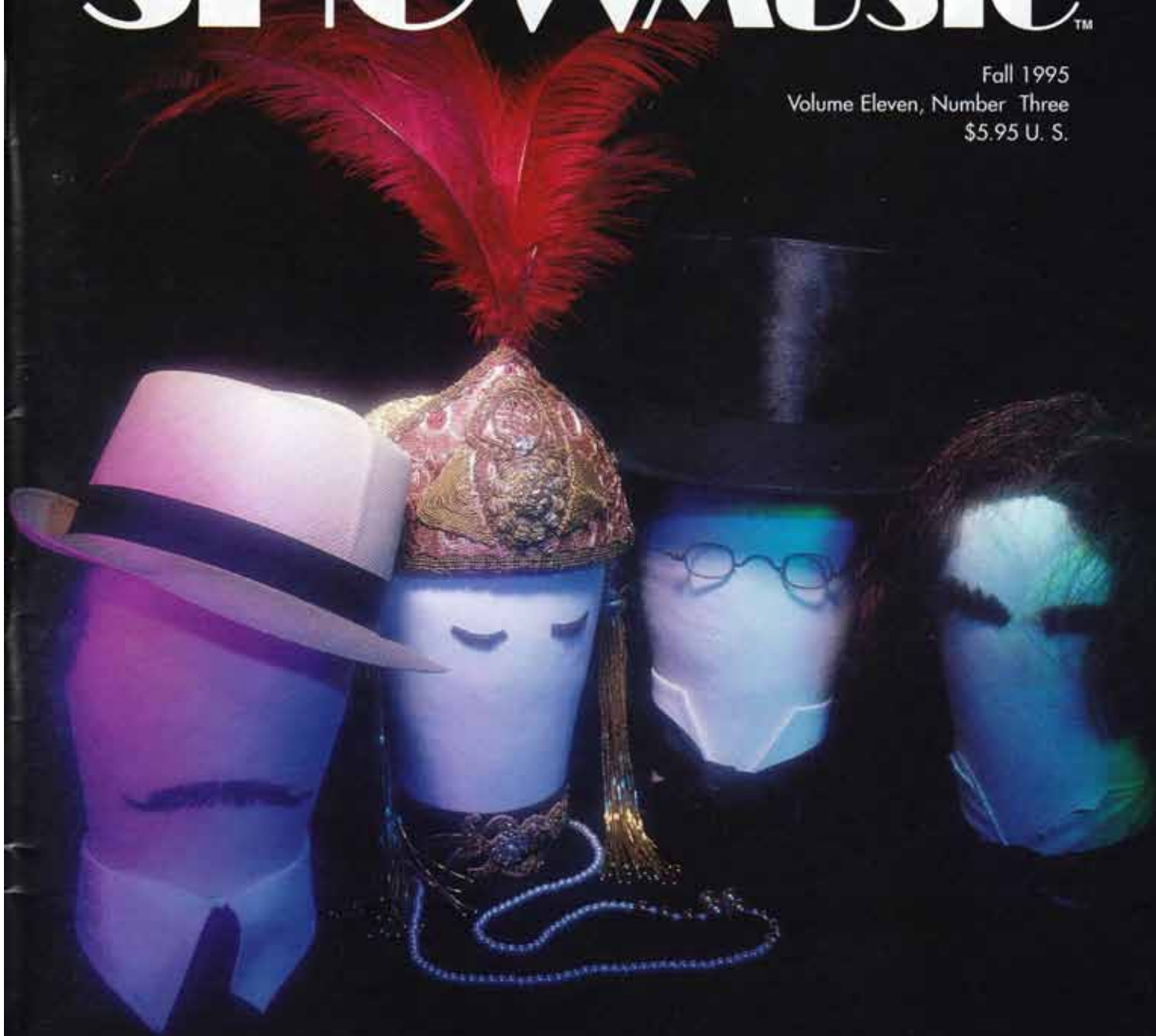


# SHOWMUSIC™

THE MUSICAL THEATRE MAGAZINE

Fall 1995  
Volume Eleven, Number Three  
\$5.95 U. S.



VICTOR/VICTORIA ♦ JEKYLL & HYDE

## Leslie Bricusse's Duality Duo

It's one of those musicals everybody knows is good but nobody knows. With *The Golden Apple*, librettist John Latouche and composer Jerome Moross virtually invented a new musico-dramatic form. This delightful show, best described as a "musical comedy opera," offers a consistently surprising and enchanting collection of contradictions. Based on Homer's epic poems, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, it presents classical Greek myth as accessible American folklore. It combines satire and sentiment, one-liner jokes and three-dimensional characters, giddy fun and genuine ideas, all in a commercial entertainment that is also a work of art. Both a musical comedy without dialogue and an opera without operatic music, it is as capable of pleasing the tired businessman as it is the Sondheim acolyte. A recognized theatrical milestone dating from 1954, it has had little practical effect on the evolution of the musical, and yet the very form it pioneered is now the dominant commercial form of musical theatre.

*The Golden Apple* was the first off-Broadway musical to transfer commercially to the Great White Way. Nonetheless, the critical huzzahs it received (including the prestigious Drama Critics Circle Award) didn't prevent its run at the Alvin Theatre from lasting a disappointing 16 weeks. The Random House libretto has long been relegated to rare book stores and the occasional library. Neither vocal selections nor a full score were ever published. The out-of-print RCA cast album (reissued briefly on Elektra Records in the 1960s) has never been released on CD. If one can find a copy, the severely truncated (to fit on one LP) recording, while certainly providing a tantalizing taste of this startling piece, fails utterly to convey the exhilarating way in which the show works as an entity (and is additionally handicapped by the annoying rhymed narration added at the eleventh hour to bridge the plot gaps). Considering all the obstacles, it's a wonder that the show has any contemporary profile.

And yet, *The Golden Apple* remains stubbornly alive. Off-Broadway, four revivals have appeared: Equity Library Theatre (1961), its commercial version (1962) and two York Theatre Company productions (1978 and 1990). A one-hour version was broadcast in 1977 on the CBS Camera Three series, and it was announced as a major Broadway revival (1972) and as

## Getting to the Core of



by Erik Haagenen

a Town Hall concert (1977), although neither actually happened. It had a number of summer stock productions in the wake of its original success and still pops up occasionally at an adventurous theatre. Most recently, Light Opera Works of Evanston, Illinois, in conjunction with Chicago's Pegasus Players, presented it in August 8, 1995. This production featured William and Jean Eckart's much lauded original scenic concept and employed, for the first time professionally since 1954, the full 25 piece Hershy Kay/Jerome

Moross orchestration.

In commercial terms, *The Golden Apple* has always been a hard sell. The idea of a through-composed, all-rhyming musical version of Homer's intimidating classic set in turn-of-the-century, small town America was Greek to the ears of a host of skeptical would-be producers. Though librettist John Latouche cajoled Cheryl Crawford into sponsoring his and Moross' successful application for a Guggenheim grant to write it, the finished product scared her away. From Kermit Bloomgarden to the Theatre Guild, top producers toyed with it and then dropped it.

Finally, it was presented off-Broadway by the newly created Phoenix Theatre in an old Yiddish vaudeville house at Second Avenue and 12th Street. The Phoenix was modeled on one of London's first "fringe" theatres, the Lyric Hammersmith, where "recognized artists" in challenging work were offered at low prices. In the early 1950s, off-Broadway served largely as a bare-bones showcase for unknown talent. The Phoenix set out to change that. The triumphant finale to their first season, *The Golden Apple* established the company as a force to be reckoned with in New York theatre.

But the commercial transfer didn't take. One handicap was Brooks Atkinson's review in *The New York Times*, which caviled about the sung-through nature of the show. Atkinson liked much of what he saw, but he wanted "songs" and apparently lacked the ear to find *The Golden Apple's* plentiful supply of them, even calling "Lazy Afternoon," the one standard to come out of the score, "bland." The rest of the virtually unanimous rave notices found no such problem.

Still, audiences probably sensed an unfortunate strain of elitism. The critics went out of their way to mention that the show was fun! fun! fun! and that knowledge of the original Homeric texts wasn't necessary to enjoy it. That was true. Unfortunately, such vociferous insistence implied that if you were conversant with Homer, you'd enjoy *The Golden Apple* all the more. One does not entice the mass audience into the theatre by promising them they'll be made to feel ignorant. The cognoscenti flocked and the masses went to *The Pajama Game*.

But *The Golden Apple* really is an unpretentious and accessible delight. Resetting the familiar legend of Paris' abduction of beautiful Helen, whose face launched a thousand ships to the Trojan War, in the turn-of-the-century American





*Ulysses and his men return home from the Spanish-American War in this updating of the classic tale (1954, Broadway).*

West, it finds specific, recognizable American archetypes to tell its classic tale. Homer's original is an adventure story of war, full of battles and heroism, not to mention monsters and other supernatural villains. Its hero, Ulysses, is punished for his arrogance in believing that power is man's right and that man can control his fate in the face of a hostile and capricious universe, dominated by mysterious forces which are personified by the gods of Greek mythology.

*The Golden Apple* shifts the focus of the tale from adventure to satire in what is both a celebration and criticism of the American character. The transposition of high-flown Greek myth to folksy American settings is inherently humorous. John Latouche described his work as "no adaptation of Homeric grandeurs, but a comic reflection of classical influence on the way we think nowadays." But it also contains a strong emotional core by accentuating the character of Penelope, the wife Ulysses leaves behind, and her yearning for her husband to cease adventuring and pay attention to the human values of home and hearth. Latouche's focus is not on battles and adventures but, rather, Ulysses' "search for a set of stable values in the frenetic process of change."

The capriciousness of the gods becomes the incredible scientific progress of the



RCA Victor Records Photo/Courtesy Bill Rosenfield

*Musical director Henri Rene and (l-r) Priscilla Gillette, Bibi Osterwald, Kaye Ballard and Stephen Douglass vie for the first copy of the cast recording. Today it's still a struggle for collectors to find.*

20th century, which will eventually temper the innocent, naive, unthinking optimism of Teddy Roosevelt's America. Written less than a decade after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *The Golden Apple* employs the lightest of touches and the vocabulary of that most American art form, the musical comedy, to suggest the need for maturation of the American manifest destiny mindset.

Latouche was determined that it would all "arise out of our native songs, dances, jokes and ideas," not only because of its American setting, but because he believed that "a truly lyric work is direct, open and entertaining." The sparkingly melodic and rhythmically infectious Jerome Moross music makes great use of "popular songs and dances of the period — waltzes, ragtime, blues, vaudeville turns, etc.," all filtered through a distinctly original contemporary voice. Moross' personal musical vocabulary had always been rooted in American folk music, which he then combined with more sophisticated harmonies, rhythms and classical structures, making him the ideal composer for *The Golden Apple*. Setting out to write a score that was "constructed as a series of interlocking musical comedy production numbers," he and Latouche hoped "that those who wanted to be entertained could come and have an evening of just fun" but that at least some might enjoy



*Despite numerous awards TGA's Broadway stay was a mere 16 weeks.*

"the comment woven into the work." "We hope it pleases and at the same time we hope it stimulates," they told *The New York Times*.

To the consternation and delight of disparate audiences, they succeeded. The consistently witty, gently satiric humor, the genuinely touching simplicity of sentiment, the imaginative and colorful methods of theatrical presentation, and the adroit updating of classical myth

allowed *The Golden Apple* to effortlessly commingle art and entertainment without ever sacrificing one to the other. Whether playing to the intellectual, dramatic play Phoenix Theatre crowd or the more broad-based Broadway musical fans, the house was always happy.

The show underwent very little change in its novel off-Broadway tryout. The insulation from commercial pressures

allowed Latouche and Moross' vision to remain nearly intact. Director Norman Lloyd, a man who had little experience with musicals, did not share the vision of the creative team and left late in rehearsal. Producer Alfred de Liagre took over working with the actors. Meanwhile, choreographer Hanya Holm and William and Jean Eckart made the set, which was a series of light, airy framed pieces and cut-outs made of folding panels of

## THE GOLDEN APPLE SYNOPSIS

*The Golden Apple* transplants Homer's epic to the little town of Angel's Roost, nestled at the foot of Washington State's Mt. Olympus in turn-of-the-century America. Ulysses and his men are now returning veterans of the Spanish-American War. Patient Penelope is his loyal, long-suffering housewife. Impatient Helen is a farmer's daughter of easy virtue recently married to the much older Sheriff Menelaus. ("He's bent with age, his feet are flat/But his bank account will straighten that!/I love him" she bellows when her disappointed suitors return.)

The Olympian goddesses who meddle in mortal affairs are transformed into three high-powered townswomen: Minerva, goddess of Wisdom, becomes the spinster schoolmarm; Juno, goddess of Women and Marriage, becomes Mrs. Juniper, the mayor's proper wife; and Aphrodite, goddess of Love, is Lovey Mars, matchmaking busybody married to the local military captain. Eris, goddess of Discord, who deliberately sets the events in motion that will lead to war, is turned into Mother Hare, local mountain-dwelling mystic whom the townswomen consult for potions, herbs and predictions of the future, but whom they consider too strange to include in the social life of Angel's Roost. Hector, hero of Troy, becomes Mayor Hector of the neighboring city of Rhododendron, a sleazy, Jimmy Walkeresque song and dance man. And Paris becomes that quintessential American figure, the traveling salesman.

Essentially, Act One is *The Iliad* and Act Two is *The Odyssey*. Penelope welcomes her wandering husband home and is thrilled at his promise to remain for good. ("It's the going home together/Through the changing years/It's the talk about the weather/And the laughter and the tears.") Unfortunately, Mother Hare, angry at her exclusion from town life, has other plans. She gives a shining apple made of golden wire to be the prize of a baking contest held during the welcome home celebration for the returning soldiers. She knows the three townswomen will all scheme to win it. Handsome Paris, who has just arrived via balloon, is to be the impartial judge. The ladies try to bribe him. Lovey Mars wins out by offering him the favors of Helen, whom she knows cannot resist anything in suspenders. ("I offer you perfection/A love that will not die/Just for the selection/of my little pie.")

Helen devours the poor fellow and they are soon balloon-bound for the big city. Sheriff Menelaus and the old men of Angel's Roost whip up a frenzy for revenge in Helen's legion of former town beaux ("It's the principle of the



Mrs. Juniper, Lovey Mars and Miss Minerva (from left: Sylvia Short, Jane Connell, Peggy LeRoy) in a bake-off for the prized golden apple (1962, off-Broadway).



Ulysses (Stephen Douglass) and Penelope (Priscilla Gillette) are reunited at last.

thing!") and soon a reluctant Ulysses finds himself once again leaving his stalwart Penelope to fight a war. ("Old men always do the shouting/Young men have to do the shooting.") But, secretly, Ulysses is glad of the opportunity, as his restless desire to see more of the outside world and the coming scientific wonders of the 20th century has been stirred up by the malicious Mother Hare, who has shown it all to him in a mesmerizing vision.

Ulysses and his men arrive in the big city as Act Two begins. The inhabitants of Rhododendron protect Helen and Paris. Finally, Ulysses and Paris agree to duke it out. When Ulysses wins, Helen hastily makes up with Menelaus and they leave for home.

But Ulysses isn't ready to go just yet and he and his men decide to have a well deserved night on the town, which is juxtaposed with faithful Penelope's moving lament about all the years she and her husband have lost being apart. ("I lie in the house/As the stars grow dim/And I think of how his body was/So warm, warm and slim.") Ulysses' 10-year wanderings, which give *The Odyssey* its title, are here transformed into a late-night bender staged as a nightmarish sequence of music hall turns. Calypso, Scylla and Charybdis and the Sirens are portrayed as the various tempting corruptions of the city. They pick off Ulysses men one by one. ("Now we will have our revenge on them/... The city itself will be our stratagem" sings the oily Mayor Hector.)

Finally, Circe, the sorceress who turns men into swine, arrives to offer Ulysses complete power at the price of human feeling (in the form of the golden apple of Act One). Ulysses is about to accept when a cowardly Paris tries to stab him. Achilles, Ulysses' last remaining compatriot, dies intercepting the knife meant for his beloved leader.

Now completely alone, Ulysses is forced to look inside himself to find the meaning of it all. His lust for adventure, excitement and sensation has turned victory to ashes. He realizes that:

"Life is life's answer  
And death is the same...  
I know that I am myself  
And I am also other men  
And knowing this truly  
I can go home again."

And he does, to an angry Penelope who finally asserts herself ("Should I roll out the carpet?/Ask you sweetly how you are, pet?"), and only accepts him when she is convinced of his new commitment to human values over the hubristic pursuit of fame, fortune and adventure. Older, wiser and chastened, he is finally home to stay and they vow "We've Just Begun" as the curtain falls.

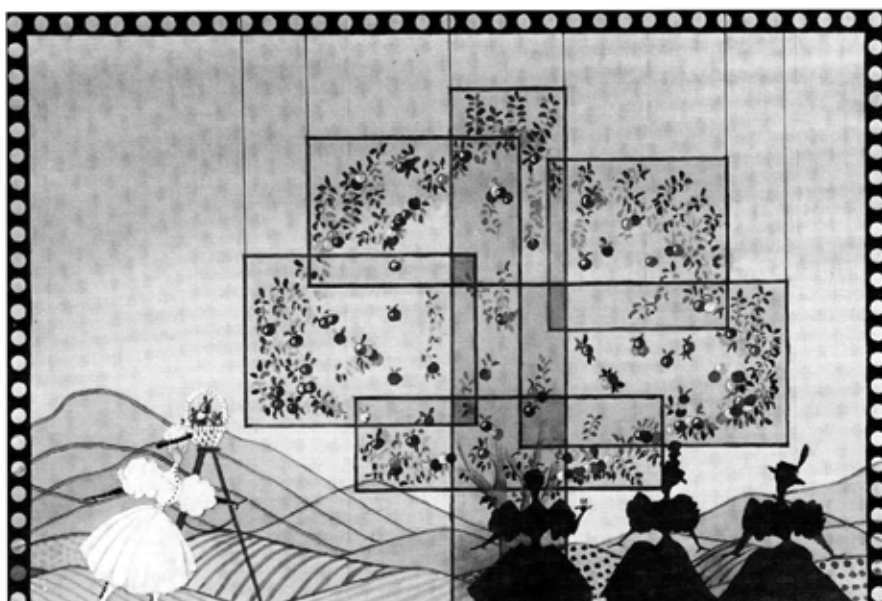
— E.H.

fabric (suggested by shoji screens), work fluidly with the staging in a way that would eventually become routine in musicals, but was still new at the time.

The only major disagreement to cause real dissension in the creative ranks involved the finale. Originally, the show ended with a duet for the reunited Ulysses and Penelope, "We've Just Begun," a soaring hymn of middle-aged hope. This was considered a letdown by several critics, who wanted a more "rousing" finale. Latouche and Moross tried to deal with the objections by drastically rewriting and shortening the final scene leading into the song, while also adding a quick reprise of "Lazy Afternoon" for good measure. But producers de Liagre and Roger Stevens insisted that "you can't end a musical with only two people on-stage." Instead, they pressed for a reprise of Ulysses and Penelope's Act One love song, "It's the Going Home Together," backed by a full chorus in the best tradition of Broadway finales.

Unfortunately, this changed the entire meaning of the show. "We've Just Begun" was about husband and wife making a new commitment, suggesting that each had learned from his or her mistakes and that they would now start afresh. The reprise suggested that they knew everything they needed to know at the start and were returning to their old relationship. The producers made the change the price of moving uptown and the authors reluctantly paid it. But though this is what was published and recorded, the authors reinstated the original ending as early as the following year in summer stock. "We've Just Begun" is now the only ending made available by the show's licensor, Tams-Witmark.

*The Golden Apple* shares elements of dramatic approach and thematic concern with other shows of its period. Its skeptical view of the Industrial Revolution and scientific progress was a theme of 1948's *Love Life*, and its Act Two sequence of music hall numbers is akin to the minstrel show in which *Love Life*'s principals sort out their marital problems. 1947's *Allegro* pits the corruption of the big city against the innocence of small town American life with more sanctimony, but remarkable similarity. The 1954 film *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* was another musical comedy updating of myth set in the frontier American West. And playwrights such as Jean Giradoux (*Amphitryon 38* and *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*) and Jean Anouilh (*Antigone*) had already updated



William and Jean Eckart's shoji-like tree design for Act I Scene i.



Kaye Ballard and townswomen beneath its realization.

classical myths in order to deal with their own contemporary concerns. What made *The Golden Apple* so unique was neither its themes nor its theatrical devices, but its bold attempt to find a new musico-dramatic form of storytelling.

John Latouche (1915-1956) was one of Broadway's most perpetually promising lyricists. His collaborator Jerome Moross (1913-1983) was a Brooklyn-born, classically trained composer whom Aaron Copland said was "probably the most talented" composer of his generation. In the tradition of Gershwin, Weill and Bernstein, Moross was that Broadway

rarity, an excellent tunesmith who could also write for the concert hall and orchestrate his own work. Financial pressures led Moross to Hollywood, and he is best known today for his film scores, particularly for several notable westerns. He also wrote a number of successful ballets, including the classic *Frankie and Johnny*, as well as numerous concert works.

Although he had a show on Broadway by the age of 21 (the 1935 satirical political revue *Parade*, produced by the Theatre Guild) and his burning goal was to create a

Continued on page 66



## A "TOUCHE" OF THE POET

His lack of fame today is in inverse proportion to his considerable talent. Known primarily for his few lyrical contributions to *Candide*, John Latouche actually wrote at least 17 musical shows in 18 years, as well as contributed songs, sketches and special material to a host of revues and club acts. His exuberant, witty, evocative lyrics too often went down with the rickety vehicles which contained them, while his successes were invariably artistic rather than commercial. Lacking the cast albums to keep him alive, he has drifted into undeserved obscurity.

John Treville Latouche was born on November 13, 1915, to a farming family from Richmond, Virginia. (He was later to move that date up to 1917 upon reaching the ripe old age of 24.) As a child, he turned out poems, plays and paintings, while producing, designing, directing, and acting in entertainments for his family and friends. The grand prize in a short story contest brought him to New York City in 1932 with a full scholarship to the prestigious Riverdale Preparatory School. He soon segued to Columbia University, where, as a sophomore, he wrote the "Rabelaisian" 1935 Varsity Show, *Flair-Flair, the Toast of Gay Paree*, and promptly fled, leaving a newly created faculty censorship board in his wake.

Vernon Duke, Ira Gershwin and Lorenz Hart became mentors. Asked to describe him, Hart replied with the single word, "Threat." He wrote "socially significant risqué songs" for the world-weary cabaret star Spivy, and his lyrics were interpolated into numerous revues, including the long-running *Pins and Needles*. He achieved national attention in 1939 with "Ballad for Americans," a patriotic "narrative cantata" written with Earl Robinson for the WPA revue *Sing for Your Supper*. Paul Robeson and chorus performed it on radio to such acclaim that the Library of Congress asked for the original manuscript. This led to the job of lyrics for *Cabin in the Sky*, his first book show and only commercial success.

Short, stocky and swarthy, with darkly brooding good looks set off by masses of wavy hair, "Touche" possessed a formidable bad-boy charm, which helped to smooth over his erratic working habits and fondness for imbibing. He presented himself in interviews as a sartorially eccentric, self-styled "rebel," who could sing an authentic Chinese chant and who, in his salad days, often "read poetry in the nude by candlelight." He had a lifelong



Latouche (left) and Jerome Moross

fascination with the Faust legend, frequently sketching little devils on paper scraps and tablecloths and often signing his letters "Beelzebub." A gay man who introduced Tennessee Williams to his life-partner, Frank Merlo, while on a Provincetown jaunt, he nonetheless married and divorced the millionaire daughter of a Hollywood magnate and former Ambassador to Spain. Husband and wife lived in bohemian Greenwich Village "because we want to," Latouche insisted.

Latouche considered himself a "poet" rather than a lyricist and was articulate and determined about his desire to bring poetry into the commercial arena. (He felt so strongly about this that he turned down the offer to do the lyrics for *On the Town*, a job for which he was announced in the newspapers, because he decided the "management wanted conventional lyrics instead of poetry." Comden and Green, originally slated to do only the book, happily assumed the chore, producing considerable "poetry" of their own.) His imagery was often delightfully off-center ("Though skies are grey/I'm as gay as a Disney cow" from *Banjo Eyes*; "Not a Care in the World" is pure Latouche), but what he meant by "poetic" lyrics was a vocabulary more expansive, expressive and character-based than the standard Tin Pan Alley lingo. He believed that "the American theatre is growing more mature and a new art form is going to arise." He was determined to develop the integrated musical play.

Once Latouche gained the nerve to start doing his own scripts, he began to fulfill his goal. He died of a sudden heart attack at the age of 40, only one month after the successful premiere of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, his first opera. At the time,

he was at work for David Merrick on the book and lyrics (to the music of Coleman Dowell) of what ultimately became *Take Me Along*—eight songs had been completed.

In her eulogy, Carson McCullers said that he died "at the peak of his greatness." Actually, he was just hitting his stride and his greatest shows undoubtedly lay ahead. But the songs remain. Revue conceivers and cabaret singers take note! Latouche's oeuvre lies dormant, like Baby Doe's Matchless Silver Mine, a rich vein of ore just waiting to be worked again for the considerable treasures within.

—E.H.

### John Latouche: On Stage

*Pins and Needles, Two for Tonight, From Vienna, Stars for Spain, Sing for Your Supper, Ice Capades of 1941* (1938-1941) - Revues. Music: Lee Wainer, Berenice Kazounoff, Earl Robinson & others.

*Cabin in the Sky* (1940) - Music: Vernon Duke.

*Banjo Eyes* (1941) - Music: Vernon Duke.

*The Lady Comes Across* (1942) - Music: Vernon Duke.

*Nutcracker Jive* (1943) - Music: Tchaikovsky, adapted by Herbert Kingsley.

*Rhapsody* (1944) - Music: Fritz Kreisler, adapted by Robert Russell Bennett.

*Polonaise* (1945) - Music: Frederic Chopin, adaptation and new music by Bronislaw Kaper.

*Beggars Holiday* (1947) - Music: Duke Ellington.

*Ballet Ballads* (1948) - Music: Jerome Moross.

*Tambourina* (1949) - Music: Ernesto Lecuona.

*Mooncalf* (1949) - Music: Lehman Engel.

*The Golden Apple* (1954) - Music: Jerome Moross.

*Happy Dollar* (1955) - Music: William Friml (son of Rudolf).

*The Vamp* (1955) - Music: James Mundy.

*The Littlest Revue* (1956) - Music: Vernon Duke.

*The Ballad of Baby Doe* (1956) - Music: Douglas Moore.

*Candide* (1956) - Music: Leonard Bernstein.

new form of American musical, Moross ended his career with only four musical shows to his credit (plus a one-act opera based on *Sorry, Wrong Number*, his last major work, completed in 1977). It was a disappointingly slim output, largely due to the fact that Moross sat and waited for Latouche to be available, while Latouche often worked with other composers as well. Once Latouche died, Moross was unable to find as suitable a collaborator. Nevertheless, in their work together, Moross did know the satisfaction of realizing his goal.

The two men had been trying to write something together since they first met in the late 1930s. That something became the experimental music theatre piece, *Ballet Ballads*, which debuted off-Broadway in 1948 as a production of, quite appropriately, the Experimental Theatre (after losing the sponsorship of the man who commissioned it, impresario Mike Todd). *Ballet Ballads* was the first crucial step in their search for a new theatrical form, one that could tell tales of mythic size and feel in a stylized way, mixing dance, song and storytelling in equal parts. The show consisted of four "ballads," one of which, a topsy-turvy version of *Little Red Riding Hood* (which featured a heroine much tougher than the wolf, long before *Into the Woods*) was dropped before production due to lack of funds. The other three were *Susannah and the Elders* ("a revival meeting"), *Willie the Weeper* (an extended "reefer dream") and *The Eccentricities of Davy Crockett* (as told by himself). Each had its own choreographer and a rhymed text by Latouche set to music by Moross.

As the title implies, the evening was based in dance. The tales were narrated rather than dramatized, with soloists and/or chorus singing while dancers carried out the action. Roles were double cast ("singing Willie" and "dancing Willie," for example), though sometimes the dancers did their own singing as well. Both in description and critical reaction, the show sounds remarkably similar to Graciela Daniele's current attempts to find a dance-based theatrical storytelling form (utilizing in her case speech as well as song), most recently on display in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

*Ballet Ballads* was a *succes d'estime*. Words like "adventurous, novel, interesting, whimsical, unique, unusual" were used by the critics to describe it.



Roderick MacArthur/Courtesy Susanna Moross Tarjan

Brooks Atkinson called it "one of the most joyous performances of the season," but also said "it would be overenthusiastic to describe [it] as a new art form." There were also a few contrary voices. Those critical of *Ballet Ballads* had been particularly irked by the equal time given to each artistic discipline. Walter Kerr summed up such complaints when he called the mix of forms distracting, "promising first one thing, then another, without being free to fulfill the promise wholly either way." The show did attempt a Broadway transfer, but nobody seemed to know if it was a musical or a ballet or a concert, and it wilted at the Music Box in the heat of July after only a nine-week run.

Nonetheless, Latouche and Moross were emboldened by the overwhelmingly positive tone of the response and decided to try again. They also listened to their critics and made a crucial refinement in approach to their new form. As they set about mapping out *The Golden Apple*, they made a clear choice to tell the story primarily through words and music. This is not to say that dance played no part. The important role of Paris was fashioned as a non-speaking, all-dancing one. There were also several choreographic set pieces, including an Act One welcome home celebration gently spoofing the sturdy rusticity of Rodgers and Hammerstein's hayrides and clambakes ("We're Going to Raise a Ruckus Tonight") and the vaudeville routines of Act Two's nightmare city sequence. And the scene changes were carefully choreographed. Still, the attempt at equal balances had definitely shifted. Words and music now dramatized, rather than narrated, the story. All other elements

*The citizens of Angel's Roost "Raise a Ruckus" at the town social (1954, Broadway).*

now enhanced and supported, rather than competed, with that basic goal.

What made it unique was the retention of the all-sung, all-rhymed structure, the idea of which at the time was a major turn-off to the general public. Rodgers and Hammerstein had made the musical play the ascendant commercial form. Operetta was passé (which Latouche knew from the painful experience of writing lyrics for two of them) and all attempts at opera on Broadway, including such critically acclaimed shows as *Porgy and Bess*, *Regina*, *Street Scene*, and *The Medium*, had failed commercially. Indeed, when *Porgy and Bess* was revived in 1942, Cheryl Crawford insisted on producing it as a musical play with dialogue, rather than a through-sung opera. It then became a commercial hit.

But *The Golden Apple* was an "opera" with a difference. Everything in the evening was structured in popular song forms. Even the recitative (i.e., the sung sections between longer songs that carried the dramatic action forward) was structured as miniature songs, often using fragments of melody later expanded upon elsewhere. It wasn't the dreaded endless repetition of a single note so familiar to habitués of the Metropolitan horseshoe. Nor were the voices traditionally operatic. Such performers as Kaye Ballard, Bibi Osterwald, Portia Nelson and Charlotte Rae (a cast replacement) had been plucked from the world of night clubs. Nola Day came from television and radio. Jack Whiting was an old vaudeville soft shoe

man. The more legitimate voices of romantic leads Stephen Douglass and Priscilla Gillette were really just strong musical theatre voices.

Nonetheless, audiences could not be convinced in sufficient numbers to sample this new form. It took the success of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita* in the 1970s to challenge the commercial stranglehold of the book musical. Ironically, it's unlikely that those shows had any connection to Latouche and Moross' achievement. Authors Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice have often stated in interviews that they wrote *Superstar* in the form of a pop record album because they despaired of getting it produced as a theatre piece. When its success led to a stage production, this inevitably dictated a form where a series of songs combine to tell a story without intervening dialogue, as no one wanted to muck about with what was already a huge hit. The result was as accidental as *The Golden Apple* was deliberate.

What Lloyd Webber, Boublil and Schönberg and other noisy Europeans now employ for their through-sung efforts is simply a cruder, less intelligent and more bombastic version of what Latouche and Moross pioneered. The musical vocabulary is more European than American, but it is

still based in song forms. A particularly noteworthy difference between the two is evident in their texts. Latouche's rigorous attention to character delineation, coupled with his rich language and endlessly inventive and playful rhymes, allow him to keep *The Golden Apple* gloriously aloft. They also make the nearly instantaneous switching of tone from satiric to sentimental, deftly mirrored in the music as well, seem effortless and natural. Today's pop operas, however, are notable for the virtual absence of any humor, while striking a relentless note of plodding portentousness in their simple-minded, cliché-strewn texts (also too often deftly mirrored in the music).

A few American writers have dabbled in this form, notably Marc Blitzstein in *The Cradle Will Rock* (before Latouche and Moross), Frank Loesser in *The Most Happy Fella* and William Finn in *Falsettos*, but it never took commercial root in the Broadway theatre. This is at least in part due to a major pitfall. It becomes much harder for a dramatist to utilize subtext (i.e., the difference between what a character is feeling or thinking and what he or she is saying) when everything is sung. Music, being an abstract medium, is so emotionally persuasive that it usually makes what is being sung sound like it is

honestly meant. This reduces the complexity of human character. And Broadway musicals have always been (at least until recently) colloquial and human, unlike opera, where size, grandiosity and the reduced importance of the text work against nuance and detail.

But musicals like the above prove that there are ways around that. Now that the public is eager for through-composed shows, perhaps young writers ought to take a look at how Latouche and Moross did it simpler, smarter and stronger more than 40 years ago. And perhaps an enterprising commercial producer ought to follow the lead of Light Opera Works and Pegasus Players and reinvestigate one of the milestones of American musical theatre. H. L. Mencken said that no one ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public. But it may just be possible that the American public has finally caught up with *The Golden Apple*. ■

Erik Haagensen has been a research consultant for the Leonard Bernstein and Kurt Weill estates and is an acknowledged expert on the work of Alan Jay Lerner. As a librettist/lyricist, three of his musicals have received production, including *A Fine and Private Place* at Goodspeed-at-Chester/The Norma Terris Theatre.