
 KEEP IT HOT

THE CONCEPT MUSICAL

Within one twelve-month period, from mid-1975 to mid-1976, three shows greatly developed the most misunderstood form in the musical's history. What is a concept show? It is a presentational rather than strictly narrative work that employs out-of-story elements to comment upon and at times take part in the action, utilizing avant-garde techniques to defy unities of place, time, and action. To put it another way: *Love Life* gives *Allegro* a blowjob.

Chicago (1975), billed as a “musical vaudeville,” is a book show with a score compiling old show-biz tropes—an Eddie Cantor number, a Helen Morgan number, a Bert Williams number. Because *Chicago* sees show biz as an overriding power in American culture—turning a murder trial, for example, into a circus—the out-of-story “presentations” of the numbers create an Alienation Effect at once Brechtian and Ziegfeldian. It's a peep-show *Follies*.

Pacific Overtures (1976) is completely different in every respect, though it also employs out-of-story devices—a narrator, for example. It, too, is presentational, combining elements of American and Japanese theatre that make it, like *Chicago*, more an intellectual than romantic experience. (For instance, all major roles are played by men, even the female roles.) But *Chicago*, above all, tells of one person in a brief period of her life. *Pacific Overtures* has no protagonist; its subject is history.

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue (1976) offers a cast in modern dress on a bare stage putting on a show. Thus a play inside a play, it covers the first century of life in the White House, this being a metaphor for American life. One couple portray the various presidents and first ladies; another

couple play their black servants. Most of the numbers are sung by characters as part of the narrative, but these performers keep recurring in different eras, making a fantasy of the flow of historical time.

The three shows have little in common. All boasted scores by major writers, but *Chicago* is a musical comedy and the other two are musical plays. *Chicago* is drawn from a satiric piece of the 1920s, the other two from chronicle. *Chicago* was staged by a top director-choreographer, *Pacific Overtures* by a top director who is not a choreographer; and *1600* had staging problems. *Chicago* was built around two great divas, while *Pacific Overtures'* players were unknown and *1600's* uncelebrated. *Chicago* performed in a unit set that actually looked like something, with the orchestra overhead on a giant drum. *Pacific Overtures* was a Boris Aronson spectacle. *1600* lacked visuals, though there were period costumes. And *Chicago*, underrated in its day, was nevertheless a hit. *Pacific Overtures* was a succès d'estime. And *1600* was a bomb.

But all three are concept shows that expanded the definition of the genre, as each concept musical tends to. No two are alike, because they favor such complex interaction between naturalism and stylization, between the integration of arts and the separation of arts.

Chicago is the simplest of the three in its "idea." The source, Maurine Watkins' 1926 play of the same title, has a large cast and climaxes with the heroine's murder trial on a crowded stage. Yet it tells a tidy little tale about Roxie's crime in a place that thrives on sensation and has no morals. Roxie's husband, Amos; Roxie's lawyer, Billy Flynn; Roxie's fellow murderess Velma Kelly; the matron of the prison; a sob-sister columnist, Mary Sunshine; and Roxie's confidant, a cynical reporter named Jake (played originally by the young Charles Bickford), are all the speaking parts of any size. When Bob Fosse began planning the scenario of the musical *Chicago*, he did nothing more to the dramatis personae than turn the cynical reporter into a cynical agent. This stresses the show's view that in America all types of fame are equal and all the famous are "stars" in show biz, whether they are performers or criminals. Maurine Watkins' heroine even mentions that she is headed for vaudeville, but it's just a line in passing. Fosse built it into his grand finale.

The project had been conceived as a vehicle for Fosse's wife and star, Gwen Verdon, in the early 1960s. Watkins was shy (though she did at least arrange for Verdon to get first refusal after Watkins' death). But by

then Verdon did not want to carry a show alone. So the role of Velma Kelly was built up for Chita Rivera, inspiring an amusing line from Verdon as Rivera makes an exit: "She sure don't look like a Kelly to me." Adding Jerry Orbach as the lawyer, Barney Martin as the husband, and Mary McCarty as the matron, Fosse turned one trick in hiring a male (billed as M. O'Haughey) to play Mary Sunshine in drag, his falsetto suggesting the dippy high of the professional bleeding heart. David Rounds played the agent, acting also as the show's emcee. But tryouts led Fosse to drop Rounds, give his important lines to the matron, and let others in the cast play emcee at different times.

I say "Fosse" because *Chicago* was truly his work, though lyricist Fred Ebb wrote out the book material (much of it directly from Watkins) and though, of course, the Kander and Ebb score is not just one of the great ones but the center of what Fosse wanted to do with the format of the show. His "musical vaudeville" isn't dog or magic acts, but rather the songs that, together, summon up like those in *Follies* the American showbiz past. In these songs lie the ideas, the performers, the styles—the art that communicated certain notions that more or less everyone in the country agreed on as received truth.

So Verdon is on a piano for "Funny Honey," the Helen Morgan number about the undeserving guy who nevertheless holds her in thrall. The matron, in full nightclub kit, gets the Sophie Tucker number, "When You're Good To Mama." The venal lawyer enters with the Ted Lewis number, "All I Care About (is love)," and the drag-queen columnist takes the Marilyn Miller number, "A Little Bit of Good." (It even uses the vamp to "Look For the Silver Lining," from Miller's Ziegfeld vehicle *Sally*.) Marilyn Miller, the nation's heroine, as a drag queen! Fosse, you rogue. Other allusions take in Rudy Vallee megaphones, Bing Crosby boo-boo-boo, Texas Guinan, Eddie Cantor, and Zez Confrey piano novelties.

Not every number executes such precise archaeology. But the format clearly wants to unmask hypocrisy in American culture by unmasking the poses struck by "I love him so" numbers, "What's money?" numbers, "We're all God's creatures" numbers. Still, more important than Fosse's theme is Fosse's organization. This is a *very* integrated show, in the way that spoken dialogue interrupts and then alters or develops a song, and in the way that the music keeps coming in sequences. Every now and then

there is a sizable book scene. But generally, *Chicago* is a *musical* vaudeville, racing through plot points to get to the next number.

At times, the songs travel in convoys. Near the end of Act One, the lawyer and Roxie give a press conference in which she plays dummy on his knee and he works her like a ventriloquist. This is “We Both Reached For the Gun,” which climaxes when he holds a high note while “drinking” a glass of milk. As the song ends, several reporters phone headlines in, and the next number has already begun, “Roxie.” It’s a unique piece: first, Roxie’s long speech in which she gloats over her notoriety. There’s a lot of autobiography in it, as Roxie snaps her fingers and dances around in those Fosse life-is-nothing-the-moment-is-everything circles:

ROXIE: I started foolin’ around. Then I started screwin’ around, which is foolin’ around without dinner.

Already, she sees this spot as the basis of her vaudeville act. Six chorus boys have entered in Support, and the song has begun. Roxie even tenders an explanation for America’s love affair with fame:

ROXIE: That’s because none of us got enough love in our childhood.

As the number concludes and the chorus men dance off to Roxie’s “Those are my boys,” more headlines are called out to us. Then a two-minute scene between Velma and the matron leads directly to Chita Rivera’s tour de force, “I Can’t Do It Alone.”

This is a musical pile-on worthy of an operetta. *Chicago*, however, is the ultimate musical comedy, bawdy and satiric. This may have led some to underrate *Chicago*’s book and thus the show as a whole when it was new. Walter Kerr said, “The storyline with its built-in satire has really been lost altogether, sacrificed to stunts and soft-shoe.” On the contrary, the story line had been jumped up by being carried by the score—in an oblique way. Because so much of the pop music that *Chicago* re-creates was specialty numbers, Kerr must have mistaken the purpose of *Chicago*’s songs. When Sophie Tucker puts over “You’ve Got To See Mama Every Night,” the number has no purpose other than to please. Sophie is not Mama; Sophie is kidding. But *Chicago*’s matron singing “When You’re

Good To Mama” is an explanation of the corruption on which The System works. This is *Chicago*’s story.

At that, the book is all the more remarkable for the way it complements the score. Because everything in *Chicago* that can possibly be turned into music has been so turned, the book consists mostly of deal-making and jokes:

JUNE: (one of the murderesses) Mrs. Morton, if my husband, Wilbur, comes here to visit me, you tell him I do not want to see him.

MATRON: June, your husband is dead, you killed him.

JUNE: Oh well, forget it then.

There is one flaw: the trial. It did get a lively staging, with one player constantly changing his look to impersonate all twelve members of the jury. Still, it goes on forever while covering events that we already know of in ways that we can predict. Indeed, the sequence doesn’t come alive till the scene changes to the prison, where Velma and the matron are following the trial on the radio. Velma fulminates at Roxie’s use of Velma’s tricks much in the way that a comedian treats a colleague stealing his jokes:

MARY SUNSHINE: (on radio) Mrs. Hart . . . looks simply radiant in her . . . elegant silver shoes.

VELMA: (suspiciously) With rhinestone buckles?

MARY SUNSHINE: With rhinestone buckles.

It is worth noting that while the concept musical came into being in the late 1940s, it could not flourish until the 1960s, when staging policy had acculturated non-realistic design. Concept shows don’t look like *Oklahoma!* or *The Music Man*. *Chicago* didn’t really look like anything—yet the costuming was realistic, as if Jerome Kern had planned the clothes while Erwin Piscator had built the set.

Boris Aronson built *Pacific Overtures*, fourth in the seventies quintet of Sondheim-Prince collaborations. We knew that the sets would essentialize the work, as with *Company*’s glass-and-chrome apartment boxes and *Follies*’ blasted temple of delight. With the *hanamichi* (the runway for entrances and exits through the house) and the elongated rectangular staging area, Aronson presented something like a Kabuki theatre, and his

art had the look of Japanese woodcuts. Florence Klotz's costumes stood boldly against the backdrops, especially as the players were so made up that their faces disappeared as if behind masks.

They were figures in a play: exactly the point. John Weidman's book, about the forced opening of Japan by the West in the mid-nineteenth century, sees all people as Tolstoyan puppets of history. In Tolstoy's view, no one man can make history, and not even an entire people can stop it. History is going to happen. So, in another of those insanely brilliant opening numbers, "The Advantages of Floating in the Middle of the Sea," Sondheim presents the social condition of Japan, blithely secure in its lack of contact with the outside world. To the characteristic Sondheim repeated chord ($e^{\frac{5}{2}}$, so unexploited that Sondheim has virtually invented it), we are treated to the three elements of perfect civil order, "arrangements" of the screens, the rice, the bows: art, economy, and social degree. Even this soon, the Reciter (Mako) functions as interested party as well as Brechtian narrator. This is Epic Theatre, complete with Alienation Effect, political footnotes, and character development set against historical panorama. But Mako has joined us from a season or two among Americans, and he has some of our style in him. He makes jokes. He takes sides.

So *Pacific Overtures* is Kabuki and Epic Theatre *but*. It makes its own rules, adapting those of the other two genres to suit. Nothing in it typifies the Broadway musical, but it borrows here and there from forms that Jerry Herman would recognize. Again: *but*. What could be more revolutionary than a sort of Heroine's Wanting Song delivered by two Observers kneeling at sides of the stage while the heroine (Soon-Teck Oh, in one of four important roles) dances, not least because the heroine will commit suicide before her husband sees her again?

The song's lyrics are revolutionary, too, broken into the tiny declarations and wishes that, in typical Japanese style, combine into a truth. "There Is No Other Way" is spare and carefully expressed, with its recorder over hand drum. Then harp, then strings. It builds till, at an elegiac expansion on the line "The bird flies," it seemed the most beautiful music yet heard on Broadway.

I remember thinking at the time that few will get this work. Simply the device of disintegrating this moment into its constituents would bewilder the slow. Any other musical, even another bold one, would have stated

this scene in a duet for the wife and her husband, Kayama (Isao Sato). But only the two Observers sing, one about what is happening and the other “speaking” for the wife. Note that even Jonathan Tunick’s orchestration is segmented; the entire show is. *Pacific Overtures* breaks this vast account down into the loosest and tightest of book musicals. Loose because it allows room for so much; tight because it never relaxes its grip on how the history is happening.

Some characters are introduced only to vanish. Others recur, such as the government councillor Abe Masahiro (Yuki Shimoda). Similarly, the score introduces many figures we never see again, such as a madam of geisha girls or three British sailors. Yet it never ceases to consider the turning of history’s wheel—the madam’s and sailors’ songs treat the social dislocation caused by the Westerners’ arrival.

Conversely, the obviously eventful day on which Japan signed its first treaty with America falls into the score in an offbeat way. “Someone in a Tree” is a beguiling discussion by characters who didn’t understand what was happening—exactly what history is while it’s in the present tense. The trade negotiations between Japan and its visitors are conducted in “Please Hello,” a burlesque. Costumed as if for the senior-class operetta in a Japanese high school, the various Western admirals sing in pastiche. The American gets John Philip Sousa, the Brit sings Gilbert and Sullivan patter, the Frenchman a cancan; and the number climaxes with an evocation of a word that was very much in use at that stage of the Cold War, “détente.”

Such an intricate pageant could not properly bear a protagonist. However, two figures do form a central story line in this *opera senza amore*, Kayama and his friend Manjiro (Sab Shimono, the original Ito in *Mame*). They humanize for us the growing crisis in Japan, between Westernizers and the reactionary élite. Ironically, the minor samurai Kayama goes Western, while Manjiro, at first a commoner who likes America, grows into a xenophobe devotee of aristocratic tradition.

These two also have a number that draws from the annals to develop character. Sondheim himself likes to cite “Someone in a Tree” because it centers the show’s view of history. But “A Bowler Hat” is perhaps the outstanding number, in a coup de théâtre deftly blended of song, speech, mime, and the use of props. We listen to Kayama as he becomes ever more fluent in Western ways; we watch the silent Manjiro losing himself in the rhapsodic tranquillity of the tea ceremony.

It was a stunning experience in saying much with the most limited means, another aspect of Japanese art. Alien, exotic, and complex, *Pacific Overtures* represents more of the great disconnect between the musical and its public. Back when Ethel Merman and Cole Porter ran things, the notion of an intellectually challenging musical was unthinkable. Even the spoken theatre seldom truly challenged its public, except perhaps to persevere through the longer O'Neill works. *Pacific Overtures* encountered such a buyers' resistance during its Boston tryout that producer Prince had to spend his own money to bring the show to New York. There it got the most mixed notices in theatre history. One television idiot described the music as "atonal," and one of the supplementary papers actually called the show "loathsome" and "disgusting."

I think *Women's Wear Daily's* Howard Kissel, of those who liked the piece, best appreciated what an Age of Sondheim meant to the enlightened theatregoer. "The most original, the most profound, the most theatrically ambitious of the Prince-Sondheim collaborations," Kissel wrote, because the best theatre is adventurous, not *Contact* or *Mamma Mia!*. "It is also," he continued, "the production in which the team that sets Broadway's highest standards most fully meets the astonishing objectives they set themselves."

One could not say as much of Leonard Bernstein and Alan Jay Lerner's *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* (1976), one of the most self-evident of the Bad Idea musicals. That idea was to reduce all of American history to an *Upstairs, Downstairs* on race relations. Ken Howard and Patricia Routledge played various presidents and their wives; Gilbert Price and Emily Yancy played the ageless retainers Lud and Seena. There was to be none of *Chicago's* plot motion, none of *Pacific Overtures'* unity of action; rather, *1600* was a revue with a throughline, embodied in the opening and closing number, "Rehearse!": democracy is ever in a state of rehearsal, ever refining and developing its liberal urge.

Unfortunately, Bernstein and Lerner were suffering from the sixties American version of the Disease of the West, whose symptomatic behavior obeys the rule, Democracies cannot be criticized enough and leftist fascisms cannot be criticized at all. The lack of patriotism in a Bicentennial musical is simply silly; the self-hatred is contemptible.

Worse, the show was bad entertainment, based as it was on little more than the usual white liberal obsession with black civil rights. The contents included the founding of Washington, D.C.; Thomas Jefferson's

introduction of waffles and spaghetti into American cuisine; the War of 1812; the national crisis that led to the Civil War; the implication that James Buchanan was gay; and the age of the robber barons. This was presented as a minstrel show, just as in another musical with no plot, Lerner's *Love Life*. There was nothing of the opening of the west (with the genocidal elimination of the Indian, not a major leftist concern in the 1970s); the industrialization of the north; the expansion of the continent through the railroads; or the arts world's halfhearted attempts to identify an American style in music, painting, and theatre in the late 1800s.

The show's humiliating Philadelphia premiere found staff departing in exasperation that the material—or the authors—proved so intransigent. Director Frank Corsaro and choreographer Donald McKayle were replaced by Gilbert Moses and George Faison. Set and costume designer Tony Walton also left, taking his name off the posters. But his show curtain, a blueprint of the White House, was retained even so, complete with Walton's initials, unmistakable in the lower right-hand corner.

With some flops, one regrets the wasted time—in this case, four years of planning and writing. The Coca-Cola Company, *1600's* sole backer at well over a million dollars, regretted the bad choice of PR and disavowed the production.

But *1600's* participants must have regretted the loss of the music in the feast-or-famine system operating at this time. For Bernstein and Lerner created an astonishingly good score, even a synoptic all-American one, with fanfare, march, waltz, blues. It's Bernstein's most classical work for Broadway—more so than even *Candide*—with the expertise of the genius musician. Perhaps Bernstein wanted to make his own mark in the Age of (his onetime protégé) Sondheim, as in a number called "Sonatina": British Army aristos disdainfully pantywaisting around in the White House dining room. Bernstein laid it out in the orthodox three movements of sonata-allegro, minuet (on an English theme appropriated for "The Star Spangled Banner"), and rondo finale. Bernstein also revived a favorite trick, building much of the score on variations of an ur-theme. The melody is used most purely as the first lines of the show's anthem, "Take Care of This House." But it is heard throughout the evening, for instance tootling blithely in the woodwinds as punctuation during a scene between Washington and congressional delegates over where to locate the new capital, "On Ten Square Miles of the Potomac River."

Of our three concept shows, *1600* exploited the form least fully. *Chicago's* vaudeville was “disguised” as character and plot numbers, a genuine innovation, and *Pacific Overtures'* Kabuki history was replete with curiosities. But *1600's* concept eventually ran out of interest, especially because the two black leads and their servants chorus had little to do beyond reflecting the changes in racial integration and celebrating Lud and Seena's wedding in the irresistible “I Love My Wife,” set to a Caribbean beat.

Still, every concept show does amend the catalogue of practices. There was one arresting touch in “The Little White Lie,” when James and Eliza Monroe, sleepless in bed, bicker over the slavery issue. Accusing Monroe of accommodating racism, Eliza sings, “You knew it when you were Adams”—and Jefferson, and Madison. This is something new, a character's expressing knowledge of the show's non-realistic concept *while remaining realistically in character*. Another touch brightened the very end of the evening: as all but the two leads filled the stage for the closing reprise of “Rehearse!,” the president and first lady entered upstage right, perfect replicas of Theodore and Edith Roosevelt. A sight gag: and the curtain fell.

The most lasting memory of *1600's trompe l'oeil* impersonations fastens on “Duet For One,” possibly the only genuine showstopper to appear in a show that ran but a single week. Ken Howard may have lacked the magnetism to play, among others, George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson; but Patricia Routledge was a singer and comic of dazzling gifts. “Duet For One” offered the presidential inauguration of 1877. To bits of Rutherford B. Hayes' spoken oath of office, the incoming Lucy Hayes and the outgoing Julia (Mrs. Ulysses S.) Grant comment on the controversial election of 1876.* Routledge played both women, jumping

* Democrat Samuel J. Tilden won the popular vote, but the Republicans contested results in four states, stopping Tilden one vote short of victory in the Electoral College. Irregularities in the final results for the four states could not be settled by application of constitutional law, which was ambiguous on the matter. Ultimately, a compromise was reached: the Democratic South was liberated of Northern occupying forces and got other concessions; and the Republican presidential candidate, Hayes, was certified as the winner. Note an arresting coincidence in that Bernstein and Lerner could not possibly have guessed that their show would contain episodes relating to singular events of the millennium: the impeachment of a president (Andrew Johnson; Bill Clinton) and a disputed election (1876; 2000).

back and forth by flipping a movable part of her headgear. Routledge didn't merely change "hats": she completely changed in look and sound, from Julia's catty mezzo to Lucy's cooing soprano. The nine-minute number builds so extravagantly that the last big statement of the waltz refrain, "The First Lady of the Land," thrilled the opening-night audience into an ovation *during* the music.

The later history of our three shows is various. *Chicago's* run was threatened early on by what seemed to be the entire world's refusal to give any more praise to Bob Fosse after he won a Tony, an Oscar, and an Emmy in the same year. Also, *Chicago* and *A Chorus Line* showed up almost simultaneously, and the usual revolutionists trumpeted preemptive hallelujahs for the latter show, not realizing that it is not revolutionary and that Michael Bennett was the latest in a line that Bob Fosse had helped to found.

Chicago got eleven Tony nominations (including Best Actress for both Verdon and Rivera) but lost them all, mainly to *A Chorus Line*. However, when Verdon suffered a throat ailment requiring an operation, Kander and Ebb favorite Liza Minnelli stepped in as Roxie. Minnelli was at the height of her powers and fame, and her nine-week stint put *Chicago* into sellout, with the usual spillover, after Verdon returned, from those who make a point of attending anything that sells out.

So *Chicago* eventually lasted 898 performances, though it never got its due till Encores! tried it in 1996. Concept shows generally do well in concert, because they seldom take place in specific locations and thus need no scenery. William Ivey Long dressed everyone in variations on hot black formal circuswear, Walter Bobbie and Ann Reinking staged the show in Fosse style; and Reinking, Bebe Neuwirth, James Naughton, and Joel Grey were excellent. Also, the cuts in the libretto were judicious rather than, as sometimes at Encores!, disfiguring. With Fosse no longer among us and sorely missed, *Chicago* was suddenly everyone's favorite show. Moved to Broadway, this concert staging became by far the most successful revival in Broadway history, going on to international popularity and a phenomenally successful film version.

Pacific Overtures, too, is better appreciated today. A relatively lavish Off-Broadway revival in 1984 got much better reviews than the original. (Those who couldn't grasp it the first time adopted the alibi that the original had been overproduced.) There was very little revision, mainly the

dropping of two scenes, one in which the United States and Japan trade gifts (ours are a ton of cultural keepsakes, from Audubon's *Birds of America* to a locomotive; theirs are tiny treasures fastidiously wrapped), and one on the introduction of the rickshaw. The deletions help center the work. But it isn't written to be centered. It's history's "scrapbook," as Sondheim once put it.

This new staging, by Fran Soeder, strongly resembled the old one; is there but one way to perform this show correctly? The Prince-Aronson vision is virtually written into the text, and a 1987 production by the English National Opera, pinchpenny spare, recalled the original even so—though it was, surprisingly for an opera company, not at all as well sung.

Then, in 2000, and on tour in New York in 2002, a Japanese group mounted the show in somewhat different style. Director Amon Miyamoto sought to segregate the American input from the Japanese input in the composition by using the *hanamichi* not simply for entrances and exits but as a stage for the Western characters. Thus, the invasion of Japan is physicalized: the strangers come aggressively out of the audience toward the Japanese in the central playing area while a vast American flag unfurls overhead. Further, the Reciter (Takeharu Kunimoto) was an outright comic figure, lacking Mako's advocating intensity.

The production was comic in general, even gimmicked. Many of the original's most picturesque moments—Mako's grand-manner keening when Kayama discovered his wife's corpse, or the deadly quiet of Manjiro's tea ceremony while Kayama ebulliently flies on history's wings in "A Bowler Hat"—were gone. Apparently, the new cheap Broadway obtains in Japan as well, for the original orchestration for twenty-two players (not counting the stage band) was reduced to seven. They sounded terrible, and "There Is No Other Way" in particular was ruined. Nor, finally, was it useful to introduce World War II into the action* with a simulation of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during "Next." We didn't start that war. Japan did.

* In 1976, given an already crowded evening, John Weidman (who was assisted on the book by Hugh Wheeler) wisely dealt with this matter obliquely, in lines spoken by Lord Abe: "We must appease the Westerners until we have learned the secrets of their power and success. Then, when we have become their equals. Then, perhaps. Then, if we are sure the time is right . . ." The belligerent threat is unmistakable, though of course the usual idiots missed it.

Alone of concept musicals, *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* lives on devoid of its concept. As *A White House Cantata*, it is now less even than a concert staging: a concert. The “Rehearse!” frame is gone, along with a pair of numbers for the black singers. But virtually all the rest of the score is retained, even “The Red White and Blues,” staged on Broadway as a striptease for the chorus men in the try-anything panic before opening night. An important duet for Lud and Seena, “This Time,” a casualty of the tryout, has been restored, and the original scoring, by Sid Ramin, Hershy Kay, and Bernstein, has been improved to keep a full-sized orchestra busy. The work has even been recorded, with some cuts to hold it to a single disc, so at least the best of this Bicentennial monster is preserved.

And that is all one asks of this project, after all. The novel format that proved so intractable reminds us why so many producers fear novelty: it can go so awry. They want a sure thing. Not a good idea. A used one.