

BACKSTORY



FIIORELLLO!



Your behind-the-scenes look at TimeLine productions

YESTERDAY'S STORIES.
TODAY'S TOPICS.

TimeLine
Theatre Company

Dear Friends,

“Well, children, I’m back again...!”

These are the opening words of *Fiorello!*, and at the first rehearsal they generated not only a hearty laugh from the assembled cast and design team but also a feeling of great excitement and opportunity.

It isn’t often that we get to return to a piece of work. When a show closes, the ideas, emotion and inspiration that infuse it are normally packed with the costumes and props, never to be accessed again. It’s

for many more weeks, had the schedule allowed.

Fiorello H. LaGuardia’s story — brought to life with Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick’s knockout songs — sprouted amazing joy, laughter and discussion in our theater. It made us all yearn for his style of politics, one that elevates public debate and expects the most from elected officials.

As I write this in March, the headlines are full of political resignations, scandals, litigation and a presidential nomination process with no end in sight and getting tetter by the day. So it is with

There is perhaps no greater model to look at than LaGuardia, a man who worked tirelessly on behalf of the down-and-out and the forgotten — immigrants who struggled to build a home for themselves and a lower class fighting to make an honest living against the greatest of odds as well as the Great Depression. LaGuardia took on a big-city political machine stained with corruption and brought about sweeping reform. And he did it all while standing 5 feet 2 inches tall and with a funny voice, less-than-glamorous looks and the stigma

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like a great romance you have at summer camp that ends not because the flame has died but because the clock has run out.

I’ve often felt a sense of frustration and loss watching a show slip away too soon, and that was definitely the case with our 2006 production of *Fiorello!*. It was the fastest-selling show in TimeLine’s history and could have continued

great delight that we turn again to “The Little Flower,” as he was called, a politician who was often praised for taking democracy from the politicians and restoring it to the people.

LaGuardia’s story is a fitting cap to our 2007-08 season, a year in which we looked at the role of the average citizen and how the “little guy” responds to extraordinary circumstances.

of a being an outsider in every way imaginable.

His story is worth trumpeting, and there is much to learn from his brand of governing. Fierce in the pursuit of his goals and often characterized as a royal (albeit likable) pain in the ass, he once barked at one of his staff, “If you were any dumber, I’d make you a commissioner.” He led with passion, charisma, a volatile



Artistic Director PJ Powers (left) with director Nick Bowling at the 2007 Joseph Jefferson Citations. Fiorello! received a Citation for Outstanding Musical and Bowling was honored for his direction. Also receiving awards: Doug Peck for music direction and Terry Hamilton for supporting actor in a musical.

temper, sweat and a flair for the dramatic.

He rushed to New York City fires to aid the fire department, publicly smashed slot machines confiscated from gambling racketeers with a sledge hammer, read comics over the radio to children during a newspaper strike, was a guest conductor with the city orchestra at Carnegie Hall and brandished cuts of raw pork on the floor of the U.S. Congress in impassioned speeches about the escalating cost of meat. This was a man who once said he “would rather be right than regular.” He more than fulfilled that proclamation!

While governing during the darkest days of the

Depression he defied logic and dreamed big, believing that government had an obligation to the people and that he could restore a sense of respect and pride in the city. A great lover of the arts and a believer in inspiring the heart and soul of a populace, he vowed to “provide more music and more beauty for the people, more parks and more light and air and all the things the framers of the Constitution meant when they put in the phrase, ‘Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’” He wanted New York City to be a leader not only in commerce but also in the health and spirit of its citizens.

When I stepped into Fiorello’s shoes two years ago (admittedly, with great trepidation) I devoured as much information as I could about his life and his style of leadership. I couldn’t get enough, and with each article or book my admiration grew. Then and now, I don’t understand why the musical and the man it portrays are so underappreciated. For some inexplicable reason, *Fiorello!* never joined the ranks of the oft-revived, household-name “great American musicals,” despite tying *The Sound of Music* for the Tony Award for Best Musical in 1960 (and

also beating a little musical called *Gypsy*) and being one of only seven musicals ever awarded a Pulitzer Prize for drama. Nearly 50 years later, *Fiorello!* has yet to be revived on Broadway.

Fiorello, man and musical, share similar traits. They’re surprising, powerful, efficient, gritty, packed with fire and passion and, perhaps most significantly, deserving of far greater attention and regard than is given them today.

So it is an honor and a treat to return to LaGuardia’s story. In the inspired hands of director Nick Bowling and music director Doug Peck once again, we have approached this production as something fresh and new. Rather than merely going to the trunk to retrieve the costumes, props and heart of our 2006 show, we have attacked this production with a renewed sense of purpose, great additions to the cast and an appetite for new possibilities. I hope you will share our enthusiasm and appreciation for this great American musical and the great American whom it honors.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'PJ' followed by a stylized flourish.

Fiorello! is a classic Broadway musical with heartbreaking ballads (“When Did I Fall in Love”), rousing chorus numbers (“Politics and Poker”) and melodic showstoppers (“Little Tin Box”) that tell the story of an honest man’s struggle against corruption in big-city politics. At a time when New York City was awash in vice and corruption with the Tammany Hall political machine, Fiorello H. LaGuardia put a bright, new shine on the city and became one of the most enduring figures of the 20th Century.

Fiorello! opened on Broadway November 23, 1959, at the Broadhurst Theatre with Tom Bosley in the title role. It received seven Tony Award nominations and won three: Best Featured Actor — Tom Bosley, Best Direction — George Abbott and Best Musical (tying with *The Sound of Music*). *Fiorello!* also has the distinction of being one of only seven musicals to have won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. After an impressive 795 performances, the original production closed October 28, 1961.



Jerome Weidman, born in 1913 in New York City, made his debut as a novelist at 22 with *I Can Get It for You Wholesale*. He went on to publish more than 30 novels and volumes of short stories, among them *The Enemy Camp*, *The Sound of Bow Bells* and *The Fourth Street East*. He made his debut in the theater with *Fiorello!*, co-authored with George Abbott, Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick. He teamed with them again on the musical *Tenderloin* (1960) and continued to write novels and books into the 1980s. He died at the age of 85 in 1998.

George Abbott, born in 1887 in Forestville, N.Y., studied playwriting at Harvard before appearing as an actor on Broadway in 1913 in *The Misleading Lady*. He became a highly regarded director for Broadway and Hollywood, working on such shows and films as *On the Town*, *The Pajama Game*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and *Damn Yankees*. He was 107 when he died in 1995.

Jerry Bock and **Sheldon Harnick** first collaborated in 1958 on *The Body Beautiful* but had their first real success with *Fiorello!* in 1959.

Bock was born in 1928 in New Haven, Conn. He began his career composing and contributing songs to musical revues and shows in New York. Harnick, born in Chicago in 1924, started out writing lyrics and complete songs for others’ Broadway-bound musicals before teaming with Bock. They remained writing partners for nine other shows, including *Tenderloin* (1960) and *The Apple Tree* (1966). Their most famous work is *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), which won nine Tony Awards and has been revived on Broadway twice. It was made into a Hollywood film in 1971, starring Topol and directed by Norman Jewison. Bock and Harnick ended their professional relationship after *The Rothschilds* (1970), which told the story of the Rothschild banking dynasty.

Bock retired but Harnick went on to collaborate with many other composers, writing lyrics for adaptations of *Pinocchio* (1973), *A Christmas Carol* (1981) and *A Wonderful Life* (1986). He also provided English-language librettos for numerous classical as well as original operas. In April 2006 he was honored by Northwestern University, his alma mater, and inducted into its Waa-Mu Hall of Fame.

TIMELINE:

The life and times of Fiorello H. LaGuardia

- **1882** Fiorello Enrico (“Enrico” later Americanized to “Henry”) LaGuardia is born in New York City on December 11.
- **1885** When he is 3, his family moves to North Dakota, then to upstate New York. The family finally settles in Arizona for many of LaGuardia’s formative years.
- **1900** LaGuardia joins the American Consular Service, serving first in Budapest (Hungary), then Trieste (Italy), and Fiume (Italy) where he establishes a humane, organized system to deal with the growing number of emigrants to America.
- **1904** LaGuardia’s father dies from complications after eating rotten beef sold to the Army by crooked contractors. This is the main event that motivates him to fight against corrupt bureaucrats and politicians who prey on defenseless citizens.
- **1906** LaGuardia decides to sail back to New York City, become a lawyer and enter public service.
- **1907** While studying the law at New York University in the evening, LaGuardia is appointed as an interpreter at Ellis Island.
- **1910** LaGuardia sets up shop as a lawyer, aiming to serve the underprivileged. He quickly becomes noted for treating law as a service, not a business, and often lowers or waives his fee.
- **1912** He represents the workers in a shirtwaist factory strike and helps them settle for a shorter work week and better wages. Through this, he gets his first taste of leading the people.

Special Events and Resources

the conversation

We hope you will join us for these special events during the run of *Fiorello!*:

Sunday Scholars Series

On **Sunday, May 4**, TimeLine will host our Sunday Scholars Series, a one-hour panel discussion featuring experts talking about the themes and issues of the play, moderated by TimeLine Board member **Peter H. Kuntz**. **Tickets are \$10; \$5 for TimeLine subscribers**; call the Box Office to order tickets and visit our Web site at timelinetheatre.com to learn more.

Post-Show Discussions

Stay after performances on **Thursdays, April 24, May 1 and 8 and Sundays, April 27 and May 11 for free post-show discussions** moderated by a TimeLine Company member and featuring the production dramaturg and members of the cast.

Company Member Discussion

The heart of TimeLine is its Company members, who

shape the artistic vision and choose the programming. On **Sunday, May 18**, join them after the show for an informal discussion about how the Company works and the process that brought *Fiorello!* back to TimeLine’s stage.

Other Resources

Don’t miss our **historical lobby displays, study guide** and more, available at timelinetheatre.com.

During the 19th century millions of Europeans were suffering from economic depressions, famines, dramatic population increases and the Industrial Revolution, while the United States had entered a period of incredible prosperity. These Europeans began to envision America as a land of unbounded opportunity.

From 1865 to 1890, about 10 million immigrants settled in America, primarily from England, Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia. A second wave of immigration occurred from 1890 to 1914, bringing about 15 million immigrants; they predominantly were from Italy and other eastern and southern European countries.

Most immigrants came with little money and could not afford farms or expensive farming equipment, so they settled in cities like New York, Boston, Pittsburgh and Chicago. Others settled in urban areas either because American agricultural practices were so different from what they were accustomed to or their ancestors already had established cultural, religious and educational institutions there.

The immigrants who arrived before 1890, with the exception of the Irish, had



New York City in 1939.

Anglo-Saxon or Protestant backgrounds and were more easily assimilated into American society. Later immigrants, however, were not as accepted. Not only were their languages and cultures less like America's, they looked different and were predominantly Jewish and Catholic.

The circumstances that greeted these later immigrants made their life even worse. Disease, overcrowding and crime were prevalent in the urban areas. Plus, turn-of-the-century America

had become a place of high unemployment, growing labor unrest and political corruption.

At first many Americans believed that immigration could provide a necessary pool of workers to staff the nation's growing factories and so would help boost the economy. Minds began to change, however, as strikes became more common and the labor unions grew larger and more powerful.

Increasingly, Americans blamed immigrants for the

nation's labor problems. As a result, relations became openly hostile, with many Americans becoming anti-immigrant, fearing the customs, religion and poverty of these newcomers and considering them less desirable than earlier immigrants.

This notion was further enhanced in 1907 when the U.S. Senate formed a commission to study the origins and consequences of immigration. In a series of reports, the commission placed the blame for the nation's problems on these new immigrants and recommended harsher immigration laws.

In reality, this perceived difference did not exist. Newer immigrants, although seem-

ingly different, brought the same values as earlier ones. Statistically, they did not commit more crime or contribute any more to national misfortunes than had previous immigrant generations.

Fiorello! transports us into the midst of this conflict. Set in New York City from 1916 to 1933, it takes us through World War I into the economically and socially Roaring '20s and on into the Depression. The city was beginning to grow into the booming metropolis it is today.

Immigrants had faced unsatisfactory conditions in their home countries and came to America with the hope of starting anew. But as they adjusted to different customs and a new language, they found it difficult to hold safe, secure jobs; run their businesses; or receive public services because New York City's government and court system were rife with swindlers and profiteers looking to take advantage of them.

The city needed a positive change. It needed a leader for the people, someone who was willing to fight injustice and political corruption at every level. Fiorello H. LaGuardia was poised to meet that challenge.

■ **1914** LaGuardia joins Weil, LaGuardia & Espen, a larger firm dedicated to his ideas of helping workers, poor immigrants and housewives. He is assigned a secretary, Marie Fisher.

■ **1914** He runs for Congress in the 14th District of New York City. After a hard-fought campaign, he loses to the robust Tammany Hall machine but pledges to run again in 1916.

■ **1914** In an attempt to keep LaGuardia in check, the New York Republicans appoint him deputy attorney general. Rather than satisfy him, this position pushes him even further into his fight against political corruption.

■ **1915** LaGuardia's mother comes to New York to live with him; she dies six months later. That same year he meets Thea Almerigotti, a young woman living in New York who was born in Trieste, like his mother. They begin dating.

■ **1916** LaGuardia is elected to the U.S. House of Representatives for the 14th Congressional District by 357 votes.

■ **1917** The U.S. enters World War I. LaGuardia enlists in the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. Serving as a captain and eventually major, he is stationed in Italy and flies missions. He also serves as a diplomat, maintaining and improving U.S./Italian relations during the war.

■ **1918** The war ends and LaGuardia returns home. He runs for reelection in the House of Representatives on a Republican/Democratic Fusion ticket, formed as an attempt to beat the rising Socialist Party candidates. He wins in a landslide.

"The next young girl went and they asked her, 'How do you wash stairs, from the top or from the bottom?' She says, 'I don't come to America to wash stairs.'"

— *Pauline Notkoff, a Polish Jewish immigrant; 1917*

the players

Fiorello H. LaGuardia devoted his life to public service. Standing just over 5 feet tall, but possessing a larger-than-life personality, he is best known for being mayor of New York City from 1934 to 1945. He also served as U.S. consul in Europe, as a U.S. congressman, a major in World War I, and director general of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. As mayor, LaGuardia restored the economic lifeblood of New York City

during The Depression. His massive public-works programs employed thousands of unemployed New Yorkers, and his constant lobbying for federal government funds under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal allowed the city to establish a firm foundation for its economic infrastructure.

LaGuardia is perhaps best remembered for reading the Sunday comics over the radio, which he started doing during the newspa-

per-delivery strike in 1945. Because of public demand, he continued broadcasting these readings after the strike was resolved.

Tammany Hall was the Executive Committee of the New York County Democratic Committee that existed from 1789 through the 1960s. It exerted its most powerful control over New York City politics from about 1850 until the 1930s. Named for a Native American chief of the Lenape tribe, which lived in the area in Colonial times, "Tammany" soon became synonymous with political corruption. Originally the Tammany Society, it became known as Tammany Hall after a home-base location was established in the 1830s. The practice of exchanging immigrants' votes for benefits and jobs quickly became the organization's backbone. In 1930, Judge Samuel Seabury began the Tammany Investigations, a series of inquiries that exposed the corrupt profiteering and manipulation rampant in the organization. This, combined with LaGuardia's defeat of Jimmy Walker in the 1933 mayoral election, helped take down Tammany's political control forever.



Marie (Fisher) LaGuardia at the LaGuardia's summer home in Northport, Long Island, 1939.

Thea Almerigotti met LaGuardia in 1915 while working as a dress designer in the garment district. She was born in Trieste, Italy, like LaGuardia's mother, and though she and LaGuardia contrasted in looks — he short and dark-haired, she tall with porcelain skin and

blonde hair — they fell instantly in love. They had a lengthy courtship, not marrying until 1919. It is said that she understood nothing could come before LaGuardia's goals and the political work he set himself to do. After giving birth in 1920, she contracted tuberculosis and she and their daughter, Fioretta (who also contracted the disease), died the next year. LaGuardia was heartbroken and took a brief hiatus from politics.

Marie Fisher started out in 1914 at the age of 18 as secretary for LaGuardia's law firm, Weil, LaGuardia & Espen. She remained his assistant throughout his professional life, until they married in 1929. Long credited as the person who knew him best and the only one who could handle his fluctuating temperament, Marie became the true love and support of Fiorello's life.

LaGuardia wanted immediate justice without regard to stepping on toes and public perception.

- **1919** LaGuardia runs for President of the Board of Alderman of New York City. He wins, but finds it to be a largely ceremonial position with no real power. After he becomes mayor in 1933 he abolishes the Board of Alderman, considering it wasteful of the taxpayer's money.
- **1919** LaGuardia marries Thea Almerigotti.
- **1920** Their daughter, Fioretta, is born, unhealthy. Thea becomes very sick from complications during the birth. Both are diagnosed with tuberculosis.
- **1921** LaGuardia, unwilling to heed the Republican political bosses, loses the mayoral primary. His daughter dies in May, his wife in November. LaGuardia spends the month of December in Cuba attempting to adjust to his loss.
- **1922** After taking some time off, LaGuardia returns to work at his new law firm, LaGuardia, Sapinsky & Amster. Later that year he is approached to run for Congress again, this time in the 20th District. He runs and wins.
- **1929** LaGuardia marries his long-time secretary, Marie Fisher. He also runs for mayor against Jimmy Walker, the longtime Tammany incumbent. Despite a hard-fought campaign, the city is not ready to elect LaGuardia, and he loses by 500,000 votes.
- **1932** LaGuardia loses his 20th Congressional District seat to a Democratic Tammany alderman. Disheartened, LaGuardia considers giving up politics.
- **1932** Jimmy Walker is forced to resign from mayoral office in New York due to Judge Samuel Seabury's crackdown on criminal activity committed by Tammany Hall officials and affiliates.

Thea Almerigotti and Fiorello LaGuardia, 1919.



In 1914, while practicing law, Fiorello H. LaGuardia decided to enter New York City politics, which had been controlled for more than 100 years by the corrupt Democrats of Tammany Hall. Tired of justice taking a back seat to the profits made by politicians and their friends, LaGuardia believed the people deserved their due as American citizens. A self-described "Lincoln Republican" — though many believe he chose the Republican party simply because of its underdog position in New York City politics — he ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1914. He lost. He ran again in 1916 and won by a narrow margin.

After shaking up the House of Representatives, LaGuardia set his sights on the political territory Tammany had tighter control over — the office of New York City mayor. His unrelenting principles combined with his fierce temper became

construed by many as self-righteousness and political opportunism, and he was so insistent on immediate justice that he often bit the hand that fed him (the Republican party) and came across as a do-gooder.

Uncompromising in his pursuits, LaGuardia wanted immediate justice without regard to stepping on toes or public perception. Though he lost the mayoral election in 1929, he ran again in 1933, pledging to fight even harder to get his reform message to the people. He won by a landslide and took office in early 1934.

One of his first acts was passing the emergency Economy Bill (100 days later it became law), which balanced the New York City budget by consolidating or abolishing overlapping departments and regulating the pay of employees. LaGuardia even cut his salary to \$22,500 from \$40,000.

All through his tenure as mayor he took measures to revitalize the city and its poor, working to make New York the best city in the world. Finally, in 1945 LaGuardia decided to end his service as mayor and not seek re-election. He died two years later.



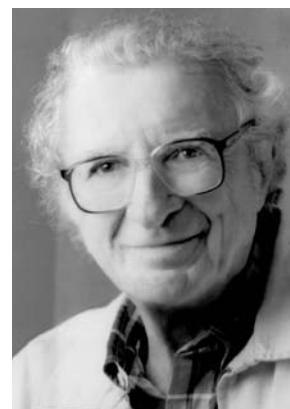
The 2006 cast, led by TimeLine Artistic Director PJ Powers (center), sings the rousing campaign song "The Name's LaGuardia" during the company's award-winning production of *Fiorello!*

Before *Fiorello!* opened at TimeLine in May 2006, Richard Christiansen (RC), the former chief critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, interviewed Sheldon Harnick (SH), who wrote the lyrics for the musical, at the Three Arts Club in Chicago. Following are excerpts from that interview.

You can listen to the entirety of this extraordinary hour-long conversation — or read a complete transcript — by visiting our Web site: timelinetheatre.com/fiorello2.

(RC) It's my great pleasure to be able to talk to Sheldon Harnick, whose Broadway career is extraordinary. ... In 1956, he met a fellow young Broadway striver, Jerry Bock, and they formed an alliance which is one of the great alliances in music theater in the United States. *Fiorello!* was their first huge hit. ... I'm curious, Sheldon, whose idea was it anyway to do a musical about Fiorello H. LaGuardia?

(SH) Well, it started with a director, Arthur Penn. Arthur had been asked to do a television documentary about LaGuardia. And as he was doing his research ... he discovered how colorful LaGuardia was in many ways, including his use of language, he began to feel that there would be a musical in this. So he took it to Harold Prince and his then-partner Bobby Griffith, and they agreed. And they let Arthur be the book writer. But months went by, and Arthur, who was a wonderful — and is a won-



derful — director, was not a wonderful book writer and what was developing, was developing very slowly. And, Griffith and Prince were not happy with what he was writing, so they finally reached an agreement with him where he would retain the financial interest in the property but he would withdraw as writer.

So they went to George Abbott — Hal Prince shared an office with George Abbott; in fact, Abbott had been Prince's mentor — and at first Abbott was not interested. He didn't think that a political figure was

- **1933** Chosen by anti-Tammany Judge Samuel Seabury to be the Republican mayoral candidate, LaGuardia wins the election, becoming the 99th mayor of New York City. He and Marie adopt two children, Jean, 7, and Eric, 6.
- **1941** Under Franklin Delano Roosevelt (a long-time admirer), LaGuardia is appointed Director of the Office of Civilian Defense, in charge of civilian involvement in World War II efforts.
- **1941** LaGuardia becomes the first three-term mayor of New York City.
- **1942** After living much of his adult life in an apartment on Fifth Avenue, LaGuardia and Marie are convinced to move into Gracie Mansion on the East River. Though the house is not their style (LaGuardia thinks New Yorkers will think he's gone high-brow and snobby), he and Marie agree that the two-acre grounds will be good for the children.
- **1945** He decides not to run for a fourth term.
- **1946** LaGuardia is appointed director general of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.
- **1947** After a long illness, LaGuardia dies on September 2.

right for a musical. But Hal explained to Abbott, he said, “Look, George, there are two wonderful love affairs in his life. One is he married the beautiful girl of his dreams, who died not too long after they were married. He was heartbroken. And then, ultimately, he married the loyal secretary who had worked for him for years and who adored him from afar and they got married, Marie.” So that intrigued Abbott, the fact that there were two love stories. And he agreed to do it.

And thank goodness he did, because our book writer was Jerome Weidman. And Jerome Weidman was a wonderful novelist but inexperienced in the theater. And what Weidman brought to it meshed with what George Abbott brought to it, and together they did a terrific book. ... They hired Jerry because Jerry had a successful credit. ... I got a call from Hal asking if I would write four songs on speculation — wouldn’t get paid for them, but it was an opportunity to see if I was the right writer for this show. ... They said, read the book and you’ll see marked, there are four places where we would like you to try songs.



Sheldon Harnick (left) talks with Richard Christiansen, April 29, 2006.

One of the places was a going-away party for Fiorello in 1917. Fiorello was one of the first members of the brand new American Air Force, and he became a pilot. So there was a going-away party, and they wanted a song that would sound like an Irving Berlin song of the period for people to dance to. And Jerry wanted to work with me, so he wrote four tunes, and he brought them to me. And he said, “Which one do you like?” I listened to them, and I said, “I like that one.” And he said, “Oh, good, that’s my favorite, too.”

But, we almost didn’t get the job. We went in to audition our four songs for Griffith and Prince, and the first song we did was “The Strike Song.” They bought that. They said, “That’s wonderful.” Then we did a song, which was a song of service rivalry. It was supposed to be performed at the going-

away party, and it was a song where the soldiers and the sailors and the members of the fledgling Air Force insulted one another, and they didn’t buy that song at all. Then there was another song, which I don’t remember what it was. But we played that, and they didn’t buy that. And I saw my life just going down the drain.

Then we did “Till Tomorrow,” which was the Irving Berlin waltz. ... It was a lyric that was kind of uncharacteristic of me. I always think of it as a kind of lace valentine. And my reputation, such as it was, depended on revue material that was kind of edgy. That’s what Griffith and Prince knew me for, in fact. When they offered me the chance to write these four songs on spec, Hal was very blunt. He said, “We don’t think you’re right, but we think you’re talented. So we want to give you the chance to try for this. The

reason we don’t think you’re right is that we think what this show needs a very haimish, a very warm score and what we know of your stuff is edgy.” So anyway, I’m singing the lyric to “Till Tomorrow” and I was looking at Hal, and I got to one of the lacier parts of it and I made the mistake of smiling. So we finished the song and Hal said, “Now this is a put on, this is not real, this is satire.” And I said, “No, it’s not! No, it’s not! This is really supposed to be 1917. It’s that kind of a song.” He said, “No, it’s not.”

And to my rescue came Bobby Griffith, who was older than Hal, and he said, “Hal, you don’t remember these songs as well as I do, I’m from that period. This is, this sounds like...” And they had this big argument. And I’m listening, thinking, “I hope Bobby wins, I hope Bobby wins.” I didn’t know what was going to happen. And then there was a ring at the doorbell. It was our choreographer, Pete Gennaro. So Hal said, “Don’t say anything, don’t

say anything.” And Pete came in, and he said, “Pete, I’m gonna have the boys play the song for the going-away party. It’s called ‘Till Tomorrow.’ Tell us what you think.” So we played it and this time I didn’t smile, and we finished it and Pete said “Oh, my God, it’s 1917. It’s Irving Berlin.” And Hal said, “Kid, you’ve got the job.”

(RC) You have to admit, you were a strange choice for a lyricist. You were a Chicago boy with no real New York experience.

(SH) Well, that was what was so interesting to me. Hal later told me he and Bobby had [a] talk about it. They did not want a New York lyricist. They were afraid that somebody from New York might make it too inside, and they figured somebody from out-of-town would see LaGuardia in a way that would appeal to other out-of-towners. So that the fact that I was from Chicago was in my favor. ...

I have to tell you the experience we had ’cuz it was wonderful. We met his

second wife. She was still alive, Marie. She lived up in Riverdale. She had an agreement in her contract that she had to approve the show, otherwise they couldn’t go forward with it. So while we had written about six songs, and they had most of the book if not all the book, we had to go to Riverdale and Jerry Bock and I auditioned it. So we went there, and it was a very formal meeting with Marie LaGuardia. She was nervous. We were nervous. Hal began to describe what the story was and we would do songs. And, before we started she said, “You know his first wife, Thea. Everybody said she was gorgeous. She wasn’t that gorgeous.”

Anyway, we did about three songs, and from time to time I would look at her and I saw her face clouding over and I didn’t know what was wrong. And suddenly she stopped, and she said, “Wait a minute, who is this Neil, his assistant? There was no Neil in his life. Who was Ben Marino, the Republican Ward Boss — there was

[Hal Prince] said, “We don’t think you’re right, but we think you’re talented. So we want to give you a chance to try for this.”

no Ben Marino.” And Hal said, “Marie, we had to get permission from you. From anybody who was a real figure, we would have to get their permission to put them on stage, if we had to do that we’d never get the show done. So Neil is a composite. Ben Marino is a composite. All these people are composites.” And then the cloud lifted from her face, she said, “Oh, okay, now I understand. Start over.” But she said, “First, let’s have a drink or two.” So we had a couple of drinks, and then we did the score, and she was beaming throughout the whole thing. And after every third song we have a drink. And when we finished she said, “It’s wonderful, and by the way, Thea was gorgeous.”

[Christiansen and Harnick discuss how the show-stopper “Little Tin Box” became part of the show. While the play was having its out-of-town runs, Abbott decided

he wanted to tighten a scene he didn’t think advanced the plot, to get to a scene that would be the heart of the second act.]

(SH) There was an investigation of Jimmy Walker’s regime and they discovered all the corruption in the regime, and when the next election came along, Walker was voted out and LaGuardia was voted in. But there was a scene we wanted to do about the impending investigation by Judge Seabury, and I remembered, when I got the job, one of my acquaintances in New York ... said, “Go to some second-hand stores and see if you can locate a sixth volume, history of things of popular history in America: the songs, the dances, the clothing, the sports, that kind of thing. It’s called ‘Our Times.’” ... I did find this set of books, and when I was reading the period that covered the period of our show, about Fiorello, there was

also information about the Judge Seabury investigation.

And there was a photograph of one of the people who’s testifying, and the caption of it was “Little Tin Box,” and it mentioned that this man, while he was on the stand and he was asked where he got all this money he put in the bank, he said, “Well, my wife is very frugal, and she has this little tin box she puts everything in, in the kitchen window, and she saves from the money and puts in the money, and that’s where it came from.”

So that phrase stuck with me, “little tin box.” And when we had to write a new song, I thought, “That’s a great title for this song.” And I wanted to start writing it and Jerry Bock was not available — he had gone to the movies. I knew where he went. And I thought, well, I would love to write to music, ‘cuz the music would give me the form for the song. And I remembered the song about service rivalry we’d written [that] had been rejected. And the thing I had liked about this song is that it had a lot of 16th notes in it; there was room for a lot of words.

I wrote three choruses, and, but I didn’t — there was nothing in the existing



Sheldon Harnick talks about the song “Little Tin Box,” April 29, 2006.

music that would give me the actual chorus, “little tin box, little tin box.” So, I went to meet Jerry when the movie broke and he said, “Hi.” I said, “We wrote a song tonight.” And he said, “How was my music?” And I said, “I believe you’ll like it.” So we went back to his hotel room, where he had a piano, and I showed him what he had done. And he loved it. He said, “Okay, let me work on the rest.” And he called me about five in the morning and I came down and he played me the chorus, and I said, “It’s terrific.” So the next day we auditioned it for Griffith and Prince and our choreographer Pete Gennaro and for Abbott and they said, “Yeah, This is good. This is okay.” Which was not the response we were hoping for. But they rehearsed it, and they put it in. ...

By the way, this I think may interest you. ... One of my classmates at Northwestern was a comedienne who went on to have a nice career in television, a woman named Charlotte Rae ... Around 1948, Charlotte had gone to New York on the Christmas holiday, and when she came back to school she gave me, she loaned me an LP. She said, “Sheldon, I saw this show in New York, it’s called *Finian’s Rainbow*, and you must hear this.” So I took it home and I played it, and I thought the music was wonderful, but it was the lyrics — it was the lyrics that were so playful. And yet I thought, along with the playfulness, they are saying something of importance. And for the first time I thought, “Now there’s — if I can do that, that would be a career worth following.”

“I went to meet Jerry and he said ‘Hi.’ I said, ‘We wrote a song tonight.’ And he said, ‘How was my music?’ And I said, ‘I believe you’ll like it.’”

BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

*Dramaturgy @
Historical Research
by Brennan Parks &
Jason Harrington*

*Written by Brennan Parks,
Jason Harrington, PJ Pow-
ers and Lara Goetsch*

*Edited by Karen A. Callaway
and Lara Goetsch*

*Photography and Graphic
Design by Lara Goetsch*

*Fiorello! Cover Photo
by Ryan Robinson*

*Backstory is published
four times each season.*

*Pictured on front cover
(from left): Music director
Doug Peck; lyricist Sheldon
Harnick, director Nick
Bowling, choreographer
Linda Fortunato and Peck;
actor Rebecca Finnegan;
and actors Michael
Kingston and PJ Powers.*

*Pictured on back cover
(from left): Lyricist
Sheldon Harnick with
choreographer Linda
Fortunato; actor Maris
Hudson; actors Joe Savino,
Dan Loftus, Terry Hamilton,
Steve Best, Thomas M.
Shea and Andy Nagraj; set
concept model by scenic
designer Kevin Hagan;
actor Donica Lynn; and
actors Andrea Prestinario,
Mindy Wetzel and Sara
Sevigny.*

Fiorello!

the musical



April 17 - June 15, 2008 *previews 4/13, 4/15 & 4/16*

book by
**JEROME WEIDMAN
& GEORGE ABBOTT**
music by
JERRY BOCK
lyrics by
SHELDON HARNICK

directed by
NICK BOWLING
music directed by
DOUG PECK

The recipient of a 2007 Joseph Jefferson Citation for Outstanding Musical returns in this remount of TimeLine's critically acclaimed 2006 production. Ahead of its time when it premiered in 1959 and often called a neglected masterpiece, *Fiorello!* is a classic Broadway musical about Fiorello H. LaGuardia's historic struggle to overcome corruption in the Big Apple.

The Cast (in alphabetical order)

Steve Best: *Ensemble*
Rebecca Finnegan: *Marie*
Terry Hamilton: *Ben Marino*
Maris Hudson: *Dora*
Michael Kingston: *Morris*
Dan Loftus: *Ensemble*
Donica Lynn:
Mizzi/Ensemble

Andy Nagraj: *Ensemble*
PJ Powers: *Fiorello*
Andrea Prestinario: *Thea*
Joe Savino: *Ensemble*
Alan Schmuckler: *Neil*
Sara Sevigny:
Mrs. Pomerantz/Ensemble
Thomas M. Shea: *Ensemble*
Vance Smith: *Floyd*
Mindy Wetzels: *Ensemble*

The Production Team

Linda Fortunato:
Choreographer
Brandon Magid:
Assistant Music Director
Kevin Hagan:
Scenic Designer
Lindsey Pate:
Costume Designer
Keith Parham:
Lighting Designer
Mike Tutaj: *Projections &
Sound Designer*
Julia Eberhardt:
Props Designer
Jason Harrington
& Brennan Parks:
Dramaturgs
John Kearns:
Stage Manager
Seth Vermilyea:
Production Manager

APRIL 2008

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

MAY 2008

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

JUNE 2008

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15						

- Regular Performance**
- Preview Performance**
- Opening** featuring post-show reception ***Sold Out***
- Post-Show Discussion** with cast & production crew ***Free***
- Sunday Scholars** a one-hour post-show panel discussion with experts on the themes and issues of the play ***Tickets \$10; \$5 for subscribers***
- Company Member Discussion** post-show discussion with Time-Line's Company members ***Free***

SHOW TIMES

PREVIEWS SUN 7 PM; TUE/WED 8 PM
WEDNESDAYS & THURSDAYS 7:30 PM
FRIDAYS 8 PM
SATURDAYS 4 PM & 8 PM
SUNDAYS 2 PM

RUNNING TIME

About 2 hour and 45 minutes,
including one intermission.

(773) 281-8463 x24