

# Rodgers and Hammerstein's **Oklahoma!**

Music by Richard Rodgers and Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II  
Based on the play *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs  
Original Dances by Agnes de Mille

Director and Choreographer: Donna Feore  
Musical Director: Berthold Carrière  
Designer: Patrick Clark  
Lighting Designer: Alan Brodie  
Sound Designer: Peter McBoyle

Festival Theatre  
April 10 to November 4  
Opens May 29, 2007

---

## ABOUT THE MUSICAL

### OVERVIEW

“Forget baseball, hot dogs and apple pie. Nothing is more American than *Oklahoma!*... One of the landmarks of 20th-century theater, it remains a defining event of American culture.”

– Houston Chronicle, 2004

This three-act American musical was the first collaboration between Rodgers and Hammerstein and marked the beginning of the most acclaimed musical partnership in American theatre history. It also signaled a new era on Broadway with a form called the musical play – a fusion between Rodgers’s musical comedy and Hammerstein’s operetta. Other collaborations included *Carousel*, *Allegro*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *Me and Juliet*, *Pipe Dream*, *Flower Drum Song* and *The Sound of Music*.

### SYNOPSIS

Oklahoma farm girl Laurey’s game of hard-to-get backfires when she finds herself riding to the Box Social in an old wagon with the thuggish hired hand Jud Fry, while her Aunt Eller goes with handsome cowboy Curly in a fancy rented surrey. At the Box Social picnic-basket auction, Curly and Jud stage a bidding war over Laurey’s basket. Curly wins, but only after he sells his most precious possessions to finance the bid. After Curly and Laurey’s wedding, Jud comes back for revenge. As he and Curly scuffle, Jud pulls a knife – then falls on the blade and is fatally wounded. Curly is instantly acquitted for his part in Jud’s death, and the new couple start their honeymoon with a clean slate.

## MUSICAL SELECTIONS

- Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’
- Surrey with the Fringe on Top
- Kansas City
- I Cain’t Say No
- Many a New Day
- It’s a Scandal! It’s a Outrage!
- People Will Say We’re in Love
- Pore Jud is Daid
- Lonely Room
- Out of My Dreams
- The Farmer and the Cowman
- All Er Nothin’
- Oklahoma

## AWARDS for various versions of *Oklahoma!*

- special Pulitzer Prize for Drama
- two Academy Awards, 1955
- special Tony Award, 1993
- “Best Musical of the Century,” New York Drama League
- four Olivier Awards including Best Musical Production, 1999
- London Evening Standard Award: Best Musical, 1998
- International Emmy Award, 1999
- seven Tony Award nominations, 2004

## SOURCES AND ORIGINS

Based on the play *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs.

Regarding Mr. Riggs’s contribution, Oscar Hammerstein once wrote to the New York Times:

“Mr. Riggs’ play is the wellspring of almost all that is good in *Oklahoma!*. I kept many of the lines of the original play without making any changes in them at all for the simple reason that they could not be improved on – at any rate, not by me.

“But more important than this, *Green Grow the Lilacs* had a strange combination of qualities – lusty melodrama, authentic folk characters and a sensitive lyric quality pervading the whole story. I feel that in some measure we were able to preserve these values in the musical version and they comprise a very important contribution to its success.

“Lynn Riggs and *Green Grow the Lilacs* are the very soul of *Oklahoma!*”

## **STAGE HISTORY**

The première production of the musical took place on March 31, 1943, at the St. James Theater in New York. Rouben Mamoulian directed Betty Garde, Alfred Drake (Curly), Joan Roberts (Laurey), Celeste Holm (Ado Annie), Joan McCracken and Howard Da Silva. Choreography was by Agnes de Mille. The original production ran an unprecedented 2,212 performances (other sources says 2,248), closing on May 29, 1948.

“A national company toured the United States for ten years, performing in about 250 cities before an audience exceeding ten million. In addition, when the New York engagement ended, the original company went on a tour of seventy-one cities. Companies were formed to produce the play in Europe, South Africa, Scandinavia, Australia and for the armed forces in all the theatres of war during the last years of the Second World War. In London its run proved the longest in the three-hundred year history of the Drury Lane Theatre.” (source: [www.theatrehistory.com](http://www.theatrehistory.com))

A 1951 revival ran for 100 performances, May 29 to July 28, 1951, at the Broadway Theatre in New York.

A 1979 revival ran for 293 performances, beginning with previews on December 6, 1979, and closing on August 24, 1980, at the Palace Theatre on Broadway. It was nominated for two Tony Awards and two Drama Desk Awards and it won a World Theatre Award (for Harry Groener as Will Parker).

On March 21, 2002, at the George Gershwin Theatre in New York, a revival opened that ran for 388 performances, closing on February 23, 2003. The production was nominated for many Tony Awards including Best Revival of a Musical, Best Actor in a Musical, Best Featured Actor and Actress in a Musical, Best Lighting Design, Best Choreography and Best Direction of a Musical. It won for Best Featured Actor (Shuler Hensley as Jud Fry). It was nominated for numerous Drama Desk Awards and won two.

## **STRATFORD STAGE HISTORY**

This is the first production of the musical at the Stratford Festival.

Previous productions of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals at Stratford include *Carousel* (1991), *The King and I* (2003) and *South Pacific* (2006). The Festival has also presented Rodgers's *The Boys from Syracuse*.

## IN OTHER TERMS

The original Broadway cast album was released in 1943, a studio cast album was made in 1964 and the revival cast album was released in 1979.

A 1955 motion picture (20th Century Fox) starred Gordon MacRae as Curly and Shirley Jones as Laurey, with Eddie Albert as Ali Hakim, Gloria Grahame as Ado Annie, Charlotte Greene as Aunt Eller, Gene Nelson as Will Parker, Rod Steiger as Jud Fry and James Whitmore as Andrew Carnes. The director was Fred Zinnemann. The film was nominated for four Academy Awards, including colour cinematography and film editing, and won for sound recording and scoring of a musical picture. It has been released on video and DVD. The soundtrack has also been remastered and released by Angel Records.

Paul Newman did a screen test for the role of Curly, but lost the role to Gordon McCrae. The actor, who danced the role of Curly in the dream ballet in the original production in 1943, ended up playing a cowboy in the 1955 film.

The 1998 film of the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain production, starring Hugh Jackman as Curly and Josefina Gabriele as Laurey, was released by Image Entertainment. It was directed by Trevor Nunn.

---

## ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

### PERIOD AND SETTING

The musical is set in Oklahoma Territory outside the town of Claremore in the late 19th or early 20th century.

Our production will be set in period at a stylized version of a turn-of-the-century prairie farm. The large set will feature a round stage and a “horizon” made of light boxes stretching across the side walls of the theatre. Aunt Eller’s home is a stylized prairie farmhouse.

The performers will wear period farmer and cowboy costumes.

### SELECTED ARTISTIC PERSONNEL

**Kyle Blair**, a graduate of the Birmingham Conservatory of Classical Theatre Training at the Festival, returns for his seventh season to play Will Parker. Mr. Blair appeared last season as Noah Claypole in *Oliver!* and the Professor in *South Pacific*. In previous

seasons he has played Jack in *Into the Woods*, Ambrose Kemper in *Hello, Dolly!*, Lucentio in *The Taming of the Shrew* and Pandar in *Pericles*, amongst other roles in both Shakespeare and musicals. He has appeared at other theatres including the Grand Theatre, Drayton Festival and Huron Country Playhouse.

**Dan Chameroy** plays Curly in his sixth season at the Festival. Mr. Chameroy played Amiens in *As You Like It*, the Executioner in *The Lark*, Posthumus in *Cymbeline*, Lancelot in *Camelot* and roles in *Timon of Athens*, *King John*, *Gigi*, *Richard III* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, among others. He has performed in theatres across Canada – including the lead in *The Drowsy Chaperone* – and spent his first season at the Shaw Festival last year, playing Dexter Haven in *High Society* and General Henri in *The Magic Fire*. TV audiences may know him as Laurie Lawrence in CTV's *Little Men*. This season he will also play Father Petr Karolyi in *Pentecost*.

**David W. Keeley** plays Jud Fry in his seventh season at Stratford. Last seen here as Horatio in *Hamlet*, opposite his singing partner Paul Gross (with whom he recorded two CDs), and as Buckingham in *The Three Musketeers*, Mr. Keeley has recently performed on Broadway as Sam Carmichael in *Mamma Mia!* Other roles at Stratford include Clarence/Richmond in *Richard III*, Cominius in *Coriolanus* and Nathaniel in *Love's Labour's Lost*. He was a member of Robin Phillips's company at the Citadel Theatre and has appeared frequently on television and in film. He also plays Prince Nikki in *My One and Only* this season.

Aunt Eller will be played by **Nora McLellan**, who has spent 42 years as an actor and 22 seasons of her career at the Shaw Festival in leading roles such as Catherine in *Arms and the Man*, Momma Rose in *Gypsy* and the title roles in *Saint Joan*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*. Ms McLellan has appeared in lead roles – both dramatic and musical – across Canada and has received numerous awards for her work, including the Dora Mavor Moore Award for her lead role in *Music for Contortionist*. This season is her Stratford Festival debut. She also plays Anna Jedlikova in *Pentecost*.

**Lindsay Thomas** plays Ado Annie Carnes in her second season at the Stratford Festival. Last season she appeared in *Oliver!* and *Don Juan*. Her credits elsewhere include the Broadway, first U.S. national tour and original Canadian companies of *Hairspray*, *Anne of Green Gables* and *Somewhere in the World* (Charlottetown Festival), *Grease* (Citadel Theatre), *Aladdin* (Stirling Festival), *Sleeping Beauty* (Casa Loma) and *The Boy Friend*, *City of Angels* and *The Crucible* (Theatre Sheridan). Film and television credits include *Honey* (Universal Pictures) and *Eloise at the Plaza* (ABC/Disney). This season, Ms Thomas also appears in *My One and Only*.

**Blythe Wilson** plays Laurey Williams in her fifth season at Stratford. Last season she played Nancy in *Oliver!* and Sue Yaeger in *South Pacific*. Ms Wilson has also played Donna Sheridan in *Mamma Mia!*, spent three seasons at the Shaw Festival and has appeared at theatres across Canada and on tour in roles ranging from the Narrator in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (with Donny Osmond) to Antonia in

*Man of La Mancha* and Maria in *The Sound of Music*. At Stratford she has also played Lucy Brown in *The Threepenny Opera*, and appeared in *Amadeus* and *The Boy Friend*.

## **PRODUCTION SPONSORSHIP**

Union Gas is the production co-sponsor.

**RUNNING TIME:** Estimated running time is 2:45 with one interval.

---

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

### **RICHARD RODGERS (1902–1979): MUSIC**

Born in New York on June 28, 1902, Richard Rodgers co-wrote many musicals with Lorenz Hart, including *The Boys from Syracuse* and *Pal Joey*. After Hart's death, Rodgers began a new partnership with Oscar Hammerstein II; their first show together, *Oklahoma!* (1943), revolutionized American musical theatre. Besides *South Pacific*, they collaborated on seven more stage musicals, including *Carousel* (1945), *The King and I* (1951) and *The Sound of Music* (1959), as well as one written for film, *State Fair*, and one for television, *Cinderella*. Rodgers's work after Hammerstein's death included *No Strings* (1962), for which he won a Tony Award for Best Composer; *Do I Hear a Waltz?* (1965); *Two by Two* (1970); *Rex* (1976) and *I Remember Mama* (1979). He died on December 30, 1979, aged 77.

### **OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II (1895–1960): BOOK AND LYRICS**

Born on July 12, 1895, Oscar Hammerstein II studied law at Columbia University but gave it up to pursue his real interest, writing for the stage. His first musical, *Always You*, with music by Herbert P. Stothart, opened on Broadway in 1921, and was followed by such classics as *Rose-Marie* (1924), with music by Stothart and Rudolph Friml; *The Desert Song* (1926) and *The New Moon* (1928), both with music by Sigmund Romberg; and *Show Boat* (1927), with music by Jerome Kern. His last musical before beginning his partnership with Rodgers was *Carmen Jones* (1943), based on Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen*. All told, Hammerstein's collaborations with Rodgers won 34 Tony Awards, 15 Academy Awards, four Drama Desk Awards, three Outer Critics Circle Awards, two Pulitzer Prizes, two Grammy Awards and two Emmy Awards. Hammerstein died of cancer on August 23, 1960, aged 65.

### **LYNN RIGGS (1899 - 1954): ORIGINAL PLAY**

One of the United States' foremost Native American writers, Rollie Lynn Riggs was born on August 31, 1899, in Claremont, Oklahoma, in the Indian Territory near Tulsa. A highly successful screenwriter and playwright, he also was a cattle hand, singer, proofreader and teacher; he had his first major stage success in 1931 with *Green Grow*

*the Lilacs*. The play was very popular and gave some future film cowboys, including Tex Ritter, their first acting success. It formed the basis of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*

---

## RELATED EVENTS

### TABLE TALK

Before the matinée performance of *Oklahoma!* on Friday, July 20, enjoy a buffet lunch and informal talk on the play by Robert Harris, host of CBC Radio's *I Hear Music*. The event begins at 11:30 a.m. in the Festival Theatre's Paul D. Fleck Marquee. Cost (not including performance ticket): \$30. Cash bar.

### THEATRE EXPLORER

*Oklahoma! Cattle Call*: Saturday, June 16, Saturday, July 21, Sunday, September 9, and Saturday, October 13, at 10:30 a.m. Company members teach patrons a song and dance from *Oklahoma!*, followed by lunch before the matinée performance of the musical. Suitable for children. Cost (including lunch but not including performance ticket): \$45.

### NIGHT MUSIC

*Broadway Favourites* features Festival actors in an evening of favourites from the Broadway stage including songs from Rodgers and Hammerstein and Gershwin. Monday, June 25, from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. in the Paul D. Fleck Marquee at the Festival Theatre. General seating: \$20. Cash bar. (From 6-7 p.m. enjoy a casual barbeque – not included in ticket price.)

---

## OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

### GOING POSTAL

In March 1993, the United States Postal Service issued its first stamp to honour a Broadway musical. They chose *Oklahoma!* and it was released at a ceremony attended by many veteran cast members on the 50th anniversary of the musical. In July of 1993, the stamp was reissued as part of a four-stamp tribute to Broadway shows which included *Show Boat*, *Porgy and Bess* and *My Fair Lady*. In Oklahoma, the stamp outsold all others including the other “hot” stamp that year: Elvis Presley.

Rodgers and Hammerstein were themselves recognized on a stamp that was issued in 1999.

### WHERE THE WIND COMES SWEEPING DOWN THE PLAIN...

The title song, *Oklahoma*, was made the official song of the state of Oklahoma in 1953.

### GRINGO

The musical is based on a 1931 play by Native American writer Lynn Riggs, which in turn takes its title from a popular early American folk song, *Green Grow the Lilacs*. In the popular tradition, the word “gringo,” used by Mexicans to mean non-Hispanic, originated from the song (“green grow”), which cowboys and other *norteamericanos* used to sing. Some legends say it was Scots regiments singing a marching song called *Green Grow the Rushes-O* (written by Robert Burns).

### “NO GIRLS, NO GAGS...”

“When *Oklahoma!* opened out of town, scouts sent back to New York the succinct message: ‘No Girls, No Gags, No Chance.’ After the New York opening, the line was revised to read: ‘No Girls, No Gags, No Tickets.’ For at that première performance the surpassing beauty, the freshness, the imagination and the magic of this musical play held the audience spellbound from the opening curtain on. There was a vociferous ovation at the end. The next day the critics vied with each other in the expression of superlatives. One of them, Lewis Nichols, did not hesitate to describe it as ‘folk opera.’”

(source: [www.theatrehistory.com](http://www.theatrehistory.com))



## **OH NO, YOU DON'T!**

Rodgers and Hammerstein oversaw the making of the 1955 film, so that the producers did not add songs by other composers or drop theirs, as was often the practice in filming stage musicals. The film is thus unusually similar to the original staged version – including the ground-breaking dream ballet by Agnes de Mille.

---

## **ON THE INTERNET**

### **THE RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN ORGANIZATION**

The official web site of the composers:

[www.rnh.com/org/](http://www.rnh.com/org/)

### **ESSAY ON LYNN RIGGS, PLAYWRIGHT**

[tarlton.law.utexas.edu/lpop/etext/lsf/borowitz27porejud.htm](http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/lpop/etext/lsf/borowitz27porejud.htm)