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# OK! The Story Of Oklahoma!: A Celebration Of America's Most Beloved Musical (Applause Books)



## Synopsis

(Applause Books). Oklahoma! opened nearly sixty years ago and instantly made musical theatre history. It was a daring ahead-of-its-time piece of dazzlingly inventive theatre that exploded every myth about what constitutes a successful musical. Revised and updated to include a special section on the Royal National Theatre's production that Cameron Mackintosh is presenting on Broadway in spring of 2002, OK! The Story of "Oklahoma!" celebrates this watershed work that has taken its place in the pantheon of American musical theatre.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The first pairing of Richard Rodgers's music and Oscar Hammerstein's lyrics, along with Agnes de Mille's choreography, turned the sentimental *Green Grow the Lilacs*, written by a playwright named Lynn Riggs, into a phenomenon that was to set the standard for musical theater. And few first-nighters attending the 1943 Broadway opening of *Oklahoma!* could have known that they were witnessing the genesis of modern musical comedy. Conveying a "Hey, I was there" ambience, Wilk (*Don't Raise the Bridge Lower the River*), author of 20 books, many of them on the performing arts, here recounts the arduous odyssey of the Theatre Guild-Shubert undertaking from conception to SRO box-office success. Readers are made privy to the joys and sorrows of struggling for theatrical perfection while romancing investors, battling auditors, overcoming cynical critics--and coping with a measles-ridden cast. The book, which combines scores of black-and-white illustrations with Wilk's delightful text, has the mark of a hit, or, to paraphrase Agnes de Mille's unabated enthusiasm for the

show: "My God, this is put together with real skill." Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.  
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March 31, 1993 will mark the 50th anniversary of the opening of Rodgers and Hammerstein's first collaboration, Oklahoma! During tryouts in New Haven and Boston, this milestone of American musical theater was billed under the optimistic title *Away We Go*. Most theater aficionados are familiar with the other names associated with the production: Agnes de Mille, Alfred Drake, and Celeste Holm. This delightfully written and profusely illustrated book tells the story of a collaboration that didn't take place (Rodgers and Hart) and a production group that would have gone out of existence without a hit (Theatre Guild). Each aspect of mounting the now classic musical is recounted with anecdotes from surviving cast members and production staff. The volume is not as lavish as Ethan Mordden's *Rodgers and Hammerstein* (Abrams, 1992), but it is the best work available on this particular show. It's a lot better than just "OK." For all libraries.- Diane H. Albosta, Episcopal H.S. Lib., Alexandria, Va. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A truly excellent look at the making of the original Broadway production ! Author Wilk interviewed many of the surviving members of that cast & crew when he originally penned this back in the early 1990's. A must for musical & theatre buffs !!!

Superb overview of the making of a legendary musical, with all sorts of behind-the-scenes stories,. Wilk is maybe too much of a cheerleader for the show but he tells the story with verve and insight.

I liked how the author used authentic quotes and told the story well. This is great for anyone doing a research paper or simply interested in the show

Now that it seems certain that the acclaimed British revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's OKLAHOMA! is headed to Broadway, perhaps the publishers of this invaluable book will re-release it? Max Wilk has assembled facts, memorabilia (including original ads, costume designs, etc.) cast photographs, interviews with the authors...in fact, everything that has anything to do with this musical (including short, contemporary comments by no less than director/producer, Harold Prince and composer/lyricist, Stephen Sondheim) which became a theatrical, historical phenomenon. Wilk has an easy, very readable style and the story of how this show came to be and how, in fact,

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein ever came to work together (this WAS, remember, their very first collaboration), how the musical was cast, rehearsed, directed, choreographed, had its title changed from "Away We Go!", how theatre-goers begged and bartered for impossible-to-purchase tickets, and how this truly inspired musical "took off like a prairie wildfire" is exciting and a real page-turner. If you have any interest in live theatre, in musicals, in America during WW2, I urge you to, somehow, find this fascinating and handsome book.

This is the kind of book that used to excite me, books all about the Broadway musical. Has there ever been a musical with as much to offer as OKLAHOMA? It wasn't always a surefire hit, for before it began, people thought, oh well, this is a pretty slow show, no girls, no big numbers, and livestock on the stage. The powerful imagination of Oscar Hammerstein II caught that cornsilk and lit it on fire with the poetry of his lyrics. Who can ever forget "All the cattle are standing like statues." Mr Max Wilk evidently knows his OKLAHOMA and he has had great luck tracking down OKLAHOMA memorabilia. There are ticket stubs, photos of people watching the show, and the memories of those who first went to Broadway's "St James Theater" in March 1943 and made theatrical history. Richard Rodgers had been a topnotch Broadway composer for twenty years or more before OKLAHOMA but for one reason or another his music never really got under the skin of the mass US public. He had been partnered with the divinely talented Lorenz Hart for most of that time, and perhaps Hart had been caviare to the general? At any rate it took Oscar Hammerstein to begin Rodgers' incredible parade of shows with a heart. Rodgers wanted Charlotte Greenwood to play Aunt Eller but she was so busy she didn't get to play the part until the movie version many years later. (And she was great at it, still doing her trademark kicks with her elastic legs.) American soldiers in New York made the show a hit. Those hard men would sit in the back rows of the St James and weep like babies for love of the great land. In London, too, when OKLAHOMA travelled there, American soldiers sold out house after house, for when you're an American GI overseas there's nothing like a heaping dose of "We know we belong to the land" and the attending flagwaving. Wilk has it all on the ball, including the circumstances that led to the hiring of Agnes de Mille, top choreographer, to do the dances and ballets for this groundbreaking show. She was a strange creature, half magnet, half steel, but she brought something original to the Broadway stage, and her best dances have a unique poetry distilled out of a particular time and space. The movie version of OKLAHOMA preserves their flavor well.

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