

September 3, 2020 – Jerome Kern's *Show Boat*

Celebrate Labor Day early on the Thursday Night Opera House with Jerome Kern's Broadway musical *Show Boat*. With a book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein, it's based on Edna Ferber's best-selling novel of the same name. *Show Boat* premiered at the Ziegfeld Theater on November 15, 1927 in New York City. The show generated controversy for the subject matter of interracial marriage, the historical portrayal of blacks working as laborers and servants in the 19th-century South, and the use of the "n" word in the lyrics. The recording used in this week's program reconstructs the show as it ran on opening night, including every song, the original orchestrations, and all underscored dialogue.

The action begins in the 1880s and brings us up to the late 1920s. When Cap'n Andy Hawks (actor **Robert Nichols**) and his wife Parthy Ann (actress **Nancy Kulp**) bring their show boat *Cotton Blossom* to town for a performance, their daughter Magnolia (mezzo-soprano **Frederica Von Stade**) meets a handsome ne'er-do-well gambler, Gaylord Ravenal (tenor **Jerry Hadley**), who fall in love at first sight, although they profess it is only "Make Believe." Magnolia seeks advice on what to do from a black deck hand, Joe (bass-baritone **Bruce Hubbard**), who tells her "Ol' Man River" alone can answer that question. Leading lady Julie LaVerne (soprano **Teresa Stratas**) tells Magnolia how she too "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man." Soon thereafter, accused of being part black, Julie is forced to leave the show, taking leading man Steve Baker (baritone **Steve Barton**) with her. Magnolia and Gaylord are pressed into assuming the lead roles and are soon married.

At the 1893 Chicago World's Fair they are amazed at how their love has grown. But eventually Gaylord's gambling costs him all his money; he deserts Magnolia and their young daughter Kim. Magnolia auditions for a night club singing job, where she comes upon Julie. Now an alcoholic, Julie sacrifices what's left of her own career to help Magnolia. When Cap'n Andy discovers Magnolia in the night club on New Year's Eve, he helps her overcome her performing jitters, and then persuades her to return to the *Cotton Blossom*. As the years pass, Magnolia's solo career is eclipsed by Kim's. One day, Cap'n Andy runs into Gaylord and invites the aging gambler to visit the *Cotton Blossom*. The three are finally reunited as the mighty Mississippi rolls along.

John McGlinn conducts the London Sinfonietta and the Ambrosian Chorus in this 1988 EMI recording, CD number 49108.

From the 1936 film, here's **Paul Robeson** singing what had already become his signature song, "Ol' Man River": <https://youtu.be/eh9WayN7R-s>.

Please join me next Thursday, September 10th, for the original 1840 French version of Gaetano Donizetti's *La Favorite*, which is more frequently performed today in its 1843 Italian guise as *La Favorita*. This ill-fated love affair between the king's mistress Léonor de Guzman and the young monk Fernand stars **Vesselina Kasarova** and **Ramón Vargas**. Heard in other principal roles are **Anthony Michaels-Moore** as King Alphonse

XI, **Abbie Furmansky** as Inès, and **Carlo Colombara** as Balthazar. **Marcello Viotti** conducts this 2000 RCA recording.

The Thursday Night Opera House is heard at 7:00 p.m. Eastern on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're also streamed online worldwide, and you can listen as well on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

Bob Chapman

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