

## Background Notes on *She Loves Me*

By Dr. Kevin Rozman\*

The Broadway Season of 1963-64 contained some great productions. Richard Burton and Hume Cronyn were in *Hamlet*, Albert Finney in *Luther*, Alec Guinness in *Dylan*, and Jason Robards, Jr. in *After the Fall*. Elizabeth Ashley was in *Barefoot in the Park*, Colleen Dewhurst in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Julie Harris in *Marathon33* and Sandy Dennis in *Any Wednesday*.

Blockbuster musicals were also to be found on Broadway. Carol Channing had just opened the hit of the season, *Hello, Dolly!*, and a new star, Barbra Streisand was discovered in *Funny Girl*. There was a production of *110 in the Shade*, Bob Fosse was in a revival of *Pal Joey* and Steve Lawrence was in *What Makes Sammy Run*.

In this milieu of large scale hits, a delightful musical, *She Loves Me*, opened. But this small, intimate love story mostly stayed unnoticed in the glare of these mega shows.

*She Loves Me* is based on the story of a 1937 Hungarian play. And, its plot was recreated in both the 1940 film, *The Shop Around the Corner* and *You've Got Mail*. Its female star was the late Barbara Cook, who had won a Tony as Best Featured Actress in a Musical as Marian in *The Music Man*.

Miss Cook shared later in her career that *She Loves Me* was unique because each of the actors in it was a unique character throughout and so this show had no chorus as such. This was the first show to work without a set chorus and it created the form for such later shows as *Company* and *Follies*. The other focus of the show was that its composer and lyricist, Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, wanted to convey the story primarily by song with minimal dialogue. This also made the show special and both of these qualities made it different from the other musicals being presented that season.

Bock and Harnick would later write both *Fiorello!* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Unlike the large casts of the these musicals, *She Loves Me* takes place in a European shop. The characters are the shop owner and his staff of six. The two leads, Amalia and Georg, are unable to connect with others and so have resorted to writing "Dear Friend" letters as members of the local lonely hearts club. Joe Masteroff, who wrote the book for the show, added a second couple who are also clerks in the store to contrast with the main pair. Steven Kodaly, the male of this second pair, is a womanizing cad and Ilona Ritter (the female) too often finds a man who is available rather than her ideal.

*She Loves Me* was co-produced and directed by Hal Prince, who personally won 21 Tony Awards – a record. This was the first time that he took a show from its infancy in composition, through rehearsal to production. Given his Tony track record, his first experience served him well in his distinguished career!

The show was not completely overlooked when it was originally produced on Broadway. Jack Cassidy, who played Kodaly, won a Tony for Best Featured Actor in a Musical. By comparison, *Hello, Dolly!* swept the Tonys with 10 awards and held the record for most Tonys won by a single show until *The Producers* won 12 in 2001. (Interestingly, Carol Channing won the Tony for Best Actress in a Musical that year,

beating out the newcomer, Barbra Streisand. But when made into a film, it was Streisand who played Dolly, not Channing.)

*She Loves Me* has been revived twice on Broadway by The Roundabout Theatre Company in 1993 and 2016. Both revivals were directed by Scott Ellis. The 2016 revival also ran into some competition from a new musical blockbuster that season. That show was called, *Hamilton*.

*She Loves Me* truly is romantic, driven by well defined characters, presented in an effective structure and with lovely songs to remember. Enjoy this delightful intimate valentine!

\* Dr. Kevin Rozman is an avid Artistry supporter and volunteer. A former board member, Kevin co-leads the annual New York Arts Experience trip and fondly remembers participating in the cast of our 2005 production of *Follies*. Kevin spent over 30 years as an educator of students from middle school to graduate school. For 17 years, he taught in two of Milwaukee's Arts Specialty Schools, also serving as Artistic Director in one.