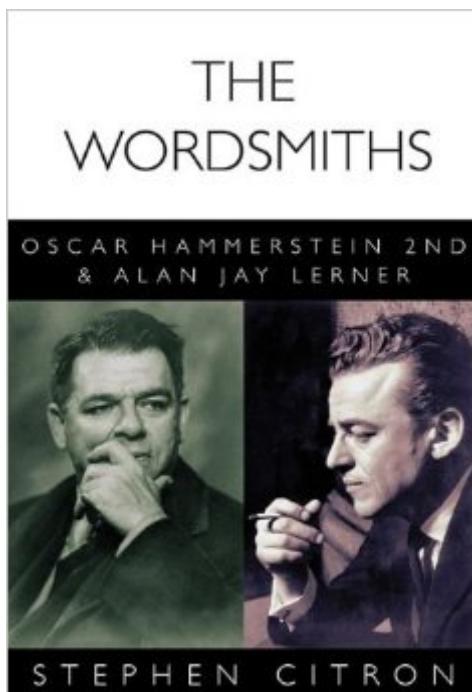


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The Wordsmiths: Oscar Hammerstein 2nd And Alan Jay Lerner (Great Songwriters)



Synopsis

Incomparable and unique in their ability to write both libretti and lyrics, Oscar Hammerstein and Alan Jay Lerner brought the musical theater to an artistic peak that remains unsurpassed. From Show Boat, Oklahoma!, and The Sound of Music to Brigadoon, My Fair Lady, and Camelot, they wrote the book and lyrics for one glittering gem after another. Drawing on a wealth of previously unpublished manuscripts, lyrics, letters, and interviews, Stephen Citrons dual biography brings to life the strikingly different worlds of Hammerstein and Lerner two remarkable artists who revolutionized musical theater. Citrons narrative brims with fascinating stories about these two master wordsmiths, sweeping readers along Hammersteins roller-coaster career with its mixture of hits and flops contrasted sharply with Lerners endless rewrites, eight marriages, and debilitating drug habits. Readers learn how Hammerstein and composer Richard Rodgers first wrote musicals together as undergraduates at Columbia University, then parted company for 20 years before reuniting to produce one smash hit after another. We also discover that the Loewe-Lerner team almost never made it past Brigadoon, due in part to Loewes aspirations to become a serious composer and Lerners chronic insecurities about his own talent. Along the way, we meet the centurys greatest composers and actors including George Gershwin and Kurt Weill, Mary Martin and Rex Harrison whose transcendent melodies and showstopping performances combined with Hammersteins and Lerners words to leave an indelible mark on musical theater. Not only does Citron offer consummate analyses of his subjects lyrics and probing insights into their plots and dialogue, he also provides a mini-reference packed with photographs of notable productions and of the artists themselves. The book also includes a complete list of works, an extensive bibliography, and a quintuple chronology of Hammersteins and Lerners lives in relation to events in the world and musical theater.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I recently finished reading this dual biography of Hammerstein and Lerner. My overall impression was that it was interesting and insightful. I would have given the book a higher rating except that the number of typographical and minor factual errors was a little more than I feel is appropriate. As an example, in the section describing Hammerstein's "Allegro", the writer stated that the hero of the piece, Joseph Taylor, Jr., sings the number "So Far" to a college co-ed. A look at the score or the libretto clearly indicates that it is, in fact, the opposite. The co-ed sings the song to Joe. This may sound a bit nit-picky, and I could forgive one or maybe even two errors like this. Unfortunately, the book gets a number of these details wrong.

The problem with a book like this which only deals with one half of the legendary teams who created such glorious music for the theater, is that unless you're familiar with the music, you're left struggling. Most people who read this will be, but Stephen Citron's considerable knowledge of the lyrics doesn't extend to insightful comments on the other elements that made these scores, and shows, legendary. He also has dubious taste. 'One More Walk Around The Garden' from Carmelina, 'When Your Lover Says Goodbye' from Coco, and 'I Am Going To Like it Here' from Flower Drum Song, aren't worth even half the attention Citron gives them.

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