

THE CROOKED MILE

A musical in two acts by Peter Wildeblood; based on his book *West End People*. Music by Peter Greenwell. Produced at the Opera House, Manchester under the management of Players' Ventures 11 August, 1959 for two weeks and played at Liverpool Empire 2 weeks to 5 September. Opened at the Cambridge Theatre 10 September, 1959 for a run of 164 performances closing 30 January, 1960.

SYNOPSIS

The curtain rises on Sweet Ginger's ironmongery shop in Soho where Jug Ears Jones and his gang are lamenting the untimely death of Gorganzola Joe. Learning that Joe has left an orphan child, Luigi, in Naples, they decide to bring him to London and adopt him. Sweet Ginger, the coloured ironmongeress who has been Jug Ears' girl friend for the last sixteen years, is ready to adopt the boy but realises that in order to do so she must first acquire an honest husband, since Jug Ears is disqualified by his criminal record. There is also the problem of raising the fare from Naples, and in song the gangsters make various suggestions for doing this. Jug Ears decides that they should hold a lottery, with a car - "you pick it, we'll nick it" - as the first prize.

Cora, a freelance street-girl, comes into the shop to escape the unwelcome attentions of the police, and Sweet Ginger tells her of her plans for the future. They are interrupted by the entrance of Mortiss Garrity, an American businessman whose family owns a coast-to-coast chain of self-service stores, and who plans to open a similar one in Soho. He explains this enthusiastically to Sweet Ginger and when he leaves she realises he is just the kind of man to make a suitable adoptive father for little Luigi.

Jug Ears' lottery, like most of his schemes, ends in failure, and he is publicly humiliated by a rival gangleader, The Carver. Cora, meanwhile, is indulging her passion for horticulture by spending all her earnings on garden tools and plants, which Sweet Ginger agrees to keep for her until the time when she retires.

The friendship between Sweet Ginger and Mortiss develops in spite of the difference in outlook and when the unsuccessful Jug Ears returns to the shop he gets a cold welcome from Sweet Ginger, who tells him that many men would be glad to have their freedom. Jug Ears tells her that as an ex-convict he alone knows the meaning of the word free. Sweet Ginger relents enough to agree not to leave until the baby arrives.

The only one to have any success in the sale of lottery tickets is Mortiss, and Jug Ears decides to award him first prize. Mortiss wants a bubble car, and the gang unfortunately pick on one belonging to Cora. Their leader, unable to raise money in any other way, goes off with his pride in his pocket to beg a loan - unsuccessfully - from The Carver.

The rest of the gang, dressed as buskers, join in the Street Scene of an open-air market. While looking for Jug Ears, Sweet Ginger meets Cora, who unromantically advises her to test Mortiss' intentions by inviting him to meet the family. They are interrupted by the entrance of Mortiss driving Cora's bubble car. Happy to be on the right side of the law for once, she has him arrested. Sweet Ginger blames this development on Jug Ears, and taunts him with his inability to earn an honest penny. He borrows a barrel organ from a blind man and, undaunted by the contemptuous threats of The Carver, stands in the street asking the passers-by to spare a penny in order to raise the money for Luigi's fare.



During the week-end Sweet Ginger waits for news of Jug Ears, and in spite of threats from The Carver decides to see Jug Ears "right through to the end". On learning that for once he has made a success of something - playing the barrel organ at a debutantes' party - she transfers her attention from him to Mortiss, who is about to appear in Court charged with theft. The Court is already crowded with street-girls. waiting to pay their fines and comforting themselves with the thought that other people's sins are more reprehensible than their own. Presently news is brought that The Carver has exploded a bomb in Sweet Ginger's shop and wrecked it. Sweet Ginger is horrified to think what may have happened to Jug Ears, but Cora is even more incensed by the thought of losing all the garden equipment which Sweet Ginger has been keeping for her. This gang warfare, she says, is becoming a serious hindrance to trade, and she leads the street-girls out on strike.

At the wrecked ironmongery shop Sweet Ginger remembers Jug Ears' words about being free. When Mortiss appears, the charge against him having been dropped by Cora who now has more important things to think about, she tells him that she is now ready to make a fresh start. But she cannot bring herself to leave Jug Ears, and breaks it to Mortiss that she cannot even consider marrying him and going off to Kansas. This comes as a surprise to Mortiss, and suddenly realising that she has built up a dream world around herself he tells her that she must come down to earth and stop being so romantic.

When Jug Ears returns, unscathed by The Carver's bomb, Sweet Ginger knows that their future should be together - but there is still the obstacle of Luigi. When he arrives, however, he turns out to be no baby, but a full-grown Italian policeman - a fact which finally decides Jug Ears to pursue the path of virtue in future rather than the Crooked Mile.

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Doubled roles as indicated

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| Fingers | Busy Lizzie//Debutante |
| Nick | Black Eyed Susan |
| Battersea Bob/Policeman | Rambling Rose/Passer-by |
| Slim/Burcher/Policeman/Barrow Boy | Welsh Poppy/Mother |
| Windy Sid/Father | Indoor Ivy |
| Knack/Blind Man | Sandwich Man/Workman/Detective/ Flip |
| Jacko/Fishmonger/Police Sergeant/ Passer-by | Policewoman |
| Lightning | Lotus Blossom/Child |
| Smudge/Barrow Boy/Chinese Waiter | Espresso Girl |
| Paddywhack/Splosh/Barrow Boy/ Workman | Belgian Annie |
| The Bishop | Dumdum/Passer-by/Sailor |
| Squeezy | Deedee/Passer-by |
| Jug Ears | Old Woman |
| Sweet Ginger | The Carver |
| Glendower | Razor/Barrow Boy/Sailor |
| Cora | Bonker/Workman |
| Mortiss Garrity | Weed |
| Delicious Daisy | Weed's Girl |
| Aida | Luigi |
| Creeping Jenny | |

MUSICAL NUMBERS:

1. PROLOGUE - The Carver
2. OVERTURE - Orchestra
3. LOLLY-BYE - Sweet Ginger, Jug Ears and Men
4. GOING UP - Mortiss Garrity
5. IF I EVER FALL IN LOVE AGAIN - Sweet Ginger
6. HORTICULTURE - Cora COUSIN COUNTRY - Sweet Ginger and Mortiss Garrity

7. FREE - Jug Ears
8. STREET SCENE - Cora and Company
9. MEET THE FAMILY - Cora and Sweet Ginger
10. SPARE A PENNY - Jug Ears and Company
11. I'LL WAIT - Sweet Ginger
12. OTHER PEOPLE'S SINS - Cora and Girls
13. THE STRIKE - Cora and Company
14. DOWN TO EARTH - Mortiss Garrity
15. FREE (Reprise) - Sweet Ginger
16. LUIGI - Luigi and Company
17. FINALE - The Company.