



The Guide to Musical Theatre

CURTAINS

A comedy musical murder mystery in 2 Acts. Book by Rupert Holmes; Music by John Kander; Lyrics by Fred Ebb. Original book and concept by Peter Stone. Additional lyrics by John Kander and Rupert Holmes,

Opened 22 March, 2007 - Al Hirschfeld Theatre. Broadway. Closed June 29, 2008

SYNOPSIS

Robbin' Hood of the Old West, a bad Western adaptation of the Robin Hood story is reaching its conclusion. The egregiously untalented leading lady, Jessica Cranshaw is a triple threat: she can't sing, act, or dance (or remember when to say her lines). To the relief of everyone, she is murdered during her opening night curtain call. The entire company comes under suspicion, and Lt. Frank Cioffi of the Boston Police Department is called in to solve the homicide. Believing that the perpetrator is still in the building, he sequesters it.

The Suspects include the hard-bitten lady producer, Carmen Bernstein; her husband, Sidney; the show's flamboyant director Christopher Belling; divorced songwriting team Aaron Fox and Georgia Hendricks; Stage Manager Johnny Harmon; choreographer/leading man Bobby Pepper, ingénue Niki Harris, and ambitious chorine Bambi Bernét.

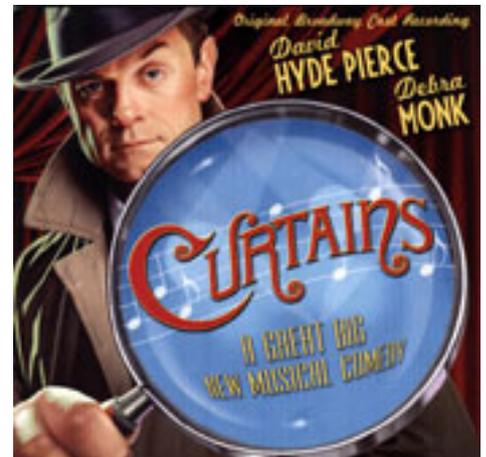
The company use its spare time to attempt to fix the show's problems. Niki, Ms. Cranshaw's understudy, is passed up for the leading role in favour of Georgia, who is encouraged to take the role despite the protests of Aaron, who has fallen in love with her again. Cioffi, a theatre fan and amateur actor, becomes more involved with saving the show than solving the case. Cioffi finds himself falling for Niki, and she seems to return his affection, so he hopes she's not the murderer. Meanwhile, secrets are surfacing, the production numbers in Robbin' Hood are rewritten, rehearsed and rewritten again, and the body count is rising. Can Cioffi solve the case, save the show, and get the girl before the curtain rises without getting offed himself? This is a musical, after all!

STORY

Act I

It's the brassy, bright, and promising year of 1959. Boston's Colonial Theatre is host to the opening night performance of Robbin' Hood! "a new musical of the Old West." The curtains rise on the show's merciful finale. Act Two, Scene 23.

As the valiant cast proclaims their undying affection for the Wide Open Spaces of Kansas, a sour note is sounded by the voice of faded film star Jessica Cranshaw, who can't act, can't sing, and can't dance — not even a little. Jessica's name may be above the title, but her performance has been beneath contempt, both on-stage and off. She takes her mandatory bow in front of the cowboy-costumed company, gathers up her obligatory bouquets from a pair of tuxedoed ushers, and collapses in a heap, easily the most graceful move she's made all evening. The cast rushes to their fallen star behind the fallen curtain and bear the unbearable Jessica off to Boston Hospital.



A few hours later, on the now darkened Colonial stage, four tormented souls in evening dress search the night owl editions of the Boston morning papers for a single charitable review. The show's composer, Aaron Fox, and lyricist Georgia Hendricks — recently divorced but professionally reunited in an attempt to create musical magic where their marriage has otherwise gone flat — find nary a quote to pull. Equally empty-handed is the show's lone financial backer, Oscar Shapiro, garment district maven but theatre district novice. Slightly less daunted is Carmen Bernstein, co-producer (with her husband Sidney) of *Robbin' Hood!* The four speculate about What Kind of Man, woman, or beast would ever choose to be a critic.

They are joined by feverishly fey director, Christopher Belling, who announces he's just given birth to a brain-child the producers must instantly adopt. To demonstrate his plan, he asks Georgia to sing Jessica Cranshaw's first ballad in the show. It's no secret to the company that Georgia has recently rekindled a past romance with leading man Bobby Pepper. Though her ex-husband may be accompanying her at the piano, Georgia is clearly thinking of Bobby as she sings *Thinking of Him*.

Director Belling reveals his masterful plan: as long as Jessica Cranshaw is indisposed, her part should be filled by Georgia, a former stage performer who obviously knows the show inside and out because she is its co-creator. All approve, except ex-husband Aaron, who points out that the problem is academic if Jessica Cranshaw returns to work. But the fateful news arrives: *The Woman's Dead*. An impromptu funeral ceremony in Jessica's honour is interrupted by the arrival of Homicide Lieutenant, Frank Cioffi, who saw *Robbin' Hood!* in previews and thinks that, with the exception of the late Miss Cranshaw, the cast are all spectacular performers in one heck of a show. The Lieutenant has done some amateur theatrical work himself, and he is as shocked as Carmen Bernstein to learn that the cast does not feel the show must go on. He and Carmen must remind the company that they are part of a special breed known as Show People.

With their faith in themselves and *Robbin' Hood!* renewed, the cast prepares to leave for the night when Cioffi explains that they can't. Since an autopsy has revealed that Jessica Cranshaw swallowed poison pellets in the last minutes of the show, during which time she never left the stage, it's clear she was murdered by a member of the company. Cioffi feels the surest way to solve the crime will be to keep the entire cast of suspicious characters sequestered in the theatre.

Sidney Bernstein, the show's senior producing partner (and Carmen's philandering lesser half) arrives from New York — or at least that's where he claims to have been at the time of the murder.

Cioffi is left alone with local neophyte actress Niki Harris, who understudied Jessica Cranshaw but is now covering for Georgia. The police detective is clearly smitten with Niki's winsome charm and confides in her about his investigation. They learn that they are both married ... to their respective careers, which in Cioffi's case has resulted in a life of lunch counter mornings and Coffee Shop Nights.

The next day, as Georgia struggles to regain her showbiz sea legs, Carmen and Sidney Bernstein invite Boston Globe senior drama critic Daryl Grady to pay them a visit, much to his bewilderment, since his review of the show found precious little to praise. The producers ask Grady to re-review their musical with its new lead, but the best he can offer is to appraise the next evening's re-opening. With Grady's challenge accepted, Chris Belling prepares to restage a particularly troublesome number, entitled *'In the Same Boat'*. Cioffi is startled to hear himself suggest that the problem might lie in the song itself, and the director is surprised to hear himself agree. Composer Aaron Fox is urged to concoct a different number for the same slot in the show, minus the assistance of his ex-wife who, owing to her frantic rehearsal schedule, has now become his ex-writing partner as well. In private with Lieutenant Cioffi, the composer makes a most unexpected confession.

Any doubt that Georgia could hold the stage is happily dispelled by the dress rehearsal of the big saloon hall number. But as the Act One curtain descends, murder rises to the occasion, and a key member of the company is forced to face *The Big Blackout*.

Act II

The second act begins with the updated medical status of the most recent victim: *The Man Is Dead*. Curtains rise upon a makeshift dormitory on the Colonial's stage, as things go bump in the night and the company, in varying stages of dress and undress, point fingers of suspicion at each other, puzzling over whether She or He Did It.

Cioffi arrives with a grim report from the coroner and even more grave concerns about the show's rapidly-approaching deadline. Aaron previews his best effort at *In the Same Boat #2* but the zealous Cioffi sends it back to the drawing board once again, while urging that star Bobby Pepper be added to the Fort Henderson square dance. This prompts Bambi, an aspiring chorine and also Carmen's daughter, to plead for a pas de deux for herself and Bobby, as a spotlight moment in the number. Carmen reluctantly gives Bambi her chance, although she reminds her that a hard-nosed producer watches the box office, not the stage, and in commercial theatre, the bottom line is: *It's a Business*.

Much to Carmen's surprise, Bambi shines in the rehearsal of the restaged *Kansasland*. But even as Bambi gets her big shot, Bobby Pepper gets his, from a gun offstage. Or was someone else the target? Cioffi's craft as a detective takes centre stage as he traces the bullet's torturous path. He is also able to solve the mystery of why Aaron Fox and Georgia Hendricks were so anxious to work on *Robbin' Hood!* as the former husband and wife team discover ample reason to renew their vows.

With the spotlight suddenly on romance, Cioffi's magnifying glass focuses on the ingénue who's too-good-to-be-true. In his wildest dreams, instead of tracking footprints, he'd be trading steps with Niki up a theatrical stairway, making moves that even Fred and Ginger would find *A Tough Act to Follow*.

But in the realm of homicide, the blink of an eye can turn daydream into nightmare, as Cioffi realises that Niki is carrying a secret, one she has shared with stage manager Johnny Harmon. Johnny's lips remain sealed — and the killer hopes to keep them that way forever. Cioffi's investigation takes him high above the stage and, hearing the chorus below as they rehearse *In the Same Boat #3*, he hits upon a solution to some (if not all) the production's problems, in a melodic amalgam that finally sees *In the Same Boat Completed*.

With that immense puzzle solved to the company's satisfaction, Cioffi has merely to piece together the clues he's gathered, correctly unmask the killer, save the life of the murderer's next intended victim, render the fiend harmless, make sense of a troubling, but telltale, observation and find a new finale for the show. In doing so, Carmen Bernstein gives Cioffi the highest praise he could ever hope to receive: he is truly one of those Show People who understands why the show must go on. The revamped *Wide Open Spaces* Finale may be *A Tough Act to Follow* (reprise), but for Lieutenant Frank Cioffi, the curtain is just about to rise on the greatest joy of his life.

— Rupert Holmes

MUSICAL NUMBERS

1. Overture - Orchestra
2. *Wide Open Spaces* - Randy Dexter, Niki Harris, Jessica, Bobby, Ensemble
3. *What Kind of Man?* - Carmen, Oscar, Aaron, Georgia
4. *Thinking of Him* - Georgia, Aaron, Bobby
5. *The Woman's Dead* - Company
6. *Show People* - Carmen, Frank, Company
7. *Coffee Shop Nights* - Frank with Niki
8. *In the Same Boat 1* - Georgia, Niki, Bambi
9. *I Miss the Music* - Aaron with Frank, Christopher & Georgia
10. *Thataway!* - Georgia, Bobby & Ensemble
11. *The Man Is Dead* - Sasha & Ensemble
12. *He Did It* - Company with Georgia, Bobby, Niki, Aaron, Oscar, Christopher
13. *In the Same Boat 2* - Bobby, Randy, Niki, Aaron, Oscar, Christopher
14. *It's a Business* - Carmen, Stagehands with Bambi
15. *Kansasland* Randy, Niki, Harv, Bobby, Bambi & Ensemble
16. *Thinking of Him (Reprise)* - Georgia
17. *A Tough Act to Follow* - Frank, Niki, Ensemble
18. *In the Same Boat 3* - Ensemble
19. *A Tough Act to Follow (Reprise)* - Frank, Niki, Ensemble

CAST

- Jessica Cranshaw
- Randy Dexter
- Niki Harris
- Bambi Bernet
- Bobby Pepper
- Johnny Harmon
- Georgia Hendricks
- Aaron Fox
- Carmen Bernstein
- Oscar Shapiro
- Christopher Belling
- Lieutenant Frank Cioffi
- Mona Page
- Harr Fremont
- Roberta Wooster
- Sidney Bernstein
- Detective O'Farrell
- Daryl Grady
- Sasha Minsky
- Marjorie Cook
- Arlene Barruca
- Roy Stetson
- Brick Hawvermale
- Jan Seller
- Connie Subbotin
- Peg Prentice
- Ronnie Driscoll
- Russ Cochran

CHARACTERISATION

- LIEUTENANT FRANK CIOFFI (40s): Local Boston detective who is also a musical theatre aficionado. Aside from being exceptionally good at his job, he has also aspired to be a musical theatre performer his entire life. He falls in love with Niki.
- NIKI HARRIS (20s-early 30s) Pretty, naïve ingénue. Niki is a chorus girl/understudy in the chorus of the show-within-the-show during its Boston tryout. She aspires to make it as a performer on Broadway. She meets and falls in love with Dt. Frank Cioffi who is investigating a murder at the theatre. Actress must have legit Soprano and good comic timing.
- GEORGIA HENDRICKS (30s) Female half of our songwriting team. Ends up taking on the leading lady role. Must sing and dance well.
- CARMEN BERNSTEIN (45-65) Brassy Broadway producer. Terrific comedic actress who sings well.
- AARON FOX (40s) The composer of the show-within-the-show. His songwriting partner, Georgia, is also his wife from whom he's separated. He's a sexy, charming ladies man.
- SIDNEY BERNSTEIN (Late 50s-Mid 60s): The producer of an out of town flop. Sidney is tough and self-serving. Seeking a character actor with good comic timing.
- CHRISTOPHER BELLING (40-60) English director. Very camp. Very funny. Requires a good comic lead actor.
- BAMBI BERNÉT (Early 20s-early 30s) Performer in the chorus and daughter of Carmen, the lead producer. Hungry to work her way up to leading performer many think she was only hired because of her mother. Bambi is a good dancer/comedienne who sings well.
- DARYL GRADY (30s): A Theatre critic for the local Boston newspaper, he enjoys using the power he has to make or break shows during their out of town tryouts.
- JOHNNY HARMON (40s-50s) The Stage Manager of the show-within-the-show. Johnny is a character man who is gruff but lovable. He keeps the company in line and on their toes throughout the rehearsal process.
- OSCAR SHAPIRO (45-65): The general manager. An agreeable if slightly gruff man. He is always looking for any angle to find money. Seeking a good comic actor who sings.
- BOBBY PEPPER (20s to early 30s) The choreographer and lead dancer. Seeking a strong singer who dances well.
- JESSICA CRENSHAW (30s-40s) Fading Hollywood star. A diva, who has no right to be one, she is a terrible singer and actress who stars in the show within a show and gets murdered on its opening night.

SCENES AND SETTINGS

Time: 1959 : Place: THE COLONIAL THEATRE, BOSTON

INSTRUMENTATION

Flute I & II, piccolo, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet I, II & III, tenor sax, alto sax I & II, soprano sax, baritone sax, bassoon, bass clarinet, French Horn I & II, trumpet I & II, trombone I & II, tuba, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, banjo, classical guitar, piano, synthesiser, acoustic bass, drums, percussion.