

GEORGE M. COHAN & CO.

Written, Arranged and Originally Directed by
Chip Deffaa

Music and Lyrics by
George M. Cohan
With additional material by Chip Deffaa

Note: This show may also be presented, if desired, under the earlier, alternate title of "George M. Cohan: A Vaudeville Life."

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PUBLISHED BY
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Dedication

For Corey McClain Smathers,

STORY OF THE PLAY

Rich with song and dance, *George M. Cohan & Co.* tells the life story of a master American showman. This vibrant two-act musical depicts an older Cohan's encounter with a persistent young interviewer who wants to write a play about him for his college.

Classic Cohan songs like "Mary's a Grand Old Name," "You're a Grand Old Flag," "Harrigan," "Forty-Five Minutes From Broadway," and "Nellie Kellie I Love You," are intermixed with rollicking rediscoveries, including "I Guess I'll Have to Telegraph My Baby," and "Down by the Erie."

By the play's end, the older Cohan has let his young interviewer glimpse the real man behind the jaunty public persona. And in the process we also get a feel for a golden era of show business.

This full-length musical can be performed in an intimate format with just two strong singing actors, or with as many as ten actors representing figures in Cohan's memory including his two wives, his father, mother, sister, and several vaudevillians he knew, all of whom appear judiciously to sing in certain numbers or to appear in pantomime bits as Cohan speaks about his life.

The show appeals to all ages. Cohan's music--pure Americana--is a joy. His rags-to-riches story is inspiring. And this show, by ASCAP/Deems Taylor Award-winning writer Chip Deffaa, has earned rave reviews.

The Original New York Production

GEORGE M. COHAN & CO. had its first production at Danny's, 346 W. 46th Street, New York City. Opening night: September 4th, 2004. (See end of script for additional details.)

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(from 2 to 10 performers)

GEORGE M. COHAN (GMC)...The consummate song-and-dance man, he is spry, charming, endearing--clearly used to putting on a good show. This play is set in 1938; he is 60 years old. At the play's start he is dressed in a dapper suit with a vest--although nothing makes him happier than to be able to remove his suit jacket and vest and work on his dance steps.

WALTER... Earnest, humble, bookish; in his early 20s. He has put on his best clothes (nothing too fancy--perhaps a tweed suit; he doesn't have a lot of money) for his meeting with a theatrical legend he greatly admires.

The actors playing Cohan and Walter should both be able to tap dance and should be wearing tap shoes from the start of the play.

Additional Casting Notes

This show was originally produced with just two actors and works very well in that intimate format. However, if a director wishes to make use of six or seven or eight additional actors, it is permissible to have these additional actors represent--as figures in Cohan's memory (or, conceivably, spirits)--Cohan's father, mother, and sister, and his two wives, and several vaudevillians he knew. The other actors would be used judiciously as memory figures to sing on certain numbers, or to appear in pantomime bits as Cohan speaks about people in his life.

If Cohan, for example, tells Walter he recalls his late father crooning, an actor portraying the father can stroll on stage--clearly a figure in Cohan's memory--to croon "Oh, Mr. Moon." If Cohan recalls performing "Nothing New Beneath the Sun" and "Belle of the Barber's Ball" as part of "The Four Cohans" act in his youth, actors representing his late father, mother, and sister can come on stage to perform such vaudeville numbers as a family act with him.

When Cohan delivers his famous curtain speech ("My father thanks you, my mother thanks you, my sister thanks you, and I thank you"), the actors portraying those characters can take their bows with him. When Cohan sings "You Won't Do Any Business if You Haven't Got a Band," the other actors can, if desired, be used to help act out in pantomime the action Cohan is playfully

describing. “Nellie Kelly” can be sung as a duet with Cohan and his sister, Josie. The song “Musical Comedy Maiden” can be performed as a duet between Cohan and Ethel Levey; the lyrics can be divided up easily and obviously so that some lines are sung by Cohan to Ethel, others are sung back to Cohan by Ethel. (The song “All-American Sweetheart” could, at the director’s discretion, either be sung entirely by Cohan, or Ethel could be assigned the lines “Just the two of us, dancing through life,” and the successive variations on those words, such as “Just the four of us...,” and “all the more of us...”)

When Cohan recalls that certain songs (“The Tattooed Scottish Lady,” “I Never Doubted You’d Be True,” and “My Babe From Boston Town”) were sung by vaudevillians, singers can portray the vaudevillians that he names. The entire ensemble can, if desired, join Cohan in singing the rousing final choruses of “You’re a Grand Old Flag” and “Over There.” If you choose to add an optional encore after the curtain calls (perhaps a reprise of “You’re a Grand Old Flag” or the medley of “American Rag Time”/“You’re a Grand Old Flag”), you might want to have your entire ensemble sing it.

If you have an actor serving as an understudy for the role of GMC, he can be used as an ensemble singer on “You’re a Grand Old Flag” and “Over There,” and as an added background player in “You Won’t Do Any Business...”

Most numbers in the show, however, would still be performed just by George M. Cohan and/or by Walter. And they would be the only speaking characters in the scripts; the other singers would be brought on, with appropriate lighting shifts, to do their vaudeville turns in Cohan’s memory, and then leave the stage or stand frozen in place until needed again.

There are lots of ways this show may be staged. Cohan welcomed flexibility in the production of his own shows, and encouraged input from actors. As you create *your* production, follow your instincts.

– Chip Deffaa

*Please see end of script for **Additional Notes** on Setting and Props, Songwriter Credits, Original Production Notes, Reviews and more.*

MUSICAL NUMBERS

(Unless otherwise noted, all songs are sung by the actor portraying George M. Cohan.)

ACT I:

1. "Give My Regards to Broadway"
2. "The Yankee Doodle Boy"
3. "I Won't Be an Actor No More"
4. "Oh! Mr. Moon"
5. "Nothing New Beneath the Sun"
6. "The Tattooed Scottish Lady"
7. "I Won't Be an Actor No More"
8. "You Won't Do Any Business If You Haven't Got a Band"
- 8a. "You Won't Do Any Business" (reprise) (GMC and Walter)
9. "Nellie Kelly, I Love You"
10. "My Father Told Me"
11. "I Never Doubted You'd Be True"
12. "Belle of the Barber's Ball"
13. "My Honey Babe"
14. "My Babe from Boston Town"
15. "I Guess I'll Have to Telegraph my Baby" (Walter)
16. "Down by the Erie Canal" (GMC and Walter)
17. "The American Ragtime"/"You're a Grand Old Flag"

ACT II:

18. Act II Opening Medley:
 - "Hello Broadway!"
 - "The Little Millionaire"
 - "The Man Who Owns Broadway" (Walter)
 - "Dancing My Worries Away" (GMC and Walter)
19. "Forty-Five Minutes From Broadway" (GMC and Walter)
20. "Harrigan" (GMC and Walter)
21. "Josephine"
22. "My Musical Comedy Maiden"
23. "All-American Sweetheart"
24. "Won't You Come Back to Me?" (Walter and GMC)
25. "Mary's a Grand Old Name" (Walter)
26. "So Long Mary"
- 26a. "Josephine" (reprise)
27. "Over There"
28. "Life's a Very Funny Proposition After All"
29. "I Won't Be an Actor No More" (second reprise)
- 29b. "Give My Regards to Broadway" (excerpt)
30. "All Aboard for Broadway"

31. Bows music: "Give My Regards to Broadway"
32. Exit music: "Forty-Five Minutes From Broadway"

A NOTE ON UNDERSCORING AND ACCOMPANIMENT

In our original New York production, we used quite a bit of underscoring, to help sustain or enhance moods; and that underscoring is written out in the piano/vocal score. It is essential that the underscoring be played in an understated manner throughout. It should be sensitive, evocative. It must never compete with, distract from, or obscure the dialog of the play. To best evoke the sound and spirit of Cohan's times, it is recommended that the music director play an actual piano (whether a grand piano or an upright) rather than a synthesizer. Similarly, if you choose to add bass and drums, an actual bass (whether a string bass or, on some numbers, a brass bass) will tend to sound more authentic than a synthesizer. If you are not able to use a "live" pianist, a CD of piano accompaniment may be obtained from the publisher. This CD can also be useful as a rehearsal aide.

The numbers work well whether sung in tempo or talk/sung more freely. Cohan himself often liked to talk/sing his material. If your actor prefers to talk/sing numbers (or parts of numbers), the musical director may sometimes choose to play simple chords beneath the vocals, rather than the accompaniment as written in the score. It is perfectly fine (and appropriate) for musical directors to take such liberties, finding what they feel works best. It is not permissible to add new lines of dialog or new songs to the script. However, if you would like to extend or shorten numbers within this score (perhaps, for example, the director wants an extra chorus of "You're a Grand Old Flag," or wants to extend or add or delete a dance break), or add reprises, permission to do so is granted. It is recommended that the arrangements be followed as written; they have been successfully "audience-tested" in their present form. But flexibility is permitted, and if you want to show off more (or less) of your performers' singing or dancing skills, extending or shortening numbers, or adding reprises, is all right.

The Cohan saga can make a good show, whether you're doing community theater, secondary-school or college theater, senior theater, regional theater, or any other kind of theater. The high spirits and the heart in Cohan's songs have universal appeal. We've sometimes found that audience members will even start singing along, spontaneously, on some of the songs that everyone seems to know. "After all," as one audience-member explained to us after a performance, "These are *our* songs, too."

End of Freeview

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