



Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical

Andrea Most

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From 1925 to 1951--three chaotic decades of depression, war, and social upheaval--Jewish writers brought to the musical stage a powerfully appealing vision of America fashioned through song and dance. It was an optimistic, meritocratic, selectively inclusive America in which Jews could at once lose and find themselves--assimilation enacted onstage and off, as Andrea Most shows. This book examines two interwoven narratives crucial to an understanding of twentieth-century American culture: the stories of Jewish acculturation and of the development of the American musical.

Here we delve into the work of the most influential artists of the genre during the years surrounding World War II--Irving Berlin, Eddie Cantor, Dorothy and Herbert Fields, George and Ira Gershwin, Oscar Hammerstein, Lorenz Hart, and Richard Rodgers--and encounter new interpretations of classics such as *The Jazz Singer*, *Whoopie*, *Girl Crazy*, *Babes in Arms*, *Oklahoma!*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*. Most's analysis reveals how these brilliant composers, librettists, and performers transformed the experience of New York Jews into the grand, even sacred acts of being American. Read in the context of memoirs, correspondence, production designs, photographs, and newspaper clippings, the Broadway musical clearly emerges as a form by which Jewish artists negotiated their entrance into secular American society. In this book we see how the communities these musicals invented and the anthems they popularized constructed a vision of America that fostered self-understanding as the nation became a global power.

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