

Current 'Carousel' as inspired as ever

By Frank Gabrenya
Dispatch Arts Reporter

Carousel was the smallest of the Rodgers and Hammerstein blockbusters, tiny compared with *South Pacific* or *The Sound of Music*. Its concentrated focus, efficient plot and musical unity seem as inspired today as in 1945 when it confused audiences who expected another *Oklahoma!*

Carousel works best when it tells its simple story of Billy Bigelow, the womanizing carnival barker, and Julie Jordan, the naive romantic who loves Billy in spite of his arrogance. The only subplot, the romance between Julie's friend Carrie and the fishing entrepreneur Mr. Snow, is both a sweet diversion and a vivid counterpoint to the main plot.

YET THE authors couldn't leave well enough alone. They inflated the show with several choral numbers and two dance specialties, each an interruption of the main action.

Those numbers must be tempting to a college production. Otterbein College Theatre, which is staging *Carousel* on the stage of Cowan Hall, can't resist the temptation.

The men's and women's choruses in this production total 28 students, and they turn numbers such as *June is Bustin' Out All Over* and *Stonecutters Cut It On Stone* into major crowd scenes. The overflow of bodies cramps the two dance specialties. Only *A Real Nice Clambake*, with the company sedately posed around a campfire, is effective.

TOO MANY bodies tend to weigh *Carousel* down. When almost a dozen men dance on in sailor costumes, one expects a troupe of Siamese children and the entire Trapp family to follow.

When the production focuses on the central characters, however, it works very nicely. Tim Gregory as Billy and Gina Grogg as Julie make an interesting pair of tongue-tied romantics, he by macho arro-

REVIEW

Otterbein College Theatre presents *Carousel* at 8 p.m. tonight and Saturday, and at 2 p.m. Sunday in Cowan Hall on the Otterbein campus. Call 890-3028 for tickets.

gance, she by natural timidity. Both have strong voices that raise *If I Loved You* from standard ballad to touching confession.

Even better is Catherine Randazzo as Carrie. Her timing, singing and wide-eyed reactions are consistently enjoyable. Just as strong are Steve Geyer as the pompous Mr. Snow, and Tim St. John as the villainous Jigger.

There are other strengths in the show. The orchestra, directed by Craig Johnson, is quite good most of the time. The several sets are moved on and off quickly by the stage crew, and a pair of follow-spotlights, operated by Nadine Sheridan and Tim Foley, worked surprisingly well during Wednesday morning's preview.

THE BIGGEST disappointment is Gregory's half-hearted rendition of *Soliloquy*, the most inspired song in *Carousel*, in which Billy runs through a variety of emotions as he contemplates fatherhood. The song meanders from swaggering pride to stunning revelation to dramatic resolve, and demands more acting than singing. Unfortunately, Gregory, one of the area's most talented actors, caught only traces of the song's fire on Wednesday.

On the other hand, *You'll Never Walk Alone*, the saccharine anthem now associated with the annual Labor Day telethon, retained its emotional punch in the finale, avoiding images of Jerry Lewis weeping all over his microphone. That, in fact, may be this production's most impressive achievement.

'Carousel,' 'Oklahoma!' give dance a chance

By Frank Gabrenya
Dispatch Arts Reporter

In 1943, columnist Walter Winchell received a telegram from his secretary who had just seen an out-of-town performance of a new folk musical titled *Away We Go*. Unimpressed, the secretary sent a terse telegram which said: "No Legs No Jokes No Chance."

Within weeks, the show had arrived on Broadway with a new title: *Oklahoma!* It went on to a record-breaking run in New York and around the world, winning the Pulitzer Prize for drama along the way.

Before *Oklahoma!*, Richard Rodgers had been half of Broadway's most successful composing team with lyricist Lorenz Hart. Oscar Hammerstein II had written lyrics and librettos with composers such as Jerome Kern (*Showboat*) and Sigmund Romberg (*The Desert Song*).

THESE WERE veterans of the musical stage who knew how to build hits from a proven formula, but they wanted to create something new. They envisioned songs as integral to the story, not simply fillers between set pieces. They imagined stories with real characters, not just extended vaudeville routines. And dance would become a dramatic element in the show.

That blend of story and song charmed the critics and brought audiences to their feet. With *Oklahoma!* established as the biggest hit in New York, Rodgers and Hammerstein set about following it up. Their second show, *Carousel*, not only benefited from their earlier experiments but attempted a few more. Again, dance played a critical part in the story, and cer-

Ohio State's Opera/Music Theatre presents *Oklahoma!* at 8 tonight through Saturday, and at 2:30 p.m. Sunday in Mershon Auditorium. Call 292-2354 for tickets. Otterbein College presents *Carousel* at 8 tonight through Saturday, and at 2 p.m. Sunday in Cowan Hall on the Otterbein campus. Call 890-3028 for tickets.

tain songs were so matched to the characters, they couldn't stand alone. Even more daring was the idea of killing off the hero early in Act 2.

In a rare case of coincidental programming, Columbus will get another, simultaneous look at these landmark musicals — and their ingenious, groundbreaking use of dance — this weekend as Ohio State's Opera/Music Theatre Department presents *Oklahoma!*, and Otterbein College presents *Carousel*.

THE CHOREOGRAPHERS of these shows couldn't be more different. Yet they have something important in common: Each is following in the dancesteps of Agnes de Mille, the legendary choreographer who made her Broadway debut with *Oklahoma!* and extended her innovative ideas with *Carousel*.

Michael McCord, choreographer of Ohio State's *Oklahoma!*, knows well the demands of the show. He's been in it twice. In particular, he's danced the role of Dream Curly, the fantasy projection of the hero in the critical dream ballet that closes Act 1.

"*Oklahoma!* is a big piece of American musical history," McCord says. "It's a real rouser, so completely American."

McCord acknowledges de Mille's landmark choreography in the original production, but he's not trying to re-create it on the Mershon stage. "If we were doing this as a museum piece, I'd say yes, we'll duplicate the original. But that's not what we're doing here.

"I studied the movie version before I came," he says. "Granted, Agnes de Mille's choreography was a real ground-breaker, but some of it is dated in 1987."

McCord cites the *Many a New Day* number, in which the female chorus behind the heroine Laurey performs a dance unrelated to the mood and action of the book. "The girls do a dance out of nowhere, full of all this business with combing their hair and everything. I just let the dancers cut loose and celebrate having a good time."

WHILE McCORD tries to get the farmers and cowboys of *Oklahoma!* to dance together, Joanne VanSant is covering familiar ground at Otterbein. VanSant

choreographed *Carousel* there 20 years ago.

That's not surprising, since VanSant has choreographed all of the school's spring musicals since her first show, *The Student Prince*, in 1952. She became dean of students in 1964, but she's always found time for the theater.

All that experience doesn't simplify the challenges of *Carousel*, which includes a ballet sequence similar to that in *Oklahoma!*, the explosive *June is Busting Out All Over*, and the show's most daring touch, an extended musical prologue that VanSant has clocked at seven minutes and 20 seconds.

"I've divided it into 14 sections," she says of *The Carousel Waltz* which fills the prologue. "At one point, I have 38 people moving about the stage."

VanSant stresses the prologue is not dance, but specific stage movement to introduce the characters without dialogue. The script, she says, gives some direction, but not much.

"I think of musical theater as pattern and movement," VanSant explains. "That movement has to fit the context of the show. Just like with the acting, the movement needs some motivation."

ONE TRICK VanSant created 20 years ago will resurface in this version. During the second-act ballet involving Billy and Julie's daughter, the carnival troupe from Act 1 returns. VanSant will form the troupe into circles to make a human carousel. "I never wrote down my choreography, but that idea has always stuck in my head."

VanSant, 62, says *Carousel* will be her last spring musical at Otterbein. "This spring has seemed a little harder than in the past, but I never said I wouldn't help again. I absolutely love these students and I'm grateful for the opportunities this has given me. I've certainly learned a heck of a lot."



Cynthia Gregory joins BalletMet for June 3 & 4 performances at the Ohio Theatre to kick off the Columbus Arts Festival.

One of the world's most prominent ballerinas, Cynthia Gregory has been acclaimed by critics everywhere during her 20 years with New York

Dodrill directs 'Carousel' for the second time around

by Marcie Hochwalt

In 1968, before Otterbein had established a theatre department, Dr. Charles Dodrill, chairperson of theatre and dance, directed the classic musical "Carousel," from a strictly liberal arts program.

This year "Carousel" is again coming to Otterbein's stage, again under Dodrill's direction, but this time co-produced by the music and theatre departments.

Dodrill said: "It's a wonderful show. I don't like doing a show over, but this is one that's just been an absolute delight to work on."

During the 19 years between these performances, Otterbein has progressed from no theatre department to one which is nationally recognized.

In 1968 "Carousel" was cast from the general student body; in 1987 Dodrill said the cast members are all music or theatre majors.

Dodrill said: "There is no doubt in my mind the quality has improved. It has a very strong cast and it really shows."

The lead roles are Billy Bigelow, played by Tim Gregory, and Julie Jordan, played by Gina Grogg. Other major parts went to Catherine Randazzo, Christine Cox, Steve Geyer, Tim St. John and Missy Helm.



Gina Grogg ("Julie Jordan") looks on as Tim Gregory ("Billy Bigelow") talks with Catherine Randazzo during a rehearsal for the upcoming production of "Carousel." Photo by Don Paullo

In addition to Dodrill, Mr. Fred Thayer, associate professor of theatre, and Dean Joanne Van Sant, dean of students, are returning from the 1968 performance.

Thayer is returning as the set designer and Van Sant is returning as choreographer.

"Carousel" is generally considered one of the finest works by the Rodgers and Hammerstein team, which also created "Oklahoma," "South Pacific" and "The King and I."

The decision to revive "Carousel" was made a year ago. Dodrill said the musical was chosen because it has a good story, good music and a large cast.

He said generally shows are chosen so that each student generation gets a wide variety of shows, as well as providing a diverse selection each performance year.

Dodrill said this diversity is important to the training of the students, and to the enjoyment of the audience.

"Carousel" also was chosen because it required a large cast. Dodrill said, "With as many students as we have majoring in

this area we look for shows that have a large cast."

Even so, the choice of "Carousel" was not enthusiastically approved at first. Dodrill said, "One of the things that really intrigued me was that when we first picked it we got some comments about why we picked this show."

Catherine Randazzo, who plays Carrie in "Carousel," said "I didn't like the show—I felt like it was such a fluff musical." She has changed her attitude since. "It's very touching and if it's done right the audience will have a warm reaction towards it."

Tim Gregory, who plays Billy, said: "When you think about 'Carousel,' you think about your typical Rodger and Hammerstein musicals, and you think, essentially, fluff. But when you get into the production, you begin to realize as dated as the musical is... it still is quality stuff that still works."