



Exploring  
a Great  
American  
Art Form

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# Overture



Joan Ellison



George Roth



## CLASSIC SONGS, FASCINATING STORY

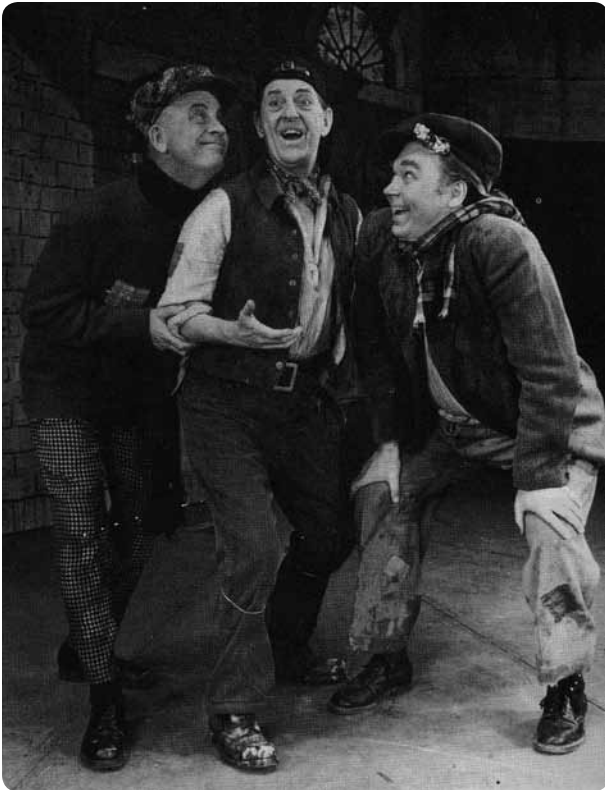
By Heather Meeker

**IN MARCH, TMTP PREMIERES A MULTI-MEDIA CONCERT** that tells the story behind one of America's greatest stage and screen musicals, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe's *My Fair Lady*. And while the road to the original Broadway production in 1956 was far from smooth, TMTP has assembled a "lovely" group of singers to bring the hit-filled score to life.

*(continued inside)*

## CLASSIC SONGS, FASCINATING STORY

(continued from page one)



Also from the original cast, Stanley Holloway (as Alfred P. Doolittle) explains his philosophy in "With a Little Bit of Luck" to cronies Gordon Dilworth and Rod McLennan.

**Bill Rudman** and music director **Nancy Maier** are joined by a cast that includes TMTF favorites **Jared Leal** and **Fabio Polanco**, **The Mentor Top 25 Show Choir**, and two new faces in the TMTF company. Managing Director Heather Meeker recently sat down with **George Roth** and **Joan Ellison** – who will sing the songs of Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle, respectively. Meeker soon discovered that "The Making of *My Fair Lady*" is not only their introduction to the *Song Is You!* concert series, but to each other.

**MEEKER: You are both mainstays of Cleveland's theater and music scene. How is it possible that you've never met?**

**ELLISON:** It is surprising that we haven't crossed paths before...

**ROTH:** When I first arrived in Cleveland, someone told me that Joan is the best voice teacher in town, so I'm glad we finally get to work together. And Joan, if you dislike me, it could actually work in our favor for this concert.

**ELLISON (LAUGHING):** Absolutely!

**MEEKER: Have you both performed in *My Fair Lady* in the past?**

**ROTH:** Coincidentally I was cast as Alfred P. Doolittle in the Beck Center's production last October. A few months earlier Bill had called to say that he and Nancy thought I'd be the perfect Henry Higgins. I was quite satisfied with myself, because between those two characters is the entire British class structure! All kidding aside, it's a real treat to attack the musical during the same year from both ends of the social spectrum.

**ELLISON:** I've always wanted to perform in the musical but have never had the chance. My introduction to *My Fair Lady* was as a kid. My parents bought me a *Time-Life* LP series of songs by great songwriting teams, and of course I fell in love with Julie Andrews singing Lerner and Loewe's songs from this show. After Judy Garland, Andrews was my earliest vocal influence: I listened to her so much that my parents would yell, "Turn that off, we can't stand it anymore!"

**MEEKER: *My Fair Lady* is widely acknowledged, as *New York Times* critic Brooks Atkinson wrote when it opened on Broadway, as "one of the best musicals of the century." Why do you think it's so timeless?**

**ROTH:** It's become such an iconic piece in Americans' shared musical heritage. These songs are in our collective consciousness, though we may not know why. It's a musical about transformations: not just for Eliza, but for Higgins as well. Lerner and Loewe explore universal themes like self-confidence, the power of words and where we fit in society. It's about aspiring to be better than we are, and finding the key to feeling more self-fulfilled.

**MEEKER: And what makes these two characters so irresistible?**

**ELLISON:** Eliza asks for so little, really. All her emotions are on the outside, and I think that's what makes her so appealing: One minute she is screaming and the next minute she lets everyone in. I think her combination of feistiness and vulnerability makes her extremely likeable and believable.

**ROTH:** Higgins's side of the story is just as important. He is trapped in the same social system, and like many people, trapped in his own habits. Where Eliza is all emotion, Higgins relies upon words and intellect. As an actor, my job is to make Higgins someone that Eliza would want to return to, and to show his own journey. "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face" is a big help in that.

**MEEKER: What challenges do you find in the songs?**

**ROTH:** Given George Bernard Shaw's writing, there's no doubt that Lerner and Loewe had plenty of dialogue to work with as they adapted *Pygmalion* into the musical. But on top of that, Higgins is a phoneticist, and his songs are written as monologues with few repeating lyrics. There are so many words to learn, and that's both fun and challenging.

**MEEKER: And sometimes the words change, as with *Eliza*!**

**ELLISON:** Yes, and Eliza's lyrics even go back and forth between accents. I am lucky because at one time, I knew all these songs cold. So I've been working more closely on how the words are said. Julie Andrews had the luxury of a dialect coach

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## WHEN, WHERE AND HOW TO GET TICKETS

### THE MAKING OF 'MY FAIR LADY'

**MARCH 6 (3:00 PM)**  
Presented on the  
Chagrin Arts Winter Series  
Performing Arts Center,  
Chagrin Falls High School

\$20 general, \$26 preferred, \$5 students.  
Call the Chagrin Valley Little Theater  
box office at 440-247-8955 or visit  
[www.chagrinarts.org](http://www.chagrinarts.org)

**MARCH 13 (3:00 PM)**  
Tri-C Metropolitan Campus  
Main Stage Theatre  
\$20. Call 216-987-4444.


Also online at [www.tricpresents.com](http://www.tricpresents.com)

**MARCH 19 (7:30 PM)**  
Lorain County Community College  
Stocker Arts Center Main Theater

\$15 for adults, \$10 for children 12 and  
under. Call 800-995-5222 ext. 4040.  
Also in person or visit  
[www.lorainccc.edu/stocker](http://www.lorainccc.edu/stocker)

**COMING SOON ON**  
 **FOOTLIGHT PARADE**

Sounds of the American Musical <sup>SM</sup>

Tune in to WCLV 104.9 FM every Saturday at 6:00 PM 

**February 26: "Broadway Dance Music"**

The often-ignored compositions that help tell stories through dance, including music by Kurt Weill, Richard Rodgers and Leonard Bernstein.

**March 5: "Big Battle of the Sexes"**

All's fair in love and war! An hour of male bashing and female bashing led by Henry Higgins, Annie Oakley and other immortal characters.

**March 12: "I Am What I Am"**

We hear from 15 men and women (plus a few kids) who have some bold statements to make about their identities.

**March 19: "Questions Worth Asking"**

Songs with question marks in their titles, ranging from "Do You Love Me?" to "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"

**March 26: "Breaking Up Is Hard (or Not!)"**

Songs about women and men who must go it alone.

**April 2: "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow"**

Three topics we ponder every day of our lives — and Berlin, Sondheim, Kander and Ebb and Jerry Herman lead the pack of writers doing the exploration.

**April 9: "Technology Rules!"**

A program humming with telegraphs, telephones, cars, airplanes, rockets, computers, the Internet and more.

**April 16: "Familiar Voices: TV Stars in Musicals"**

Jerry Orbach, Martin Short, Jason Alexander and Bebe Neuwirth are among the television stars whose work on Broadway is worth celebrating.

**April 23: "All About Me"**

Want to get to know a character in musical theater? Just ask him or her to perform a soliloquy — because if it's good enough for Hamlet, it's good enough for Billy Bigelow.

*The Song Is You!*

**THE HILLS R ALIVE W/THE SOUND OF CLICKING**

By Serena Pomerantz

**LIKE ANY NORMAL TWENTY-SOME-THING, I EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY.** My life revolves around compulsively checking my e-mails and text messages and finding out what my 3,004 "best friends" are doing via social media. But lately, my passion for technology is colliding with my real passion in life: musical theater. I cannot stop myself from thinking about how the plots of so many brilliant musicals would not — could not — be what they are in the Information Age. Consider these examples:

- In *Annie*, our favorite little orphan would sneak into Miss Hannigan's office to use her computer and surf the Internet for as much information as possible about her family. Oliver Warbucks would pay for Annie's account at [www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com) so she could discover who her parents really are.

- In *Bye Bye Birdie*, "The Telephone Hour" would be re-titled "The Texting Hour." Kim would send a mass text to everyone saying that she and Hugo got pinned. All their friends would text back and forth, "OMG!" and "Did U Hear?" Kim would also tweet about it on Twitter and change her relationship status on Facebook to "In a Relationship with: Hugo Peabody."

- *Les Misérables*'s Jean Valjean would be the focus of dramatic cable-TV programs highlighting France's "Most Wanted" criminals. Bloggers would track and post

the locations of his most recent sightings, and his mug shot would circulate the World Wide Web. Poor Cosette! Her life would not have been the same.

- The gamblers in *Guys and Dolls* certainly wouldn't stress about a location for their crap game, because they could easily gamble online, out-of-sight and free from police interference. Adelaide would never truly know if Nathan had given up gambling or not.

What is a modern musical theater writer to do? Set everything in the dark ages of the 20th century? Develop plot devices where cell phones fall into the toilet or governments pass laws that ban "texting while driving a surrey with a fringe on top?" There's no escape: each day we come out with more technological innovations that are ruining great plots. Time to console myself...by listening to the score of *Oklahoma!* on my iPod.

Guest contributor *Serena Pomerantz* graduated in May 2010 from the University of the Arts (Philadelphia) with a BFA in musical theater. She now lives and works in New York City and listens to TMTP's "On the Aisle" on Sirius XM Satellite Radio.



**CLASSIC SONGS** (continued from page two)

after the first rehearsal, and here I am, an American with no coach. But I'm giving it my all!

**MEEKER:** How important is source material to each of you as you prepare for this concert?

**ELLISON:** Very important, especially because we aren't performing the script. It means I have to create everything that happens in between the songs in my mind, and jump to the next song's emotional place without the benefit of the dialogue. For example, I'll perform "I Could Have Danced All Night" without doing all the scenes that set it up.

**ROTH:** I'm an omnivore who wants all the great ideas, so I watched every screen version of *My Fair Lady* and *Pygmalion* I could find. I'd forgotten how great Rex Harrison is. It is so touching to watch him go through his own internal struggle.



Jared Leal



Fabio Polanco

When he cracks, he does it beautifully. I hope I can funnel his strengths through my own emotional understanding of the role.

**ELLISON:** You know, it's humbling that this concert will include clips of my two childhood idols — Julie Andrews and Audrey Hepburn — and there I'll be, singing songs in between the two of them. It's just a little terrifying.

**ROTH:** You're right. We are all sunk.

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## MEET A TMTF TRUSTEE

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**JOINED TMTF BOARD:**  
2010

**REASON FOR JOINING:**

TMTF demonstrates incredible focus, direction and planning, so becoming a trustee was an easy decision. My primary role is to introduce more people to our mission, and to secure their support for our programs.

**SOMETHING THAT EVERYONE SHOULD**

**KNOW ABOUT TMTF:** This organization is for everyone, even if they are unfamiliar with (or on the fence about) musical theater. Whether it's a concert, a radio program or the school program *Kids Love Musicals!*, this organization is doing great work in northeast Ohio and across the nation. It's huge!

**FAVORITE MUSICAL:** As an impressionable youth in the 1960s there was no other musical with such an intense array of emotions as *West Side Story*: love, war, happiness and tragedy. It was all a kid younger than 10 years old could handle in one evening, and that show has stuck with me ever since.



## SING ALONG WITH US... ONLINE!

Check out TMTF's Facebook Page every day for musical theater news, links and event information. Visit our website at [www.MusicalTheaterProject](http://www.MusicalTheaterProject) for concert tickets, recommended reading, and to sign up for monthly e-newsletters.

## BILL'S PICKS

### IN PRINT

**Hollywood Musicals: The 101 Greatest Song-and-Dance Movies of All Time**

(Black Dog) is Ken Bloom's beautifully packaged companion volume to his 2004 *Broadway Musicals: The 101 Greatest Shows of All Time*, and again he proves himself to be one of our most incisive and good-natured historians. Full disclosure: Ken also happens to be one of my oldest friends, but the truth is I learned something new from nearly every entry. For example, Stanley Donen on working with Gene Kelly: "I've been asked for years how one co-directs. If you substitute 'fight' for 'co-direct,' then you have it." Ken's list will generate controversy (*Beach Blanket Bingo?* Really?), but that's part of the fun: He invites us to second-guess him, and he's careful to explain that he has chosen "the greatest musicals, not necessarily the best....Let the wrangling begin!"

**To Broadway, To Life! The Musical Theater of Bock and Harnick** (Oxford), by Philip Lambert, is the long-overdue critical biography of composer Jerry Bock and lyricist Sheldon Harnick, whose seven musicals for Broadway include two masterpieces, *Fiddler on the Roof* and *She Loves Me*, along with the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fiorello!* Until now we've known very little about the team; they essentially broke up more than 30 years ago due to artistic



disagreements surrounding *The Rothschilds*. But Lambert makes a case that the works of Bock and Harnick are crucial to understanding the development of the American musical in the 1950s and 60s, and his analysis of both words and music can be appreciated by the general reader. It's fortunate that he interviewed them when he did; Jerry Bock died in November at 83.

**A Biographical Guide to the Great Jazz and Pop Singers** (Pantheon), by Will

Friedwald, is a book you could get lost in: 811 pages of essays that take stock of more than 300 singers. But what you will find reading any page is both penetrating and a lot of fun. Although Friedwald, who writes about music for *The Wall Street Journal*, is best known for his views on jazz, his understanding of musical theater provides the icing on the cake that makes this book a TMTF must-have. On Ethel Merman: "Call her a singer, an actress, a comic, a diva or an American icon. Call her whatever you wish, but precious few performers beyond Merman can accurately be described as a force of nature...and she had charm, chutzpah and emotional warmth to match."

### CLASSIC SONGS (continued from page three)

**MEEKER:** What song are you most looking forward to performing?

**ELLISON:** Without a doubt, "I Could Have Danced All Night." It's just pure joy. I don't know of too many songs that so perfectly encapsulate the rush of being in love for the first time.

**ROTH:** I like "Hymn to Him," otherwise known as "Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Man?" It's a lovely comic moment that Bill tells me is Stephen Sondheim's favorite piece in the score.

**MEEKER:** Lerner and Loewe wrote remarkable words and music, didn't they?

**ELLISON:** They managed to wed a brilliant script with brilliant songs. And Lerner has a knack for placing a song so it has to come *right there*, right at that specific moment and no other.

**ROTH:** Whether it's *My Fair Lady*, *Camelot*, *Brigadoon* or *Gigi*, their songs go straight to the heart. *My Fair Lady* soars in a way that a lot of musicals aspire to but rarely achieve. When you hear these songs, you realize just how much is possible in musical theater.



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