

Roundabout Theatre Company

book by Neil Simon music by Cy Coleman lyrics by Carolyn Leigh
based on the novel by Patrick Dennis
directed and choreographed by Rob Marshall

PRODUCTION GUIDE

little me



From Page To Stage Production Guide

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WHAT IS THE PLAY ABOUT?

"Little Me has one of the best of Broadway musical books. The show will doubtless prove revivable because of its unique, smoothly written and deliriously funny script. The score is also wonderful, but the lasting power of a Broadway musical is always determined by its book. . . with Little Me, [Neil Simon] found an exuberance and comic lunacy that he did not often display in even his most successful comedies."

— Martin Gottfried, *Broadway Musicals*

At the beginning of *Little Me*, Belle, the play's central character, is hosting a party to celebrate the publication of her memoirs. As she starts to recount the key events of her life, her party guests and the audience are drawn into a winding tale of one woman's remarkable life. What emerges is not only a story of Belle's accomplishments, but her search for love. Since the author of both of these story-lines is Neil Simon, neither is presented without a healthy dollop of comedy and caricature.

In one sense, Belle's tale is a classic rags-to-riches story. From humble surroundings, where she dreams of fame, fortune, and social position, Belle embarks on a journey that takes her to exotic locales with colorful characters. Among the many intriguing episodes in Belle's life are those in which she is put on trial, becomes a vaudeville performer, survives a maritime disaster, and stars in a Hollywood movie. By sending Belle on so many adventures, Neil Simon exploits the comic potential of the play by providing a wide selection of outrageous characters and peculiar situations. The result is a parody of an archetypal narrative form.

Little Me is concerned with more than Belle's search for fame, fortune, and social position, however. Belle is also in pursuit of her true love, Noble Eggleston. From the moment Belle and Noble meet, they know they're destined to be together. Unfortunately, Belle and Noble encounter several obstacles. In fact, they always seem to be on the brink of coming together when some extraordinary and unexpected force tears them apart. As he did with the story of the heroine's journey to wealth and fame, Neil Simon satirizes the love story in *Little Me* through exaggeration, reversals, and strong contrasts.

The "lasting power" of *Little Me*, as Martin Gottlieb says, then seems to come from a combination of several aspects of the script. It utilizes classic elements—the heroine's journey from poverty to wealth, and a love story—and mixes them with sparkling satire. *Little Me* is an engaging piece of theatre not only in the story it tells, but in how it tells it.

WHO'S WHO

BELLE (played by Faith Prince): A woman who begins life as a poor girl from "the other side of the tracks," but is able to meet people from all over the world with her innocent charm.

NOBLE EGGLESTON (played by Martin Short): A man of wealth and brains, who is Belle's true love from the moment they meet.

PINCHLEY (played by Martin Short): An old miser with a cruel sense of humor who needs someone to teach him that he actually has a heart "deep down inside."

BENNY AND BERNIE BUCHSBAUM (played by Martin Short and Michael McGrath): A pair of show business promoters who convince Belle that all she needs to do to get out of a tight spot is to "be a performer." As brothers, they work so closely together that they can finish each others' sentences.

VAL DU VAL (played by Martin Short): A suave French entertainer who becomes quite vulnerable after he develops a serious memory problem.



Martin Short and Christine Baranski in *Promises, Promises*

FRED POITRINE (played by Martin Short): A shy, near sighted army clerk, who becomes Belle's first husband.

OTTO SCHNITZLER (played by Martin Short): A German movie director who is forced to take a menial job after having made several bad movies.

PRINCE CHERNEY (played by Martin Short): The monarch of a small nation in central Europe that is facing hard financial times, he resorts to desperate means to save his country.

LUCKY MALONE (played by Michael Park): A friend of Belle's who promises always to be around if she just snaps her fingers.

MOMMA (played by Ruth Williamson): Belle's mother, who warns Belle not to dream about people with a lot of money and social position.

MRS. EGGLESTON (played by Ruth Williamson): Noble's mother, who is determined to find a rich wife for Noble.

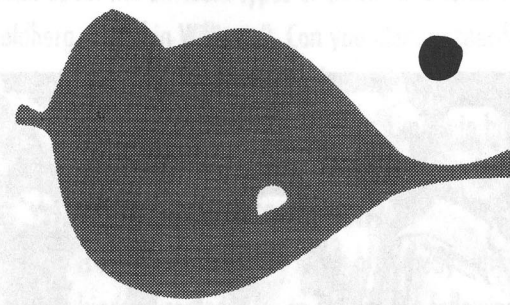
RAMONA (played by Andrea Chamberlain): A rich friend of Noble's whom Mrs. Eggleston feels is the only woman suitable to be Noble's wife.



Faith Prince and Nathan Lane in *Guys and Dolls*

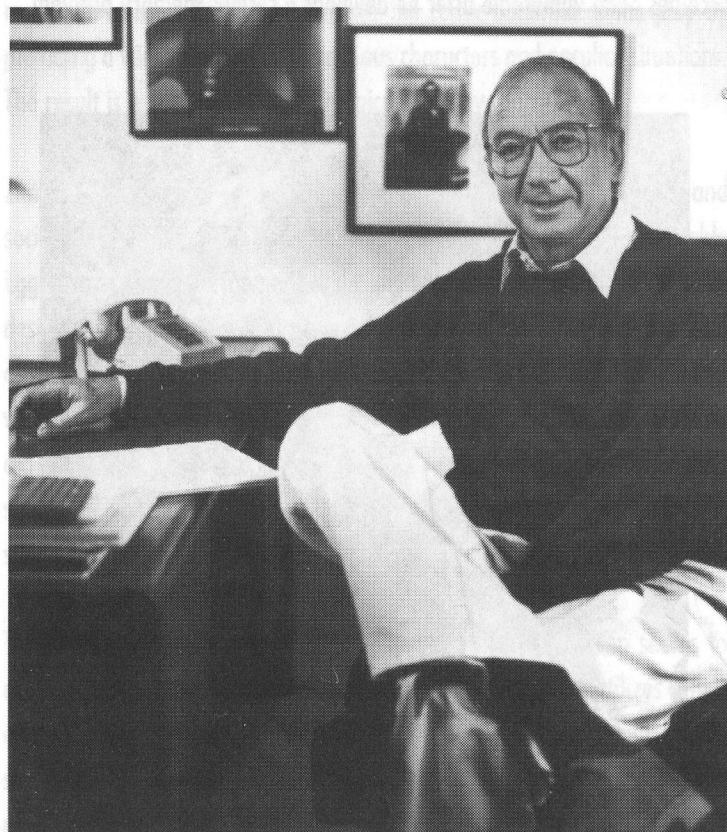
ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF

little me



NEIL SIMON

Neil Simon is one of the most successful playwrights in American theatre history. For a stretch of thirteen years (from 1961 to 1974), he had at least one production playing on Broadway (except for two gaps of four months in 1963 and 1967). In 1967, he had four plays running on Broadway simultaneously: *Barefoot in the Park*, *The Odd Couple*, *Sweet Charity*, and *The Star-Spangled Girl*. Among his awards are three Tony awards, the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and the Kennedy Center Honors. Simon has written 29 musicals and plays. Other musicals include *Sweet Charity*, *Promises, Promises*, *They're Playing Our Song*, and *The Goodbye Girl*. Like *Little Me*, several of his plays and musicals involve characters in show business. *They're Playing Our Song* is about a songwriting team (based on the partnership of Marvin Hamlisch and Carol Bayer Sager). *The Gingerbread Lady* and *The Goodbye Girl* feature a woman who is dating an actor, and *The Sunshine Boys* includes two retired vaudeville performers. *Chapter Two, I Ought to Be in Pictures* and *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* are autobiographical plays and include characters who are writers.



Neil Simon

CY COLEMAN

Cy Coleman has composed popular songs, scores for Hollywood films, and 10 Broadway musicals. Among his most well known musicals are *Sweet Charity* (with Neil Simon), *Barnum*, *On the Twentieth Century*, *City of Angels*, *The Will Rogers Follies*, and *The Life*. Coleman has served on the board of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) since 1966 and has won three Tony awards, three Emmy awards, and two Grammy awards.

CAROLYN LEIGH

Carolyn Leigh was born in New York in 1927. She began writing lyrics for songs in the 1950s. In the 1960s, she wrote the lyrics for several musicals on Broadway and on television. With Cy Coleman, she wrote several pop songs as well as the musicals *Little Me* and *Wildcat*. She is probably best remembered for co-writing the lyrics for *Peter Pan*, which was produced on Broadway and on television with Mary Martin. Ms. Leigh died of a heart attack in 1983.

PATRICK DENNIS

Patrick Dennis, author of the novel *Little Me* on which the musical is based, is one of the pen names for Edward Everett Tanner II, born in Chicago in 1921. His early career was in international affairs, and he served in North Africa during World War II. He'd collaborated on several serious books on foreign affairs, so when he wrote his first comic novel in 1953, *Oh, What a Wonderful Wedding*, he adopted another name, Virginia Rowans. While he wrote four other books using Rowan's name, Tanner chose a second *nom de plume*, Patrick Dennis. Under this name, Tanner created his most famous character, Mame Dennis, who was the subject of *Auntie Mame* and *Around the World with Auntie Mame*. *Auntie Mame* was adapted into a play, then a film, then a Broadway musical, and a musical film. Audiences familiar with *Mame* might find some similarities with *Little Me*, since they both include adventurous women who believe in getting the most out of life.

SHINING STARS

Though first produced in 1962, *Little Me* actually belongs to the era of musicals that began in the '20s and peaked in the '50s. During this period, many musicals were written not just to simply to tell a particular story, but to provide a performance opportunity, or a "vehicle," for a particularly dynamic and popular actor. In the 1920s, many of these stars were trained in vaudeville where they performed in sketches or traveling acts. From vaudeville, stars moved into revues like *The Ziegfeld Follies* and *George White's Scandals*, or directly into the "book" musicals (the musicals with plots). When vaudeville died and the revues went out of fashion, the "book" musical became king.

One star that was the center of several musical vehicles was Ethel Merman, who came to prominence in 1930 in the George and Ira Gershwin musical *Girl Crazy*. When Merman stepped to the footlights to sing *I've Got Rhythm*, she belted her way into instant stardom. Merman held the "I" for 16 measures, and people joked that she could hold a note longer than Chase Manhattan Bank. After that, Merman had several shows written for her, including *Anything Goes*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Call Me Madam*, and *Gypsy*. It took a star as big as Merman to turn down a major role like *Hello, Dolly!*, so it was left to another, Carol Channing, to walk off with the part. Thirty-five years later, she still owns it.

Of course, other stars are closely linked as the inspiration for major American musicals. Rodgers and Hammerstein, for example, wrote *South Pacific* for Mary Martin. Gertrude Lawrence brought them the idea of making a musical out of *Anna and the King of Siam*, and they obliged with *The King and I* (which, in later years, Yul Brynner succeeded in refashioning into a star vehicle for himself). Barbra Streisand became a household name after starring in *Funny Girl*, which originally was intended for Mary Martin.

In addition to the "belters," musicals were also structured around the talents of Broadway's top comedians. Bert Lahr, whom many consider the greatest of stage clowns, appeared in many shows, including revues like *George White's Scandals* and *Tonight at 8:40*, and book musicals like *Foxy and DuBarry Was a Lady* (another Ethel Merman vehicle). *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, which opened the same year as *Little Me*, was designed to feature a another popular comedian. Originally



Roy Middleton and Ethel Merman in *Annie Get Your Gun*

intended for Phil Silvers, the show became a Broadway vehicle for the prodigious comic antics of Zero Mostel. When Neil Simon adapted *Little Me* from Patrick Dennis's novel, he wrote it for the famous comic actor, Sid Caesar. Though Caesar had reached prominence in television, he was well-known for doing sketch comedy, which is how vaudeville comics practiced their craft several years prior. Simon knew exactly what to write to show off Caesar's talents, since they had worked together on Caesar's television program, *Your Show of Shows*.

The stars of Roundabout's production of *Little Me* come from similar backgrounds as the old-fashioned musical stars. Like Sid Caesar, Martin Short is a comedian who has honed his craft doing sketch comedy in television. Faith Prince received recognition for her musical comedy talents after years of working in Off-Broadway and regional theatres, a training that is like a contemporary vaudeville circuit. Because this is a revival, however, Short and Prince are not serving as the inspiration for the show, but are adapting to roles created for other people. This distinction is important and highlights one important way musicals have changed: when enormously talented stars are found on Broadway today, they're usually starring in the musicals of yesterday.

ACTIVITIES:

BEFORE THE PLAY:

Think about the different types of clowns and comic performers you have seen. Do you have any favorite comic actors, like Jim Carey, Whoopi Goldberg, or Robin Williams? Can you identify specific characteristics about their acting that you see in each of the performances, for example: certain facial expressions, use of their voice, certain gestures, a silly walk or posture. If you are familiar with Martin Short's performances, try to make a list of funny things you've seen him do in his performances.

AS YOU WATCH THE PERFORMANCE:

Little Me is filled with different kinds of comedy: physical comedy, word play and puns, outrageous characters, etc. As you watch *Little Me*, look for different kinds of comedy. Try to answer the following questions:

- What is funny about Belle's character?
- What makes Noble's character funny?
- What about the other characters that Martin Short plays, what makes them funny?
- Do you notice one type of comedy more than others?

AFTER THE SHOW:

Write a story or a play about a character who goes on a long search and encounters several characters and adventures along the way. If you'd like, you could style it after *Little Me* and make it comedy or a mock-autobiography. Some things you might want to consider are:

- What are some of the challenges the central character faces?
- What lessons does the character learn?
- Which other characters are most important to the main character? Why?

When you've finished your story or play, send it to Roundabout, and we'll share it with people who work on *Little Me*!

Send it to : Margaret Salvante, Education Director
Roundabout Theatre Company
1530 Broadway
New York, NY 10036
or to: margies@www.roundabouttheatre.org

WEBSITE:

Be sure to check out Roundabout's website for more information on this production, the rest of our season and all of Roundabout's activities.

<http://www.roundabouttheatre.org>

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EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Margaret Salvante, Education Director
Philip A. Alexander, Education Assistant
Michael Paller, Consulting Dramaturg

WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

What To Look For

The upper lobby of the Roundabout Theatre has a number of resources for your convenience. There is a refreshment counter where you can buy soda or a snack, but please remember that you will not be permitted to take these items into the theatre with you. Student discounts are available to those who show a student ID card. Roundabout's lobby is also an art gallery, so you might want to have a look at the paintings we have on display. Also, take the time to review the display about the show.

Ticket Policy

As a student participant in *From Page To Stage* or *Theatre Access*, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

Audience Etiquette

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.

Thank You For Your Cooperation And Enjoy The Show!

*THE ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE FOLLOWING FOR
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