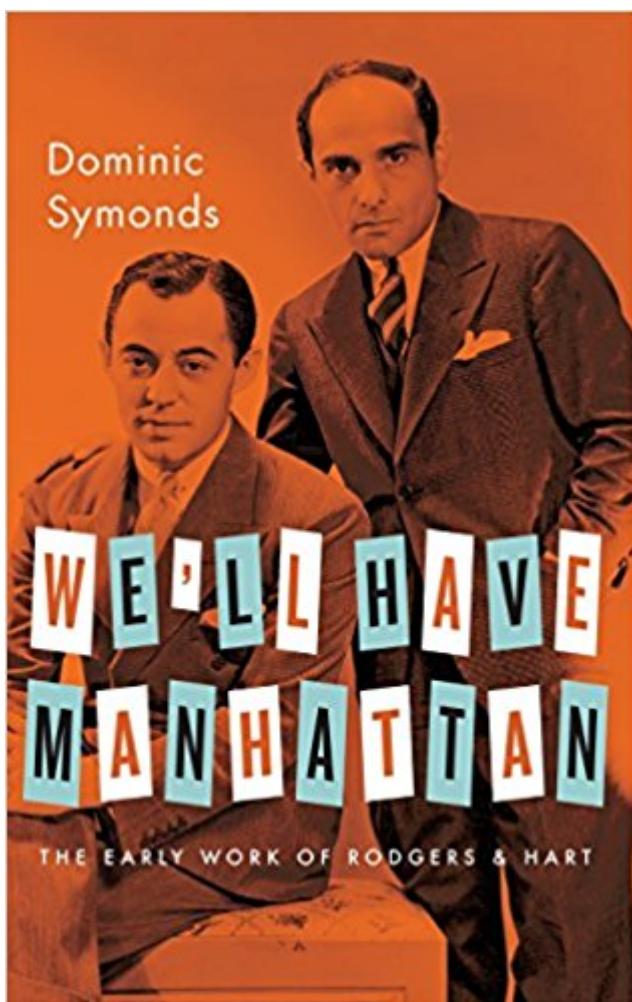


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We'll Have Manhattan: The Early Work Of Rodgers & Hart (Broadway Legacies)



Synopsis

Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart are one of the defining duos of musical theater, contributing dozens of classic songs to the Great American Songbook and working together on over 40 shows before Hart's death. With hit after hit on both Broadway and the West End, they produced many of the celebrated songs of the '20s and '30s--such as "Manhattan," "The Lady is a Tramp," and "Bewitched"--that remain popular favorites with great cultural resonance today. Yet the early years of these iconic collaborators have remained largely unexamined. *We'll Have Manhattan: The Early Work of Rodgers & Hart* provides unprecedented insight into the first, formative period of Rodgers and Hart's collaboration. Author Dominic Symonds examines the pair and their work from their first meeting in 1919 to their brief flirtation with Hollywood in the early 1930s as they left the theater to explore sound film. During this time, their output was prodigious, progressive, and experimental. They developed their characteristic style and a new approach to musical theater writing that provided the groundwork for the development of the Broadway musical. Symonds also analyzes the theme of identity that runs throughout Rodgers and Hart's work, how the business side of the theater affected their artistic output, and their continued experimentation with a song's dramatic role within a narrative. *We'll Have Manhattan* goes beyond a biographical or historical look at Rodgers and Hart's early years--it's also an accessible but authoritative study of their material. Symonds documents their early shows and provides deft critical and analytical commentary on their evolving practice and its influence on the subsequent development of the American musical. Fans of musical theater and devotees of Rodgers and Hart will find this definitive exploration of their early works to be an essential addition to their Broadway library.

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Customer Reviews

"The author succeeds in all respects...a fulsome balance of history, biography, musicology, and analysis that will help readers understand the two men's contribution to the establishment of an integrated musical form. Essential" --Choice "...[A] meticulous exploration of a songwriting duo..." - New York Times"Mr. Symonds' enthusiasm for early Rodgers and Hart is, if anything, equal to their own gusto." - Washington Times"In We'll Have Manhattan: The Early Work of Rodgers and Hart, Dominic Symonds deftly explores the period from 1919 to 1931 when the celebrated team did their chronological and artistic growing up. Impeccably researched and sensitively written, this essential book offers detailed but accessibly presented musical and lyrical analyses as well as insights into two young geniuses as they were becoming, but had not yet become, the icons of the American songbook we now know them to be. Highly recommended."-Jim Lovensheimer, author of South Pacific: Paradise Rewritten"Symonds writes engagingly and colorfully, yet with exhaustive research and expertise, about these lesser-known shows and the personalities that created them; scholars and fans alike will benefit from this much-needed study of Rodgers and Hart's early years. He upends the narrative of how the Broadway musical became 'integrated,' arguing that having songs fit plots and serve characters was as much a response to external pressures - from critics, producers, and a sense of America's struggle for identity - as an artistic pursuit. Full of context and history, this study also pauses to dig into the material; this book is worth reading just to watch Symonds examine 'Thou Swell' from every conceivable musical and cultural angle."-Jessica Sternfeld, author of The Megamusical"Symonds's contributions to the literature are manifold...there is much to admire about We'll Have Manhattan."--Notes

Dominic Symonds is Reader in Drama at the University of Lincoln and founding editor of the journal Studies in Musical Theatre. He is also a director and writer for musical theatre.

Dominic Symonds has written a most entertaining and yet scholarly book about Rodgers and Hart's early years; particularly interesting are his chapters about their now forgotten London shows, most of whose songs are rarely played or sung anymore. Symonds also draws our attention to the now forgotten contribution of their college friend Herbert Fields, brother of the lyricist Dorothy, who wrote

the books for many of their early shows and encouraged their experiments musically and dramatically. What emerges here is not the now commonly accepted picture of the business-like but rather methodical Rodgers putting up with the unreliable alcoholic homosexual Hart, but a more three-dimensional depiction of two hard-working theater professionals, young men on the rise, learning their craft and enjoying the good life, together. The young Rodgers, always in the shadow of Gershwin, longed to be taken more seriously as a musician. Symonds shows that he may have studied composition secretly in Europe on his many trips abroad, but chose never to publicize it. The fun-loving Hart, the quintessential New Yorker, comes off here as someone without pretension, perfectly content to enjoy all that early success afforded him but dedicated to advancing the standards of the musical theater. Not quite the Gilbert & Sullivan symbiosis, the odd couple, as often depicted in recent biographies. True friends and collaborators, as their music demonstrates.

This a very academic view of the work of Rodgers and Hart, written by a British Academic. While I will not attempt to comment on Mr. Synods review of the technically musical attributes of Rodgers' music, I will say that his knowledge of New York City, especially Manhattan in the first 50 years of the last century is lacking. To say in the Introduction (page 9) of the book that Lorenz Hart was born on the Upper East Side of Manhattan in 1895 shows his utter ignorance of Manhattan and the Jewish community of the day! Hart, a Jew, was born in the Lower East Side Jewish enclave where indeed the majority of New York Jews of the era were born, a community of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe. Manhattan's Upper East Side at the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries was still being developed, and was by far the most WASP community on the island. Further, Mr. Symonds' knowledge of the Manhattan "accent" of the first half of the 20th century is iffy at least, or perhaps just deficient. Larry Hart, who was a poet and genius at lyric writing uses that way of speaking often in his lyrics, he further employs ways of rhyming that are based on that particular "lingo". A form of American English that I am sure is unfamiliar to the author. I also think that Symonds has also failed to look deeply into the origins of story lines and backgrounds of the musicals that Rodgers and Hart wrote. I certainly understand such oversights and errors in a work by a British academic who has spent little time in our country, much less in New York City, or around the milieu of New York Musical Theater, but he really ought to make an attempt to get the lives and work of perhaps Broadway's most influential composers right! Come to the City (not the City of London), live among the theater community and the Jewish community, learn from those who remember and lived it what the Broadway Musical Theater and Rodgers and Hart were all about, then revise your book! Because this edition misses much that even "sometime" theater history buffs know by heart!

I am nearly finished with this book, I've been writing comments as I go, an odd way to review a book, but I'm doing this because simply I keep thinking of things I want to say about what I read, and I am bursting to say them, and also know that if I don't get them out on the spot, I will just forget them. And I want to say here and now that this is a very difficult book to read. Names long dead (major and minor) are discussed as though they might show up in the morning news. Plots and all their revisions (their evolution) before the show reaches Broadway are described, practically down to who enters stage-left in Act Two and why. And a knowledge of what is called music theory is required to get through the analyses of Rodgers music and its place in American music, Though according to Symonds, the creation of purely American music (as opposed to European - Herbert, Friml, Romberg) started around 1900 with Kern, Berlin and Gershwin. Rodgers began in the mid-20s, though Symonds says that Rodgers finally led the way in creating what became American popular music - don't turn on your radio to hear it, it has been completely obliterated - the evolution became a devolution - I have asked several people the past few weeks - Rodgers is unknown, his songs with Hart are unknown, even his shows with Hammerstein draw a blank - even the infamous (right word) "Sound of Music" is unknown. However. What I intended to say is that the fact that most of Symonds' book is over my head does not make it an inferior book. It is scrupulously researched, loaded with info that many people CAN understand, plainly written, but for all that, is in no way smug or condescending.I probably will not buy the sequel - not that is if it takes up after 1943 and continues with Hammerstein. I have no more interest in Oscar Hammerstein's lofty sentiments than I have in Hart's sex life.I think this book is wonderful. Why is it always the the British who are doing this? Thumb through 's reissues of old musicals, and see how many come from England. I am not finished with this book (just finished an exhaustive and exhausting discussing of "Dearest Enemy") and have some things to say. I assume this author like his publisher (Oxford) is English. His devotion to America is unbelievable. "Dearest Enemy" was inspired by an incident in American history, but beyond that is patriotic ("revisionist") fiction. The author tells the plot of the show (including the original plot and first two tentative titles), and also tells exactly what did take place in history. Then justifies the changes, both musical and national justifications. One reviewer (apparently paid for for his opinion) happens to be right. There is much music theory in this book. One thing about that. The author explains the use of arpeggios in several of Rodgers' tunes. Sondheim's only hit is all arpeggios. Also someone in the 20s (antedating Sondheim's identical remark) commented that Hart cared more about how he said a thing than he did about what he said. I disagreed when Sondheim said that, and I still disagree. Glimpses of R&H's private lives come in,

but this sort of thing is not the kind of biography this is. It is a history of their work, not their lives and personalities. Nolan (2 books) and Rodgers' autobio are the places to go for that and other human interest. Still there is some interesting facts in it - like Helen Ford's devotion to the show and her conviction that her entrance (naked except in a barrel) would make a star of her. It is though a wonderful book. I am not very bright, am told I am very gullible, and am easily snowed. So I don't know how much of what this author says about European music, the encroachment and its supplanting by jazz (I never did know what jazz is), the syncopation, sexuality and hyper-Americanism of jazz - in general his explanation of the creation of purely American music (which has certainly been stamped into oblivion now) is true, and its evolution, and its greatest exponent being Rodgers himself - is true and is demonstrated by his analysis of Rodgers' music, especially his tunes. However the actual beginning of American music (as opposed to European) was all new to me and fascinating. It all started with Kern, Berlin and Gershwin - who all went before Rodgers. And some of Romberg's songs were put in one of RH's earliest shows (before The Garrick Gaeties). RH didn't know that had been done, incidentally, til they went to opening night! His discussion of Hart and his (early) debt to GS of course is easy to understand and up to a point, believe. One last note on the theater's Americanism - and the pseudo-factuality of it. The last song in Berlin's last show (and my favorite show of his) - "It's A Great Country" - goes "take a look in your history book and you'll see why we should be proud". well, you may be proud if Texas achieves its intention to rewrite American history books. Not otherwise. I'm writing this several days later after reading over half the book, into "Conn Yank". There is practically no human interest in it at all. Just endless lists of names I never heard of, dates before my time, and descriptions of plots and revisions. The least boring thing I've read so far is a synopsis of Twain's "Conn Yank" - I never read the Twain. And I had no idea it was such a violent bloodbath. I never thought Twain could or would write such a thing, even as a satire. I doubt I'll finish reading this book. The best word to describe it is DENSE. The onrush of information never leaves off for a minute. I won't buy the sequel. It's a few days later. This is a very odd way to review a book. I'm almost finished with "Chee-Chee", RH's scandalous flop. "Chee-Chee" as I suppose most people know is a show about castration. As usual, the author goes into exhaustive plot detail, and it is almost impossible to read. Just before this, in his discussion of "Conn Yank", he gives another very technical analysis of Rodger's music. The chapter on "Chee-Chee" however has one thing going for it. The author gives some very salacious info on the sex habits of some important people (Porter, Woolley, Hart, West), and also a discussion of sex and homosexuality in shows of the late 20s. The National Enquirer couldn't have written this any better. Though I'm not a prude, had some idea of these things already, and am gay myself, I found

this chapter very upsetting. But apparently "Chee-Chee" needn't have been the flop it was. The producer seems to have got cold feet and closed it after 31 performances. But the main (if not only) critical objection to it was the subject matter, not the quality of the show, exactly as the case with "Pal Joey", hardly a bad show. And in fact, about this same time Mae West was jailed for a short time on a morals charge for her show called merely "SEX". Most of the critics (reliable ones) liked it very much, praised its daring and much to Rodgers delight, praised its "sung-through" structure, a thing Rodgers was aiming for (and brought off in his movies). Rodgers at the time of the show was clearly very happy and excited about "Chee-Chee". It wasn't until his auto-bio many years later that he disowned and repudiated everything about the show, laying the blame for it (if I remember) squarely on the influence of Hart and his trashy lifestyle, friends and taste. According to Symonds there were only six full-length songs in the show, but many short musical bits. Many years ago Betty Comden recorded onto LP five of these songs (she did not sing the sixth, called "The Tartar Song"). I have the LP. I've never found it on CD. The critics liked the music very much, saw Rodgers in his prime, and Hart at his "showy" best. On the other side of Comden's LP are songs from an unsuccessful Gershwin show, "Treasure Girl". I have never liked the Gershwins and know nothing about these songs or the show. But I do remember one stanza from an Ira lyric that I love - "Did you pick/That cravat?/You did that?/Here's your hat./I don't think I'll fall in love today." Stepping back a second from Symonds' book, American blue laws, history. Fields' closing the show, the opinions of the critics - pro and con, Rodgers' unexplained change of heart about the show, Hart's so-called "trashy friends and taste" etc. etc - and looking at the thing for myself - castration and its function in this plot are a new and clever idea for a musical. That's all. I never saw the show (according to Symonds it was recently revived) and have heard only 5 songs from it. Also, this may come later, Symonds hasn't mentioned it, but Rodgers said in his auto-bio that it tickled him to work a few bars from Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" into the score, and it delighted him even more when several people in the audience laughed. One last word on "Chee-Chee". It was neither a bad nor unsuccessful show. Fields closed it out of fear of the new and newly enforced censorship of shows in NYC. The law (called "the padlock law") was that any producer found "guilty" of "indecency" (sex) in court, was forbidden to use his theater for a year. This frightened even the likes of Billy Rose and the Shuberts. Mae West had a show in a theater very close to "Chee-Chee", and that alarmed Fields as well. Also, according to Symonds, Fields specialized in "family entertainment". The final chapters and sections talk about people, not plot revisions and the importance of dotted quarter notes. It includes Rodgers' envy of Gershwin and his attempt to do what he did (no better way to say it), a jealousy that went away when Gershwin died, and the Hollywood explosion which attracted RH because their shows

were no longer brilliant (I have recordings of nearly all these "inferior" songs and without exception I like them very much).

Too technical

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