

## Hope and Human Potential Through the Lens of Broadway Musicals

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Some of the most endearing and inspirational melodies I find myself humming from time to time come from Broadway musicals. But what about the lyrics? Although the emotions lyrics convey are just as powerful or even more so than the tunes they accompany, our memories of lyrics often fade to a few catch phrases. This morning I'll try to give lyrics their due.

If the right side of my beard seems a bit fuller than the left, you can blame acclaimed actor and singer Shirley Jones, who 19 years ago came down from the stage at Natrona High School and vamped me. Shirley performed leading roles in the movies Oklahoma, Music Man, and Carousel. Now, at age 89, she is still working.

It's Carousel I want to talk about. The musical debuted on Broadway in 1945 and was released as a movie in 1956, starring Shirley Jones and Gordon MacRae. The signature song in "Carousel" is "You'll Never Walk Alone" composed by Richard Rodgers and sung by Claramae Turner. Oscar Hammerstein wrote the book. The lyrics go like this:

When you walk through a storm  
Hold your head up high  
And don't be afraid of the dark.  
At the end of the storm  
Is a golden sky  
And the sweet silver song of a lark.

Walk on through the wind,  
Walk on through the rain,  
Tho' your dreams be tossed and blown. Walk on, walk on  
With hope in your heart  
And you'll never walk alone,  
You'll never walk alone.

In 1963, Anfield Stadium in Liverpool was one of the first in England to have a disc jockey. Before games he would play the UK's top hits over the sound system, one of which was a version of "You'll Never Walk Alone" song by local musician Gerry Marsden of Gerry and the Pacemakers. It was a huge hit with Liverpool football (American soccer) fans, becoming the team anthem. In 1989 it became much more than a song.

On April 15, 1989, Liverpool was a semi-finalist for the FA Cup, an annual football competition open to all eligible teams down to level nine in the English league. This is a really big deal. Their opponent was the Nottingham Forest Football club and the game was played at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. Liverpool supporters were allocated a standing-room-only terrace at one end of the stadium. Shortly before kick-off, in an attempt to ease overcrowding outside the entrance turnstiles, the police ordered an exit gate to be opened, leading to an influx of supporters entering the terrace. This resulted in overcrowding and a

tragic crush resulting in 97 deaths and 766 injuries, the highest death toll in British sporting history. The game was abandoned and restaged in Manchester on May 7, 1989. Liverpool went on to win the FA Cup.

Initially, the police tried to blame unruly fans for the disaster, needless to say an unpopular claim not sustained by subsequent court verdicts. Over the years "You'll Never Walk Alone" signified Liverpool's fight for justice for their fans, letting the families and friends of those lost at Hillsborough know that they would never be alone. And incredibly, despite the visceral competitiveness of English football fans, for a least a year afterward wherever Liverpool played be it home or away the whole stadium would erupt in "You'll Never Walk Alone."

In 1985 my wife, Barbara, and I heard about a new musical from France that opened at the Barbican Center on October 9. Two or three weeks later we decided to attend, despite a rather mediocre review published by the London Times. After all, how could anything from France be exceptional? Later the production moved to the Palace Theatre on the West End, where it played for 19 years. I wonder if the critic kept his or her job. Our tickets at the Barbican cost less than \$30 apiece. These were kinder, gentler times.

We were overwhelmed, despite a ten minute interruption at the beginning of the second act prefaced by a crew member in head phones running onto the stage waving "stop, stop." Apparently the collapsible barricade intended to emerge from the wings would not un-collapse. This clearly was not Paris in 1848. The show was so new that cassettes (you remember those) were only available in French.

Enraptured by the music of "Les Miserables," it was only upon preparing this talk that I took a good look at the lyrics. Not as frequently presented at concerts, but no less moving, is the beautiful tone poem "Castle on a Cloud," sung by the eight year old orphan Cosette as she slaves under the tyrannical care of an inn keeper. She is the daughter of Fantine, a factory worker, seamstress and one time prostitute. The lyrics are printed in your program:

There is a castle on a cloud,  
I like to go there in my sleep,  
Aren't any floors for me to sweep,  
Not in my castle on a cloud.

There is a room that's full of toys,  
There are a hundred boys and girls,  
Nobody shouts or talks too loud,  
Not in my castle on a cloud.

There is a lady all in white,  
Holds me and sings a lullaby,  
She's nice to see and she's soft to touch,  
She says "Cosette, I love you very much."

I know a place where no one's lost,  
I know a place where no one cries,

Crying at all is not allowed,  
Not in my castle on a cloud.

The theme is hope, so often encapsulated by lyricists in Broadway musicals.

During the late 1940's through the 1950's I suffered the indignity of being a Boston Red Sox fan, occasionally buoyed up by the play-by-play radio announcing of Wyoming icon Curt Gowdy before he moved up to network TV. I grew up in Connecticut on the dividing line between Red Sox and Yankee fans, which made things worse, because the Yankees always won, so there were plenty of friends happy to mock me. The opening of the musical comedy "Damm Yankees" in 1955 and film adaptation in 1958 offered some redress.

The story was a modern telling of the Faust legend, in other words, striking a deal with the devil. In this case Joe Boyd, a middle aged fan of the woefully incompetent Washington Senators baseball team imprudently declared that he would sell his soul to the devil to see his team beat the Yankees. The Faustian bargain was struck, with a few escape clauses, and the devil transformed Joe into an athletic twenty something who led the Senators to compete head-to-head with the Yankees, the deciding game being the last of the season. In one of the adaptations of the musical, my favorite, the devil reverts Joe to his former self, a lumbering fifty year old, as he rounds third base to score the winning run for the Senators. Joe is tagged out at home plate, but the umpire, who of course is fallible, calls him safe. The devil goes berserk, but to no avail. The episode ends with my favorite sports line of all time: "*even the devil can't change an umpire's decision.*" This of course was before the advent of challenges and instant replay. The theme of the signature song of Damm Yankees is heart and hope, as printed in your bulletin:

You've gotta have heart  
All you really need is heart  
When the odds are sayin' you'll never win  
That's when the grin should start  
You've gotta have hope  
Mustn't sit around and mope  
Nothin's half as bad as it may appear  
Wait'll next year and hope  
When your luck is battin' zero  
Get your chin up off the floor  
Mister you can be a hero  
You can open any door, there's nothin' to it but to do it  
You've gotta have heart  
Miles 'n miles n' miles of heart  
Oh, it's fine to be a genius of course  
But keep that old horse  
Before the cart  
First you've gotta have heart.

I first met the Man of La Mancha in the basement of the Casper College Administration Building round about 1982. He had laryngitis. Which was a shame, because that night he sang the lead role of Don Quixote in the musical “Man from La Mancha,” based on a 17<sup>th</sup> century novel by Miguel de Cervantes. In those days (the 1980’s, not the 17<sup>th</sup> century), either Stage III, Casper College, or both staged their performances in a theater-in-the-rectangle below the administrative offices. Thirty years later I attended an excellent performance of Man from La Mancha under much better conditions on the McMurry Main Stage of the Krampert Theater. First performed on Broadway in 1965, the musical is set in the volatile days of the Spanish Inquisition, when the writer, Miguel Cervantes and his manservant find themselves imprisoned after being accused of crimes against the church. A little appreciated fact is that only 10 per cent of the Inquisition’s prisoners were physically tortured, the remainder being subjected to endless questions from lawyers whose object was to determine the extent to which the accused agreed, or disagreed, with church doctrine. I’ll leave it up to you to decide which would be worse!

Cervantes must persuade his unruly fellow inmates not to burn his prized manuscript by performing it for them. Thus, Man from La Mancha is a play within a play. The central character of the play is the near-sited Don Quixote of questionable sanity who goes on a series of quests to become a knight. He mistakes a windmill for an adversary on horseback and charges it with his lance. Thus the expression “tilting at windmills.” There are some modern analogs here, but I’ll leave that to future discussions.

In 2016 an exhibition at the British Library titled “Imaging Don Quixote” explored how artists have illustrated him over time. Cervantes characterized his character Don Quixote as “approximately fifty years old; his complexion weathered, his flesh scrawny, his face gaunt.” Picasso’s pen-and-ink drawing of 1955 mimicked earlier interpretations, that is, a tall thin man long of face and body. Picasso added a goatee. Any souvenir shop in Spain will likely offer a wooden statue in that mode.

The second time I met the Man from La Mancha was at a Unitarian gathering in Casper in 1982 or 1983. We had just chartered our little Fellowship. In walked a tall thin man about 50 years of age with a goatee. My goodness, I thought to myself, he looks like Don Quixote! His name was Bill Young. “What do you do, Bill?” I asked. He replied: “I operate a wind turbine south of Medicine Bow.”

Indeed he did. Bill had purchased the experimental four megawatt turbine funded by the Department of Energy in the late 1970’s after the turbine had broken down. With help of friends, including our own Bob Mullen, Bill painstakingly restored the machine to health, sometimes hanging upside down nearly 300 feet above the ground cleaning generator armatures with something like a tooth brush. That was Bill’s quest, his impossible dream. Here’s the lyrics from Man from La Mancha.

To dream the impossible dream,  
 To fight the unbeatable foe,  
 To bear with unbearable sorrow  
 To run where the brave dare not go;  
 To right the unrightable wrong.

To love, pure and chaste, from afar,  
 To try, when your arms are too weary,  
 To reach the unreachable star!

This is my Quest to follow that star,  
 No matter how hopeless, no matter how far,  
 To fight for the right  
 Without question or pause,  
 To be willing to march into hell  
 For a heavenly cause!

And I know, if I'll only be true  
 To this glorious Quest,  
 That my heart will lie peaceful and calm  
 When I'm laid to my rest.

And the world will be better for this,  
 That one man, scorned and covered with scars,  
 Still strove, with his last ounce of courage,  
 To reach the unreachable stars!

Many of us likely have a secret place where we long to be. Mine was a jumble of sand, rocks and shrubs about two acres in size called Duck Island, located in Long Island Sound a mile or so off Kelsey Point in Clinton Connecticut. A receding glacier had likely dumped its contents as an after thought millennia ago. From a cottage my family rented in the late 1940's and early 1950's, I could see the island from my bedroom window. Extending at right angles from the shoreward side of the island were a pair of stone breakwaters forming a sheltered anchorage for pleasure boats. On weekends my friend Beecher Wooding and I would pester a dad to motor out to look at the boats. Despite our pleading, we never landed on the island. Beecher and I were convinced there had to be buried treasure. We were keen to explore.

Finally, in 1953 when we were both twelve, our parents miraculously gave their consent for Beecher and I to camp one night on Duck Island. We were ecstatic, but at the same time a little nervous, knowing that our parents by use of binoculars would likely observe any mischief we were up to, like setting fire to the island. Everything started out well. After scouting the island for secret treasure, but finding only flotsam, we pitched our tent beside a clump of shrubs, built a fire from driftwood, and cooked a delicious meal of hot dogs and baked beans capped off by chocolate chip cookies. After checking our surroundings for wolves and bears and finding none, we went to sleep, only to be roused around midnight by a ferocious thunder storm accompanied by torrential rain. Beecher's golden lab dutifully sponged it up, then came into the tent to shake it off. For reasons that only parents can understand, Mrs. Wooding called the Coast Guard to ask if we could be evacuated. Eventually the storm passed, and we went back to sleep.

Duck Island, the Bali Ha'I of my youth, is now a Wildlife Management Area, presumably on behalf of birds rather than bears or wolves. I think it's great to have a personal Bali Ha'l. It's nice to have aspirations, even if they turn into flotsam and jetsam. Here are the lyrics from the musical "South Pacific."

Most people live on a lonely island,  
 Lost in the middle of a foggy sea.  
 Most people long for another island,  
 One where they know they will like to be.

Bali Ha'i may call you,  
 Any night, any day,  
 In your heart, you'll hear it call you:  
 "Come away...Come away."

Bali Ha'i will whisper  
 In the wind of the sea:  
 "Here am I, your special island!  
 Come to me, come to me!"

Your own special hopes,  
 Your own special dreams,  
 Bloom on the hillside  
 And shine in the streams.  
 If you try, you'll find me  
 Where the sky meets the sea.  
 "Here am I your special island  
 Come to me, Come to me."

Bali Ha'i,  
 Bali Ha'i,  
 Bali Ha'i!

Someday you'll see me floatin' in the sunshine,  
 My head stickin' out from a loaf nighin' cloud,  
 You'll hear me call you,  
 Singin' through the sunshine,  
 Sweet and clear as can be:  
 "Come to me, here am I, come to me."  
 If you try, you'll find me  
 Where the sky meets the sea.  
 "Here am I your special island  
 Come to me, Come to me."

Bali Ha'i,  
 Bali Ha'i,  
 Bali Ha'i!

We have some time for discussion. Perhaps you'd like to share a tune or a poem or a piece of prose that gave you hope and inspiration.

