

**LIVE**  
FROM LINCOLN CENTER



**August 18, 2010 at 8:00 on PBS**  
**Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific***

Our next Live From Lincoln Center, on Wednesday evening, October 18, will bring into your homes one of the landmark accomplishments in the history of the American musical theater: the Rodgers and Hammerstein epic *South Pacific*. Opening on Broadway on April 7, 1949 *South Pacific* racked up a total of 1,925 performances over a period of more than 5 years. Since then it has had numerous revivals the world over, has been twice made into a feature film, and a 2006 concert version from Carnegie Hall was shown on PBS's Great Performances series. Amazingly, however, Lincoln Center Theater's current run of *South Pacific* in the Vivian Beaumont Theater, a run which is now longer than 2 years, is the work's VERY FIRST Broadway revival.

The back story of *South Pacific* is fascinating. It all began with James Michener's 1948 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, "Tales of the South Pacific". Those "Tales" resonated in the memory bank of famed stage director Joshua Logan, a World War II veteran, who sensed in them material for a Broadway show. He and producer Leland Hayward secured the rights from Michener...and they were on their way. It was only 5 years after composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist and librettist Oscar Hammerstein II had soared to "the top of the heap" with their first collaboration, "Oklahoma!" But they were the inevitable choice for the planned musical.

Enter Edwin Lester, head of the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera Company. The great Italian bass, Ezio Pinza, a headliner at New York's Metropolitan Opera for nearly two decades, had signed a contract for \$25,000 to appear with Lester's company in a new musical. Nothing came of that musical, but under the terms of his contract Pinza was due his money come what may. When Lester learned of the planned musical adaptation of the Michener novel, he contacted Logan and Hayward and offered them Pinza for the role of the French plantation owner, Emile de Becque. With Pinza on board the team, led by Hammerstein, then went after--and got--Mary Martin for the role of the American nurse, Nellie Forbush.

With three of Michener's "Tales" woven together to make a continuous story line, *South Pacific* opened at New Haven's Shubert Theater in March, 1949. Its sensitive treatment of racial prejudice was bold for 1949, and remains bold still some 60 years later. In a nutshell, it revolves around the complicated love between Little Rock-born and raised Nellie and de Becque who, as Nellie learns later, has two Polynesian children from a previous marriage. And there is a parallel romance between American Marine Lieutenant Joe Cable and Liat, a Tonkinese beauty, the daughter of another leading character named Bloody Mary. In one of the show's most insightful numbers Cable sings "You've Got to be Carefully Taught", a recitation that prejudice is "not something you're born with, it happens after you're born".

The score of *South Pacific* is replete with material that has long since been part of the hallowed American Songbook: "Some Enchanted Evening", "There Is Nothing Like a Dame", "I'm In Love With a

Wonderful Guy", "Younger Than Springtime", "This Nearly Was Mine" to name but a few. The initial Broadway run earned ten Tony Awards, among them Best Musical, Best Score, Best Libretto, Best Director, and Best Actor for four of the Principals.

Fast Forward to April 3, 2008, when the current Lincoln Center revival opened, directed by the acclaimed Bartlett Sher. "I know we're not supposed to expect perfection in this imperfect world," wrote Ben Brantley in his New York Times review the next day, "but I'm darned if I can find one serious flaw in this production." Audiences and critical panels have agreed. This production of *South Pacific* has gone on to win five Drama Desk Awards and 11 Tony nominations, winning in seven of the categories. And a special Award was given posthumously to Robert Russell Bennett for "his historic contribution to American musical theater in the field of orchestrations, as represented on Broadway this season by Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*."

So, to brighten a summer's evening our next Live From Lincoln Center will bring you this enchanting production of *South Pacific* directly from the stage of Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater. The date again is Wednesday evening, August 18. Our good friend Alan Alda returns to the series as the evening's host. Kelli O'Hara will return to the cast to reprise her role as Nellie Forbush, Paolo Szot will appear as Emile de Becque, and there may yet be another surprise or two in the cast! And again let me remind you to check the schedule of your local PBS station for the exact date and time of the telecast in your area.

Enjoy!

MARTIN BOOKSPAN