



# Brigadoon: The Musical of the Century

By **Peter Filichia** (</news/author/peter%20filichia>) on June 16, 2017  
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Here's a suggestion on how to advertise your production of *Brigadoon*.

"A musical like this comes only once every 100 years."

True, advertising *Brigadoon* that way would be an inside joke, for not everyone would know that Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe's first hit tells of a town that comes alive only once every 100 years.

Since 1947, the show certainly has been produced more often than that. For after *Brigadoon* had become the 19th longest-running musical on Broadway, it had two major Broadway

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revivals, two limited engagements at City Center and a concert benefit seven years ago this week.

When The New York Drama Critics Circle gave its 1946-47 Best Musical Award to *Brigadoon*, it said that the show's "taste, discretion and thoughtful beauty mark a high note in any season and because it finds the lyric theater at its best."

(Did you get tripped up on "beauty mark," assuming that it meant a facial mole? I did, too, until I realized that "mark" was the verb in the sentence.)

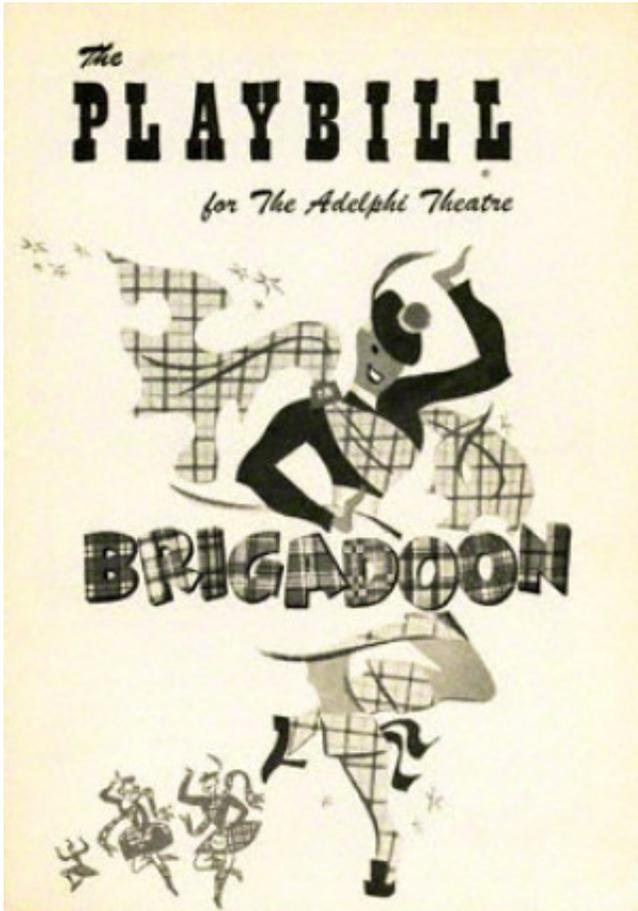
This is the score that spurred RCA Victor Records to make the show its first-ever original cast album – which has been followed by six other major recordings. *Brigadoon* is one of the comparatively few musicals that followed its Broadway run with both a film version (in 1954) and a TV special (in 1966) – each of which yielded albums of their own. (And if anyone has a copy of the Mexican cast album, let me know.)

Venues from conservatories to community theaters have told the story of Tommy Albright and Jeff Douglas, two New Yorkers who visit Scotland and wander into a town that only comes alive for one day every hundred years. In between, Brigadoonians get plenty of sleep.

For the cynical Jeff, the place is a bore, even if he is chased by the man-hungry Meg Brockie. Tommy, however, has been looking to enhance his life, although he's on track (albeit lacklusterly) to marry his fiancée Jane and remain at his job.

Love often comes when you're not looking for it, and Tommy finds it in this quaint town. So does Brigadoonian Fiona MacLaren, who hasn't felt sparks from any man she already knows. Tommy gives Fiona her once-in-a-hundred-years' day.

The '40s were famous for two-couple musicals, so with Jeff not entranced by Meg, Lerner invented Fiona's sister Jean, about to marry Charley Dalrymple. (And no jokes about how Charley needed 100 years to make a commitment.) Harry Beaton is inconsolable that Jean hasn't chosen him. He may not be mad at the world, but he's certainly angry enough to destroy Brigadoon.



*(Playbill from the 1957 Broadway Revival at the Adelphi Theatre.)*

Technically speaking, *Brigadoon* is an original musical, in that it doesn't credit a previous work as its inspiration. Should it have? Esteemed theater critic George Jean Nathan claimed that Lerner stole the plot of Friedrich Gerstäcker's *Germelshausen*. That 1860 story is named for a village that also shows up for a day each century – when Arnold arrives and meets Gertrud.

Wrote Abe Laube in *Broadway's Greatest Musicals* "Today on many college campuses, German professors who teach Germelshausen blandly refer to it as Brigadoon."

There are three sides to every story – Person A's version, Person B's and The Truth – but according to Lerner, George Jean Nathan wanted a relationship with Marion Bell, *Brigadoon's* leading lady, who preferred Lerner. (She even married him.) Lerner always believed that Nathan retaliated by saying he'd stolen from *Germelshausen*.

Even if Lerner were as guilty as Scar in *The Lion King*, he did what Rodgers and Hammerstein did when they adapted *Carousel* from *Liliom*: they made the ending happy instead of sad. Arnold left Gertrud, but Tommy returned to Fiona just in case she might show up again. And damn if she didn't; their love is powerful enough to break the spell.

Loewe could write music that sounded right for The Old American West (*Paint Your Wagon*), La Belle Epoque Paris (*Gigi*), middle America (*The Day Before Spring*) and England, be it early 20th century (*My Fair Lady*) or many centuries before (*Camelot*). He was just as apt with Scottish music for the Brigadoonians and a distinctly American sound for Tommy. (Jeff doesn't sing; there's little music in him, so you can cast a tone-deaf actor.)

Tommy gets the best-known songs: "The Heather on the Hill" and "Almost Like Being in Love." (Some audiences may recognize the latter as the song that ends *Groundhog Day* – not the current Broadway musical, but the original film.) As for Loewe, he always said that "Come to Me, Bend to Me" was his favorite song of all he wrote.

If you *really* want your production to succeed, make certain that no one working on the show mentions the word "Brigadoon." That would invite disaster. Instead, always call *Brigadoon* "the Scottish musical."

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