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Cinderella:

Rodgers and Hammerstein's classic
comes to Broadway

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Rodgers and
Hammerstein's
Cinderella
creates magic
on Broadway

By: David Barbour

Storybook & Classic

Conceived as a one-off live television broadcast in 1957, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella* has made it to Broadway after a mere 56 years. There have been many stops along the way—new versions for television in 1965 and 1997 and revisions (by different writers) for the stage in 1993, 2001, and 2008—all of which paid tribute to the property's durability. Finally—given the score's quality and the burgeoning market in shows aimed at tweeners girls—it was decided that the time had come for a definitive Broadway *Cinderella*.

Over the decades, the only unchanging aspects of *Cinderella* were its core of musical numbers written for the original broadcast and its general scenario, based on what is arguably the world's most famous fairy tale. The 1957 show, with a young Julie Andrews in the title role, featured a libretto by Oscar Hammerstein II in addition to songs by him and Richard Rodgers. In 1965, after Hammerstein's death, Rodgers, reportedly feeling that the original script was too jokey, brought in Joseph Schrank for a rewrite. Just about every new production since has featured another adaptation.

The *Cinderella* now playing at the Broadway Theatre features a book, by Douglas Carter Beane, that retools the fairy tale for modern sensibilities. In this version, Cinderella is hardly a passive ingenue waiting for the day when her prince will come, nor is the prince a cardboard hero with a square jaw and stentorian voice. Instead, Cinderella is the intellectually curious child of an abusive household—Madame, her stepmother, freely admits she married Cinderella's late father for money—and the prince, named Topher, is insecure in his royal role, leaving him subject to the manipulations of Sebastian, his amiably corrupt prime minister. (The prince is also an

orphan.) There's also a touch of revolution brewing in the kingdom, with the leading dissenter, Jean-Michel, raising alarms about the widening gulf between the haves and have-nots. Cinderella's stepsisters, united in their greed and disdain in other versions, are not a matched set; one of them, Gabrielle, is really rather sweet, if cowed by Madame, and she carries a torch for Jean-Michel. (This approach allows for Ann Harada, as

Jean-Michel rouses his followers with "Now is the Time," cut from *South Pacific*, as was "Loneliness of Evening," a solo for Cinderella. "There's Music in You," written for the 1953 film *Main Street to Broadway*, is here given to Marie, Cinderella's fairy godmother.

Nevertheless, under Mark Brokaw's direction and with lively, inventive choreography by Josh Rhodes, this *Cinderella* preserves the



Laura Osnes, opposite, and above with the female ensemble in "The Prince is Giving a Ball."

Charlotte, the other sister, to stop the show with "Stepsister's Lament," in which she complains amusingly about her inability to get to first base with Prince Topher.)

Because the original *Cinderella* ran only 76 minutes (plus commercials), the Broadway production has been fleshed out with other, lesser-known Rodgers and Hammerstein songs. Prince Topher's existential dilemma is laid out in "Me, Who Am I?," which was cut from the rarely seen backstage musical *Me and Juliet*.

classic values of both Charles Perrault's original story and of Broadway during its book musical heyday. High technology and show business glitz have been forgone in favor of classic staging techniques. (The most gasp-inducing moments are the astonishing costume transformations, all of them staged a vista, engineered by designer William Ivey Long.) Instead, the impulse was to create a complete, coherent fairy-tale world that draws the audience into its embrace.



A forest motif is used throughout the show, beginning with the show curtain, seen in model form above.

Into the woods

The tone of *Cinderella* is set by Anna Louizos' scenic design. Interestingly, she didn't draw on any well-known illustrators from children's literature. "Mark [Brokaw]

wanted it to always be grounded in the world of the forest," Louizos says. "He had a number of images that supported this idea: One showed a forest with chandeliers hanging in it and another with an

elegantly dressed woman in a forest. He also loved the colors in Brueghel's paintings—you can see that influence in the village scene and also in William's costumes. Also, he didn't want any blackouts; instead, he wanted the scenes to flow from one to another. I think the trees helped us in that regard."

In fact, forest imagery is prevalent throughout *Cinderella*. The show curtain is a set of trees placed downstage, which slide open to show the forest where Topher sings "Me, Who Am I?" while slaying a giant (an actor on stilts) and a dragon (created using sound and lighting effects). There are four sets of traveling trees, plus forest portals, that inform the look of virtually every scene in the show. When the action moves to the palace, Louizos added four half-arches that move around the stage and form various configurations; even though they are elegantly sculpted pieces of architecture, they are anchored by trees. Similarly, trees are



The half-timbered look of Cinderella's cottage gives it a suitably rustic feel, making it seem like an organic part of the forest.

Photo: Carol Rosegg

used to frame the interior of Cinderella's cottage.

There's a practical reason for the forest motif. "We didn't know for quite a while which theatre we'd get, and when we knew it was going to be the Broadway"—which seats 1,761—"we had the challenge of a very large house," Louizos says. "When you are in the auditorium, it sometimes feels very far from the stage; we were concerned that we might lose the intimacy of the story if we didn't find a way to draw people into the setting. At the same time, we needed plenty of room for dancing, especially in the ballroom with the big dresses that William designed. And Mark's sensibility is somewhat minimalist; he likes to see only a few pieces on stage."

Louizos says her initial strategy was to design a dimensional proscenium that would be built out into the auditorium, framing the action with trees and vines. This was ultimately deemed too expensive; instead, she employed a variety of moving pieces, assembling them to create locations that would push the action downstage, creating a feeling of intimacy for the longer book scenes. When the time comes for the big choreographed numbers, it is relatively easy to clear the stage.

In the opening sequence, the trees rearrange themselves to make various forest locations as Topher performs his heroic feats. The yard outside Cinderella's cottage includes the exterior of that building, a pair of trees (out of which appear puppets of a fox and raccoon, Cinderella's forest friends), a stone well, a harvest wagon, and a low upstage wall with pumpkins on it; we also see the wagon pulled by Cinderella and attended to by Marie, the local madwoman. The half-timbered look of the cottage gives it a suitably rustic feel, making it seem like an organic part of the forest. There is also a little nook in front of the house where Cinderella sings "In My Own Little Corner," in which she dreams of living



The interior of Cinderella's cottage shows Madame's flair for the French Provincial style.

a more exciting life.

For the transition to the cottage interior, the cottage revolves to become the fireplace, a door unit comes onstage from stage left, an upstage wall rolls on, and a roof flies in. The interior is furnished in what looks like the French Provincial style, with an elegantly carved dining table and chairs, a fortepiano, and a china cabinet with many pieces on display—all of them signs of Madame's pretensions to gracious living and all of them in conflict with the cottage's essentially rustic nature. Even so, the forest motif continues; you can see vines overlaid on the painted walls. It's as if the forest is quietly taking over the artifice of Madame's home. To facilitate intimacy, "the house interior is basically an all-in-one scene," Louizos says. The town square, where Jean-Michel's call to arms is drowned out by announcements that Prince Topher is throwing a ball, consists of two half-timbered buildings and a few pushcarts.

Magic appears during the big first-act transformation scene in which

Marie turns a pumpkin into a coach with horses. This occurs in front of Cinderella's cottage; behind the upstage wall, a pumpkin appears to grow and bursts open revealing the carriage, a dazzling structure, that, Louizos says, is "made of steel and hand-sculpted shapes that were built by [the Cornwall, New York-based scenic specialist firm] Costume Armour. The horses are hand-carved also, with vine-shaped body parts"—there's that forest motif again—"that are attached to the structure's frame; their mechanics are attached to a pedal that makes the horses' legs move." The horses are also covered with more than 1,000 points of fiber-optic lighting.

In contrast, the palace scenes are defined by a select number of large-scale scenic elements suggesting a marble interior. "The staircase was a challenge because Mark doesn't like symmetrical stage pictures," Louizos says. "It travels on a curved track and pivots to meet the upstage balustrade platform, with a telescoping landing that bridges the gap. It's a big piece of scenery to bring on stage a vista; Josh



Above and below: Cinderella's carriage. The horses are hand-carved, with vine-shaped body parts attached to the structure's frame and mechanics attached to a pedal that makes their legs move. The horses feature more than 1,000 points of fiber-optic lighting.



[Rhodes] did a great job with swirling dances downstage as the pieces come together." Because the Broadway Theatre was originally a

movie house, space is at a premium, and storing scenery in the wings was an impractical idea. Thus, adds the designer, "The balustrade travels in

segments that are hinged; as they move offstage on a curved track, they double back," folding into place like train cars. Also, "the four half arches can revolve and travel independently to make different configurations."

Of course, no *Cinderella* is complete without a clock to tick down the minutes to midnight, and Louizos has designed a beautiful wrought-iron clock face that appears at upstage center. And when the time comes for the couples at the dance to take part in a romantic waltz to the music of the ballad "Ten Minutes Ago," three chandeliers and a star drop plus a deep blue wash by the lighting designer Kenneth Posner, are enlisted to create the right mood.

For the final scene, the wedding of Cinderella and Topher, the staircase moves to center stage, and the balustrade hinges open to allow the happy couple to make their entrance. The scenery, except for those pieces



Because of wing space issues, the palace's balustrade is in segments that are hinged to double back as the piece moves offstage.

by Costume Armour, was built by Hudson Scenic Studio, of Yonkers, New York and ShowMotion, of Milford, Connecticut, with automation by Hudson. Rose Brand supplied the soft goods, including some Ink Blue Crescent velour drapes, a scrim, and the clock face, which was digitally printed on RP screen material. Props are by Jerard Studio, Prop n Spoon, and BrenBri Properties.

Louizos notes that, with so much scenery in motion, the over-the-stage area is particularly crowded; at the same time, room had to be made for the flying system, from Flying by Foy, which is used to make the transformed Marie soar over the stage. The designer adds that all of Marie's flying takes place on one track, which made it relatively easy to clear a path for her travel.

Again, says Louizos, "It needed to feel real," and indeed the most significant achievement of her design is

that she creates a fantasy world that is both magical and of this earth.

Moonlight at midnight

Asked why he chose to design the lighting for *Cinderella*, Kenneth Posner says simply, "How often do you get the chance to do a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical on Broadway?" Like Louizos, he sees *Cinderella* as having "the feel of a vintage show but with modern panache. The conceit was to rely on old-school stagecraft." As a result, he says, his goal was "to reveal everything as elegantly as we could." It's a case of mission accomplished: Posner's lighting is seemingly invisible—you will look in vain for elaborate cues or eye-grabbing effects—and yet everything on stage seems to glow with an incandescent light of its own.

Like Louizos, Posner says his biggest challenge was, "How do you

make this story feel intimate in a Broadway house of this scale? How do you focus on those two characters [Cinderella and Topher] and tell their story?" One key to this problem is the extremely delicate use of followspots to pull the leads out of the stage picture. This required the installation of a dedicated followspot catwalk. "I'm not the first person to do this in the Broadway Theatre, but that's where I invested much of my budget," he says, adding that the new position created a much steeper angle for the followspots, allowing them to be worked into an overall on-stage look with extra finesse. There are three Lycian units on the catwalk.

The second biggest challenge involved the fact that Posner's lighting design relies to an enormous degree on sidelight, especially during the extended dance sequences and forest scenes. However, he notes, "There is basically no wing space in the theatre;



Four half-arches form various configurations; they are anchored by trees and include intricate ironwork reminiscent of vines.

when the scenery moves off, it has to telescope and move upstage.”

Therefore, “the sidelight is carefully cued to let the ladders fly up and down, accommodating the scenery.”

Adding to the lighting’s subtlety was Posner’s use of a limited color palette. “It is driven by William’s costumes. Early on, he took me through the design,” which ranges from dirty, dingy grays and neutrals for the peasants to pastels for the royals. “All of my colors were pulled out of William’s palette.” Interestingly, the a-vista costume transformations designed by Long—when mad Marie becomes the fairy godmother and two separate instances of Cinderella going from rags to elegant ball gowns in a matter of seconds—are so brilliantly done that Posner further

highlights them. “In each case, we go from a single followspot to a full overlay on Vicky or Laura to underline the transformation.”

Posner’s treatment of the costumes can be seen in the sequence that begins with “Ten Minutes Ago” and continues into “Waltz for a Ball.” As the couples circle the floor, with the ladies in their sumptuous gowns at times literally floating in the air, Posner’s meticulous sidelight gives extra shape and dimension to the performers’ silhouettes, combining with the music and choreography to create a dream of romance. His sidelight also adds a great deal to “The Pursuit,” in which the prince and his men race through the forest, searching for Cinderella. Throughout the show, the designer says that he worked intensively to

“make the cueing as subtle and lyrical as possible.” Of course, he adds, Rodgers’ lilting music was an enormous help in this endeavor.

The designer’s plot mixes a standard package of conventional units with a mix of Philips Vari*Lite VL3500 Spots, VL2500 Washes, and Martin Professional MAC 2000 Performance units, the latter of which were used on the sidelight ladders. Posner says he found them useful in this position because “I could do shutter cuts with them.” Lighting is controlled by an ETC Eos, programmed by Timothy F. Rogers.

Cinderella underwent fairly extensive changes during previews, losing 20 – 25 minutes and a couple of numbers. However, Posner says he was prepared to handle this. “When I



Posner's use of sidelight subtly sculpts the performers in an extended waltz set to the music of the ballad "Ten Minutes Ago."

construct a show, it's done in such a way that one can delete segments or move them around in a cue structure." He adds, laughing, "The anxiety comes in when you're doing it 45 minutes before a performance."

Still, it's clear that he considers the entire experience to have been a happy one. "We all wanted to celebrate Broadway musicals of the '50s and '60s. I feel really fortunate to have worked on it. Shows like this don't come along very often in one's career."

There's music in you

Along with Louizos' classic scenery and Posner's simple, yet sophisticated, lighting, Nevin Steinberg's sound design has a pleasant transparency not often found in this age of high technology. "In talking to Mark

Brokaw, it was interesting to learn that we weren't required to razzle-dazzle the audience" with the latest effects, he says. "It's a very elegant production, which, interestingly, doesn't seem to disqualify us with younger audiences." (Far from it; from its first full week of previews, *Cinderella* joined the elite club of Broadway musicals earning more than \$1 million weekly.)

And once again, Steinberg faced the same challenge as his colleagues: how to create a feeling of intimacy. "The Broadway is one of the bigger houses, seat-count wise, and the mezzanine area is particularly vast," he says. "Just from the point of view of geometry, that requires a lot of attention. The question was how to get audio to all the seats in a plausible

way. That being said, because of all the wall treatments that have been put in over the years, the room is acoustically very dry, which is a great advantage for an amplified score. It's a bit tricky for a show with Rodgers and Hammerstein songs, however."

One significant advantage, Steinberg adds, are the orchestrations by Danny Troob, with additional contributions by Bill Elliott, Doug Besterman, and Larry Hochman. In classic Broadway fashion, they rely on underscoring by the strings during the vocal parts, with the brassier sounds reserved for the musical bridges and dance numbers. "That's the key thing," he says. "I can't tell you what a relief it was to hear those charts at the orchestra rehearsals. They don't just make my job easier;

they make it possible.”

Still, his loudspeaker layout required considerable thought. “The paradox of a show that wants to sound natural in a large space is the fact that you need to be very careful about where you amplify the sound or, put another way, how you amplify the sound over the distance required. I’m not a huge fan of line arrays on the proscenium, but for *Cinderella* I put in two of them so I could basically shade the amplification from the back to the front of the house.”

“If you want your PA to have the same character, you may want to use the same manufacturer across the board. But I’m not convinced that this is always an effective approach.” —Steinberg

These line arrays consist of L-Acoustics KIVA loudspeakers and KILO subs, all chosen for their compact sizes. He says, “I’ve never been quite happy with the sound of big line arrays up close, and I didn’t want something so overwhelming that it would draw focus. At one point, the speakers were going to be hidden under a dimensional proscenium designed by Anna, but when that went away, all of the speakers were exposed. It helps that they are some of the very smallest line array elements available.”

Located at the center of the proscenium is a split cluster of Kiva and Kilo boxes. “They’re focused to the left and right for the main floor,” Steinberg says. “Also on the same truss are two Kiva/Kilo lollipop clusters split left and right, for the mezzanine.” In addition, he notes, “Because of the catwalk for the followspots, the path from the proscenium to the mezzanine is partly cut off, so I put d&b audiotechnik Q-Series boxes on a truss just downstage of the lighting bridge.” Front fill is supplied by d&b E3s. Rounding out the rig are Meyer Sound 600-HP subs and, for delay, a

combination of d&b E3s and E0s and L-Acoustics 108Ps. A surround system consists of EAW JF60s. More of the EAW units are built into the set for spot effects. Foldback is provided by JF60s and EAW UB12s.

It’s an eclectic lineup, but, as Steinberg says, “Different manufacturers have different strengths. Sometimes, if you want your PA to have the same character, you may want to use the same manufacturer across the board. But I’m not convinced that this is always an

effective approach. Even inside a company, not all boxes sound alike.”

Given the extensive use of millinery in Long’s designs, aided by Paul Huntley’s elaborate wigs, mic placement was a bigger-than-usual challenge. “Thanks to early conversations with William and Paul, we were able to negotiate all of these issues early in the process. Hats and masks [worn in the ball scene] were potential problems, not to mention the costume transformations. We knew it was coming and were able to discuss it in advance. I can’t say enough about the collaboration with William and Paul and their staffs in solving these problems.”

The cast members are heard via DPA 4061 capsules, aided by Sennheiser MK5212 transmitters and em-3732 receivers. The orchestra is miked with units from Audix, DPA, Shure, AKG, Neumann, with Radial and BSS direct boxes. Vocal and orchestra reverbs are managed by TC Electronic M3000 and TC 6000 units.

Sound is controlled by the DiGiCo D5T console. “We have a big cast and a sizable orchestra,” Steinberg says. “We’re running live with 28 wireless lines on stage and over 50

inputs in the orchestra as well, plus effects and playback.” Sound effects, including the clock’s toll at midnight and the dragon in the opening scene are controlled by QLab.

Steinberg adds that getting “the first ten minutes right was pretty exciting. We spent a great deal of time dialing in Topher’s battles with the giant and the dragon. Early on in the process, there were even more creatures to bring to life. It was a tremendous effort on everyone’s part to deliver something that was exciting and fun with sound and lighting. Except for the giant, the entire sequence is all about lighting and sound effects.” In any case, he adds, the mantra was “the constant adherence to creating something that was natural and comfortable, that drew the audience in.”

Additional production personnel include Hilary Noxon (associate scenic designer), John Viesta (associate lighting designer), Jason Crystal (associate sound designer), Donald Oberpriller (production carpenter), James Maloney (production electrician), Timothy F. Rogers (lighting programmer), Justin Rathburn (production sound engineer), Jeff Brewer (head electrician), Scott Silvian and Bob Biemers (deck sound) Jake Scudder (advance sound), Aimee B. Dombo (assistant scenic designer), Nick Solyom (assistant lighting designer), Emiliano Pares (production properties supervisor), Peter Drummond (head properties), Eric Castaldo (assistant properties), and Hyun Ju Kim (sound intern).

Cinderella posted robust grosses from its earliest performances. And for good reason: By creating an illusion of simplicity, the show’s designers are giving young audiences an object lesson in the delights of the classic Broadway musical style. 🎭

For a *Cinderella* bonus report, go to www.lightingandsoundamerica.com/LSADigitalEdition.