
Arthur Mills.....	Herbert Malthouse*
Milton Parsons.....	Farmer (Iowa Stubborn)*
Barbara Pepper.....	Feril Hawkes (Snapping Beans)*
Charles Percheskly	Salesman*
Gary Potter.....	Dewey Malthouse*
Max Showalter.....	Salesman on the train*
David Swain	Chet Glanville*
Larri Thomas	High School Girl*
Hank Worden.....	Undertaker*
Peggy Wynne.....	Ada Nutting*

*uncredited



Written by	Meredith Willson & Franklin Lacey (<i>Book</i>) Marion Hargrove (<i>Screenplay</i>)
Produced & Directed by	Morton DaCosta
Non-Original Music.....	Meredith Willson (<i>from musical "The Music Man"</i>)
Lyricist	Meredith Willson
Orchestrators.....	Frank Comstock, Gus Levene & Ray Heindorf
Music Supervisor & Conductor	Ray Heindorf
Vocal Arrangements	Charles Henderson
Cinematographer.....	Robert Burks
Editor.....	William Ziegler
Production Supervisor.....	Joel Freeman
Assistant Director.....	Russell Llewellyn
Casting Director.....	Hoyt Bowers*
Art Director	Paul Groesse
Set Decorators.....	George James Hopkins & Phil A. Ankrom*
Costume Designer	Dorothy Jeakins
Assistant Set Costumer	Robert Fuca*
Choreographer	Onna White
Assistant Choreographer.....	Tom Panko
Sound.....	M.A. Merrick & Dolph Thomas
Make Up.....	Gordon Bau & Jean Burt Reilly
Hair Stylist	Myrl Stoltz
Miss Jones Make Up.....	Robert J. Schiffer*
Dog Trainer.....	Robert E. Blair*
First Assistant Camera	Bobby Greene*

Images courtesy of Stephen Banks.

Characters

It takes more than leading actors to create memorable films. Here are a few of the unforgettable characters from The Music Man.



BUDDY HACKETT (Marcellus Washburn) – Brooklyn born Hackett is best remembered as a popular Las Vegas headliner whose "adult" comedy acts were shocking for their time. In the 1950's Universal considered pairing him with Hugh O'Brian as an answer to the popular comedy team of Abbott and Costello but after the unsuccessful *Fireman Save My Child* (1954) the idea

was dropped. Hackett eventually portrayed Lou Costello in the TV movie *Bud And Lou* (1978). Hackett's best remembered films include *It's A Mad Mad Mad Mad World* (1963) and the original version of *The Love Bug* (1968). Hackett died in 2003.



HERMIONE GINGOLD (Eulalie Mackechnie Shinn) – One of show business' most lovable eccentrics, Gingold got her start on the London stage in 1908 playing Shakespeare and the classics. By the 1930s her interest had turned to rowdy music hall revues where she perfected her talent for quirky timing. After several years on the legitimate Broadway stage she ventured to Hollywood

where she made numerous film and television appearances throughout the 50s and 60s. She played a great comedic witch in *Bell Book And Candle* (1958) and is probably best remembered singing the duet "I Remember It Well" with Maurice Chevalier in *Gigi* (1958). Gingold died in 1987.



PAUL FORD (Mayor George Shinn) – Ford entered show business later in life. A master at puppetry, Ford was in charge of staging puppet shows at the World's Fair during the depression. Throughout the 40's Ford played a wide variety of radio, stage and film roles where he was usually cast as a gruff business executive or military brass. His big break came at age 54 when he

appeared over four seasons as Colonel Hall on "The Phil Silvers Show" (1955). Ford was also an accomplished Broadway actor and had the privilege of repeating two of his most famous stage roles in their film adaptations: *Teahouse Of The August Moon* (1956) and *Never Too Late* (1965). Ford died in 1976.



RON HOWARD (Winthrop Paroo) – Born into a family of actors, Howard made his film debut at the age of 18 months in *Frontier Woman* (1956). Throughout the 60s and 70s he frequently appeared on television where he was cast as Opie on "The Andy Griffith Show" (1960) and Richie Cunningham on "Happy Days" (1974). He wrote, starred in and directed *Grand Theft Auto*

in 1977 and has since enjoyed the role of director. Since the 70s he has directed such box office hits as *Splash* (1984), *Cocoon* (1985), *Apollo 13* (1995), *Cinderella Man* (2005, which he also produced) and most recently *The Da Vinci Code* (2006). He is also remembered for playing the young boy who brings his widowed father Glenn Ford and neighbor Shirley Jones together in *The Courtship Of Eddie's Father* (1963).

MARY WICKES (Mrs. Squires) – One of the best-loved light comedic actresses of stage and screen, Wickes worked constantly from the time she stepped on the Broadway stage in 1934 until just a few weeks before her death in 1995. Her 60 year career included over 50 films, 27 Broadway productions and 10 television series where she excelled at deliveries of caustic wit. In her early career she was often typecast as either a nurse in films like *Now, Voyager* (1942) and *The Man Who Came To Dinner* (1942) or a housekeeper as in *On Moonlight Bay* (1951) and *By The Light Of The Silvery Moon* (1953). In later years she turned to habit roles in films like *The Trouble With Angels* (1965) and *Sister Act* (1992). Her last film role was *Little Women* (1994). A longtime friend and neighbor of Lucille Ball, Wickes often appeared in episodes of "I Love Lucy" and "The Lucy Show" throughout the 60s.



**Film Society Members make it all happen.
Please join and 'party' on us. See page 8.**



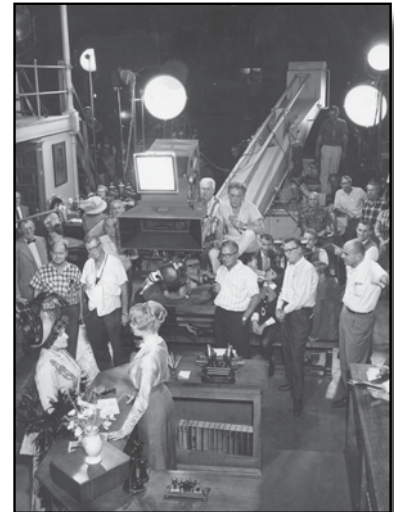
A young Ronny Howard fixes her up with his widowed father Glenn Ford in *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* (1963), she is the object of Gig Young's romantic desires in *A Ticklish Affair* (1963) and unwittingly becomes the target of con-men Marlon Brando and David Niven in *Bedtime Story* (1964). But by the mid 1960s the musical genre and romantic comedies were dead in Hollywood and Miss Jones spent the rest of the decade performing primarily in night clubs.

in the musical genre with *The Music Man* (1962). The film teamed her with Robert Preston who had originated his role on Broadway. During this time the Cassidys also had three sons of their own: Shaun, Patrick and Ryan. Shirley was pregnant with Patrick during the filming of *The Music Man* and specially designed costumes had to be constructed to camouflage her expanding stomach.

The early 60's saw Shirley in several other memorable film roles.

Shirley's career got a much needed boost when she signed on to star in the popular television series *The Partridge Family* (1970-74). The role of Shirley Partridge, the widowed mother of five musically talented children, gave her the opportunity to once again sing in front of the cameras. The show was also responsible for propelling her 20 year old step-son David Cassidy to super teen stardom.

Shirley and Jack Cassidy divorced in 1976 and the following year Jack was killed in an apartment fire. In 1977 Shirley married comedian Marty Ingles. In 1990 they collaborated on a book



In the Library, Gingold and Jones. On Camera crane, DP Robert Burks and Director Morton DaCosta (R).

entitled Shirley and Marty: An Unlikely Romance. Miss Jones continues to grace both the small and big screens. The late 1990s has found her appearing in such television hits as *Melrose Place*, *The Drew Carey Show* and *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch*. Ms. Jones is currently providing the voice of Mrs. Claus in the upcoming *Who Stole Santa's Sack?* ■

Ronald Bonk is the current Secretary of the Alex Film Society and a frequent contributor.

THE BUFFALO BILLS

The roots of perhaps the best loved barbershop quartet of the 20th century originated in 1945 when lead singer Al Shea and three others performed as The Barbershop Four on a weekly Sunday afternoon radio program in Buffalo, New York. Two years later Shea and his baritone friend Hershel Smith wanted to start a new quartet of their own. Tenor Vern Reed and bass Bill Spangenberg provided just the right voices needed to complete the four part harmony. While performing at the Buffalo Quarterback Club in 1947 they were introduced as The Buffalo Bills and the name stuck.



Diligence and practice seems to have paid off for the group. After winning 16th place at an international competition in 1948, and then 6th place in 1949 (when Smith was replaced by Dick Grapes), they began winning numerous medals and achieving unusual recognition for a barbershop

quartet in 1950. Throughout the 50's their big sound and talented arrangements resulted in offers to perform at military posts all over the world.

In 1957 composer Meredith Willson, having become familiar with the group via records and radio broadcasts, invited The Buffalo Bills to New York City to audition for his new play *The Music Man*. They were quickly cast in the roles but the requirement of relocating to the Big Apple resulted in Grapes' decision to leave the group. He was replaced by tenor Wayne "Scotty" Ward from The Great Scots Quartet of Steubenville, Ohio. The groups appearances in the hit Broadway show and as frequent guests on the Arthur Godfrey

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



Robert Reiniger Meredith Willson was born in Mason City, Iowa on May 18th 1902. At 16, Willson moved to New York City where he studied flute and piccolo at Damrosch Institute (now the Juilliard School). In 1921, Willson auditioned for John Phillip Sousa and got the job, playing flute in the Sousa band for three years. Willson also worked with Dr. Lee deForest in 1923 on some of deForest's early sound-on-film recording experiments. From 1924 to 1929, he played principal flute in the Philharmonic Symphony Society of New York (later the New York Philharmonic) under the direction of Arturo Toscanini. Willson moved to Washington and then California and was concert director for KFRC in San Francisco and then became the musical director at NBC first in San Francisco and then Hollywood.

Willson scored three feature films. *The Lost Zeppelin* (1929), Charlie

Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940), for which he received an Academy Award™ nomination, and Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* (1941). He was a Major in the U.S. Army during World War II and was the Musical Director for the Armed Forces Radio Service. There he worked with stars like George Burns and Gracie Allen. Eventually he would be the band leader and on-air character for their radio program. It is easy to conclude that Willson's gregarious, humorous and optimistic demeanor was the precursor to today's musician/composer/on-air personalities like Doc Severinson or Paul Schaefer.

As musical director / conductor, Willson is known for his work on the popular radio programs *Carefree Carnival* (1933-1936) and *Maxwell House Coffee Time* (1940-49). The theme song for *Maxwell House Coffee Time*, "You and I", became a number one hit. He had another hit with "May the Good Lord Bless You and Keep You", the closing theme for Tallulah Bankhead's *The Big Show* (1950-1953). During this period, he also wrote the University of Iowa fight song, and most especially the holiday perennial, "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas".

Many people, including his wife Reni and composer Frank Loesser, suggested Willson write something about his beloved and stubbornly independent home state. Willson worked on *The Music*

Man, originally called *The Silver Triangle* and based on his boyhood impressions of Mason City, for seven years (and over thirty drafts!) before the show opened on Broadway in 1957. The New York production ran nearly four years, winning eight Tony Awards, including Best Musical Author and Best Composer and Lyricist for Willson. The cast album won the very first Grammy Award ever presented. The movie version won an Oscar™ for Best Musical Score.

Willson also wrote *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, which opened on Broadway in 1960 and *Here's Love*, a musical adaptation of *Miracle on 34th Street*, opening in 1963. He also wrote two autobiographies, *And There I Stood With My Piccolo* and *Eggs I Have Laid*, as well as a novel, *Who Did What to Fedalia?* His musical anthology includes many more songs, symphonic and choral works.

In later years, Willson was a six-time president of the Greater Los Angeles chapter of Big Brothers. President Kennedy presented Willson with the National Big Brother Award in recognition of his service and President Johnson appointed him to the National Council of the Humanities. In 1982, the National Academy of Popular Music elected Willson to the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Meredith Willson died in Santa Monica on June 15, 1984 at the age of 82. ■

AFS Board member Frank Gladstone is another frequent contributor to the Voice of The Theatre. We especially enjoy his annual Three Stooges Big Screen Event!.



BUFFALO BILLS cont'd

radio program brought them recognition they had never even dreamed of.

After appearing in the film version of *The Music Man* in 1962, Spangenberg was forced to leave the quartet due to illness and died the following year. He was replaced by bass Jim Jones of the Sta-Laters quartet.

The Buffalo Bills made their final performance at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City on May 24, 1967. At that time it was reported that they had made 1,510 Broadway performances, 728 concerts, 675 radio shows, 672 night club appearances, 626 conventions, 216 television shows and 137 state fair performances. *The Music Man* was their only film appearance. ■

Society News

Before our shows (here at *A Hard Day's Night*), members and guests enjoy a drink on us. Join the Society and have one on the house too. See the application below.



*Fan's join
Maggie D'Abo, musician
Ian Whitcomb
and KCSN's Les Perry
for a drink at the
pre-show Member's
reception.*

*Engineers Ken Scott
and Brian Kehew
discuss recording
the Beatles
Moderated by KLOS's
Uncle Joe Benson.*



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
mail with check to: **ALEX FILM SOCIETY**
P. O. Box 4807, Glendale, CA 91222-0807

Name(s)
(please print)

Org/Business

Address

City Zip+4

Home Phone

Day Phone

E-Mail

☐ I (WE) CAN VOLUNTEER, Please call.

☐ Enclosed is my (our) donation of \$

(discount admissions good for every screening)

☐ Patron \$100
(Eight discount passes)

☐ Family/dual \$40
(Four discount passes)

☐ Individual \$25
(Two discount passes)

☐ Senior/Student \$15
(One pass) Senior over 60,
F/T student graduation date:

Please list your two favorite films:

www.AlexFilmSociety.org

Tickets: 818.243.2539

Saturday, September 16 at 8 pm only

JANET KLEIN Headlines 5 LIVE ACTS

plus **CHARLIE CHAPLIN & BUSTER KEATON** on Screen!



VAUDEVILLE EXTRAVAGANZA!

Our 13th season kicks off with the most anticipated family event held annually at the Alex. For one night only, AFS pays tribute to the grand theatre's roots with an eclectic mix of live acts that made vaudeville so beloved by a generation of fans. Headlining our seventh annual vaudeville night will be the enchanting Ukulele Chanteuse Janet Klein and her Parlor Boys, performing nostalgic music from the vaudeville era. Other acts include a tribute to Abbott & Costello; juggler Beejay Joyer; glass harmonica and magical transformations. **Film program includes Chaplin's ONE A.M. and Keaton's PARDON MY BERTH MARKS.**

Saturday, October 28 at 2 and 8 pm only

First Film With the Amazing New Wonder **EMERGO: The Thrills Fly Right Into The Audience!**

HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL

Vincent Price invites five strangers to a sinister hilltop mansion for his wife's haunted-house birthday party, promising each guest \$10,000 to spend the night. With a ceiling that drips blood and an acid vat in the basement, it seems only a matter of time before tragedy strikes. Price, ever the thoughtful host, has even provided loaded guns as party favors. *House On Haunted Hill* was a blockbuster for exploitation producer William Castle. With the horrifying effect process dubbed EMERGO and the scenery-chewing performances of bug-eyed Elisha Cook and slinky Carol Ohmart, Castle had crowds lining up for this camp horror classic. Price, at the start of his glorious horror film career, is supercilious, sardonic and lethally charming as the demented host. Recreating EMERGO, AFS promises to give you the chills, thrills and laughs that are hallmarks of classic October film events at the Alex. Allied Artist release of a William Castle Production (1959).



Saturday, November 25 at 2 and 8 pm only

"Saving Private Curry... Stooges in Arms"

THREE STOOGES™ BIG SCREEN EVENT!

We celebrate the 9th year of our popular "Stooge-fest," a collection of five classic short subjects cherry picked from the Columbia Pictures' vaults by our blue ribbon panel of Stoooge-o-philos. Each of the shorts has a military or wartime theme.

VOICE of the THEATRE

Published by and for members of the Alex Film Society

P. O. Box 4807 • Glendale, CA 91222 • 818.754.8250

ClassicFilms@AlexFilmSociety.org

\$3 (mailed free with membership)

editor randy carter
design/layout brian ellis
printer alco printing, glendale