



Coming up Roses: The Broadway Musical in the 1950s

Ethan Mordden

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The 1950s saw an explosion in the American musical theater. The Broadway show, catapulted into the limelight in the 20s and solidified during the 40s thanks to Rodgers and Hammerstein, now entered its most revolutionary phase, brashly redefining itself and forging a new kind of storytelling. In *Coming Up Roses: The Broadway Musical in the 1950s*, Ethan Mordden gives us a guided tour of this rich decade.

With loving detail, Mordden highlights the shift in Broadway from shows that were mere star vehicles, showcasing a big-name talent, to the bolder stories, stuffed with character and atmosphere. During this period, subject matter became more intricate, even controversial, and plots more human and complex; Mordden demonstrates how, in response, musical conventions were polished, writing became more finely crafted, and dance became truly indispensable. Along the way we meet the key players: such greats as Ethel Merman, George Abbott, Jerome Robbins, Gwen Verdon, Bob Fosse, Stephen Sondheim, Frank Loesser, Cole Porter, Leonard Bernstein, and many others. We get the backstage scoop on why *Guys and Dolls* is so well-made, why *West Side Story* is so timeless, why *The King and I* and *Gypsy* pushed the envelope, and why no one ever talks about *Ankles Aweigh*. All this is peppered with a dash of industry gossip--the directorial struggles, last-minute script rewrites and cast replacements, the power of the poster listings--that made Broadway so nerve-wrackingly vibrant.

This passionate and informed study illuminates a crucial period in American musical theater and shows us the origins of many of the musicals recently revived to huge success on Broadway.

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