

BROADWAY MUSIC

by Donna Marie Baver

The music of Broadway has a distinct spice and a subtle thrill. It is in a classification all its own, and no other form of music can touch it. It is a genre totally unto itself and has an identity that is completely sacrosanct.

There are many characteristics that separate the music of Broadway (and sometimes of Hollywood, although the music of movies deserves an article totally to itself, so I shall not trifle with it in this article) from any other form of music in the world. The first of these and the most important is the inexorable connection between the song and the show for which it was written. Without the show the song loses some of its meaning and the same applies with the meaning of the song to the show, especially with the "new" form of Broadway music which involves a good deal more than a chorus and dancers breaking up a scene that needed a little more "spice." Stephen Sondheim, along with many others, has lent his unique talents to perfecting this particular form of Broadway music that is "married" to the show for which it was written. For example, I can think of no popular songs that have emerged from Sondheim's three greatest hits in the past years: Follies, Company, and A Little Night Music, his current hit.

There are, however, two exceptions to this rule: the immortal team of Rodgers and Hammerstein, and the team of Bacharach and David (which, unfortunately, is no longer a happy marriage as both have gone their separate ways) whose songs have fit their shows to perfection but have also gone on to become simply "popular music." A well-known example of this is "I'll Never Fall in Love Again" from the show Promises, Promises. Of course, practically anything by Rodgers and Hammerstein also falls into this category.

Broadway music has a spe-

cial and totally unique "mood" about it. Because every song is a part of an entire show, there is a story behind every song. The character is feeling something as he or she sings and the mood permeates the song. The song is the result of a series of events and is sometimes even used as a device to reveal past events in the life of a particular character. In "The Butterfly," a touching and yet strangely chilling song from Zorba the Greek, Nikos is trying to explain his reasons for hesitation and caution in all he does, because he, as he tells in the song, once forced a butterfly to emerge from its cocoon before its ordained time. "I was stronger than nature," he sings, "And I made it be born! But the wonder of life...has a definite plan...so he died in my hand...." Nikos' entire personality is revealed through this song much more effectively and emotionally than could have been accomplished through the use of dialogue. The song is a definite part of the show and can never be completely separated from it, although it is one of the most hauntingly beautiful and touching numbers that I have ever heard. It will probably never appear on the Top Forty charts, which I, personally, feel is a great loss to the world of music. But to appreciate the song fully one must first appreciate the show for which it was written, the situation in which it is sung, and the character who sings it.

Broadway music is deep and thought-provoking. Broadway is no longer merely an escape to the glitter and glamour of the theatre. It explores real problems and real dilemmas of our life and society. And the songs in Broadway musicals, especially those in the category about which I spoke earlier, the "new" Broadway music, are an intrinsic part of this exploration. The music in Two Gentlemen of Verona berated and poked fun at things which not have been heard in a theatre some years ago. It criticizes our government and our leaders. Applause looked into the "dirt" and nastiness that goes on within the walls of a theatre. Company presented a controversial picture of marriage. There are many others, too numerous to mention here. And there is one other nice thing about Broadway music, perhaps even the nicest: one need not go to New York to see the show to appreciate the music. The "new" Broadway music is so explicit in its meanings and its relations to the plot of the show that one need not even see the show to understand it. All one must do is hear the album, for the meaning is there within the songs.

I am afraid I have merely scratched the surface of the meaning and understanding of Broadway music. I hope that I have managed to give some people some small measure of in-

continued next page


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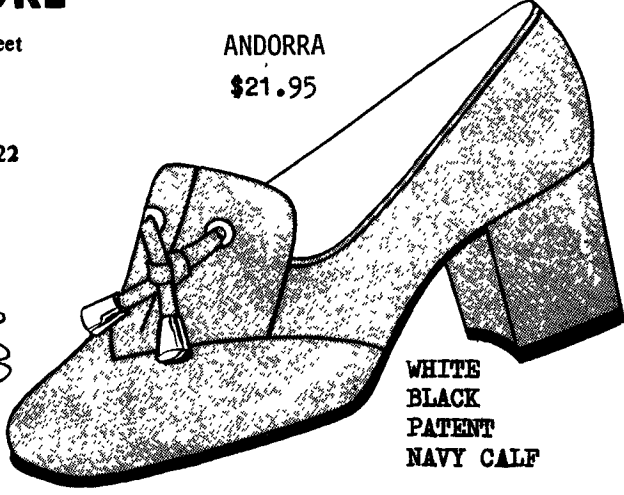
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