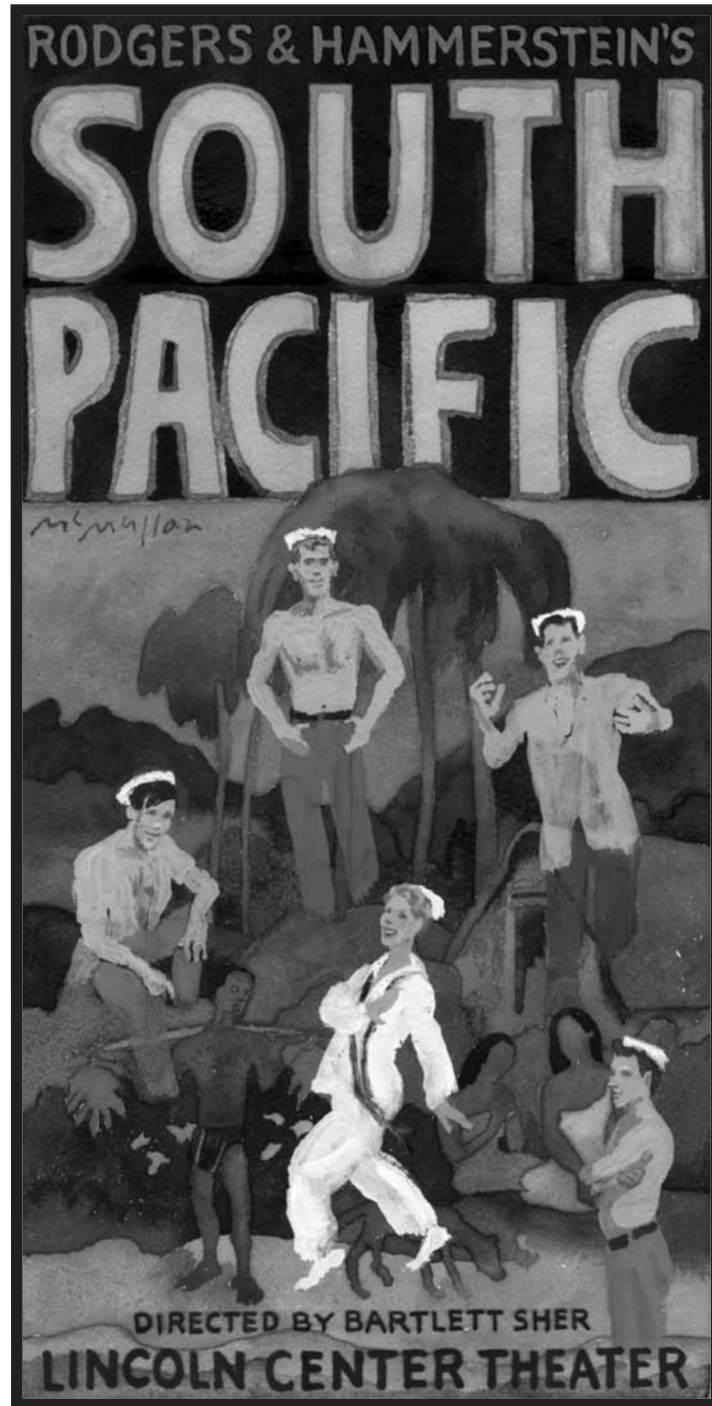


# Study Guide for Teachers



This study guide is supported by a generous grant from Citi Foundation



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# LINCOLN CENTER THEATER AT THE VIVIAN BEAUMONT

under the direction of  
ANDRÉ BISHOP and BERNARD GERSTEN

in association with  
BOB BOYETT  
presents

## RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S SOUTH PACIFIC

Music RICHARD RODGERS Lyrics OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II  
Book OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II and JOSHUA LOGAN  
Adapted from the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Tales of the South Pacific* by JAMES A. MICHENER  
Original stage production directed by JOSHUA LOGAN

with  
KELLI O'HARA PAULO SZOT

MATTHEW MORRISON DANNY BURSTEIN LORETTA ABLES SAYRE  
SEAN CULLEN VICTOR HAWKS LUKA KAIN LI JUN LI  
LAURISSA ROMAIN SKIPP SUDDUTH NOAH WEISBERG

and

BECCA AYERS WENDI BERGAMINI GENSON BLIMLINE GRADY McLEOD BOWMAN CHARLIE BRADY  
MATT CAPLAN CHRISTIAN CARTER HELMAR AUGUSTUS COOPER JEREMY DAVIS  
MARGOT DE LA BARRE CHRISTIAN DELCROIX LAURA MARIE DUNCAN MIKE EVARISTE  
LAURA GRIFFITH LISA HOWARD MARYANN HU ZACHARY JAMES ROBERT LENZI  
GARRETT LONG NICK MAYO GEORGE MERRICK WILLIAM MICHALS KIMBER MONROE  
EMILY MORALES DARIUS NICHOLS GEORGE PSOMAS ANDREW SAMONSKY JEROLD E. SOLOMON

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Costumes  
CATHERINE ZUBER

Lighting  
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Sound  
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BARTLETT SHER

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A STUDY GUIDE by Victoria Abrash

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# How to Use this Study Guide

The body of this study guide is divided into four major parts. Each of these parts includes suggested activities and discussion topics that you might wish to use with your class. A guide to the relevant strands of teaching and learning in the arts as defined by New York City's Blueprint for the Arts in Theater follows immediately after this section.

The study guide is intended to provide you with information and materials that may help to deepen the experience of *South Pacific* for your class. You may wish simply to review the material and draw out the information that is useful to you in your teaching, or you may wish to share certain sections with your class. This study guide has been designed so that individual sections can easily be copied as handouts for your class. This study guide is meant to be a resource, and you should feel free to use it in whatever way you find most useful.

The first section, **The Play: About *South Pacific***, provides background information on the playwright and the play. If your class will be reading the script of *South Pacific*, or watching the video of a film version, this section would be a good accompaniment to your discussion of the text. If you are not reading the script, it will still provide useful material to explore before seeing the play.

The second section, **The Production: About *South Pacific* at Lincoln Center Theater**, gives details about the choices that went into the Lincoln Center Theater production of *South Pacific*. It includes information on how the director and designers approached the play; background on their sources of inspiration and research; and supplementary information on the time, place and topics of the play, which may enrich your classroom preparation and discussion of the play. This section might be especially useful to explore immediately before seeing the production at Lincoln Center Theater.

The third section, **The Background**, offers the kind of information that helped the artists bring *South Pacific* from the page to the stage, along with material that might be useful to more fully understand and appreciate the action, characters, setting, and themes of the play.

The fourth and final major section of the study guide, **Activities for Further Exploration After Seeing *South Pacific***, is exactly what its name suggests. It includes post-performance discussion topics and a wide range of activities, designed to engage students with a variety of different learning styles. The activities are divided into three categories according to their focus: Listen, Look and Language. You may wish to select activities for your class or let students select the activities that most engage their interest.

The **Resources** section provides information on books, websites and other resources that you might wish to use for further study of the play.

# New York City's Blueprint for the Arts: Theater

Throughout this study guide, you will find activities that connect the study of the Lincoln Center Theater production of *South Pacific* to the following arts standards (the full text of the Blueprint can be downloaded from [www.nycenet.edu/projectarts](http://www.nycenet.edu/projectarts)).

The Five Strands of Teaching and Learning in Theater:

## **1. Theater Making: Acting, Playwriting/Play Making, Designing and Technical Theater, and Directing**

Theater Making provides multiple avenues for active learning. Through the interpretation of dramatic literature and the creation of their own works, students engage as writers, actors, designers, directors and technicians. Students learn to use their minds, bodies, voices, emotions, and sense of artistry to examine the world and its meaning.

## **2. Developing Theater Literacy**

Theater Literacy provides the skills and knowledge to deepen a student's understanding of the many forms and genres of theater. Students explore theater history and the multiple roles that theater plays in society. They use theater vocabulary when making and responding to performance, and develop critical, analytical and writing skills through observing, discussing and responding to live theater and dramatic literature. In this strand, dramatic literature is also viewed as a catalyst for production and performance. Therefore, the associated activities are experiential in nature and support Theater Making as well as a deeper understanding of text.

## **3. Making Connections**

Students make connections to theater by developing an understanding of self and others. They respond to theater by identifying personal issues and universal themes in performance and in dramatic text. They investigate theater by examining the integration of other arts into a complex multi-media art form. Additionally, students connect and apply learning in other disciplines to their inclusive understanding of theater.

## **4. Working With Community and Cultural Resources**

Community resources that support Theater Making, theater literacy, theater connections and career exploration, expand students' opportunities for learning. Active partnerships that combine school, professional and community resources create rich avenues for student and teacher innovation in the classroom and in production. Additionally, students validate their learning by sharing and performing outside of the classroom and in partnership with artists and organizations in support of community efforts.

## **5. Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning**

Students develop audience skills and a connection to theater that allows them to value theater throughout their lives. They explore the scope and variety of theater careers in teaching, production, performance, criticism, design, technical theater and related occupations, and they investigate how these careers align with their personal goals and aspirations.





Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II working on the score of *South Pacific*, 1949. Photo courtesy of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization.

SECTION II

*About South Pacific*

# About *South Pacific*

## The Writers:

### Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II

With Richard Rodgers composing the music and Oscar Hammerstein II writing the words, Rodgers and Hammerstein became perhaps the most successful writing team in the history of musical theater. Through a series of groundbreaking shows throughout the 1940's and 1950's, they changed the face of the American theater.

Richard Rodgers (1902–1979), achieved fame through twenty years of writing songs, from the 1920's through the early 1940's, with lyricist Lorenz Hart. Together they wrote more than 40 lighthearted, sophisticated musical comedies, including *On Your Toes*, *Babes in Arms*, *The Boys from Syracuse*, *I Married an Angel* and *Pal Joey*.

At the same time, Oscar Hammerstein II (1895–1960) became famed for his work writing the words for operettas, or “light opera” which had its roots in 19th century Europe. He collaborated with a number of composers, including Rudolf Friml and Sigmund Romberg. The shows he wrote include *The Desert Song*, *Rose-Marie* and *The New Moon*. He tackled many challenging issues in his work, including racial issues. *Show Boat*, written in 1927 with Jerome Kern, and *Carmen Jones*, was an all-black revisiting of Georges Bizet's tragic opera *Carmen*.

Rodgers and Hammerstein first collaborated in 1943 on *Oklahoma!*, a show that is widely considered to be the first true musical play, combining elements of musical comedy and operetta to create a more integrated, dramatic musical form than had been seen before. Their subsequent works include *Carousel*, *Allegro*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *Me and Juliet*, *Pipe Dream*, *Flower Drum Song* and *The Sound of Music*. They also wrote the movie musical, *State Fair*, and for television, *Cinderella*. Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals won many honors, including a total of 35 Tony Awards, 15 Academy Awards, 2 Pulitzer Prizes, 2 Grammy Awards and 2 Emmy Awards.

Oscar Hammerstein II died in 1960, but Rodgers continued to write for the Broadway stage. *No Strings*, the first show he wrote without a partner, won Tony Awards for both music and lyrics. He followed it with *Do I Hear a Waltz?*, *Two by Two*, *Rex* and *I Remember Mama*, which opened on Broadway in 1979, only a few months before Rodgers died.

## The Co-Author: Joshua Logan

Joshua Logan brought the idea for *South Pacific* to Rodgers and Hammerstein, although originally he only intended to be the show's director. But Hammerstein found himself having trouble writing military jargon and Logan, who had served in the military, offered to help. Although, at this point Hammerstein had not co-written a libretto for almost 20 years, he discovered that Logan was a helpful sounding board. And so Logan became Hammerstein's co-author.

Joshua Logan was born in Texarkana, Texas in 1908 and became a leading director, writer and producer in theater and in movies. He attended Princeton University, but left before graduating to study with the famous Russian director and acting teacher, Konstantin Stanislavsky in Moscow.

In 1928 he was a founding member of the University Players, a theater company on Cape Cod, with Henry Fonda and James Stewart, both of whom went on to become major stars. Logan directed his first Broadway play in 1935. His production of *On Borrowed Time* in 1938 was the first of a string of major hit shows, including *I Married an Angel*, *Knickerbocker Holiday*, *Morning's at Seven*, *Two for the Show*, and *Higher and*



Joshua (Josh) Logan in rehearsal for *South Pacific* (1949). Photo courtesy of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization.



*Higher*. His service in World War II was postponed so that he could direct *By Jupiter* in 1942 before he left for war. He directed *This Is The Army* during his service and served with the U.S. Air Force Combat Intelligence.

After the war, he had an impressive run of hit plays and musicals, including *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Mister Roberts* (which he also co-wrote), and *South Pacific* (for which he co-wrote the book).

He also had a successful movie career, directing many films including *Picnic*, *Bus Stop*, and *Camelot*. He died in 1988.

### **The Novelist: James Michener**

James Michener wrote the original book, *Tales of the South Pacific*, which Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan adapted into *South Pacific*.

James Michener was born in New York City in 1907 and grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. His first career was teaching teachers, after which he edited textbooks until he joined the Navy during World War II. As a lieutenant junior grade he was stationed at Espiritu Santo in the South Pacific. When he returned, he published *Tales of the South Pacific*, based on his wartime experiences, and the book's success began his career as one of America's leading authors.

*Tales of the South Pacific* won Michener the 1948 Pulitzer Prize, and was, of course, the basis for *South Pacific*. Over the next 40 years, he wrote 23 novels, 5 art books, a book of sonnets and literally hundreds of articles, introductions, contributions to collections and other works. He became particularly known for well-researched historical fiction, such as *Hawaii*, *Chesapeake*, *Space*, *Texas*, and *Alaska*.

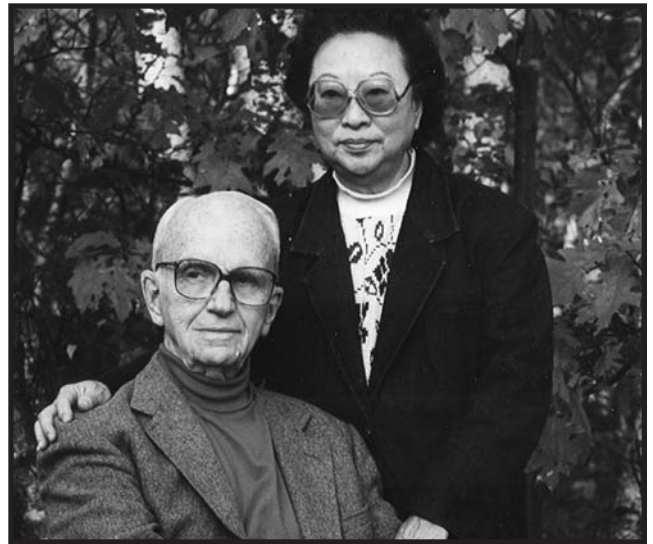
Michener also ran for Congress and took on political roles including serving as a cultural ambassador to many countries. He was a member of the Advisory Council to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the advisory committee of the U.S. Postal Service.

In addition to his Pulitzer Prize, Michener received many honors, including the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award given by the United States and an award from the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

He died in 1997, at age 90.

### **Classic American Musical Theater**

*South Pacific* is one of the best examples of a unique American art form: the musical play. Musical theater as we know it today evolved out of many traditional forms



James A. and Mari Sabusawa Michener, photo by Bob Gross, 1991. Courtesy of the James A. Michener Art Museum Archives.

of entertainment from all over the world. Their transformation into the musical happened right here in New York City, and to a large degree, thanks to Rodgers and Hammerstein, creators of *South Pacific*.

Music and theater have co-existed, probably forever, and have been on American stages together since before the founding of the nation. Each immigrant group that arrived brought its own entertainments to add to the mix. Musical theater forms that originated in Vienna, London, Ireland, and Eastern Europe, and elsewhere all found new life in the United States. Home grown musical forms sprang up in New Orleans, the West and throughout the rest of the nation. And in the nineteenth century, uniquely American forms of theatrical entertainment began to emerge from this mix.

The modern American musical has roots in a range of musical entertainments. Revues were popular shows made up of unrelated sketches and songs, like *Saturday Night Live*. Many different kinds of revues, including minstrelsy, burlesque, vaudeville, and variety shows were designed to amuse an audience with popular music, broad humor, stereotypes and showgirls.

Operetta had its roots in Europe. It involved light-hearted, usually romantic stories and was geared to an urban audience. Oscar Hammerstein II was a master at writing the words for operettas for two decades before he began to work with Richard Rodgers.

Early American musical comedy grew out of vaudeville and music hall and was generally pitched at a working class audience. Richard Rodgers was a leading composer of musical comedies for twenty years before he began to work with Oscar Hammerstein II.

Throughout the 1920's and 1930's, all of these forms began to come together in new and interesting ways. But it was only when Rodgers and Hammerstein got together that the more serious, artistic, and integrated form known as the "book musical" came into being.

In 1943, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II collaborated for the first time on *Oklahoma!*, widely considered the first book musical. *Oklahoma!* told a narrative story with more depth and more developed characters than seen before. It also fully integrated dialogue, song, music and dance to tell the story. Many musical historians consider this production the beginning of what is considered the golden age of musical theater. The team followed this breakthrough show with many others, including, of course, *South Pacific*, along with *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*.

The book musical tells much of its story as a play does, with spoken dialogue. It isn't a loose collection of entertainments, like a revue, it isn't sung throughout like an operetta, and it isn't just a light story to provide an excuse for songs and jokes. A book musical has more complexity to it. The spoken dialogue is known in musical theater as the "book," as distinct from the songs (the words to the songs are known as lyrics), and it is much more important than in most early musical theater. But music is integral to the book musical as well. Key moments are translated into song. In *South Pacific* and other book musicals, spoken dialogue moves the story forward, but the most intense, most emotional, most crucial moments are told through song.

Many Broadway shows of our time continue the tradition of the book musical developed by Rodgers and Hammerstein. *Hairspray*, *Rent* and *Wicked* are a few examples. Lincoln Center Theater has also brought many 21st century book musicals to the stage, including *The Light in the Piazza* and *Dessa Rose*.

When you watch the Lincoln Center Theater production of *South Pacific*, look for the ways in which the story is told through the combination of music, dialogue and song. Many musical theater traditions maintain a vibrant presence in this show.

## Suggested Activities

1. Using cooperative learning groups or pairs, have students research different aspects of musical theater history. Economics, art, literature, fashion and technology, as well as theater and music, may all factor into the research. Present the material in a report and or make a musical theater mural, or a musical about the history of musical theater.
2. Listen to the CD of *South Pacific*. Have your class list as many observations as they can about the subjects, styles and presentation of the songs. What are the songs about? Do they tell a story? Do they stand on their own? What does the sound of the music tell them? In what ways are they similar to or different from each other?



Above: Members of the original cast of *Oklahoma!* (1943). Right: Ray Bolger and Tamara Geva dance the ground-breaking "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" ballet from Rodgers & Hart's 1936 Broadway musical, *On Your Toes*. Photos courtesy of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization.

## The Story of the Play

### The Writing of *South Pacific*

**S**outh Pacific got its start when the director Joshua Logan was working on a play called *Mr. Roberts*, which was set aboard a navy ship in the South Pacific during World War II. The set designer, Jo Mielziner, suggested that Logan look at a book by James Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific*, which was based on

Michener's experiences and observations while stationed in the region during the war. Mielziner thought it would be helpful background reading.

*Tales of the South Pacific* was made up of eighteen loosely linked stories. Logan decided to try to buy the rights to adapt one of the stories, "Fo' Dolla," for the stage. "Fo' Dolla," was the story of the doomed romance between an American officer and a young Tonkinese woman, and it eventually inspired the story of Lieutenant Joe Cable and Liat in *South Pacific*. But first, Logan needed to find someone to write a play based on the story—his interest was only in directing it.

Logan mentioned his idea to Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. When they read *Tales of the South Pacific*, they decided to buy the rights to all eighteen stories. And in the end, every single story from Michener's book contributes something to the finished musical.

When Rodgers and Hammerstein collaborated, Hammerstein almost always wrote the words first, and then Rodgers set them to music. Hammerstein usually wrote both the words to the songs and the spoken text, which is known in the theater as the 'book.' But he found himself stuck when he started to write the book for *Tales from the South Pacific*. He just couldn't write



L to r: Joshua Logan, Richard Rodgers & Oscar Hammerstein II at a rehearsal for *South Pacific* (1949). Photo courtesy of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization.

the military characters. He had never been to war, and he didn't know how the characters would talk or behave. Joshua Logan had served in the U.S. Army during the war, so Hammerstein asked him to come to his house in Pennsylvania to help make sure he got the military details right. Logan planned to stay for a day to give some pointers. Instead, he and Hammerstein

ended up writing the entire script as a joint effort. Logan didn't leave until it was done—only ten days after they started.

Hammerstein wrote all of the song lyrics on his own, and Rodgers then set them to music. Sometimes that came easily. A famous anecdote tells that Hammerstein shared the words to "Bali Ha'i" over a working lunch, and Rodgers immediately sketched out the tune right there at the table. Other songs were not so easy. "Younger Than Springtime," the love song that Lieutenant Cable sings to Liat, was only written after Joshua Logan had insisted that the first two attempts at songs for that spot were not good enough. Rodgers was irritated at having his songs judged, but the results suggest that the teamwork was a success.

*South Pacific* opened on Broadway on April 7, 1949 and was an immediate sensation. The reviews were raves, the show was a smash hit and it ran for 1,925 performances, finally closing in 1954. It won 9 Tony Awards and the Pulitzer Prize.

Though it has not had a Broadway revival since, it has been staged all over the country and around the world, and it was adapted into both a 1958 movie and a 2001 television special.

## *A Synopsis of South Pacific*

### **This is what I've longed for**

On the island of Espiritu Santo in the South Pacific during World War II, Nellie Forbush, a U.S. Navy nurse, visits French plantation owner Emile de Becque. They have only known each other for a few weeks, but are in love. He reveals that he left France for this island long ago because he killed a wicked man. Nellie accepts this and agrees to think about his suggestion that they share their lives.

### **It is boar's teeth — and women**

U.S. Navy sailors, Seabees and Marines bargain for local souvenirs with Bloody Mary, an entrepreneurial local woman, and Luther Billis, a Seabee who always has a plan. The men lament the lack of women on the island. When Navy nurses jog through and Nellie stops to chat with Billis, it only reminds the men how lonely they are for female company. Billis wants to go to the nearby island of Bali Ha'i, which has both exotic keepsakes and women, but only officers can sign out boats for the trip.

### **I've been elected**

Lieutenant Joe Cable arrives, having just flown in from another island. Billis and Bloody Mary interest Lt. Cable in Bali Ha'i, but he is intent on talking to Commander Harbison and Captain Brackett. Cable is undertaking a dangerous spying mission on Marie Louise Island and has come to enlist Emile de Becque to join him, since de Becque knows the island well.

### **Find out as much as you can about him**

Brackett and Harbison ask Nellie to gather information on Emile de Becque to help them enlist him in their cause. Harbison tells Brackett confidentially that the spies won't survive more than a week on their mission, but Brackett replies that it could still help America win the war.

### **I'm gonna wash that man right out-a my hair**

Nellie tells Lt. Cable that she has gotten a letter from her mother disapproving of her romance with Emile de Becque because of their different backgrounds. After Billis brings Nellie the rare treat of hot water she showers and announces that she has decided to break up with Emile. The nurses leave, and Emile arrives to invite Nellie to a party he is giving to introduce her to his friends. He tells her more about himself, his belief that all men are created equal, and why he killed a man. Then he proposes to her. They kiss.

### **This I am sure of**

Brackett, Harbison and Cable ask Emile to take part in the dangerous spying mission. He says no; he will not put his life with Nellie at risk, even for such an important cause.

### **I hold the world in my embrace**

Cable and Billis go to Bali Ha'i. Bloody Mary pushes Cable to meet her daughter, Liat, and they fall instantly in love.

### **Emile, they are yours**

After Emile's party, he and Nellie are alone and in love. When Emile's children, Ngana and Jerome, enter she finds them adorable. When she realizes that they are Emile's and that their mother was Polynesian, she leaves abruptly.

### **How d'ya like the show**

The troops are entertained by the "Thanksgiving Follies," with Nellie as host, star and choreographer and Billis as producer, stage manager, and performer. Emile comes with flowers for Nellie. Billis tells him that Nellie has been crying and has asked for a transfer to another island. Emile insists he has to see her, but Billis says he has to wait until after the show. Cable comes looking for Billis to get him a boat so he can go to Liat. He can't sign out his own boat because he has been hospitalized for malaria, but he cannot wait to see Liat again. Liat and Bloody Mary enter with the news that a French planter wants to marry Liat. Cable says she can't marry the planter, but that he himself can't marry her. He gives Liat his gold watch, which Bloody Mary smashes. Onstage, Nellie, Billis and the nurses perform the comic song "Honey Bun."

### **I love her and yet I just heard myself saying I can't marry her**

After the show, Luther gives Nellie Emile's flowers. She and Cable talk and realize that their prejudices are keeping them from the people they love, but don't think they can help it. Nellie tells Emile that she can't marry him because his first wife was Polynesian. She asks Cable to explain, and he says bitterly that they have been carefully taught to hate and fear. Now that he has lost Nellie, Emile agrees to go on the dangerous mission with Cable after all.

### I know what counts now

Cable and Emile send important reports back from behind enemy lines. Nellie realizes that Emile has gone on the mission, and at the same time learns that Lt. Cable has died. She realizes how much she loves Emile and that letting her prejudices keep them apart is a mistake. Bloody Mary and Liat come looking for Cable, because Liat will not marry anyone else. Nellie embraces Liat.

### Because I love you very much

The troops are all preparing to move out now that the successful spy mission has turned the tide of the war. Nellie, however, is staying behind with a small crew. She goes to care for Emile's children and tells them that she loves them very much. Emile returns home to hear that, and reunited, he, Nellie and the children sit down to a meal together.

### Cast of Characters

Ngana	Commander Harbison
Jerome	Brackett
Henry	Dinah
Nellie Forbush	Native Girls
Emile de Becque	French Girls
Sailors	Liat
Seabees	Servant
Marines	Party Guests
Nurses	McCaffrey
Bloody Mary	Buzz Adams
Stewpot	Abner
O'Brien	Pilots
Luther Billis	Officers
Professor	Shore Patrolman
Quale	Nurse McGregor
Lt. Joseph Cable	

## South Pacific: A Groundbreaking Musical

A conversation with Laurence Maslon, author of the upcoming  
*The South Pacific Companion*\*

“The most important thing about *South Pacific* is that by the time it opened, World War II had been over for only four years. And the battles in the South Pacific region were some of the bloodiest, most brutal battles of World War II. Most people nowadays know more about the European front of the war, but when *South Pacific* opened, most of the people in the audience and in the show itself would have known people who served in the South Pacific or even been there themselves. And they knew how serious it was. “This was something very new for a musical. If you look at Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!*, people in the audience may or may not have ever been to Oklahoma.



Signal Corps cameramen, wading through stream while following infantry troops during invasion at a beach in New Guinea. 1944. (National Archives.)

In any case, few people were still alive who had been to Oklahoma in 1906, the period in which the play is set. But everybody in the audience of *South Pacific* had lived through it. They had shared common knowledge, so whatever was happy and romantic on stage would be understood in relation to the shadows that people had experienced.

“To think of what it was like, imagine writing a musical about 9/11 four years after it happened.

“Rodgers and Hammerstein were always pushing the envelope. Their show *Carousel* had a difficult hero at the center—and he dies. *South Pacific* also has a death

\*To be published by Simon and Schuster in May 2008.

in it and all sorts of very real problems. That was not seen in a musical before. Musicals up until then were frothy and had nothing to do with reality, for the most part. The fact that it was contemporary, that there was no choreography to speak of, no costumes to speak of, these decisions were all revolutionary. They changed the musical theater forever. Rodgers and Hammerstein would move a step ahead, people would follow, and they would move another step ahead.

“It wasn’t an easy choice. Friends of Michener begged him to convince Rodgers and Hammerstein to drop the song ‘You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught,’ which says that racism is learned. Hammerstein’s response was ‘that’s what the show’s about.’

“When the national tour of *South Pacific* played Atlanta, Georgia in 1954, the Georgia state legislature drafted a bill to have the song ‘You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught’ banned. Rodgers and Hammerstein refused. The legislature backed down and the song was performed. And *South Pacific* was not an exception for Rodgers and Hammerstein. Their next play was *The King and I* [about the friendship and respect between an Englishwoman and the King of Siam, now Thailand], and their last musical was the *The Sound of Music*, the first musical to deal with the Nazis.

“Hammerstein had a moral vision of what a musical can do. So did Rodgers, but I think Hammerstein was the leader in that. He had written *Show Boat*, [which was also about racism and the right to marry the person you love]. He was bolder. He was a huge leader in anti-Nazi movements even before World War II. He was a very engaged citizen.

“So many people came back from the South Pacific after the war changed forever. Some soldiers did marry Asian wives. Michener said it changed his life completely. I can’t imagine a single GI who wouldn’t say it changed everything. For everyone. Blacks had greater influence in American culture because they had better

jobs during World War II and women had greater influence because they had better jobs during the war.

“It was brave to take on such serious issues in a musical, but it was the right show in the right time. They weren’t trying to alienate their audiences. They were trying to write a hit. And they did. It was huge. There’s a joke from the time: a woman went to the box office with two tickets to *South Pacific* and asked to return one. They asked her why, and she said her husband had died. They said ‘Surely you could get a friend to go with you.’ She replied, ‘They’re all at the funeral.’ So the show was such a hot ticket that someone might miss her own husband’s funeral to see it.

“It’s really essential to remember not only how important *South Pacific* was but also how entertaining it was. If it had been like taking medicine, it wouldn’t have run for so many performances. Though the show is adapted from James Michener’s *Tales of the South Pacific*, Rodgers and Hammerstein invented the whole Thanksgiving Follies performance at the beginning of the second act that’s not anywhere in Michener’s book because they knew that the audience needed something fun at that point.

“From the great remove of six decades we can easily admire the craftsmanship of Richard Rodgers, Hammerstein, and co-writer Joshua Logan; it is far more difficult to appreciate their incredible daring and courage in capturing such a raw and bitter moment in American history. Perhaps the best way to understand it is to remember Michener’s own words, from the conclusion of his first chapter of *Tales of the South Pacific*:

*They will live a long time, these men of the South Pacific. They had an American quality. They, like their victories, will be remembered as long as our generation lives. After that . . . longer and longer shadows will obscure them, until their Guadalcanal sounds distant on the ear like Shiloh and Valley Forge.”*<sup>1</sup>

1. James A. Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific* (New York: Fawcett, 1984), p. 12.

# *South Pacific*: Serious Stuff

An Interview with Ira Weitzman



Photo by Paul Kolnik.

Ira Weitzman, Lincoln Center Theater's Associate Producer of Musical Theater, says, "The bottom line is musicals, by virtue of the music and lyrics, have the ability to speak to all kinds of people of different backgrounds. A musical seems to impact people. I think it's the subconscious power of song. The lyricist Yip Harburg said 'Music makes you feel a feeling. But a song makes you feel a thought.' There's something disarming about a song. It's so much easier to tackle an issue in a musical, relaxing into an idea through music instead of preaching. Musicals don't have to disavow entertainment or comedy to explore serious stuff.

"The idea of doing *South Pacific* has long been a fantasy of André's [André Bishop, LCT's Artistic Director] and mine. It is a show that interested us as children in theater in the first place. I loved *South Pacific* from the album. I listened to the songs and what they were saying. They were grown up thoughts. They show that it's possible to be entertaining, grown up, stimulating, and thoughtful in a musical. When I started actually working on musicals, I had it in mind, from *South Pacific*, to be interested in reaching for something while being entertaining.

"Rodgers and Hammerstein knew that. That's why they put the comic song 'Honey Bun' and the Thanksgiving Follies show within the show in the second

act, which is pretty heavy. The soldiers even march off to battle to the tune of 'Honey Bun,' the lighthearted song is tied to a serious end. You have to have some light to see

the dark, and some dark to see the light."

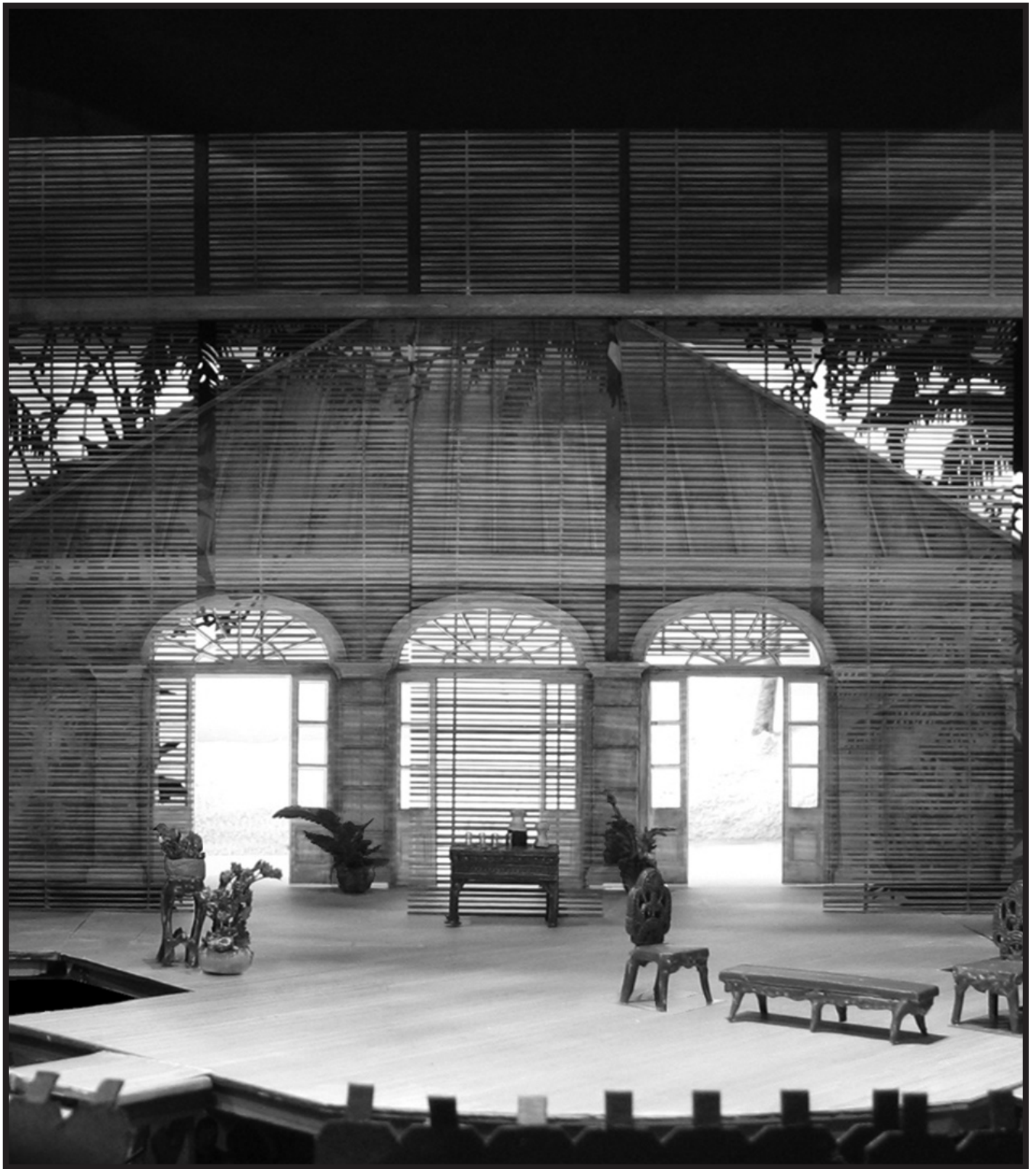
To Weitzman, the light in *South Pacific* is still fun and the dark is still relevant in our world. "Racism is a social issue now that is out in the open and has been for 40 years. In 1949 it wasn't—not on Broadway, not openly. But it's still an issue that should be discussed. Issues that were too hot to handle in 1949 are sadly still relevant."

## Suggested Topics for Discussion

1. If your students have read *South Pacific* or seen the movie, what aspects of the story do they remember best? Was anything confusing? What parts did they respond to the most? What parts seemed least appealing? Were there parts they wished were different? How?
2. *South Pacific* has been produced constantly, across the country and around the world, from the time of its premiere until today, almost 60 years later. Why do your students think it continues to be popular? What do they think is the play's message?







Emile's house for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *South Pacific*; set design by Michael Yeagan.

### SECTION III

# The Production

# Why *South Pacific* Came to Lincoln Center Theater

*South Pacific* is based on a story written in 1949, about events that took place during World War II. So what do the artists who brought it to the stage think it has to say to a 21st Century audience? Plenty.

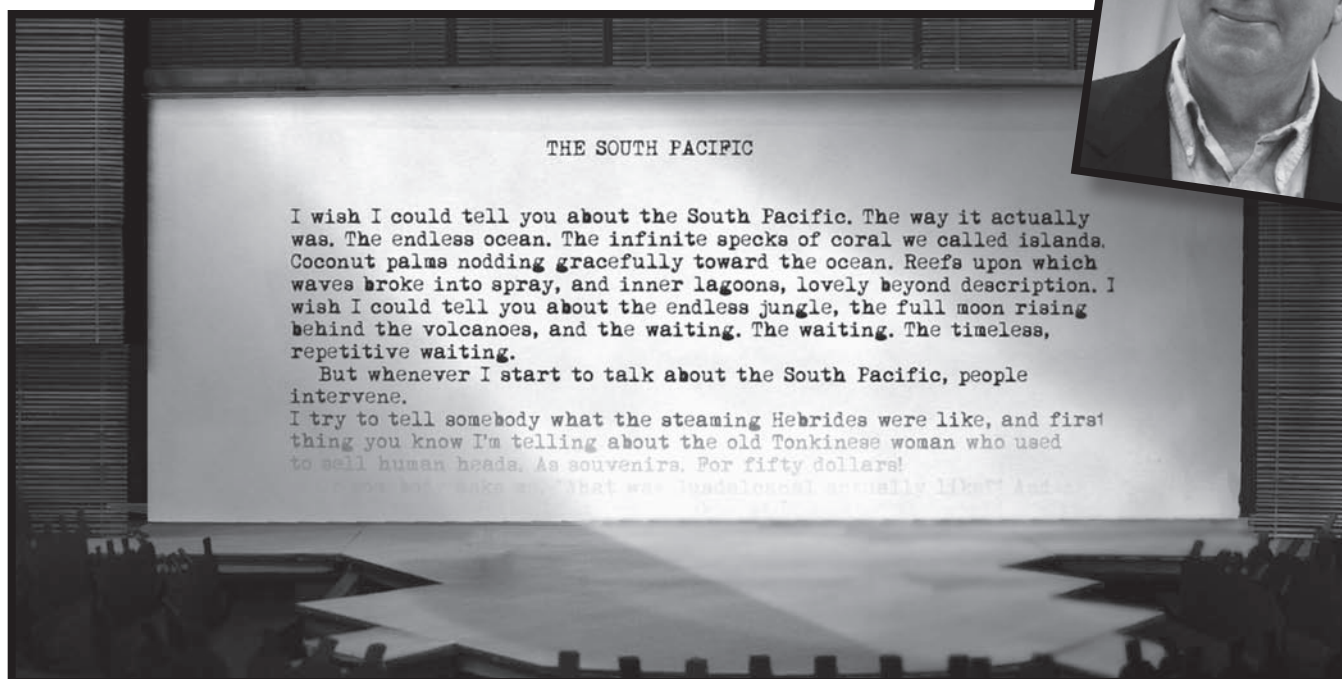
As the Artistic Director of Lincoln Center Theater, André Bishop is the person who chooses what plays are produced. Why did he decide to present *South Pacific* now? Only because he couldn't do it sooner.

He explains: "I didn't really choose to produce *South Pacific* at this time; the fact is that I have wanted to produce it for years and have badgered the Rodgers & Hammerstein office about doing it at Lincoln Center Theater for at least ten years.

"*South Pacific* is my favorite musical," he continues. "Always has been and always will be." And he feels that Lincoln Center Theater is exactly the right place for the show. "What excites me is the intimacy of the Beaumont in terms of audience relationship to the stage, and the vastness of the stage itself. We can really do a lovely production, and we are able to have an enor-

mous cast and a very large orchestra. That would not necessarily happen in a commercial situation. And the fact is that everybody knows the show but actually very few people have SEEN it."

Not only is *South Pacific* a wonderful show, Bishop says it is as meaningful today as ever. "Yes, *South Pacific* was topical when it was written, because the war in the Pacific had ended a few years earlier," he explains, "and the Michener book came out just the year before. And many of the men and some of the women in the chorus had actually been in the military and had actually served in the South Pacific. But the piece is as relevant today. It is Romantic, and we are all romantics. It is about Loneliness, and we are all lonely at times. It is about War, and we are a nation at war. It is about taking over a culture and imposing our own. We do that everywhere. It is about people trying to find a common language. As Larry



Show curtain for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *South Pacific*: set design by Michael Yeargan. Inset: André Bishop, Lincoln Center Theater's Artistic Director. Photo by Paul Kolnik.



For Lincoln Center Theater's production of *South Pacific*: set design by Michael Yeargan.

Maslon says in his book (*The South Pacific Companion*, Simon & Schuster, May 2008), there is a huge amount of dialogue and many songs that are about trying to be understood. Well that is pretty topical. And it is about racism, and we still live in a racist world. And, finally it is about something that probably did not strike anyone in 1949, which is a new definition of the family.

The piece begins and ends with a domestic scene, and the final scene is one of harmony, of individuals from very different worlds coming together and sharing a meal. And today the American family, at least in some parts of the USA, is made up of disparate yet harmonious elements. Adoptions from China and Romania. Gay men and women having children. Races intermarrying, which in 1949 was illegal in some states.

André Bishop notes that *South Pacific* is an unusual undertaking for him and Lincoln Center Theater, and one he cares deeply about. "I am mostly interested in producing new musicals, so it is rare that we do a revival of a classic. And plenty of classic musicals have been revived lately. But I took into account the fact that the show has never really been produced by a "Broadway" theater since the original 1949 production. A lot of people want to see it. But what I really took into account is what I am lucky enough to always be able to take into account: my deep love for this piece and my hope that we have found first-rate artists to bring it to life once again."

## Suggested Topics for Discussion

1. Ask your students to consider the themes explored in *South Pacific*. Think about the impact of encounters with unfamiliar people and cultures; the nature and impact of prejudice; whether 'you've got to be carefully taught' to hate and fear, or how we choose our relationships.
2. Ask your students if they can think of any type of person outside of their own culture, ethnicity or community who their parents might disapprove of their marrying. What might they say? How might you react? Discuss whether their situation is the same or different from that in *South Pacific*.
3. A wide cross-section of Americans joined up to take part in World War II. Discuss the reasons that so many different kinds of people joined up. Ask your students what they think would be worth going to war for, and what they think would motivate someone with a background like Joe Cable, Nellie Forbush or Luther Billis today.

# How *South Pacific* Came to Lincoln Center Theater:

## Production Choices

Director Bart Sher says that he entered *South Pacific* from four different points. The first point of entry was the work of the novelist James Michener, and his evocation of “a big, adventurous American experience of the 1940’s and 1950’s.” The second was “the sound of that experience: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s beautiful, innocent, melodic American sound.” The third was the co-writer and original director Joshua Logan’s “deeply realistic” work. And the last was the real history in the piece, and the understanding of American power abroad.

“*South Pacific* is one of those rare musicals that was written immediately following actual events,” Sher says. “It was written in 1949 as a response to the war. It’s almost like a national memory, an expression of survival, and for this reason it is a profoundly resonant show. So, there are certain gestures that have to be made—to Rodgers and Hammerstein, to James Michener, and to this island way of life, this “Bali Ha’i-ness” as we call it.”

Sher worked with his designers for almost a year to explore the ideas, demands and possibilities of the play for his production.

Set designer Michael Yeargan found ways to bring to the stage Sher’s sense of entering the play through one key element at a time.

“It’s important that the first thing you encounter when you come to the show is Michener’s words followed by Rodgers and Hammerstein’s music,” Sher explains. Yeargan’s solution? “When you enter the theater, a big front curtain shows the prologue from Michener’s *Tales of the South Pacific*,” Sher explains. “Then the stage pulls back and you see and hear the

30-piece orchestra.” Yeargan explains that this way of bringing in Rodgers and Hammerstein grew out of his own personal wishes. “I’m so sick and tired of going to a musical and hearing the orchestra over speakers, but never seeing it,” he says. “We’ve got a 30-piece orchestra, so we thought the whole floor could just peel back and you could reveal the orchestra while it’s playing this fantastic Rodgers and Hammerstein overture.”

“Michener is the first thing the audience encounters, and then the amazing overture music begins,” Sher recaps. “So we’re talking about Michener and Rodgers and Hammerstein before the curtain’s even gone up. Then, what Michael’s done beautifully is basically revealing the set piece by piece. Like an island under occupation. You have to start with the pure nature of the island. So we start with a very raw and open space. Then an airplane comes in, and with it the war. The Americans land and take over.”

“This is a story based on real events,” Sher points out, “It is almost a history play, and it needs to be real. The Beaumont Theater is very big, and that allows us to have a real airplane on stage, and actual World War II military trucks. This is a very realistic take on this play.”

But Yeargan says that finding a simple, theatrical



For Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *South Pacific*: set design by Michael Yeargan.



space that could transform with just a few of these realistic details was essential. *South Pacific* has many locations and has to move smoothly from scene to scene and song to song. He credits Bart Sher with the “big breakthrough” which was an “image of this beautiful, empty space with a mound of sand at the back and there’s one palm tree. And suddenly, when we reveal that, we hear all the guys singing, ‘Bloody Mary is the girl I love.’” In addition to the beach-like knoll, Yeargan and Sher also use a series of window blinds that can open and close the space and change the atmosphere. Yeargan says that the looking at set elements “filtered through these native blinds, there’s a fantastic effect that evokes the island’s purity and tranquility.”

Donald Holder’s lighting design is also crucial to transforming the stage and the mood from scene to scene. The lights can instantly change the setting from the romance of an enchanted evening to the bright light of the island sun, and from a plantation to an office to the beach. The lights illuminate the action and help focus audience attention on particular places within the large stage of the Vivian Beaumont Theater.

Catherine Zuber’s costumes reinforce the sense of realism with meticulously researched clothing rich in historical detail. And the costumes not only fit the setting and the characters, they also convey all kinds of information. Costumes tell the audience whether the characters are at work or at play, American or island natives, officers or Seabees the moment they come into sight.

All of the designers did an enormous amount of research to bring *South Pacific* to life. Michael Yeargan shares his approach. “I have a huge collection of National Geographics and things that I found on e-Bay that I’ve amassed over the years. As National Geographic goes through the war years they have color pictures of the real islands, articles about the New Hebrides, as Vanuatu was called then, and war maps. So, I amass all this information and then I start drawing, and try to figure out what pieces tell the story, and get at the truth of the place and the time. People have a conception of the South Pacific as being painted palm trees and hula girls. But the truth of it comes through in these photographs, articles, and

For Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *South Pacific*: costume designs by Catherine Zuber.

in Michener’s own work. It is a rough world. The racism is confronted head-on in all these sources. And, I think that this production is going to show more of that than has ever been shown before.”

Which takes us from Sher’s third point of entry, realism, to his fourth: the ideas.

And those, he says, are enduring American issues.

“This is a national memory play,” Sher insists. “It engages with all of the same themes that continue to engage us. Racism, who our families are, who we love, the experience of otherness, what does it mean to be an American?”

*South Pacific* tells the story, Sher says, “about a bunch of American boys and girls going abroad and experiencing otherness for the first time. This has happened again and again to Americans. You have the South Pacific, then Korea, then the Vietnam War, then Iraq. With each engagement, we encounter the experience of racism, the experience of otherness. It blows their minds, being in the South Pacific.”

Specifically, he says, he “wanted to take the experiences of Cable and Nellie and contrast them. Cable is a Northern born son of a businessman who is pulled under by the experience of otherness. Contrast that with the white Southern nurse who is transformed by it. People have deep feelings about marriage. Think about the conflicts about gay marriage today. Does everyone accept mixed marriages even now? Nellie is so brave. Love is the thing that brings you to places you wouldn’t ordinarily go. Love makes you say I don’t want to go by the rules anymore.”

Sher continues, “A whole bunch of people from different walks of life were all together in the South Pacific. This play includes Tonkinese, who were Vietnamese imported workers, local Islanders, who were very dark and included 34 different ethnic groups, French, and Americans, including whites and African-Americans in segregated units and a wide range of class differences. It’s really a cross-section of who we are. Today we are in a war that is not being fought by all classes, but I wanted us to feel what it’s like if everybody served, as they did in World War II.”





A group of African-American Marines aboard a U.S. Coast Guard-manned transport somewhere in the Pacific. (National Archives.)

“But above all, it’s a musical.” Sher concludes. “The music is its central muscle. My goal is to take the sound of this music and these real stories which are most deeply true.”

“I don’t think anybody else has ever pulled this off; it’s pretty amazing to take such real events and make a musical out of them. Every song is an expression of what’s going on in the scene. It’s a masterpiece. It’s mind boggling how good it is.

### **Bringing the Music of *South Pacific* to Life”**

The music comes to the stage through the talents and hard work of music director, Ted Sperling. Sperling explains what that job entails. “As music director, it’s my job to shape the musical performance of the show. This includes making sure we cast actors with the appropriate voices for the score, teaching the music to the cast, coaching them in their performances of the songs, working with the director and choreographer to make sure that all the instrumental music fits their concept of the staging, rehearsing the orchestra, and in most cases, conducting the performances from the pit.

“Once the show is finished being rehearsed, it’s also the music director’s job to maintain the performances of both cast and orchestra, and to continue to inspire and shape the performances from the best seat in the house, the podium!



Ted Sperling

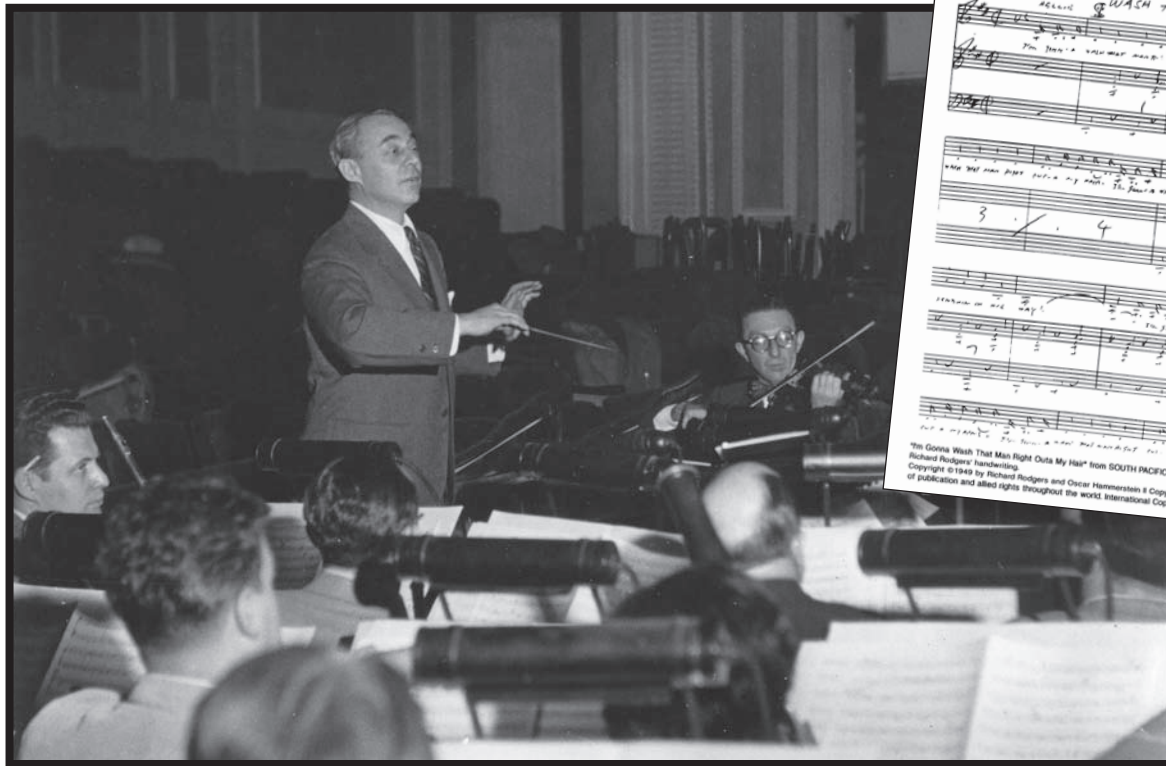
“A challenge when doing a revival of a revered classic like *South Pacific* is how to honor the original text (in my case, the original underscoring, dance music and orchestrations), and still leave room for the director and choreographer to reinvent how the production looks and moves. Often these musical elements are completely rewritten when a show is revived in New York, usually because the creative team wants to reinvent the tone of the production, and often because the number of musicians budgeted is much smaller than for the original production. We have hired 30 musicians, the same number as in the original *South Pacific* orchestra. This allows us to use Robert Russell Bennett’s lush original orchestrations, and also the original incidental music.”

“Bart has been working in the opera world a lot recently, so he is really sensitive to good and bad singing, so my job was a lot easier than it could have been in pushing for the good voices! We couldn’t have gotten a better cast, and I’m really excited for everyone to hear them fill the house with gorgeous sound.”

### **Casting *South Pacific***

Lincoln Center Theater makes it a rule to cast the best person for the role, regardless of their race, and their productions therefore include people of every ethnicity in all kinds of roles. For instance, Associate Producer of Musical Theater Ira Weitzman explains, “*Carousel* is a play about community, and when we produced that, the cast reflected the world, with a mix of races.”

*South Pacific* will also have a mix of people on stage, but it won’t be random this time. “*South Pacific* is about race, in part, so we are casting according to skin color,” says Weitzman. “The show is about specific people of specific color and ethnicity. Bloody Mary and her daughter are described as Tonkinese. That meant they were imported to this island from Asia. We did a huge outreach to make sure that the actors truly fit their roles. We auditioned actors in Hawaii, and found our Bloody Mary there. Liat was cast at an open call in Chinatown. We know that the indigenous people of the island had darker skin and did not look Asian, so we cast accordingly. We also know that the American military was not integrated in World War II. Not until



Richard Rodgers conducts *South Pacific* (1949). Inset: “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair” from *South Pacific* (1949): Early music manuscript in Richard Rodgers’ handwriting. Photos courtesy of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization.

1948. So we cast African-American actors as sailors, but they are on stage as a separate unit. The children are played by mixed race actors, because it is important to the play that they are mixed race. It’s not hard to locate those actors in New York City now. The show reflects American culture as well as the clash of international cultures.”

### Performing *South Pacific*

To Kelli O’Hara, “Nellie Forbush is a simple but passionate girl from Little Rock, AR. Her quiet little life is about to be turned upside down. I know her well. Most of us do.”

Loretta Ables Sayre says, “Bloody Mary is a wonderfully rounded, emotional, strong, passionate woman and mother, who above all things, is a survivor.”

To Li Jun Li, “Liat is untainted, innocent.” She is “the purest form of a human being...a child from a naïve time, who’s remained untouched by modern values.”

To the actors of *South Pacific*, the characters are rich, real and vivid. The actors have no question that the play is meaningful today, to themselves and their audience, for its artistry and its messages.

“The message it sends concerning race, open-mindedness, and social equality means the most to me,” says Kelli O’Hara. “It’s something that still needs to be

addressed today. *South Pacific* shows the difficulties of racial prejudices while showing that we, as human beings (even if ‘carefully taught’) can break the ties that have been binding us for too long.”

Li Jun Li agrees that the subject matter of the play is important and challenging, but also notes that those ideas are shared in an appealing way, not a preachy one. “*South Pacific* touches on timeless themes of prejudice, love and regret and is set at a truly dramatic time in world history and in a place of incredible natural beauty, where all of these characters find themselves thrown together by events, vast and world-shaping.” It is dramatic and romantic. She adds, “The story has shown it has the ability to touch people of all backgrounds and I’m honored to be part of that tradition.”

“This is an incredibly important show, both historically and because of the subject matter,” says Zachary James, who, as a member of the *South Pacific* ensemble, plays a Seabee, Marine Sergeant, and a French plantation owner. “Because it is based on real-life events, it is incredibly easy to get emotionally involved.”

For Loretta Ables Sayre, who comes to Lincoln Center Theater from Hawaii, the show is personally, artistically and socially important. “*South Pacific* is special to me for many reasons,” she explains. “First of all, it has some of the most beautifully written songs in the



From L to R: Li Jun Li, Loretta Ables Sayre, Zachary James, Kelli O'Hara.

American Songbook. Secondly, it is based in the beautiful and exotic South Pacific, which is where I am from. Most importantly, it is a show that had the courage to deal with war and interracial relationships, how our society dealt with them in the 1940's, and really, how we are still dealing with them now. It is a wonderful view on how far we have come and how far we have yet to go. It's a show about war, separation from ones we love, stepping out of our comfort zones and taking risks. It is also a show about finding out what we believe in, and finding the courage and strength within ourselves to stand up for it."

Sharing all of this in words and music is a challenge. It takes tremendous energy, training and skill to perform in a musical. But to the actors, the rewards are well worth it.

Kelli O'Hara explains that musical theater can express things that other plays cannot. "I was taught that singing is necessary when the emotional content needs to be heightened or when we can't express certain feelings by talking alone. Therefore, I have always found performing in musicals incredibly passionate, dramatic and exciting. Singing is the most beautiful form of

communication in my opinion. Therefore, giving that to others and accepting it from others is the easiest and most rewarding job I could ever have."

Li Jun Li agrees, "The marriage of a powerful musical score with poetic, profound lyrics is one of the best ways to express emotion where spoken words cannot. Rodgers and Hammerstein are true masters of their craft when it comes to both music and lyrics, and *South Pacific* ranks up as one of my favorites."

Zachary James shares that opinion. In a musical theater production, the audience is asked to imagine a world where people are in such a state of excitement and heightened emotion that speaking is not enough to convey their message and they just have to sing!" He doesn't find this as much of a stretch as it might sound. "It is similar to being so excited or angry that you have to scream or jump up and down, like at a sporting event, except in a musical this reaction is rehearsed carefully and usually accompanied by an orchestra."

Kelli O'Hara also finds it a natural extension of how we feel about big emotions in everyday life. "I don't run around singing to my husband at home when I'm



really excited and passionate about something,” she says, “(well, sometimes I do), but if I could, I would. Musical theater gives me that permission.”

Loretta Ables Sayre adds, “I see acting and singing as a way to communicate and connect with other human souls. In a busy world with busy lives, I think that somewhere deep inside we are all looking for someone or something to tell us that we are not alone. Quite often when we are sad or heartbroken, we gravitate to songs about sadness or loss. We are listening for someone to tell us “I know how you feel, and you’re going to get through this.” We are looking for that connection of mind and heart. I believe that acting in a musical is much like that. Words and thoughts spoken to us in a play, reach us on an intellectual level. When you add music to those thoughts, we start connecting on an even deeper visceral level; we begin to really FEEL something. As a performer in a musical, it gives you another level to connect with the audience. You are not only speaking, but you add a melody and then channel those words through your heart and soul and out of your mouth and hopefully making that deeper connection with your audience.” She adds, “And besides all of that, it’s FUN!”

To Loretta Ables Sayre and the actors of *South Pacific*, connecting with the audience is paramount.

Audience members are not just passive observers—they’re full partners.

“Not only am I aware of the audience,” Kelli O’Hara says. “I am in a partnership with them every night. I feed off their energy while staying true to my journey within the show.”

Li Jun Li agrees. “The energy from the audience, the ability to move them with stories, is the reason why I love performing.”

“Having a live audience is very magical and what makes theater very different from television and film,” Zachary James adds.” The audience is just as important a character as those that appear on stage. The audience and actors create a relationship of give and take, back and forth, similar to playing catch. The actor sings a song or performs a dance and throws the ball to the audience by doing so. The audience applauds, laughs or cries and therefore throws the ball back to the actor. This relationship continues throughout the entire performance and creates something very special.”

Loretta Ables Sayre explains, “If a funny line is spoken, you have to be aware enough to let the audience respond. If you don’t, they will lose the next few lines and the rhythm could be completely thrown by that. When the give and take between the actors and the audience is in sync, there is nothing like it in the world.”



For Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *South Pacific*: set design by Michael Yeargan.





USS Shaw exploding during the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor. December 7, 1941. (National Archives.)

#### SECTION IV

# The Background

SECTION IV: THE BACKGROUND  
Rodgers & Hammerstein's  
*South Pacific*

**When: During World War II**

**W**orld War II had been waging for years in Europe, Africa and Asia before the United States was drawn in. The United States provided support and supplies to Great Britain as it fought Germany, but only joined the fighting after Japan bombed the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on December 7, 1941.

By the time that the action of *South Pacific* takes place, the United States was deep in a brutal war that required one kind of fighting on the ground in Europe and another on the islands of the Pacific.

**South Pacific Timeline**

Here is an overview of key events relating to World War II, the South Pacific and *South Pacific*.

**1937**

- ★ Japan attacks China
- ★ James Michener receives a master's degree from the Colorado State College of Education, where he will teach for the next few years

**1938**

- ★ Germany annexes Austria and part of Czechoslovakia
- ★ The Japanese continue to advance in China

**1939**

- ★ Germany invades Poland
- ★ Britain, France and Canada declare war on Germany
- ★ Russia invades Finland
- ★ Japan advances through China
- ★ James Michener teaches education at Harvard

**1940**

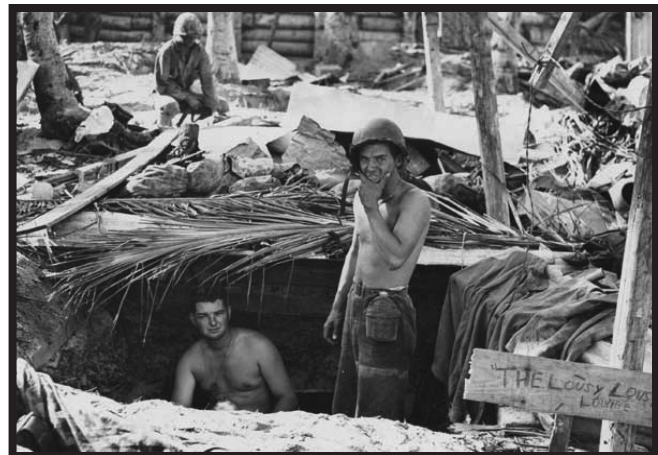
- ★ Germany defeats Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium and France, and bombs major cities in Britain
- ★ Italy declares war on Britain, invades Greece and conquers Egypt
- ★ USSR conquers Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia
- ★ Japan invades French Indochina
- ★ Japan, Hungary and Romania join Germany and Italy as allies known as the Axis
- ★ James Michener becomes a social studies textbook editor

**1941**

- ★ Germany defeats Yugoslavia, Greece and Crete and advances on the USSR
- ★ Japan conquers Indochina and many islands in the Pacific
- ★ Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, declaring war against the U.S.
- ★ U.S. declares war on Japan
- ★ Germany declares war on the U.S.

**1942**

- ★ Britain retreats in North Africa
- ★ Germany advances in the USSR
- ★ Japan attacks the Philippines, Indonesia, New Guinea and other islands in the South Pacific
- ★ American counter-attacks prevent Japan from invading Australia
- ★ U.S. establishes a military base on Espiritu Santo
- ★ American Marines recapture Guadalcanal from Japan



Two Marines on Tarawa who have named their dugout "The Lousy Lousy Lounge." (National Archives.)

## 1943

- ★ The Allies conquer Italy and Sicily
- ★ In the South Pacific, the Allies gain strength
- ★ James Michener is activated in the Naval Reserve
- ★ Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* opens on Broadway
- ★ Oscar Hammerstein II's *Carmen Jones*, a version of the opera *Carmen* with an all-black cast, opens on Broadway



Left: Build for your Navy! Enlist! Carpenters, machinists, electricians etc. / R. Muchley. Penna.: Penna Art, WPA, [between 1941 and 1943], (Library of Congress). Right: Hitler accepts the ovation of the Reichstag, Berlin, March 1938. (National Archives.)

## 1944

- ★ The Allies land in Normandy, on the coast of France
- ★ Japan attacks East of India but Britain fights them off
- ★ The U.S. and the Allies wins a series of battles in the Pacific
- ★ The U.S. Navy sends James Michener to the South Pacific
- ★ Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* is awarded a special Pulitzer Prize

## 1945

- ★ Italy and then Germany surrender
- ★ The Allies retake much of the Pacific, including Iwo Jima, Okinawa and Manila, in the Philippines
- ★ The U.S. drops atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- ★ Japan surrenders
- ★ Rodgers & Hammerstein's movie *State Fair* opens
- ★ Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Carousel* opens on Broadway
- ★ USO tour of *Oklahoma!* tours bases in the South Pacific

## 1946

- ★ Lt. Commander James Michener leaves the Navy
- ★ Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Allegro* opens on Broadway

## 1947

- ★ James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* is published
- ★ Joshua Logan reads *Tales of the South Pacific* as research for the play *Mister Roberts* that he is writing and directing

## 1948

- ★ James Michener is awarded a Pulitzer Prize for *Tales of the South Pacific*
- ★ Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan write and begin casting for *South Pacific*

## 1949

- ★ Rodgers & Hammerstein's musical *South Pacific* opens on Broadway at the Majestic Theater

## 1950

- ★ *South Pacific* receives Tony Awards for Best Musical, Director, Author, Composer, Producer, Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor and Supporting Actress
- ★ Rodgers & Hammerstein and Joshua Logan are awarded a Pulitzer Prize for *South Pacific*

## 1951

- ★ *South Pacific* opens in London and runs for 800 performances

## 1954

- ★ *South Pacific* closes on Broadway after 1,925 performances and a profit of \$7 million

## 1957

- ★ Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas is integrated under the protection of the National Guard, despite violent efforts by the Governor of the state and many citizens to keep the school all white

## 1958

- ★ The film of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *South Pacific* opens

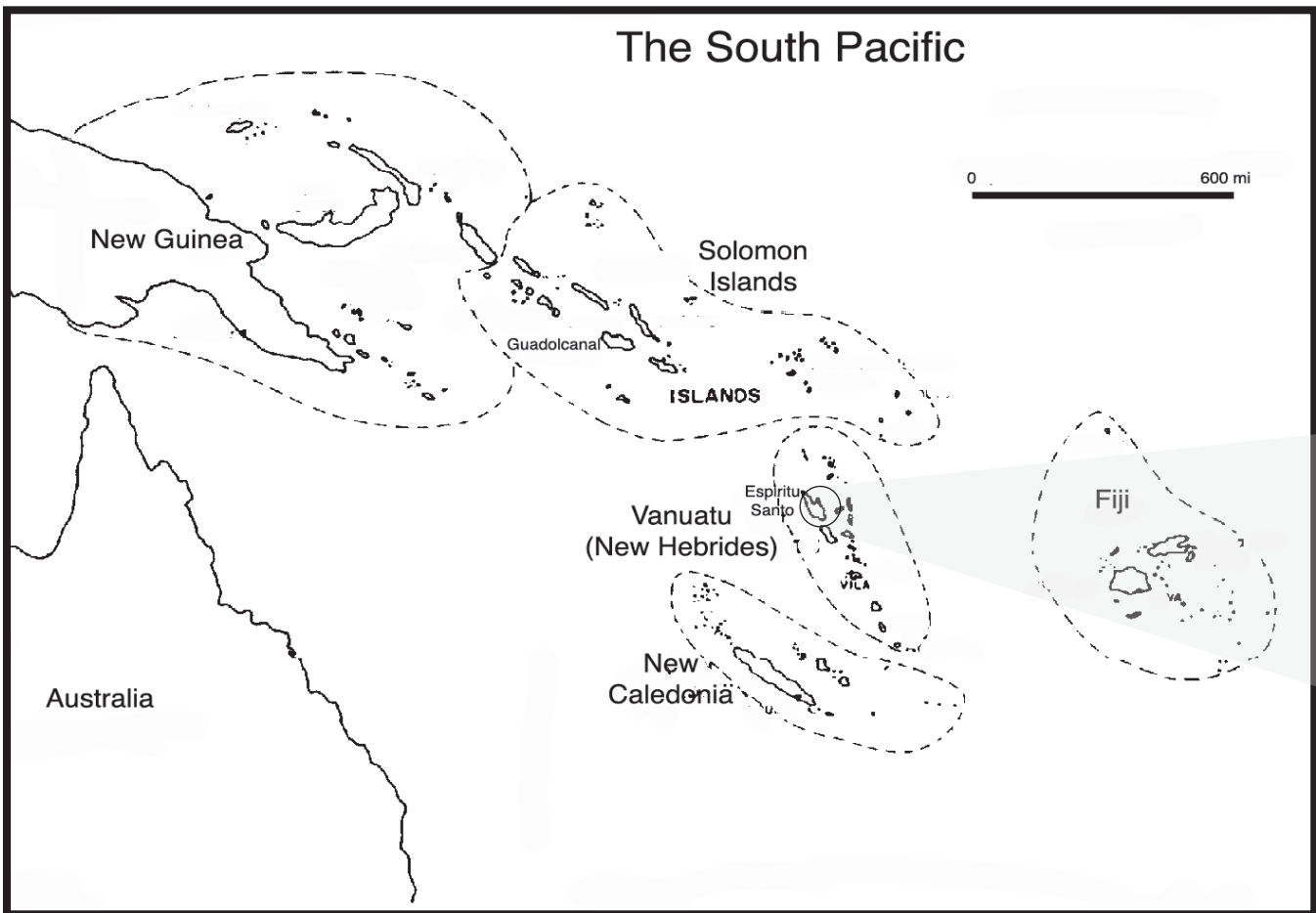
**Where: The South Pacific**

Espiritu Santo is one of the largest tropical islands (about 2400 square miles) located in Vanuatu, a chain of islands in the South Pacific, east of Australia and just south of the Solomon Islands. It has a population today of about 100,000.

During World War II, Espiritu Santo and the rest of the New Hebrides, as Vanuatu was then known, was an important military base, from which Allies distributed supplies and spied on and launched attacks against the Japanese on the nearby Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands are a chain of hundreds of tropical islands stretching over 900 miles in Melanesia in the South Pacific, just north of Vanuatu and East of

New Guinea. During World War II, the Solomons were the southernmost islands occupied by the Japanese. The largest battles of the Pacific were fought in the Solomons as the Allies fought to drive the Japanese out, and protect supply routes to Australia. In addition, Allied spies landed on Japanese occupied islands to report on Japanese military operations. These were extremely dangerous missions and many spies were discovered, tortured and killed. The future president, John F. Kennedy, was shipwrecked on the Solomons during such a mission. The military base on Espiritu Santo was an important staging area for operations against the Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands.



Map of the South Pacific

SECTION IV: THE BACKGROUND

# Who: The people of *South Pacific*

## American service people

Seabees take their name from the initials of their formal title, Construction Battalion—or C.B.

Seabees, like Luther Billis in *South Pacific*, supported military operations by building military bases, landing strips, roads, housing, and other construction needed by soldiers moving into new areas. The Seabees were started at the beginning of American involvement in World War II, at first with volunteers recruited for their engineering and construction skill. The Seabees are still active today. 325,000 men served as Seabees during World War II, most of them on islands in the Pacific. As

much of the military at the time,

African-American Seabees were allowed only to perform menial jobs, as servants or laborers, in separate units from white Seabees.

Thousands of Seabees were stationed on Espiritu Santo, where *South Pacific* is set, and their work was critical to the Allied

success against the Japanese occupying the Solomon Islands. With an average age of 37, Seabees were older than most other recruits, and they were not expected to fight, so their training



The QM's portable laundry diesel engine somewhere on New Guinea. 1943, (National Archives.)

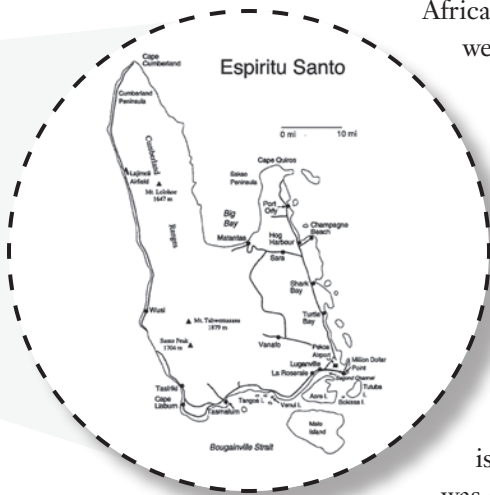
was less strict than that of many soldiers. Nonetheless, they accomplished amazing feats. One of their mottos was “The difficult we do at once. The

impossible takes a little longer.”

Navy Nurses, like Nellie Forbush, served an important role in the U.S. Navy since before World War I. By the beginning of World War II they were informally treated as officers, a position that was formalized after the war started. Until recently, Navy nurses were all female, and although women held other positions in the Navy, few were allowed aboard ships or served as close to the front lines as the nurses.

Naval Officers, like Lieutenant Joe Cable, were (and still are) the elite of the navy. They received more pay and better assignments than enlisted sailors. Before World War II, most officers came from wealthy and educated backgrounds, as does Lieutenant Cable, raised in Philadelphia and educated at the Ivy League Princeton University. Since a college education is a traditional requirement to earn a naval commission to become an officer, only the well-to-do were likely to qualify in the early 1940's. Although the huge need for labor during the war created opportunities for more ordinary people to rise through the ranks, officers were still more likely to be privileged than sailors, and African-Americans were not allowed to be officers at all until the very end of the war.

The Sailors in *South Pacific* are the enlisted members of the U.S. Navy, men who signed up with none of the privileges of the officers, and most likely without the educational background. The Navy was the





A Marine patrol on Saipan found this family hiding in a hillside cave. 1944. (National Archives.)

backbone of the Allied forces in the South Pacific, and sailors were a critical part of the effort.

Marines are technically land soldiers who are transported by sea. That enables the Marine Corps to send large numbers of troops wherever they are needed. The U.S. Marines were particularly important to the success of American efforts in the Pacific during World War II.

### **Inhabitants of the islands**

Liat and Bloody Mary are identified as Tonkinese. Tonkin is the northernmost area of Vietnam, on the border with China. France claimed Tonkin as part of French Indochina and French colonials throughout the Pacific brought Tonkinese people to their islands during the first half of the twentieth century to work as laborers.

Melanesians were the primary native population of the Islands of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, descendants of seafaring people from coastal New Guinea who settled on the islands to the east about 35,000 years ago, and gradually spread throughout the region. Other native inhab-

itants of Vanuatu descended from Polynesian ancestors who also sailed to Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands from the east. There are a tremendous number of languages spoken in Melanesia. In addition to English and French, 113 languages are spoken in Vanuatu alone, with each language having an average of only a few thousand native speakers.

French plantation owners played an important role in European colonial control over the Pacific islands, and had a lasting effect on the region's social, religious and ethnic makeup. Soon after Europeans discovered the Pacific islands in the 1500s, French, English, Spanish and other Europeans settled there, just as they came to America. French and other colonists cleared jungle and planted crops that could be sold

for high prices on international markets: sugar, palms for palm oil, coffee, and cocoa. Growing these crops required many workers. Local populations, which often were devastated by diseases like measles that Europeans brought with them to the islands, frequently could not provide as many workers as needed. To meet their labor needs, plantation owners imported workers from



CB's trading with natives from Malaita, Solomon Islands. September 23, 1943. (National Archives.)





Little Rock, 1959. Rally at state capitol. Photo by John T. Bledsoe. (Library of Congress.)

other places, including China, Thailand and Vietnam. Descendants of these laborers still live on many islands.

### Race

During World War II, when *South Pacific* is set, racism was not discussed much in America, but it was very prevalent. Separate water fountains, train cars, and schools for people of different races were the norm in the Southern states, and racism was prevalent in the North as well. Until the U.S. Supreme Court ruling of *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967, marrying someone of a different race was illegal in 16 states. Chinese immigration was blocked by law until December 1943, and from 1942-1945, most of the duration of America's involvement in the war, thousands of Japanese-Americans were held in detention camps. The camps were created out of a misplaced fear that Japanese-Americans might spy for Japan. In fact, not a single case of espionage by a Japanese-American in the United States was identified, and German-Americans were not held on the same grounds. The armed forces were segregated. People of all races served their country, but soldiers of different races served in separate companies.

Racism was so pronounced in America at this time, that someone like Nellie Forbush, growing up in Arkansas, would have been told directly that people of other races were inferior. Even a Northerner like Joe Cable would have been unlikely to encounter a person of color in a social situation. There were no students of color studying at Princeton in the 1930s and 1940s.

However, World War II changed many American's sense of race. Soldiers, sailors and nurses traveled during the war and encountered multi-cultural and multi-ethnic societies. Americans worked alongside people of other races. Fought alongside them. Fell in

love with them, as Joe Cable does. They formed families that would have been unthinkable at home, as Nellie does when she accepts Emile's children as her own.

Experiencing what the world was like without the racism and rules that they had accepted as normal all of their lives helped to change the racial attitudes of a generation that took part in the war. When they returned home to the United States, nothing was ever the same.

### Wartime Romance

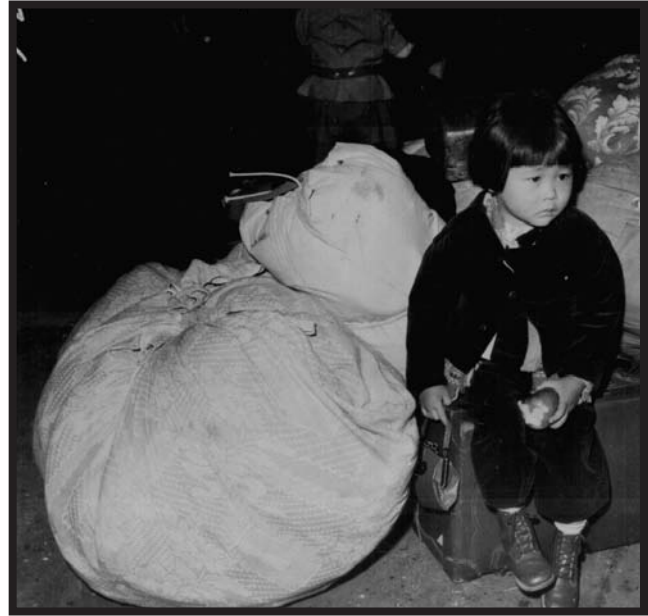
*South Pacific* is centered on two romances: Nellie Forbush and Emile DeBeque and Joe Cable and Liat. Both couples are people who never would have met if it weren't for the war, who speak different languages and who grew up with different cultures, but both fall deeply in love. This was a real and common occurrence. Wars take young men and women far from home, and put them in intense situations, and love is often the result. Some, like Joe Cable, don't feel they can bring their love home. Many wars have resulted in cross-cultural marriages. American servicemen and women visited many different countries in World War II, and married locals pretty much everywhere they went, from Germany and England to the Philippines and Japan. 15,000 brides from Australia alone married American servicemen they met during World War II.



Celebrating the surrender of Japan. August 14, 1945. (National Archives.)

## Suggested Topics for Discussion

1. Ask your students what they know about the U.S. during the 1940's, when *South Pacific* is set. Where did they get their information and ideas? Do any of the attitudes or events of *South Pacific* seem surprising for the period?
2. Lieutenant Cable and Nellie Forbush both feel that they have to take their parent's opinions—and prejudices—into account when choosing whom to marry. Ask your students to think about their parents' expectations and assumptions about their life choices. Can they imagine a circumstance in which their parents might urge them not to marry someone they love? How would they respond?
3. Discuss what external factors may affect the differing opinions of parents and children. Economics? Religion? Culture? Are the factors today different from those in the 1940's, or are they the same?



A young evacuee of Japanese ancestry waits with the family baggage before leaving for an assembly center. April 1942. (National Archives.)



Signal Corps cameramen, wading through stream while following infantry troops during invasion at a beach in New Guinea, 1944. (National Archives.)

## SECTION VI

# Activities

## SECTION VI: ACTIVITIES

# For Further Exploration

This is a good time to check some of the predictions students made before seeing the play. Ask your class to compare Lincoln Center Theater's production to what they expected to see and hear.

Any one of these questions or activities can be used to evaluate how much your students understood and enjoyed the performance.

### Topics for discussion about *South Pacific*

#### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In studying *South Pacific* in class, you may have already discussed some of these points, but attending the live performance could spark new ideas and spark your students' interest in discussing them further.

1. What particular feelings did the music in this production give you? Did what you were hearing add to what you were seeing on stage? Was it what you expected to hear? Why or why not?
2. *South Pacific* is set in the islands of the South Pacific during World War II. The production uses a stylized set that transforms from one location to the next quickly. Lighting helps to evoke many different locations and moods, and the costumes are historically accurate and carefully designed. Did you think these were the best production choices? Why or why not? Was it what you expected?
3. Bloody Mary thinks Liat and Lieutenant Cable should marry. He thinks that's impossible. Discuss the gap between their opinions and why they believe what they do.
4. List all of the decisions that Joe Cable makes in the play. Which are good decisions and which are not? Why

does he make the decisions he does? What might he have done differently? What would have happened if he had made different choices?

5. Answer the same questions for Nellie Forbush.



Crowds gather outside the Majestic Theater before a performance of Rodgers & Hammerstein's *South Pacific* (c. 1949). Photo courtesy of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization.

## SECTION VI: ACTIVITIES

# Group Activities

These activities allow for written, visual, oral or aural responses to the play to engage students with varying needs and interests.

Divide your class into small groups or let them choose their own activities.

The story of *South Pacific* has been engaging audiences for nearly 50 years with its story of love and war, prejudice and courage. It was made into a popular movie in 1958. Now it has a new life on stage at Lincoln Center Theater.

Just as theater is a collaboration among the arts, and just as the Lincoln Center Theater production of *South Pacific* incorporates all the arts, responses to the play can also involve music, art, language, image, sound and writing.

After your students have seen Lincoln Center Theater's production of *South Pacific*, ask them to think about what made the biggest, most immediate impression. Did they leave humming the tunes? Those students may want to try one of the activities under "Listen." Did the eye-catching costumes appeal? Try a project under "Look." Students who liked the lyrics or were caught up in the story will probably be drawn to the activities in "Language."

## Activities for those who like to LISTEN

### GOLDEN OLDIES

Lincoln Center Theater's production of *South Pacific* is set during World War II. Songs are often closely associated with a particular era. Songs that were popular in 1943 might be very different from songs that are popular today.

- Research mid-20th century music. Find as many songs as you can from a particular time. Present your songs to the class and talk about how they relate to the period and what the songs convey. Think about both the music and the lyrics. Arrange your songs to make a musical play with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

### RAPPING IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan wrote *South Pacific* in words and music that express deep feeling. Many contemporary musicians have covered songs from *South Pacific*. Rap music and hip-hop often tell stories using bold language and clever phrases.

- Pick one key scene from *South Pacific* and create a rap re-telling.
- Or, following the play scene by scene, write a hip-hop song that gives an overview of the whole story of *South Pacific*.



“Thanksgiving Follies” for Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *South Pacific*: set design by Michael Yeargan.

## Activities for those who like to LOOK

### POSTER

Posters can be used to advertise a production. The way they are designed may give you an idea of how the theater piece will be presented.

- Create a poster for Lincoln Center Theater’s production of *South Pacific* based on the impressions you got from seeing their production.

### BEHIND THE SCENES

The Lincoln Center Theater designers were inspired by the *South Pacific* itself and by the clothes people wore and the items they used during World War II. The set uses a beach, a palm tree, and a few bold, realistic set pieces—like an airplane or a couple of genuine World War II era trucks—to give the flavor of each location. The set and costumes were carefully researched and designed to evoke the time-period, as well as to make the characters’ personal transformations visible. Some theatrical productions find inspiration in history, like this one, others in artwork or in pure imagination.

- Find an artist whose work you think represents a look that would be appropriate for *South Pacific*. Research the artist and present his or her artwork to the class, along with your reasons for choosing the artist.
- Or do historical research and select your own inspirations for designs for *South Pacific*. Present images from your research to the class along with your reasons for those choices.

- Or create a totally original design for your own production of *South Pacific*. Explain how and why you think your design is appropriate for this play. Present your design in sketches, collages, models or another form.

## Activities for those who like LANGUAGE

### DEBATE

The characters in *South Pacific* make many choices that effect the action of the play. Discuss your answers to these questions. Debate your point of view with a classmate who disagrees with you.

- Create a poster for Lincoln Center Theater’s production based on the impressions you got from seeing their production.
- Think about Nellie’s decision to “wash Emile out of her hair.” Does she act as she should? Could she have taken other actions? What would have been the results? Ask your classmates about their opinions of the decisions Nellie makes throughout the play. Discuss your answers to these questions.
- Or think about Emile’s decisions, first to refuse to help in the dangerous mission, then to go ahead and do it. What would have been the results if he had made different choices?
- Or choose another issue, character, or theme from the play and follow the same steps.

## FAMILY MATTERS

*South Pacific* is not only a love story, but also the story about family. When she first learns that Emile's children had a Polynesian mother, Nellie cannot imagine accepting them as her family. Bloody Mary feels that she is doing right by her daughter by trying to marry her to Lt. Cable. For his part, Lt. Cable can love Liat, but cannot imagine his family accepting her as his wife, nor can he imagine going against his family's expectations.

In pairs or groups, act out any of the following scenarios. You can improvise—set the scene and make up the action and dialogue as you go—or script the scene and then perform it.

- A parent warns a teenager not to get involved with someone of whom the community will disapprove.
- A teenager is afraid to bring home his or her boyfriend or girlfriend to parents who are sure to disapprove.
- A parent insists that a teenager is making the wrong choices in love.

Discuss the issues and choices that came up in the scenes. What would have happened if the parent or the child had made different choices?

## AFTER THE CURTAIN

*South Pacific* ends with Nellie and Emile together with his children. Write a short story or one act play about what happens next.

## YOU BE THE CRITIC

Write your own review of the Lincoln Center Theater production of *South Pacific*. What did you think were the messages of the play and the strengths and weaknesses of the production? Be sure to be specific about what you noticed about the production choices, the play, the performances and the sets, lights, costumes and music.

## LETTERS HOME

Each of the characters in *South Pacific* has a distinct point of view. Nellie Forbush and Joe Cable are both far from home and dealing with feelings and options they never imagined. Still, they are strongly influenced by what they know people at home would think of their situation.

Create letters based on the scene between Nellie and Joe Cable. Use lines from the play to support what you say.

- A letter from Nellie Forbush to her mother describing the man with whom she has fallen in love.
- A letter from Nellie Forbush to a good friend about Emile and his children.
- A letter from Joe Cable to his girlfriend in Philadelphia.
- A letter from Joe Cable to Liat before he heads to his mission.

## PERSONAL DIARY

Create a diary, as if written by a soldier, sailor, Seabee or nurse in Espiritu Santo during World War II. Research, imagine and record your experiences: the sights you see, the people you meet, the food you eat, and the differences that you notice from life at home.

Base your diary on solid research, such as guidebooks, films, period newspaper articles, and on *South Pacific*. Consider these questions:

- What will you encounter that is new and different when you first arrive?
- With whom will you interact along the way?
- What obstacles or challenges will you face? How might you overcome them?
- What opportunities will your time on Espiritu Santo offer to you? How will you take advantage of those opportunities?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

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## BY RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN

*Oklahoma!*

*Carousel*

*Allegro*

*South Pacific*

*The King and I*

*Me And Juliet*

*Pipe Dream*

*Flower Drum Song*

*The Sound Of Music*

*State Fair*

## BY JAMES MICHENER

Selected titles

*Tales of the South Pacific*

*The Fires of Spring*

*Return to Paradise*

*The Bridges at Toki-Ri*

*Sayonara*

*The Floating World*

*Hawaii*

*Caravans*

*Source*

*The Drifters*

*Centennial*

*Chesapeake*

*Space*

*Texas,*

*Alaska*

*Mexico*

*The World is My Home*



## BY JOSHUA LOGAN

*Higher and Higher* (with Gladys Hurlbut)  
*Mister Roberts* (with Thomas Heggan)  
*South Pacific* (with Rodgers & Hammerstein)  
*The Wisteria Trees*  
*Wish You Were Here* (with Harold Rome and Arthur Kober)  
*Fanny* (with S.N. Behrman)  
*Miss Moffat* (with Emlyn Williams)  
*Rip Van Winkle*  
*Mister Roberts*, screenplay (with Frank Nugent)  
*Ensign Pulver*, screenplay (with Peter S. Feibleman)

## WEB RESOURCES

Lincoln Center Theater:  
**<http://www.lct.org>**  
Information on Lincoln Center Theater.

The Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization:  
**<http://www.rnh.com>**  
Information on Rodgers and Hammerstein and their work.

The War:  
**<http://www.pbs.org/thewar/>**  
The official website of the documentary *The War*—A Ken Burns film with resources and personal accounts of the war.

Encyclopedia of World War II:  
**<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WW.htm>**  
Extensive information on World War II.

South Pacific Tourism Organisation:  
**<http://www.spto.org/>**  
Information on the South Pacific today.

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*Richard Rodgers: The Sweetest Sounds*, an American Masters production, 2006.

*South Pacific*, film starring Mitzi Gaynor and Rossano Brazzi, 1958. A 2 DVD collector's edition was released in 2006 which includes extensive background materials.

*South Pacific*, television movie, starring Glenn Close and Harry Connick Jr., 2001.

*South Pacific in Concert from Carnegie Hall*, starring Reba McIntire and Alec Baldwin, 2006.

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