

## July 2, 2020 – Berlin's *Annie, Get Your Gun* & Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate*

On this week's **Thursday Night Opera House**, we're turning to Broadway for a pair of 1940s musicals: Irving Berlin's *Annie, Get Your Gun* and Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate*. These were among the last such shows that were completely acoustical, with lead actors who could project their voices like opera singers. Jerome Kern was originally hired to set Dorothy Fields's lyrics and her brother Herbert's book, but after his unexpected death Berlin was engaged to do both the score and lyrics. *Annie, Get Your Gun* opened on May 16, 1946 and ran for 1,147 performances. **Ethyl Merman** and **Ray Middleton** starred as Annie Oakley and Frank Butler, respectively.

Annie Oakley (**Kim Criswell**) is a poor, but spirited and happy, country girl who lives by her native sharp-shooting quickly makes her the star of Buffalo Bill's (**David Healy**) Wild West Show, where she meets and falls in love with expert rifleman Frank Butler (**Thomas Hampson**). Unfortunately, the tough, outspoken Annie is not Frank's idea of what a wife should be and the two remain at competitive odds. Then Annie is initiated into an Indian tribe whose chief, Sitting Bull (**Alfred Marks**), gives her some good advice: only by deliberately, but discreetly, losing a shooting contest can she win Frank's heart. Annie does so and the show ends with the exuberant climax "There's No Business Like Show Business."

**John McGlinn** conducts the London Sinfonietta and the Ambrosian Chorus in this 1991 EMI recording.

**Kim Criswell, Thomas Hampson, David Healy** and **David Garrison** sing "There's No Business Like Show Business" with the London Sinfonietta conducted by **John McGlinn**: <https://youtu.be/yzl0LZOxJW0>.

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*Kiss Me, Kate* involves the production of a musical version of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and the conflict, on- and off-stage, between the show's producer and star, and his leading lady, who's his ex-wife. A secondary romance involves the actress playing Bianca and her gambler boyfriend. The musical was inspired by the real-life conflicts of husband-and-wife actors Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne in a 1935 production of *Taming of the Shrew*. The show opened on December 30, 1948 and ran for 1,077 performances.

A musical version of *The Taming of the Shrew* is about to open in Baltimore. In the show with producer-actor Fred Graham (**Alfred Drake**) are his former wife, Lilli Vanessi (**Patricia Morison**); Lois Lane (**Lisa Kirk**), a singer in whom he's interested; and Bill Calhoun (**Harold Lang**), who is Lois's interest. The irresponsible Bill informs Lois that he has signed Fred's name to a \$10,000 IOU for gambling debts. She begs him to reform. Fred and Lilli patch up their differences as they reminisce nostalgically about other shows in which they have appeared together. Fred sends a bouquet to Lois, which is delivered in error to Lilli. On stage as Katherina, Lilli discovers that the bouquet was

meant for Lois and threatens to leave the show. Her departure is prevented by two gangsters who have come to collect the IOU with Fred's signature. She rages, both in character and reality.

Just married to Katherina and beginning his tempestuous wedded life, Petruchio (played by Fred) begins to yearn for his life as a single man. Because of a sudden change in gang administration, the gangsters tear up the now worthless IOU and Lilli prepares to walk out on the show as Fred muses on his love for her. As the show comes to close, Lilli unexpectedly returns and, in Katherina's words, expresses her intention of returning to her husband.

As a bonus we'll hear baritone **Earl Wrightson** and soprano **Lois Hunt** in love songs and duets by Rudolf Friml, Kurt Weill, Richard Rodgers, Jerome Kern, and Arthur Schwartz.

Please join me next Thursday, July 9th, at 7:00 p.m. Eastern for Giacomo Puccini's first commercially successful opera, *Manon Lescaut*, with **Mirella Freni** in the title role, **Plácido Domingo** as Des Grieux, **Renato Bruson** as Lescaut, and **Kurt Rydl** as Geronte. **Giuseppe Sinopoli** conducts this 1984 recording.

The **Thursday Night Opera House** is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're streamed online worldwide at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, and you can listen on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

*Bob Chapman*

**W. Robert Chapman, Host of the Thursday Night Opera House**