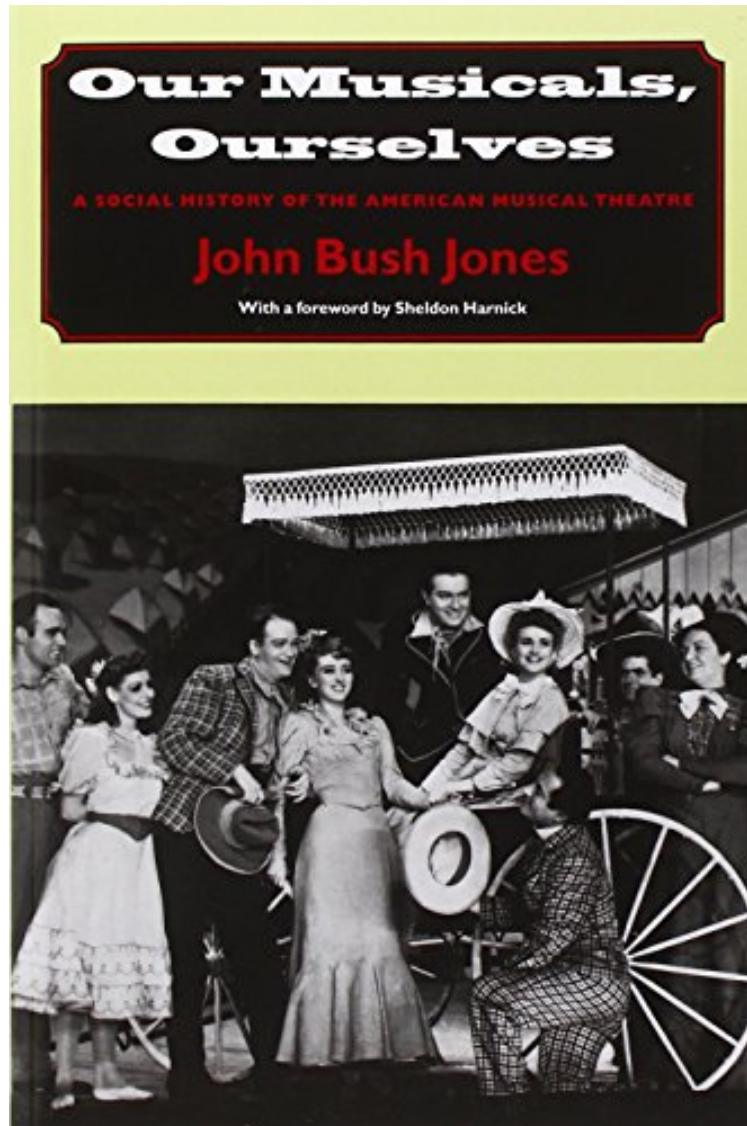


# Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre

*John Bush Jones*

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**John Bush Jones : Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. He talked about 'cabaret' and its revival as being socially more accurate in later versions but that is what good theater does iBy TravelguyI found that the author really stretched the

point on the social relevance. In fact his discussion at times was almost forced. It is well written and had some insight but it was far too aggressive in shaping his argument. In many places one can agree but the musicals he often chose to make his point were hardly pieces of theater that made an impact. For example "Woman of the Year" as a "women's lib piece was a stretch. A mediocre musical is just that and social relevance did not help it. He talked about 'cabaret" and its revival as being socially more accurate in later versions but that is what good theater does it re-invents itself in new thinking all of the time. His thesis just was too forced to be true. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. An accurate, entertaining, organized...PROVOCATIVE book By Paul I've been teaching from this book for four years now. Rather than meandering around in the early days blathering about THE BLACK CROOK, Bush Jones immediately identifies the twin roots of today's American musical theatre: Gilbert Sullivan (specifically PINAFORE) and Vaudeville. From there he's off and running. He gives us successors to those roots: Ziegfeld - vaudeville, Cohan - GS with an American twist and gives us sparkling details and cogent WHYS. He gives SHOWBOAT, OKLAHOMA!, WEST SIDE STORY and COMPANY their due as landmark, game-changing pieces, without fawning excessively over them, and credits The Princess Theatre Musicals (VERY GOOD EDDIE etc.) as a cauldron of experimentation, PAL JOEY, and URINETOWN as tinkerers that improved the form. I wish he'd update it, but it's VERY good as it is. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Lidia Rich great book for they who want to know about Musicals History

Our Musicals, Ourselves is the first full-scale social history of the American musical theater from the imported Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas of the late nineteenth century to such recent musicals as The Producers and Urinetown. While many aficionados of the Broadway musical associate it with wonderful, diversionary shows like The Music Man or My Fair Lady, John Bush Jones instead selects musicals for their social relevance and the extent to which they engage, directly or metaphorically, contemporary politics and culture. Organized chronologically, with some liberties taken to keep together similarly themed musicals, Jones examines dozens of Broadway shows from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present that demonstrate numerous links between what played on Broadway and what played on newspapers front pages across our nation. He reviews the productions, lyrics, staging, and casts from the lesser-known early musicals (the gunboat musicals of the Teddy Roosevelt era and the Cinderella shows and leisure time musicals of the 1920s) and continues his analysis with better-known shows including Showboat, Porgy and Bess, Oklahoma, South Pacific, West Side Story, Cabaret, Hair, Company, A Chorus Line, and many others. While most examinations of the American musical focus on specific shows or emphasize the development of the musical as an art form, Jones's book uses musicals as a way of illuminating broader social and cultural themes of the times. With six appendixes detailing the long-running diversionary musicals and a foreword by Sheldon Harnick, the lyricist of Fiddler on the Roof, Jones's comprehensive social history will appeal to both students and fans of Broadway.

The strength of this sweeping thesis is its scope. It seeks to demonstrate and analyze how Broadway and Off-Broadway have held up a mirror to political and social currents in American society at large. But the fun comes from showing how events and trends in widely separated decades all sprang from similar currents of thought. By looking at the entire continuum of musicals as a single ongoing dialog between Broadway and America, the book serves up fresh insights and eyebrow-raising parallels on each page. It starts in the 19th century and runs right up 2001s Urinetown, from which it concludes that the political musical remains alive and well. Playbill