



The Guide to Musical Theatre

CAROLINE, OR CHANGE

A through-composed musical: Music - Jeanine Tesori: Lyrics - Tony Kushner; Book - Tony Kushner

Productions 2003 Off-Broadway

Eugene O'Neill Theatre, Broadway - May 2, 2004 to August 29, 2004
(136 performances)

National Theatre on the Lyttelton stage (in rep) October, 2006 - 4
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Synopsis



The musical is set in Lake Charles, Louisiana during the American civil rights movement, just before, after and during the Kennedy Assassination.

Much of Caroline's work day passes in the Gellmans' laundry room, which adds some surprising singing characters to the cast – the washer, the drier, and the radio.

The title *Caroline, Or Change* has several meanings. The word 'change' is used in the sense of the change in Noah's pocket. Another sense is Caroline's tentative decision to quit her job. In addition, Noah goes through a social change after a family tragedy and Caroline changes by treating her family better and understanding Noah better. Finally, Rose changes from a Northerner to a Southerner. The nation changes as a result of JFK's death.

SYNOPSIS

Caroline Thibodeaux is a black maid for a Southern Jewish family, the Gellmans. The Gellmans' young son, Noah, is enamored of Caroline, a woman resistant to the sweep of change she sees around her. Their friendship has intensified since his mother's death. Noah's new stepmother Rose, unable to give Caroline a raise, enlists Caroline's help in a plan to teach Noah a lesson about leaving change in his pants pocket (since Caroline does the family's laundry as part of her duties). Rose tells Noah and Caroline that Caroline should keep the money Noah leaves in his pockets. Caroline is loathe to take money from a child – but her own children desperately need food, clothing and shoes.

The punishment goes awry when a \$20 bill goes missing, and Caroline's relationship with Noah suffers a painful breakdown, causing a rift between her family and the Gellmans. With the death of JFK and the inspirational speeches of Martin Luther King, the tide of change begins to affect Caroline's life, and she must come to terms with racial turmoil and the end of segregation. But the upbeat ending, involving Caroline's daughter Emmie, portends hope for Caroline's community.

STORY

Act One

a hot day in 1963 in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Caroline, a black maid who works for the Gellman family for \$30 a week, launders clothes in the basement (“16 Feet Beneath The Sea”). Caroline keeps herself sane in the basement by imagining the items in the basement as people (“The Radio/Laundry Quintet”). The Gellmans’ 8-year-old son Noah, whose mother has recently died of cancer, is attracted to Caroline, a no-nonsense single parent (“Noah Down The Stairs”). Caroline allows Noah to light her one cigarette each day, a secret they can share (“The Cigarette”). Caroline puts the laundry in the dryer and sings about her four kids and cleaning houses for 22 years (“The Dryer/I Got Four Kids”).

Noah’s new stepmother Rose cannot give Caroline a raise, but tells her to take some extra food home to her kids (“Caroline, There’s Extra Food”); Caroline declines. Noah’s father Stuart, despondent since his wife’s death, tells Noah he has lost his faith (“There is No God, Noah”). Noah confesses that he hates Rose (“Rose Stopnick Can Cook”). Rose confesses to her father, Mr. Stopnick, that she is unhappy as well (“Long Distance”).

After work, Caroline argues with her friend Dotty about each other’s lifestyles (“Dotty and Caroline”). The moon rises as they wait for a bus (“Moon Change”). They discuss the recent mysterious destruction of a statue of a Confederate soldier at the courthouse (“Moon Trio”). The bus arrives with devastating news: President Kennedy has been assassinated (“The Bus/That Can’t Be”).

Rose tells Noah to stop leaving money in his pants pockets, and that any money Caroline finds in his laundry will be hers to keep (“Noah and Rose”). The Gellman family reminisces about the good President Kennedy did for the Jews—and Dotty reminisces about the good he intended to do for African Americans (“Inside/Outside/JFK”). On the front porch of her house, Caroline tells her teenage daughter Emmie that the president is dead. Emmie says she does not care, because JFK never fulfilled his promises to the black community (“No One Waiting/Night Mama”). Noah, awake in his bedroom, asks Caroline what laws she would pass if she were president (“Gonna Pass Me a Law/Noah Goes To Sleep”).

Rose tells Caroline she is allowed to keep any money she finds in Noah’s pants, to supplement her salary and teach Noah a lesson (“Noah Has a Problem”). Noah and his father, Stuart, have trouble bonding (“Stuart and Noah”). Noah, aware of her situation, purposefully leaves his candy and comic book money in his pockets, as well as seventy-five cents (“Quarter in the Bleach Cup”). Caroline feels bad about keeping it, but does so, out of necessity. Caroline brings the money to Emmie, Jackie, and Joe who discuss all the things they can do and things they can buy with it (“Caroline Takes My Money Home/Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw”).

Act Two

As Christmas approaches Caroline, ironing clothes in the basement, remembers her ex-husband, who was kind and thoughtful until he became abusive (“Santa Comin’ Caroline/ Little Reward/1943”). Rose tells Caroline to keep any money Stuart leaves in his clothes as well but Caroline snaps at Rose saying she doesn’t need her pity or money and threatens her with the iron (“Mr. Gellman’s Shirt”/”Ooh Child”). Rose then asks if she, Dotty, and Emmie will work at her upcoming Chanukah party (“Rose Recovers”). Emmie, Jackie, and Joe encourage her to keep taking the laundry money, because the family needs it (“I Saw Three Ships”).

At the Chanukah party, Noah educates Emmie about the holiday (“The Chanukah Party”). Rose shoos Noah out of the kitchen (“Noah, Out! It’s Very Rude”) and Dotty tells Emmie about the courthouse statue (“Dotty and Emmie”). When Mr. Stopnick belittles Martin Luther King Jr.’s nonviolent civil disobedience, Emmie tells him white people have no right to be critical (“I Don’t Want My Child To Hear That/Mr. Stopnick and Emmie”). Mr. Stopnick is impressed with Emmie’s bravado, but Caroline tells her she cannot talk that way to white people; Emmie retorts that slavery is over (“Kitchen Fight”). Mr. Stopnick’s Chanukah present to Noah is a \$20 bill, intended as a life lesson about money and its value (“A Twenty Dollar Bill and Why”). At the bus stop, Emmie dreams of growing up to be independent and fighting for justice (“I Hate the Bus”). Back at the house, Stuart laments that he can give neither Rose nor Noah what they need (“Moon, Emmie, Stuart Trio”).

Noah inadvertently leaves the \$20 bill in his pants; after school he rushes to the basement, but Caroline

has found it and says she is keeping it, per their agreement (“The Twenty Dollar Bill”). Noah and Caroline exchange racial insults, then Caroline returns the money and leaves (“Caroline and Noah Fight”). After five days, Caroline has not returned to work (“Aftermath”). That Sunday on her way to church, Caroline realizes that the laundry money had only fostered greed and hatefulness; she asks God to free her from earthly desires (“Sunday Morning/Lot’s Wife”). The radio sings of a fierce heartbreak (“Salty Teardrops”). At church, Caroline gives Emmie a fierce hug and accepts her daughter’s choices (“How Long Has This Been Going On?”).

Noah finally lets Rose tuck him into bed and kiss him goodnight. Caroline returns to work and assures Noah that they will be friends again (“Why Does Our House Have a Basement?”/”Underwater”). Emmie reveals that she helped take down the Confederate soldier statue, and proudly sings that she is the daughter of a maid, but she will continue to work for a greater cause, and her children will have a brighter future. Jackie and Joe come out to shush her and she tells them that it is up to the children of Caroline Thibodeaux to change the future (“Epilogue”).

CAST

- Caroline Thibodeaux: 39-year-old African-American maid for the Gellmans, a middle-class Jewish family
- Noah Gellman: The Gellmans’ 8-year-old curious, sympathetic, and neurotic son
- Emmie Thibodeaux: Caroline’s 16-year-old free-spirited daughter, supporter of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement
- Rose Stopnick Gellman: Noah’s concerned new stepmother from New York City, marries Stuart after his first wife’s death
- Stuart Gellman: Professional clarinet player and Noah’s father, mourning the loss of his wife
- Dotty Moffett: Friend of Caroline and fellow maid, takes night classes at the University
- The Radio: Domestic appliance portrayed by a Supremes-like trio, serves as a Greek Chorus for the show
- The Washing Machine: Domestic appliance portrayed by an actor, cleans clothes for the Gellmans and pushes Caroline to move forward in life
- The Dryer: Domestic appliance portrayed by an actor, torments Caroline throughout the show
- The Moon: Portrayed by an actor, is a calming and healing presence throughout the show
- The Bus: Portrayed by an actor, is the primary source of transportation for the African-American characters in the show
- Grandpa Gellman: Noah’s grandfather, Stuart’s father
- Grandma Gellman: Noah’s grandmother, Stuart’s mother
- Jackie Thibodeaux: Caroline’s 10 year old son
- Joe Thibodeaux: Caroline’s 8 year old son
- Mr. Stopnick: Rose’s father, a Jewish man with a socialist ideology from New York City

MUSICAL NUMBERS

Act One

Washer / Dryer

1. 16 Feet Beneath The Sea — Caroline, The Washing Machine
2. The Radio — The Radio
3. Laundry Quintet— The Washing Machine, Caroline, The Radio
4. Noah Down The Stairs — Noah
5. The Cigarette — Noah and Caroline
6. Laundry Finish— The Washing Machine, Caroline, The Radio
7. The Dryer— The Dryer and The Radio
8. I Got Four Kids— Caroline and The Dryer

Cabbage

9. Caroline, There's Extra Food— Rose, Caroline and The Gellmans
10. There Is No God, Noah— Stuart
11. Rose Stopnick Can Cook— The Gellmans

Long Distance

12. Long Distance— Rose

Moon Change

13. Dotty and Caroline— Dotty and Caroline
14. Moon Change— The Moon
15. Moon Trio— Dotty, Caroline, and The Moon
16. The Bus— The Bus
17. That Can't Be— The Bus, Rose, Dotty and Caroline
18. Noah and Rose— Rose and Noah
19. Inside / Outside — The Moon, Noah and Rose
20. JFK — Rose, Dotty, and Grandpa & Grandma Gellman

Duets

21. No One Waitin' — Emmie, Caroline, and The Radio
22. 'Night Mamma — Emmie
23. Gonna Pass Me A Law — Noah and Caroline
24. Noah, Go To Sleep — Caroline

The Bleach Cup

25. Noah Has A Problem — Rose and Caroline
26. Stuart and Noah — Stuart, Noah and Rose
27. Quarter In The Bleach Cup — Caroline and Noah
28. Caroline Takes My Money Home — Noah, Caroline, Emmie, Jackie and Joe
29. Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw — Emmie, Jackie, Joe, Noah, Caroline and The Moon

Act Two

Ironing

30. Santa Comin' Caroline — The Radio
31. Little Reward — The Radio, The Washing Machine, and Caroline
32. 1943 — Caroline, The Washing Machine, and The Radio
33. Mr. Gellman's Shirt — Rose and Caroline
34. Ooh Child — The Washing Machine and The Radio
35. Rose Recovers — Rose, The Dryer and Caroline
36. I Saw Three Ships — Emmie, Jackie, Joe and Caroline

The Chanukah Party

37. The Chanukah Party — Grandma Gellman, Grandpa Gellman, Mr. Stopnick, Rose, Noah, Caroline, and Emmie
38. Dotty and Emmie — Dotty and Emmie
39. I Don't Want My Child To Hear That — Caroline, Mr. Stopnick
40. Mr. Stopnick and Emmie — Mr. Stopnick and Emmie
41. Kitchen Fight — Caroline, Emmie, and Dotty

The Twenty Dollar Bill

42. A Twenty Dollar Bill and Why — Mr. Stopnick
43. I Hate The Bus — Emmie
44. Moon, Emmie and Stuart Trio — The Moon, Emmie, Stuart
45. The Twenty Dollar Bill — Noah, The Gellmans
46. Caroline and Noah Fight — Caroline, The Dryer and Noah

Aftermath

47. Aftermath — Rose, Stuart, Mr. Stopnick and Noah

Lot's Wife

48. Sunday Morning — Caroline and Dotty
49. Lot's Wife — Caroline

How Long Has This Been Going On?

50. Salty Teardrops — The Radio
51. Why Does Our House Have A Basement? — Noah, Rose, and Caroline
52. Underwater — Caroline

Emmie's Dream

53. Epilogue — Emmie, Jackie, and Joe