

OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II

In the 100 year history of the American musical, two works stand above all others in their development of the artform: SHOW BOAT and OKLAHOMA! The author of both was Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960). Born into a theatrical dynasty headed by his grandfather and namesake, Hammerstein was determined to work in the theatre, a course he pursued despite earning a law degree from Columbia University. He began his stage career as a playwright, soon turning to librettos and lyrics written for some of the greatest composers of his day. His innovations breathed new life into the moribund artform of operetta with such classics as ROSE-MARIE (music by Rudolf Friml), THE DESERT SONG (Sigmund Romberg), THE NEW MOON (Romberg) and SONG OF THE FLAME (George Gershwin.) Hammerstein and Jerome Kern wrote eight musicals together, including SWEET ADELIN, MUSIC IN THE AIR and their masterpiece, SHOWBOAT. His last musical before embarking on an exclusive partnership with Richard Rodgers was CARMEN JONES, an all-black revision of Bizet's tragic opera. In 1943, Hammerstein, pioneer in the field of operetta, joined forces with Richard Rodgers who had, for the previous twenty-five years, taken great strides in the field of musical comedy with his longtime partner, Lorenz Hart. The first Rodgers & Hammerstein collaboration, OKLAHOMA!, merged the two styles into a completely new genre -- the musical play -- and simultaneously launched the most successful partnership in the American musical theatre. Over the next seventeen years Rodgers & Hammerstein wrote nine Broadway musicals: CAROUSEL, ALLEGRO, SOUTH PACIFIC, THE KING AND I, ME AND JULIET, PIPE DREAM, FLOWER DRUM SONG and THE SOUND OF MUSIC. They also wrote a movie musical (STATE FAIR) and one for television (CINDERELLA). Collectively their works earned 34 Tony Awards, 15 Academy Awards, two Pulitzer Prizes and two Grammy Awards. On August 23, 1960, Oscar Hammerstein II died at his farm in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. THE SOUND OF MUSIC had been his last work for the theatre; "Edelweiss" was the last lyric he wrote

RICHARD RODGERS

Richard Rodgers (1902-79) began his professional career with lyricist Lorenz Hart. Among their greatest musicals: ON YOUR TOES, BABES IN ARMS, THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE, and PAL JOEY. In 1942, Rodgers joined forces with lyricist and author Oscar Hammerstein II; their 17-year-partnership, the most successful in Broadway history, yielded OKLAHOMA!, CAROUSEL, the movie musical STATE FAIR, ALLEGRO, SOUTH PACIFIC, THE KING AND I, ME AND JULIET, PIPE DREAM, the TV musical CINDERELLA, FLOWER DRUM SONG and THE SOUND OF MUSIC. Following Hammerstein's death in 1960, Rodgers continued to write for the Broadway stage. His first solo entry, NO STRINGS, earned him two Tony Awards for music and lyrics, and was followed by DO I HEAR A WALTZ? (lyrics by Stephen Sondheim), TWO BY TWO (lyrics by Martin Charnin), REX (lyrics by Sheldon Harnick) and I REMEMBER MAMA (lyrics by Martin Charnin and Raymond Jessel).