

ASPECTS OF ART LECTURE

Scholarship and the Musical: Reclaiming Jerome Kern

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THERE ARE PERHAPS two broad problems to be addressed by students of musical comedy. The first is why musicals, as an opportunistic and commercial art form, are worth studying at all. The second is how best their cross-disciplinary, unruly and in some respects ephemeral materials can be first located and safeguarded and then reconstituted for the detached assessment they now demand, away from the pressures and traditions of show business and popular canons. The first question, about which one can easily become defensive, is not the direct concern of this paper, which outlines instead some of the issues attached to the second, touching on four areas: the nature and scope of the source materials, the changing expectations of genre, the interplay of creative ambition and commercial expediency, and the workings of nationalism. The data will be my own recent, ongoing and far from complete research on Jerome Kern (1885–1945), often thought of as the father of the American musical.

To understand the Kern source materials means grasping that his unit of creative currency, like Irving Berlin's, was the harmonised *tune*. That was the long and short of his output, for he spent his entire creative life writing tunes and working out with collaborators how they should be used and where they should be placed, often *re*-placed, in narrative theatrical products, including film. (He worked mostly on Broadway until he was fifty, then spent his last decade in Hollywood.) Most of the time he wrote his tunes first and handed them to a lyricist who would add

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words afterwards, though in some cases the pair may already have had a title phrase or other 'hook' in mind. It is difficult to imagine another composer, certainly not a twentieth-century composer, except perhaps some forgotten writer of hymns, thus content to perfect such a small, limited, standardised object; but we owe Kern and his fellow-Americans, including the Hollywood moguls, a great debt for it, for they kept alive throughout the twentieth century a certain stream of melodic, tonal tradition which was otherwise under terminal threat from every quarter, and which proved amazingly durable and adaptable. One might speculate as to whether Kern was conscious of this task or, like some peddler of everyday artefacts who knows their ongoing commodity value, simply wanted to ply his trade and be the best, sell the most, set the guild standard. The commentator who has made the most penetrating comments about Kern's lifelong job is his successor Stephen Sondheim, who as a young man pointed out in a 1957 record sleeve note how Kern shaped his tunes more and more smoothly until he reached a kind of aerodynamic like the cigar shape of an aircraft body.¹ Sondheim was presumably struck by the fact that Kern's years of composition coincided almost exactly with those of the evolution of human flight from the machine at Kitty Hawk to the postwar airliner, and this parallel in terms of American culture would certainly bear further pondering.

How many tunes did Kern write? No one knows. I have compiled a thematic index of over 1,100, mostly in the form of refrains, but this is far from complete, since the materials for a further 350 song titles, virtually all unpublished, and many additional titles in the Library of Congress Kern Collection have not yet been located and consulted. Further research may result in considerable amalgamation between these two last categories, but a fair guess at Kern's overall output of tunes would still be in excess of 1,600. As with Gershwin and most other American songsmiths of Kern's era and later, there is a staggering discrepancy between this total and the small number of songs remaining in print, let alone the even smaller number known by everybody. The standard compilation volume of Kern's tunes² contains only forty-six of them, of which 'Smoke gets in your eyes', 'Ol' man River', 'The way you look tonight', 'Look for the silver lining' and

¹ Sondheim was quoting Saint-Exupéry about the cigar shape. The sleeve note was for a Paul Weston album of Kern songs, Columbia C2L-2.

² It currently comes in two formats, *The Jerome Kern Collection* (Welk Music Group, Santa Monica CA, 1988) and *Jerome Kern Rediscovered* (Warner Bros Publications, Miami, Fla., 2000), whose musical content is identical.

one or two others are the universals.³ This does the composer little justice, for to say that only the best melodies have survived would be tantamount to wishing away Riemenschneider's edition of the 371 Bach chorales⁴ in favour of the nine or ten that have found their way into current Anglophone hymn books. The only proper repository for Kern's tunes would be a complete edition of his music, respecting his amazing knack of creating something new and fresh every time within a very restricted formula, that of the thirty-two-bar refrain with or without its prefatory verse section. This freshness is appreciated whenever a new index cue is catalogued and it turns out to use some absolutely basic and simple melodic pattern which somehow the composer had hitherto left vacant—though of course this is a desideratum of any new tune by any person. How did Kern manage this aspect of his creativity? Did he remember or even physically file all his earlier tunes? Or did his genius incorporate some mental filtering system for new melodies which, could we penetrate it, might teach us much about the workings of memory and the creative unconscious?

To an impressive extent Kern's self-knowledge must have been conscious, for his fingerprints rarely became mannerisms and when he did reuse a tune it was deliberately rather than by accident: we know this because he used the whole tune, identically or with improvements, rather than just echoing its outline or turn of phrase. There are very few exceptions to this, though the paraphrase of the refrain of 'Our little nest' (*Oh, Lady! Lady!!*, 1918) in 'You can't make love by wireless' (*The Beauty Prize*, 1923) is certainly one. The latter's more obvious revision as 'Bow belles' (*Blue Eyes*, 1928) is, by contrast, typical of a process whose frequency complicates the cataloguer's tally: I have so far logged around ninety straightforward reuses, including perhaps a dozen not noticed by earlier commentators. Only a minority of these are songs lifted wholesale from one production to another; the majority are tunes fitted out with new words, titles and perhaps accompaniment layouts. Some were reused more than once (in one case three times).⁵

³ The published piano/vocal score of *Show Boat* (Chappell and T. B. Harms, 1928) adds another dozen, while available recordings of less well-known shows and anthologies (*Leave It to Jane*, *Sitting Pretty*, a selection of the Wodehouse songs, and some historical recordings) add a further thirty or forty that can be heard but not seen. An obscure American reprint edition of his early songs in sixteen volumes (Masters Music Publications Inc., Boca Raton, Fla., n.d.) bodged the job, petered out and is not available in Britain. Beyond this, his output is a documentary wasteland awaiting the scholar's reclamation.

⁴ A. Riemenschneider (ed.), *371 Harmonized Chorales and 69 Chorale Melodies with Figured Bass* (London and New York, 1951).

⁵ Although not strictly a tune, the coda figure of 'What good are words?' from *Three Sisters* (see the sheet music to the individual song published by Chappell and T. B. Harms in 1934, p. 7, last

An intriguing example of multiple reuse is a melody that probably began life as the refrain of ‘Morganatic love’,⁶ with lyrics by Noël Coward—intriguing, because little is known about the young Coward’s abortive collaboration with Kern.⁷ The two probably met when Kern was in London to launch *The Beauty Prize*, his third musical comedy produced at, and the second written for, the Winter Garden Theatre and premiered there on 5 September 1923. Perhaps anticipating a fourth Winter Garden engagement the following year,⁸ Coward wrote a libretto, *Tamaran*, for the most part lacking lyrics, which would have been added after Kern had supplied the tunes, for Coward specified the song opportunities, modelling them on earlier Kern numbers. Kern did provide music for two songs to which Coward fitted complete lyrics, the title song and ‘Morganatic love’, may have supplied more—there are two other Coward lyrics—and would presumably have composed a complete score had production promises been followed through. ‘Morganatic love’ (see Ex. 1 (a)) was to be sung by Atlas Blubb, a London costumier intending to apply for the advertised position of king in a poor Balkan country with a preference for an unmarried English country gentleman, and Zaza Dolmondley, ‘a brainless, beautiful English movie star’ intending nonetheless to go with him, the Act II scene taking place at the Wembley Empire Exhibition. But *Tamaran* never got off the ground and Kern, according to his custom, put the song into a folder on his piano.⁹ When the young American lyricist Howard Dietz was invited to the Kern house in Bronxville, New York, with a view to a Broadway collaboration, out came the folder and away went Dietz with the tune, to which he then had a day or two to try to fit new words. He came up with the following *contrafactum* for the refrain:

Zip! and we’d dip into Bigamy,
 And then we’d slip—let ’er rip—to Polygamy.
 Boy! Wouldn’t love make a pig o’ me?
 For almost ev’ry day we’d take another wife
 If we could only lead a merry Mormon life.¹⁰

two systems) had already been used in ‘Cottage of content’ (*Men of the Sky*, 1931) and would reappear in the song ‘Your dream (is the same as my dream)’, found in both *Gentlemen Unafraid* (1938) and *One Night in the Tropics* (1940).

⁶ Library of Congress, Jerome Kern Collection, Box 95, Folder 25.

⁷ Barry Day has given a full account in *Noël Coward: the complete lyrics* (London, 1998), pp. 60–6.

⁸ Kern’s earlier Winter Garden shows had opened in successive Septembers.

⁹ It would appear that the last of these folders, edged with gilt, still survives along with its contents in the Library of Congress uncatalogued *Nachlass*—the contents being a number of songs, untexted and mostly untitled, including some used or intended for *Centennial Summer*.

¹⁰ Howard Dietz, *Dancing in the Dark* (New York, 1974), p. 67.

Refrain
ATLAS AND ZAZA:

We'll have a spree mor-ga - na-tic' lly, For we a - gree love is free most em - pha-tic' lly,

ATLAS: ZAZA:

We'll ma - nage things dip - lo - ma - tic' - lly, And as we can't be good, we'll

ATLAS:

lead a care - ful life. If you will on - ly be my mor - ga - na - tic wife.

Example 1 (a). 'Morganatic love' (*Tamaran*).

Apparently Kern was well pleased, and the song, 'A merry Mormon life', duly appeared in the first act of the musical *Dear Sir*.¹¹ But it was never published, which gave Kern *carte blanche* to use it a third time, banking on the short memories of Broadway theatregoers (and a short run, in this case). By 1927 his style was becoming less flippant, more sententious, and whereas Ex. 1 (a) could serve as the song's consequent in *Dear Sir*, it had

¹¹ Exactly how and when *Dear Sir* superseded *Tamaran* is not clear. Coward sailed for New York, apparently with a view to furthering his Kern collaboration, on 17 Sept. 1924—see Philip Hoare, *Noël Coward: a biography* (London, 1995), p. 121. This was a mere six days before the opening night of *Dear Sir*. Thus the first things he would have heard on arrival in New York were 'his' tunes with another's lyrics. Were it not for the account in Howard Dietz's autobiography, *Dancing in the Dark* (New York, 1974), pp. 64–8, it might be tempting to question the chronology and propose that Coward's show and its lyrics came after *Dear Sir*, for the Wembley Empire Exhibition only opened in April 1924 and ran until Oct. 1925. Dietz's account is in any case weakened by the fact that 'A merry Mormon life' was not his first attempt at a lyric for Kern's tune but a revision of 'I'll lead you a merry song and dance'—see Gerald Bordman, *Jerome Kern: his life and music* (New York, 1980), p. 257. Dietz also misremembered his own lyrics: as quoted in his autobiography they differ in many significant details from those in the Library of Congress copy of the song. Coward's lyrics have been published in Day, *Noël Coward: the complete lyrics*.

to be slowed down, its accompaniment adjusted, and relegated to an antecedent verse section in *Show Boat*, where it received its best-known incarnation as part of Ravenal's introductory soliloquy on his first entrance (Ex. 1 (b)), leading into the refrain 'Make-believe' (Ex. 1 (c)).¹²

Andante moderato
RAVENAL:

Who cares if my boat goes up stream,

Example 1 (b). Ravenal's soliloquy (*Show Boat*).

On - ly make be - lieve. I love you,

Example 1 (c). 'Make-believe', refrain (*Show Boat*).

The information pertaining to any single Kern melody soon builds into a complex dossier, and nothing short of a complete catalogue, tune by tune, would offer full control of the sources. This is an unrealistic hope, but a specimen entry forms a useful tool of scholarship. The Appendix (pp. 208–10) gives one for another 1924 song, 'Sitting pretty'. Note in particular the scattered locations of the sources and unconstrained status of some of them (for example the material held for production rental), their general level of unavailability, the number of creative figures involved (lyricist, librettist, orchestrator, performers then and now) and the complex *curriculum vitae* of a song as artefact within and beyond a single show. This is a relatively simple example; to chart the production of a film song or trail the multiple reincarnations on disc, film and paper of a hit such as 'Can't help lovin' dat man' would take many more pages and limitless documentary minutiae. It is easy to see both that research students can benefit from organising their work along such lines should they be working on comparable material (which would include the outputs of all

¹² See *Show Boat*, piano/vocal score (Chappell/T. B. Harms, 1928), pp. 37–46.

the American 'golden age' balladeers) and that knowing where to draw the line can be as important as it is agonising.

But the biggest problem with Kern's tunes is how to approach the shows of which they once formed the musical fabric. Of Kern's forty-four stage musicals only one, *Show Boat*, is in any sense openly available today, and even for *Show Boat* no complete libretto is published.¹³ Its piano/vocal score is available in print,¹⁴ but until recently no full orchestral score of any Broadway musical had ever been published, and Kern remains no exception to this; nor is any Kern edition planned. For two-thirds of the other Kern shows, no comprehensive piano/vocal score was issued, only a selection of individual songs, and for all but three no script. The script situation is particularly acute given that none of Kern's shows was all-sung but all carried the plot through extensive spoken dialogue. Script, score and performance material are therefore still in the hands of the companies holding the theatrical rights to the shows, and if scripts are supplied to the scholar at all they invariably arrive without the slightest indication of authenticity or provenance; otherwise, they are in manuscript or typescript copyright deposit collections, or theatre archives; or they are lost. I have managed to track all but eight, though in several instances in a revised version that muddies rather than clears the scholarly waters.

How, then, can received wisdom be tested? For it has always been assumed that while earlier twentieth-century musical comedies became quickly outdated as tastes and genres changed, the largely post-1940 Broadway canon, about which Geoffrey Block has written so persuasively, was by contrast self-selecting and inevitable and is immutable.¹⁵ According to this orthodox version of cultural history, only *Show Boat* entered the canon and the rest of Kern's stage shows proved themselves obsolescent. This is a narrative which relies on a view of the canonic musical as democratically validated (voted in by length of Broadway run) and aspiring to the condition of bourgeois realism with operatic ambition (singing is in some way or another 'integral'). But scholars have recently begun unpicking it from this or that angle,¹⁶ which is cause for celebration

¹³ It was only ever printed in Britain, by Chappell in 1934.

¹⁴ There are two published versions, the Chappell/T. B. Harms score of 1928 and the PolyGram revival score of 1946.

¹⁵ See G. Block, 'The Broadway canon from *Show Boat* to *West Side Story* and the European operatic ideal', *Journal of Musicology*, 11 (1993), 525–44, and *Enchanted Evenings: the Broadway musical from Show Boat to Sondheim* (New York, 1997).

¹⁶ See, for example, Andrea Most's uncovering of Jewish identity in the Broadway musical; D. A. Miller's of its gay appeal; John Snelson's charting of the British musical in opposition to the American, 1947–54. A. Most, "'We Know We Belong to the Land': Jews and the American

and an invitation to reconsider a particular part of Kern's output, his collaboration with P. G. Wodehouse.

Wodehouse and Guy Bolton as lyricist and librettist joined with Kern as composer to create a body of Broadway shows between 1917 and 1924; Wodehouse also worked with him on two shows for London in the early 1920s.¹⁷ Several of the Broadway productions were among the intimate, small-scale Princess Theatre musicals which helped define the national (that is, American) product, though Wodehouse was of course English, as was Bolton up to a point.¹⁸ It is extraordinary that Wodehouse's novels should have remained in print while his musical comedies are unknown, especially given the qualities and, more importantly, the actual material they share. Why should his novelistic wit have proved canonic, his theatrical wit ephemeral? Is it a beautiful proof of the power of genre, or of the power of theatrical ownership over an artistic product? It would be wrong not to acknowledge that questions were raised even at the time as to whether Wodehouse could keep his value on the stage.¹⁹ But it would be equally unwise to incorporate such criticism without examining a case of transfer, which seems never to have been done in print.

Oh, Lady! Lady!! was Bolton, Wodehouse and Kern's 1918 Princess Theatre show, opening there on 1 February. Its first-act finale can be used to demonstrate a number of points, including Kern's method of construction. The plot involves Willoughby Finch (Bill), a Hugh Grant kind of young man about to get married to Molly on the estate of her formidable mother Mrs Farringdon, who thoroughly disapproves of him for being a Greenwich Village artist, though he is not poor. Willoughby's old

musical theater', Ph.D. thesis (Brandeis University, 2001), soon to be published by Harvard University Press as *We Know We Belong to the Land: the making of Americans on the Broadway musical stage*; D. A. Miller, *Place For Us (Essay on the Broadway Musical)* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998); J. Snelson, 'The West End Musical 1947-54: British identity and the "American invasion"', Ph.D. thesis (University of Birmingham, 2003).

¹⁷ *The Cabaret Girl* (Winter Garden Theatre, 19 Sept. 1922) and *The Beauty Prize* (Winter Garden Theatre, 5 Sept. 1923), both with George Grossmith as co-lyricist and co-librettist.

¹⁸ His father was half American, his mother English. Bolton grew up in England, but his father's second wife was American and the family moved to the USA when Bolton was 10 or 11 years old. See L. Davis, *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern: the men who made musical comedy* (New York, 1993), pp. 5-14.

¹⁹ 'This is a dull business . . . And yet, Mr Wodehouse . . . is an author of much ability. He writes some of the funniest short stories now being published . . . But he did not put any of his fun into this piece' (St. J. E., review of *The Beauty Prize*, *Sunday Observer*, 7 Sept. 1923); and 'The "book", by Mr George Grossmith and Mr P. G. Wodehouse, has many flashes of wit, but, on the whole, the narrative is an arid desert' (anon., review of *The Beauty Prize*, *The Times*, 6 Sept. 1923, 8).

flame, May, has turned up inconveniently, and his best man, Hale, hatches a hare-brained scheme for dealing with this which involves enlisting Fanny, a pickpocket caught stealing a wedding present, to burst upon Willoughby as a wronged woman, thereby frightening off May. Things go awry in the finale because Molly and her mother have returned from town prematurely, Hale has fallen in love with May but failed to cancel the ruse, and Fanny is far too professional a thief to let a golden opportunity pass her by.

Kern's musical analogue, typical of his 'finaletto' procedure, provides a mixed continuum of new choral music and partial reprises of the act's earlier songs, sung or referred to as semiotic underscoring for the spoken dialogue. It begins as a final wedding rehearsal, the march sung by a chorus of bridesmaids and men (presumably ushers) and complemented with a trio recapitulating Bill and Molly's duet 'Not yet', the number in which they yearn for privacy, which they sing here against a diegetic peal of bells. The peal proves a link with the earlier bachelors' number 'Do it now', of which it prompts a brief sung reminiscence. Spoken dialogue then takes over as Willoughby is ordered into place but hears 5 p.m. strike (underscored much as is 6 a.m. in the Act II finale of *Die Fledermaus*). Fearing that Fanny will enter, he registers distraction, muttering about 'a strange woman', and this is accompanied by a chromatically dislocated orchestral version of Hale and May's duet 'You found me and I found you' indicating his confusion and Molly's second whiff of suspicion that morning. The puzzled Molly and impatient Mrs Farrington return him to his senses and the rehearsal continues with a brief recapitulation of the fanfare and march until Fanny's operatic entry on a classic diminished 7th ('Wait!', she shouts, determined to go through with her act regardless) pivots the proceedings towards a further stretch of underscored dialogue. This involves, after four bars of waltz rhythm, a poignant, subdued restatement of the refrain of 'Bill' as Molly sees her marital future receding in the wake of her fiancé's apparent disgrace. He has additionally been robbed, for 'fainting Fanny' has picked the necklace from his pocket; and as this is discovered, chaos reigns, to which Willoughby and the chorus react with a further reprise of phrases from 'Not yet', its final 6/4 punctuated with a short spoken cadenza of condemnation by Mrs Farrington before the distressed Molly brings down the curtain with a climactic vocal reprise of 'Bill'.²⁰

²⁰ To achieve this account a small amount of reconciliation between score and script is necessary, but the details match perfectly once it has been made.

Thus four, possibly five, of the six first act numbers subsequent to the opening chorus have been referred to.²¹ This makes for a tight, satisfying authorial viewpoint on the material—the author being Kern—with one glaring exception: the song ‘Bill’, which was cut before the New York opening and thereby makes no sense when restated in the finale.²² Yet how much richer the song sounds there, as it were symphonically incorporated, than in *Show Boat*!²³

Oh, Lady! Lady!! was Wodehouse’s own favourite among his musicals, as his and Bolton’s correspondence repeatedly shows.²⁴ Discussing the possible revival of *Oh, Boy!* with Bolton in 1945, he wrote: ‘My only doubt about it would be whether OH, LADY isn’t a better bet. I shall always maintain that Oh, Lady has the best story a musical comedy ever had. I’ll bet there aren’t many musical comedies which could be turned into novels, as that one was.’²⁵ The novel, fashioned from it in 1927, was called *The Small Bachelor*. Wodehouse’s own regret at the loss of ‘Bill’ may only have been retrospective—in his factually unsound introduction appended to *The Small Bachelor* many years later he wrote: ‘There was a number for the heroine in the second [*sic*] act called ‘Bill’, but we all thought it was too slow, so it was cut out. It was not till it was done in *Show Boat* six [*recte* nine] years later that we realized that, like Othello’s base Indian, we had thrown away a pearl richer than all our tribe’²⁶—but he too needed his authority over the material, and secured it by two transformative methods of comic guarantee. The first was to enlarge the narrative to include many an additional scene and several extra characters, in addition to renaming several of them.²⁷ Wodehouse himself commented:

²¹ The total would be five if the four bars of waltz rhythm could be certified as recapitulation. They may indicate a lost original verse for ‘Bill’, or possibly the repeated notes in the refrain of the show’s title song.

²² Bordman, *Jerome Kern*, pp. 166–8, speculating as to why the song was cut, indicates that ‘as originally planned it was to have been sung early in the first act’, yet he fails to mention ‘Do look at him’, a later Act I waltz song for Molly, in the published piano/vocal score which retains the gist of ‘Bill’’s verse without its deprecatory slant. It seems more likely that this was the replacement for ‘Bill’—probably the second replacement, since Bordman also states that the Act II ‘When the ships come home’ once inhabited this spot (as ‘Little ships come sailing home’).

²³ Both music and lyrics were rewritten for *Show Boat*, however, and both improved, it must be acknowledged. The two versions are republished side by side in M. Kreuger, *Show Boat: the story of a classic American musical* (New York, 1977, 2nd edn., 1990), pp. 58–63.

²⁴ See E. McIlvaine, L. S. Sherby and J. H. Heineman, *P. G. Wodehouse: a comprehensive bibliography and checklist* (New York [and Detroit], 1990), pp. 339, 340, 349, 434.

²⁵ Letter from Paris, 11 Dec. 1945, quoted *ibid.*, p. 339.

²⁶ P. G. Wodehouse, *The Small Bachelor* (London, 1927, Penguin, 1987), p. 6.

²⁷ Finch’s ex-convict valet, Hudgins, became Mullett; Mrs Farrington became Mrs Waddington (and Molly’s stepmother rather than mother); Willoughby became George; Hale became Hamilton Beamish.

Oh, Lady . . . ran—exclusive of musical numbers—to about 15,000 words. A novel has to be between seventy and eighty thousand. I wrote 50,000 words of *The Small Bachelor* before I came to the start of *Oh, Lady*. When I did, I admit that things eased up a lot, though even then the fact that I had added so many threads to the plot made it impossible to use the dialogue as it stood. Sigsbee Waddington, the false necklace, Officer Garroway and the oil shares were not in the play, and Mrs Sigsbee Waddington was an entirely different character.²⁸

To have called Mrs Waddington ‘entirely different’ from Mrs Farrington is overstatement, but Wodehouse was right about Garroway the poet-policeman and Sigsbee Waddington the hen-pecked New York society husband who longs to be a cowboy: creations of genius both, it is difficult to relish the plot without them. He was also right about the rewriting if for ‘the start of *Oh, Lady*’ one reads ‘the first-act finale’, whose equivalent occurs a little over five-eighths of the way through the novel and brings his second transformative strategy into play, for he has the entire scene unwitnessed by the narrator but retailed by the butler, himself describing what one of the other servants saw. A double layer of gossip has taken the place of Kern’s musical commentary:

Mr Waddington’s eyes bulged.

‘Tell me about this,’ he said.

The butler fixed a fathomless gaze on the wall beyond him.

‘I was not actually present at the scene myself, sir. But one of the lower servants, who chanced to be glancing in at the door, has apprised me of the details of the occurrence. It appears that, just as the wedding-party was about to start off for the church, a young woman suddenly made her way through the French windows opening on to the lawn, and, pausing in the entrance, observed “George! George! Why did you desert me? You don’t belong to that girl there. You belong to me,—the woman you have wronged!” Addressing Mr Finch, I gather.’

Mr Waddington’s eyes were now protruding to such a dangerous extent that a sharp jerk would have caused them to drop off.

‘Sweet suffering soup-spoons! What happened then?’

‘There was considerable uproar and confusion, so my informant tells me. The bridegroom was noticeably taken aback, and protested with some urgency that it was all a mistake. To which Mrs Waddington replied that it was just what she had foreseen all along. Miss Waddington, I gather, was visibly affected. And the guests experienced no little embarrassment.’

‘I don’t blame them.’

‘No, sir.’

‘And then?’

‘The young woman was pressed for details, but appeared to be in an overwrought and highly emotional condition. She screamed, so my informant tells

²⁸ Wodehouse, *The Small Bachelor*, p. 6.

me, and wrung her hands. She staggered about the room and, collapsing on the table where the wedding-presents had been placed, seemed to swoon. Almost immediately afterwards, however, she appeared to recover herself and, remarking "Air! Air! I want air!" departed hastily through the French windows. I understand, sir, that nothing was seen of her after that.'

'And what happened then?'

'Mrs Waddington refused to permit the wedding to take place.'²⁹

Not only in this scene, Wodehouse was working straight from the script, in which Fanny has the lines 'Willoughby! Willoughby! . . . Why have you deserted me? . . . You don't belong to that girl there. You belong to me—the woman you have wronged!', interrupted only by the other characters' exclamations, and 'Air—air! Give me air!', while Bill's initial response is 'You're wrong—it's—it's all a mistake!'³⁰ Earlier as well as later in the novel, many dialogue exchanges have been borrowed from *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*, and the same applies to the relationship between *Sitting Pretty* and the 1924 novel *Bill the Conqueror*. Although Bolton and Wodehouse always shared credit and royalties for book and lyrics, they generally indicated that Bolton had written the dialogue and Wodehouse the verse. One wonders, therefore, how true this was, or how many lines in Wodehouse's novels are actually Bolton's.³¹

The piano/vocal score of *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* (though not the script) was at least published.³² This is not true of much of Kern's best music, however, if one includes any number of entire songs, extended versions and supplementary sections of songs that were issued without them, and more complex passages of music to the extent of whole musical comedy finales, instrumental sequences and ballets, plus a couple of concert works. Four examples of buried songs or parts of songs will now be given, all from different periods and contexts and all with the potential to increase Kern's stature by rehabilitation.

The first comes from *Oh, I Say!* of 1913, which was only his second complete score. Six songs from this show were published individually, and a short medley was even recorded, probably in the early 1920s,³³ but most

²⁹ Wodehouse, *The Small Bachelor*, p. 134.

³⁰ Unpublished script (Tams-Witmark Music Library, Inc., New York), Act I, pp. 48–9.

³¹ Given that the Tams-Witmark script of *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* is one of those mentioned earlier carrying not 'the slightest indication of authenticity or provenance', and bears a copyright date of 1977, there is an element of assumption in the attribution of all its dialogue to original or early productions, and it is accordingly just possible that the novel was plundered for rewritten exchanges. Other evidence, including cues in the score and the shrewd timing of the underscoring, makes this unlikely, however.

³² By T. B. Harms, New York, 1918.

³³ Victor Light Opera Co., reissued as *Jerome Kern Gems* (LP, JJA Records, 19781).

of the best, extended numbers—there is a wealth of ensembles—survive only in Kern’s hand in the Shubert Archive, New York.³⁴ One of them, ‘A woman’s heart’, is thus quite unknown but constitutes a first-rate tune from relatively early in Kern’s career, one of the first in which he achieved the relaxation and breadth of a long, smooth refrain with a 2/2 pulse (though it is paradoxically notated in 4/4), a formula responsible for his essential stylishness. This *chic*—probably the best word—sets him off from most of his contemporaries. It is often implied that Kern’s melodic breadth came from his time spent in Edwardian London, where musical comedy was at its first peak. Certainly the tunes of Leslie Stuart were an influence on him. But his long journeyman years of interpolating songs into other people’s shows also brought him into contact with the music of virtually every major practitioner on the European continent as well as in America. In ‘A woman’s heart’, with lyrics by Harry B. Smith, one hears the casual grace of Lehár, perhaps of Messager, rather than anything American or British. Yet Kern’s magic touch with sequence is in evidence and his voice is unmistakable (see Ex. 2, reaching the midway mediant cadence of an ABAB₁ form). As a musical, *Oh, I Say!* faced generic limitations. It was

The image shows a musical score for the song 'A woman's heart' from the musical *Oh, I Say!*. The score is written in 4/4 time and features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are as follows:

SIDONIE:
 Why did you come in - to my life, dear? I was so ve - ry hap - py till you

(BUZOT:) Here, what's the game?
 came. I knew that I was lost, dear, But I did not count the

cost, dear, When your eyes met mine and set my heart a - flame! I loved you,

The score consists of three systems. Each system has a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The tempo and mood are not explicitly stated, but the music has a smooth, romantic quality.

Example 2. ‘A woman’s heart’ (*Oh, I Say!*).

³⁴ Box 242.

a translated French farce,³⁵ of a type much the rage at the time and sardonically described by the Lord Chamberlain's censor as 'a typical, *unmoral* French Vaudeville, like a hundred others . . . Skittish but not seriously reprehensible' when he licensed it for the Theatre Royal, Bournemouth, as a straight play.³⁶ The play went to London and from there to New York with music—Kern's music—added. The essence of farce is speed of verbal and bodily wit, and music can at best act only as its foil. Nevertheless, Kern's tunes were much appreciated, only one reviewer seems to have found them redundant,³⁷ and this Act II number does manage to capture that wit, even if it has to freeze it in the process, with its glamorous actress, Sidonie, enjoying the attentions (and means) of her two mature admirers while keeping them in turn at arm's length. (In Ex. 2 she is singing to Portal while Buzot looks on; by the end of the first refrain the positions are reversed, and by the end of the second they have reversed again. One of the men suggests a time share; the other looks fit for a duel.) Such a worldly, sophisticated approach to love and sexual politics was not destined to survive the cultural shift of the First World War with the American theatre public, which was where Wodehouse's *ingénues* came in and Continental farce went out; nevertheless, Kern found its old-world poise invaluable for fixing his own idiom and quietly retained the representation of European manners as a vital element in his dramaturgy.

The three other examples of songs fit for reclamation were all in one way or another casualties of the radio or film studio. Here the interplay of creative ambition and commercial expediency, to focus on the third topic announced at the start of this paper, could become acute, and most successful practitioners learnt strategies for reining in the former before it became too painful a casualty of the latter. 'Commercial expediency' is perhaps an unnecessarily harsh term, if it means what a democratic mass audience will accept, though there are legendary instances of pearls being thrown away in film, as with Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg's 'Over the rainbow', which only survived in *The Wizard of Oz* by the skin of its teeth.³⁸ Most American songwriters, nearly all New Yorkers by birth or

³⁵ *Une nuit de nocés* by Henri Kéroul and Albert Barre, adapted by Sydney Blow and Douglas Hoare.

³⁶ Charles H. E. Brookfield, censor's report, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Play Collection 1913, vol. 14, no. 1610.

³⁷ 'The farce seems hardly to be one that lends itself readily to a musical setting and . . . it lacked smoothness' (*The Journal of Commerce*, 31 Oct. 1913).

³⁸ H. Meyerson and E. Harburg, *Who Put the Rainbow in the Wizard of Oz? Yip Harburg, lyricist* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1993), pp. 155–6.

adoption, were seduced by Hollywood in the Depression, just after the start of the sound-film era, but drifted back east one by one as it became clear that in California songs were wanted, composers were not. Kern and Harry Warren were the two who stayed, and in both there is thenceforward as striking a circumscription of output as exquisiteness of musical intelligence. To turn it around would be to say that they learnt to channel their greatness into single songs.

One of these, and one of Kern's most popular, is 'A fine romance'. But we only know the half of it, literally. The almost continuously underscored 'New Amsterdam' scene in *Swing Time* (1936) begins with a piece of delicate orchestral tinsel, 'Snow sequence', probably written by Kern's orchestrator, Robert Russell Bennett.³⁹ But when a rich, warm melody enters as underscoring in the strings and flowers as an instrumental tune (Ex. 3 (a)), this is definitely by Kern, for it is the verse section of 'A fine romance' (Ex. 3 (b)), never sung in the film, its lyrics (by Dorothy Fields) and music not published until relatively recently, though its last four bars form the introduction to the song in its familiar format.⁴⁰ The score of *Swing Time* is full of such compositional buds that were not permitted to flower, including the contrapuntal interplay of several of the main tunes.

The second studio song casualty is more mysterious, for it survives among that portion of Kern's effects held back by his daughter until her death in 1996; this material only recently found its way to the Library of Congress Jerome Kern Collection and has not yet been catalogued. It includes a number of items intended for something variously called *The Forbidden Melody* or *The Elusive Melody*, which eventually became a stage musical with music by Sigmund Romberg and words by Otto Harbach.⁴¹ This seems to have been on the cards as a film in the early

³⁹ It is symptomatic of the function of the composer in Hollywood that such incidental music could equally well have been written by the film's composer (Kern), orchestrator (Bennett) or musical director (Nathaniel Shilkret). Although the same could sometimes be said of theatre music, Kern's responsibility for his musical theatre scores was pretty well absolute. It is far less clear where his authority (and pen) ceased in the musical films.

⁴⁰ According to Michael Feinstein (telephone interview with the author, 26 June 2003), Fred Astaire's studio recording of the song, issued, like the sheet music, as a complementary commercial artefact to the film, was too slow and they had to omit this portion, though it survives as an outtake. Feinstein himself eventually recorded the verse, with accompanying sheet music, on the album *Isn't It Romantic* in 1988. Bennett's 'Snow sequence' autograph full score survives (along with the rest of the film's music) in the RKO Collection, University of California at Los Angeles, Music File M-60; the verse to 'A fine romance' is in Music File M-58.

⁴¹ *Forbidden Melody* ran briefly on Broadway in November 1936.

The musical score is arranged in a vertical stack of staves. From top to bottom, the instruments are: Flute (two staves), Oboe, Clarinet in Bb (two staves), Bass Clarinet in Bb, Harp, Piano, Xylophone, Marimba, Celesta, 8 Violins (two staves), 3 Viola, 2 Cello, and Double bass. The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The woodwinds and strings play a rhythmic accompaniment. The Harp and Celesta play a melodic line. The strings play a rhythmic accompaniment. The 8 Violins part includes dynamics markings: *pp*, *un poco espr.*, and *pp*. The 3 Viola part includes dynamics markings: *pp*. The 2 Cello part includes dynamics markings: *pp*. The Double bass part includes dynamics markings: *pp* and *pizz.*

Example 3 (a). Kern/Bennett, 'Snow sequence' (*Swing Time*).

(Moore) I think maybe
we oughta go home

2

Fl.

Fl.

Ob. Solo
pp

Cl.
pp

Cl.
pp

B. Cl.

Hp.
pp

Pno.

Sxl.

Mar.
pp

Cel.

Vln.
(p)

Vla.

Vc.

Db.
pp

Example 3 (a). (Continued).

Example 3 (b). 'A fine romance', verse (*Swing Time*).

1930s,⁴² but there are also no fewer than thirty-nine *Elusive Melody* scripts in the Library of Congress⁴³ for what must surely have been radio episodes. Amongst the wreckage of this project there is a complete song, 'Thank you for loving me'.⁴⁴ Its date is unknown, as is the authorship of the lyrics, which sound like Hammerstein or Harbach and with their emphasis on parting after an affair are unlikely to have pre-dated the 1930s. Their exquisiteness is more than matched by the music, its chromaticism a fine example of Kern's stylistic ambition inhabiting a tiny frame. Even more puzzling than the unknown context of the complete song, however, is its partial appearance in the published score of Kern's stage musical *Music in the Air* of 1932, where in the middle of an underscored dialogue scene of nascent romance, its first four bars are suddenly heard as the couple discuss, rather uneasily, the young man's previous exposure to actresses (Ex. 4). One could easily label it a foretaste of a superficially similar melody, 'We belong together', which accompanies the final scene of the musical, but this new evidence proves otherwise, though quite what those four bars are doing in *Music in the Air* is unclear.

A degree of chromaticism unexpected in an American popular song is also the hallmark of the fourth and last example of buried material, and it comes not from the last film on which Kern worked but the last he saw to completion: *Can't Help Singing*, released on Christmas Day 1944. As usual, a good deal of its music never saw the full light of day. Some songs were

⁴² The *Men of the Sky* folder in the Warner Bros. Collection, Doheny Memorial Library, University of Southern California, includes a number of references to it, including this telegram from Jack Warner to Otto Harbach dated 27 Feb. 1930: 'WANT TO APOLOGIZE FOR NOT HAVING ACKNOWLEDGED RECEIPT OF YOUR MANUSCRIPT GONE OVER SAME CAREFULLY AND WE ACCEPT FORBIDDEN MELODY STOP HAPPY YOU AND KERN PROCEEDING ON FINISHING STORY WILL APPRECIATE YOU ARRIVING HERE SOON AS POSSIBLE AS FEEL TREMENDOUS PREPARATION NECESSARY FOR PRODUCTION OF THIS KIND WILL WARRANT A GREAT AMOUNT OF PREPARATION ON OUR PART AT STUDIO STOP APPRECIATE YOUR WIRING WHEN YOU AND KERN WILL ARRIVE HERE.'

⁴³ Jerome Kern Collection, uncatalogued additions, Box 1, item 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, unboxed material [Box 3], item 8.

SIEGLINDE: 'Did you find them pretty?' KARL: 'I don't understand!' SIEGLINDE: 'The actresses in Munich. Were they very grand?'

Andante

Example 4. Fragment of 'Thank you for loving me' as it appears in *Music in the Air*.

cut, some published as sheet music only in part, instrumental and ensemble items not published at all.⁴⁵ Kern was writing for a real soprano, the young Deanna Durbin, and in one of the unused, unpublished songs, 'Once in a million moons', she inspired a showcase of musical post-impressionism to match her tessitura and technique, with characteristic lyrics by 'Yip' Harburg. Given the sophisticated harmonies and tricky vocalise of Ex. 5, we should hardly be surprised that the film studio, Universal, signally failed to cherish the song, which was eventually published nearly twenty-five years later in simplified form in, of all places, an album entitled *Andy Williams Sings Jerome Kern*.⁴⁶

By the time of *Can't Help Singing*, musicals had become fully American: the story of that film, based on an apparently unpublished novel called *Girl of the Overland Trail*,⁴⁷ is of a Washington Congressman's headstrong

Slow waltz

morendo

Example 5. 'Once in a million moons' (*Can't Help Singing*).

⁴⁵ For example, in addition to 'Once in a million moons', three fine melodies remained unused: 'I'll follow your smile', 'There'll come a day' and 'How sweet is the summer?'; and the coloratura middle section and coda of the title song, though issued on record, were not published.

⁴⁶ T. B. Harms 1967, Chappell 1968.

⁴⁷ The authors were S. and C. Warshawsky, but the novel does not appear in the British Library, Library of Congress or New York Public Library catalogues. Hollywood was full of unpublished 'properties' such as this.

daughter following the gold rush and the man of her dreams westwards, and it is no secret that after the astounding success of Rodgers and Hammerstein's stage musical *Oklahoma!* in 1943 Kern felt under threat and responded in part by emulation, as is clear from the mixolydian inflection in *Can't Help Singing's* title song (Exs. 6 (a) and (b)). What Richard Rodgers achieved in such numbers as 'Oh, what a beautiful mornin''—the *Carousel* waltz was another—was to appropriate an out-moded symbol of the European bourgeoisie, the waltz, long one of the generic mainstays of operetta and musical comedy, and twist its connotations through 180 degrees, from those of old-world erotic sophistication and urban decadence to a New World rural folkiness that was all primal innocence (hence the mixolydian inflections). This was part and parcel of the nationalist programme in the USA (and indeed in other countries, which developed their own versions of it) which spanned the New Deal and the Second World War, and artists, including Kern, could not escape it: his last four films, all released after the USA had entered the war, form a group on their own full of nationalist material or at least patriotic motivation.⁴⁸

That Rodgers' example enabled Kern to write some of his finest waltzes, those at the end of his career, there is no denying.⁴⁹ But in accepting this historical moment as the defining one for the American musical,



Example 6 (a). Kern, 'Can't help singing'.



Example 6 (b). Rodgers, 'Oh, what a beautiful mornin' (*Oklahoma!*).

⁴⁸ The films in question are *You Were Never Lovelier* (Columbia, 1942), *Cover Girl* (Columbia, 1944), *Can't Help Singing* (Universal, 1944) and the posthumous *Centennial Summer* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1946).

⁴⁹ Kern, however, would have done so strenuously. Michael Feinstein (telephone interview with the author, 26 June 2003) tells how Kern saw the *Oklahoma!* songs on Ira Gershwin's piano and asked to borrow them. 'Condescending music' was his verdict on returning them.

with *Show Boat* as no more than its precursor, we have fallen prey to a type of nationalist history that seriously falsifies Kern's position and has written off his, and Oscar Hammerstein's, European affiliations and sensibilities. Kern's father was born in Germany, his mother's parents in Bohemia. He apparently studied harmony in Germany, and although this has never been verified, the fruits would appear to be evident in the chorale-like solidity of his tonal structures, to consolidate a previous analogy. All his life he wrote splendid polkas, though rarely under that name.⁵⁰ Perhaps his finest score is *Music in the Air*, a stage show set in 1930s Bavaria. How much life Kern could still breathe into the central European waltz is certainly demonstrated by 'I am so eager', complete with its (Richard) Straussian wrong note diegetically discussed by the characters in a music publisher's office in Munich (Ex. 7). In a recent published set of interviews with Stephen Sondheim, this is the Kern tune he says he wishes he had written.

Valse lente
BRUNO:
mf

I am so ea - ger, you are sosweet, We're so in love that lifes seems com - plete.

Example 7. 'I am so eager' (*Music in the Air*).

But it is the English Kern who should concern us last. He learnt much of his trade in Edwardian London, then the musical theatre capital of the English-speaking world. His wife Eva, whom he met in a pub in Walton-on-Thames,⁵¹ was British, daughter of its landlord and born in a house beneath Waterloo East station. More important, Kern wrote four major shows for London in the 1920s and 1930s, none of which transferred to Broadway and all of which have been done scant justice by American commentators. In the first of these, *The Cabaret Girl*, with book and lyrics by Wodehouse and George Grossmith, the first act dialogue, set in a London music shop, begins with Sir Edward Elgar at the other end of a

⁵⁰ One of the last of them innocently masquerades as the essence of Missouri in the main theme of his *Mark Twain Suite*, a wartime commission.

⁵¹ This was the Swan, still looking much as the composer must have known it and currently sporting its Kern connection on the back of the menu and on the walls.

phone.⁵² Act II is set in Hertfordshire and opens with a chorus of home-coming commuters.⁵³

There is a definite sense in these musical comedies of a more leisurely dramatic and musical pace, of the willing acquiescence in a different theatrical tradition from the ever tighter demands of Broadway. And with the third, *Blue Eyes*, an operetta about the 1745 Rebellion which opened the new Piccadilly Theatre six days before *Show Boat* first took the London stage at Drury Lane,⁵⁴ we witness a definite English advantage: a record industry already geared up to something approaching an original cast recording. Where every one of Kern's Broadway shows except the very last is concerned, with minor exceptions we do not know how it actually sounded in the New York theatre. The four recorded numbers from *Blue Eyes*, by contrast, sung by the two principals, Evelyn Laye and Geoffrey Gwyther, and other cast members (including the comedian W. H. Berry), offer ample evidence of fine singing, sensitive and flexible playing of a type soon to die out in the popular theatre, and remarkably advanced sound engineering.⁵⁵

Alas, none of these shows is properly performable because the orchestrations are lost. Theatrical practitioners tend to make light of this and regard wholesale re-orchestration as comparable to a new production: taken for granted, indeed desirable. Musicians take a different, historically informed view, that the work in a sense no longer fully exists without the original orchestral score. The two constituencies must argue it out, but until musical scholars come forward and stake out their ground, which has not yet happened where Kern's British shows are concerned, there can be no fight.

Three Sisters was the last of Kern's English musicals, and apart from *Show Boat* almost his only attempt at an epic dimension. Concerning the daughters of a travelling photographer, with its first act set on Epsom

⁵² 'EFFIE: (R.) (At phone) Yes, this is Grippe and Gravvins. Whom do you want? Mr Gravvins? I'll see, who is that speaking? Sir Edward who? Sir Edward Elgar? Have you an appointment? No. Sorry, I'm afraid quite impossible. Yes, you'd better write.'

⁵³ The following stage direction for their entrance can only be by Wodehouse: '*Enter in frock coats and top hats a bevy of BUSINESS MEN. The 2.15 from Liverpool Street is just in. All the trains to Woollam Chersey—change at Broxbourne—are good, but this is perhaps the best, and they exude happiness. They are met by their wives and children.*'

⁵⁴ The respective dates were 27 April and 3 May 1928.

⁵⁵ The four songs are 'Do I do wrong?' (which was rewritten for *Roberta* as 'You're devastating'), 'Blue eyes', 'Back to the heather' and 'Women', this last not by Kern but by his old friend and colleague Frank Tours. The show's musical director Kennedy Russell conducted the Piccadilly Theatre Orchestra, and the first song has been reissued on the CD *A Jerome Kern Showcase* (Pearl, 1991). All four were on the LP *Jerome Kern in London* (World Records, SH 171, 1973).

Downs at the 1914 Derby, starring the young Stanley Holloway as a policeman and with a top production team including Ralph Reader and Gladys Calthrop, it showed Kern and Hammerstein beginning to explore new generic horizons; one critic described it as ‘a strange, unusual show’.⁵⁶ But it was damned by its Drury Lane audience in 1934 because Americans were trying to capture Englishness; those were not generous times for cultural exchange.⁵⁷ The fact is, however, that Hammerstein knew far more about London and the Home Counties than ever he did about Oklahoma.⁵⁸ As for Kern, he was a thorough Anglophile. If one is familiar with his bumptious Yankee confidence, brash humour and tough talk, it comes as a great surprise to hear his speaking voice, which can be sampled in the Library of Congress archives,⁵⁹ the occasion being the 1942 first broadcast performance of the *Portrait for Orchestra (Mark Twain Suite)*. Kern is relayed direct from Hollywood but sounds as though he is wearing a Harris Tweed suit, with the lightest of American accents, bar the odd Bronx vowel, and an old-world ponderousness withal.

Apart from the exemplary research on Kern’s early visits to London by Andrew Lamb,⁶⁰ his English work has been all but airbrushed out of musical theatre history because of our received view of that history as the evolution of an American genre. *Show Boat* led to *Oklahoma!*, the triumph of the all-American vernacular over subject matter, international audiences and artistic tastes. This last, the fusion of artistic tastes and therefore publics, was symbolised by the inclusion of a high-art component, the dream ballet, in *Oklahoma!*, but history ignores the fact that it was Kern who first proposed the idea of a dream ballet and that it was first tried out in *Three Sisters*, unless there are even earlier progenitors.⁶¹

Yet another song that has been utterly overlooked affords a most particular and moving example of Kern’s (and Hammerstein’s) ongoing but

⁵⁶ M. Willson Disher, ‘Musical play experiment’, *Daily Mail*, 10 April 1934.

⁵⁷ The reviews were mixed, but several critics drew attention to the gallery’s vocal displeasure and one, the all-powerful James Agate, asked ‘how long Drury Lane is to be the asylum for American inanity’—‘The American alliance’, *Sunday Times*, 15 April 1934.

⁵⁸ Hammerstein’s second wife in a posthumous interview claimed that he had never even seen the Mississippi, his own ‘Ol’ man River’, until 1947, though if that is really the case he must have been fast asleep on his many cross-continent train rides to and from California.

⁵⁹ Library of Congress Recorded Sound Collections, tape RXA 9746 A.

⁶⁰ Andrew Lamb, *Jerome Kern in Edwardian London* (privately printed, 1981; ISAM Monographs no. 22, New York, 1985).

⁶¹ The dream ballet, devised by Ralph Reader, was entitled ‘While Mary sleeps’ and appeared in Act I. A memo from Kern to Hammerstein presaging such a development is dated 19 May 1933 and can be found in the Library of Congress Jerome Kern Collection, uncatalogued additions, Box 2, item 17.

suppressed connection with England. It is well known that, distressed by the European war and with feelings of impotence and guilt at America's isolationism, Hammerstein reacted to the Nazi occupation of Paris in 1940 with a song intended for no show or film, 'The last time I saw Paris', which Kern set to music.⁶² Quite unknown, however, is the fact that they also wrote a tribute to an England beleaguered by the Blitz, a song called 'Forever and a day'. It was published in 1941, but has been mentioned by no commentator, and no performance, let alone recording, can be traced.

It is a simple but touching and heartfelt tribute (see Ex. 8). Lacking advocacy from the likes of Vera Lynn, it was denied the power to change the world as wartime propaganda; but it can still alter our view of musical history infinitesimally. For that is what scholarship does to art: adjusts the overall arrangement of its available products, that is its received history, by tiny incremental amounts through rediscovery, reinterpretation, contextualisation, canonisation, the grooming process that is editing, and sheer advocacy. Of course the commercial channels in which Kern operated throughout his creative life were themselves filters of fundamentally the same sort, in that none of his songs would have reached the stage, the screen or the parlour piano without complex processes of discovery, interpretation, contextualisation, canonisation and editing playing their part in making *Show Boat* a hit, this person a legend, that work a failure.

And an is - land we call Eng - land Will be bright and green and fair, And when free - dom needs de -

col canto

port mf

fend - ers Free - dom will find them there!

mf

Example 8. 'Forever and a day'.

⁶² Later the song was included in a film, *Lady Be Good*, and earned its creators an Academy Award.

The materials of that process—scripts, reviews, sheet music, production memos, press releases, sales figures, posters, memoirs, photographs, telegrams and so on—were therefore a kind of scholarship of their own, a proud and methodical piece of community work, in their day. But time has moved on, and now they are the sources for an endeavour with different aims. Some of those aims have been hinted at in this paper. They might accordingly include rehabilitating farce and Wodehouse's social comedy as legitimate genres for the musical stage and thereby getting beyond the teleological view of musicals as aspiring to a state of bourgeois Americanism: the musical's pattern of cultural ownership surely has to change. They would certainly deconstruct the inheritance of singers' performance practice, so heavily laden with generic assumptions, though there has been no time to consider this here. They would evaluate carefully the songsmith's restricted but enshrined craft, the commercial theatre or film's constraints, and the implications of these for larger musical structures: Kern's assured way with tunes but also his lifelong quest for opportunities to compose them into larger and plausible dramatic units cast light not only on his ambition but just possibly on how operas and symphonies work as well. And they should certainly seek a better deal for a very famous man all but a handful of whose 1,000 published songs are out of print, while hundreds more, and most of the libretti for his shows, were never published and none of the major books on him contains a bibliography or footnotes.⁶³ Clearly there is a job to be done with Kern in order to pass him on more openly to the next generation of receivers, and a sense of pride and excitement attaches to having instigated it. But most of the great American songwriters, and behind them a vast hinterland of British and Continental ones, are in the same position, as is the documentary study of other and more recent figures and genres of vernacular and popular music, so there is plenty of room for scholars. They should be encouraged before it is too late and more of the surviving source materials have perished.

Note. I am deeply indebted to the students who, accompanied by the speaker, presented the live song illustrations (and in one case a whole finale) for this lecture: at

⁶³ The books in question are Bordman, *Jerome Kern* (a painstaking, reliable and extremely comprehensive labour of research despite this limitation); M. Freedland, *Jerome Kern: a biography* (London, 1978); and D. Ewen, *The Story of Jerome Kern* (New York, 1953) and *The World of Jerome Kern* (New York, 1960). Davis's *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern* is a partial exception to this stricture, though still vague in its system of reference.

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Appendix

Catalogue entry for the song ‘Sitting pretty’

Catalogue no: Suskin 1743.¹

Song title: ‘Sitting pretty’.

Written for: *Sitting Pretty* (librettists Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse).

Lyricist(s): Jerome Kern and P. G. Wodehouse.

Other use(s): *The Forbidden Melody* (Otto Harbach), ‘Opening’, third theme (ca 1934?)

Structure of [published] song: 4-bar intro.; 20-bar verse (last 5 bars in cut time); 32-bar ABA₁C refrain (‘burthen’), last 2 bars elided with 6-bar reminiscence of refrain theme of ‘Worries’ from same show; 16-bar sung interlude; repeat of refrain.

Published key and time signature: E^b major, 2/4 metre.

Refrain incipit: 5|/2–6|1–7|2226|1–7|3–1–|4–2–|5.²

Source of show/lyrics: none, but Wodehouse used parts of *Sitting Pretty* for his novel *Bill the Conqueror* (London, 1924).

Date of composition: not known, but probably late 1923 or early 1924.

Date of first performance: 23 March 1924.

Venue of first performance: Shubert Theatre, Detroit.

Other tryout first performances: Buffalo, 230 March 1924.

New York opening date and venue: 8 April, Fulton Theatre *but without this song, which had by then been cut*.

London opening date and venue: none.

Tours: USA, fall 1924 to ?spring 1925.

Name(s) of character(s) performing it in show: the secondary couple, Horace Peabody and Dixie Tolliver.

Names(s) of actor(s) in first performance: Dwight Frye, Queenie Smith.

Position in show: Act II, eighth and last number before Finale ultimo.

Setting in show: after Horace has been caught by Dixie stealing some jewels, he promises to go straight and he and

¹ S. Suskin, *Berlin, Kern, Rodgers, Hart, and Hammerstein: a complete song catalogue* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London, 1990).

² Melodic shorthand: numbers indicate degrees of the (major) scale, hypens a silent or held beat calibrated in ‘oompah’ terms. Motion is by smallest interval except where a forward slash or backslash appears, indicating an upward or downward leap respectively.

Dixie plan to start a new, simple life out west.

Location of script: 1. Rental materials from Tams–Witmark Music Library Inc., 560 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10022. No date. 2. New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

Position in script (1): Act II, p. 39, but lyrics not present.

Autograph sketches: Library of Congress, Jerome Kern Collection, Box 71, Folder 13: 2-stave skeleton sketch of verse (p. 1) and refrain ('burthern') (p. 2).

1. The refrain has different words: 'A jug of wine / Beneath the bough is fine / For those inclined that way'. Cf. the verse of 'You alone would do' from Act I: both refer to FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, picking up on a dialogue cue, which suggests that 'Sitting pretty' was first intended for the Act I position. 2. The melodic incipit is different: 5|1–6|2–\5|1116|2.³

Autograph MS: none extant.

Other primary source materials: Library of Congress, Jerome Kern Collection, Box 71, Folder 13. 1. Publisher's piano/vocal *Stichvorlage*. 2. Typed lyric sheet. In both these items Dixie's interlude begins with 'Smart frocks . . .' (see Note 2 below); otherwise, only minor variants from published song and piano/conductor score.

Location of piano/conductor score: rental materials from Tams–Witmark Music Library Inc. No date.

Position in piano/conductor score: pp. 183–9.

Original orchestration: Robert Russell Bennett.

MS of original orchestration: Library of Congress, Jerome Kern Collection, Box 69, Folder 10. 23 pp. See also Box 68, Folder 8 for Finale ultimo.

Scoring: fl, ob, 2 cls, bn, 2 hns, 2 trs, perc, hp, vn 1 *divisi*, vn 2, va, vc, db.

Location of orchestral performance material: Tams–Witmark Music Library Inc.

Routine in show: 1. As for published song, followed by dance break using complete refrain (with repeat marks).

2. As first item in Finale ultimo (once through complete refrain).

Publication details of song: T. B. Harms, plate no. TBH Co. 257-7; 7 pages of text (pp. 3–9); copyright MCMXXIV. Each published song from the show bears the first-page text box 'The right to make arrangements [of] or otherwise reproduce this composition is expressly reserved'.

Sheet music cover: the artwork for the show—silhouette of a romantic couple sitting on a garden wall, in chocolate brown and white (see Jasen, *The Theatre of P. G. Wodehouse* below for black-and-white reproduction).

Known copies of song in UK: British Library, F.1893.pp(18); G.1520.k(7).

Publication details of show: no vocal score published, only 11 separate songs ('All you need is a girl', 'Bongo on the Congo', 'The enchanted train', 'Mr and Mrs Rorer', 'On a desert island with you', 'Shadow of the moon', 'Shufflin' Sam', 'Tulip time in Sing Sing', 'Worries', 'A year from today' and 'Sitting pretty') plus a piano selection.

Current publication details: out of print; authorised photocopies can be supplied by Chappell & Co.

Separate publication of lyrics: with sleeve note, New World Records recording (see below).

Other arrangements: none (see Note 1 below).

First recording: see current recording below.

³ Perhaps Kern realised that this was too similar to Debussy's *Petite Suite*, fourth movement.

Other recordings: none.

Current recording: Jason Graae and Judy Blazer with the Princess Theatre Ensemble cond. John McGlinn, New World Records 80387-2 (1990), CD 2, track 9.

Reception history—reviews: *Detroit Free Press*, 24 March 1924.

Bibliography: G. Bordman, *Jerome Kern* (New York, 1980), pp. 244–51; L. Davis, *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern: the men who made musical comedy* (New York, 1993), pp. 262–72; D. A. Jasen, *The Theatre of P. G. Wodehouse* (London, 1979), pp. 84–5; sleeve note, New World Records recording (see above).

Notes: **1.** *Sitting Pretty* was the show for which Kern banned dance-band recordings (see publication details above), which together with its having been cut probably explains the lack of

contemporary exposure. **2.** The published score has the stage direction ‘She dictates a letter to an imaginary typist’ over the quotation from ‘Worries’, and the following interlude is the letter: ‘Dear Sir: Your favor just received . . . [etc.]’; in the rental score this stage direction is missing and the interlude lyrics are a simple monologue for Dixie implying a different occupation: ‘Smart frocks I stitch for ladies rich . . .’ **3.** The song was cut ‘because Dwight Frye had a slight speech impediment and his singing of the words “sit and sit and sit” sounded embarrassingly different’ (Bordman, *Jerome Kern*, p. 249, drawing on unspecified ‘recollections’ of Queenie Smith, probably an interview with the author). **4.** This was Dwight Frye’s musical comedy debut (he was known as a straight actor).