

April 24, 1991

The New Band Wagon

proposed libretto
by David Boles

(PREAMBLE: Many musicals set in a specific time and place... THE SOUND OF MUSIC... LES MIZ... WINDY CITY... THE KING AND I... PHANTOM... do not use a musical score from that particular historic period. Instead, a modern sound is utilized for the composition. A problem with the current adaptation of The BAND WAGON is that both score and book are restricted to the 1950's.

For my adaptation of The NEW BAND WAGON [adding "NEW" allows a little license to rearrange and renovate some of the film's dated specifics], I propose that the current pattern of musicals be reversed: update the libretto to a more current cant and rhythm, and leave the "classic feel" of the music intact.

Another problem with the latest adaptation, is its ill-advised and unyielding adherence to the dialogue, texture and structure of the film. No spirit of invention or blaze of creativity was injected into the musical theatre adaptation to give it an autonomous life of its own.

What follows here, is my brief outline for The NEW BAND WAGON. Not all songs are listed, although I did include a few where I felt a need to remind the heart of the musical's beat.)

Act One

Los Angeles. Because of a scurrilous manager, TONY has failed to pay his taxes for the past ten years. He's broke. He owes the IRS. Once the leading song and dance movie stars of all time, he watches in wretched disbelief as the IRS empties his house of his most cherished possessions: the props and costumes from his most famous film roles.

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The IRS WOMAN, a big fan, relishes the movie memorabilia she's carting off. The phone rings. When TONY tries to answer the call, the IRS WOMAN grabs the phone. TONY pays her a quarter. The IRS WOMAN gives him the phone, smiles and kisses the coin before she gingerly drops it into her pocket. In need of cash, TONY accepts an offer over the phone from his friends LESTER and LILY in New York City, to star in their new Broadway Musical Comedy. TONY hangs up, his spirits are lifted even though he is houseless, quarterless, shoeless and dressed in shabby clothes. The IRS WOMAN takes the phone from TONY and leaves. TONY is alone in a house that used to be filled with the wistful memories of a lifetime. He tries to ease his loneliness by welcoming it in song... (BY MYSELF). The IRS WOMAN returns, and slides TONY'S famous, shiny, patent leather tap shoes across the floor. The IRS WOMAN says that not even Uncle Sam can begin to fill the shoes of America's best hooper. TONY pulls on his shoes and does a spectacular song and dance number... (A SHINE ON YOURS SHOES) as...

....New York City's Times Square falls in around him. During the production number, LESTER and LILY wrap on either side of TONY and excitedly tell him about their new musical comedy. They give TONY an advance on their advance, so he can buy a new suit for the backer's audition... (GOT A BRAN' NEW SUIT).

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TONY, LESTER AND LILY arrive at the backer's audition polished and ready to knock 'em dead with their music and dancing... but they're too late... JEFFREY, the director, has begun without them. JEFFREY is acting out scenes from OEDIPUS. Oedipus?! The Musical?!! LILY and LESTER are heartbroken... their musical comedy score won't fit JEFFREY'S tragic vision of their story. JEFFREY raises the money, and LILY and LESTER vow to collaborate and make the show work... (WHO CAN? YOU CAN!).

GABRIELLE, ballet star turned ingenue, is late the first day of rehearsal. JEFFREY, TONY, LESTER and LILY fume. GABRIELLE finally arrives and apologizes for being late. A scene of frustration between TONY and GABRIELLE leads him to accuse her of being unprofessional. She doesn't care what he thinks. They threaten to quit the show. Quickly, they recant. They each refuse to give the other the satisfaction of being the lone star of the show. They'll do the show together on the following conditions: they refuse to touch, speak or look at one another. They get into costume to rehearse the new Tragi-Comic-Musical...

OEDIPUS: THAT SINGIN' SOOTHSAYING SAVANT!

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TONY, as OEDIPUS, puts on a mask with Broadway-glitter-blood streaming from stylized eye holes while GABRIELLE, as a young JOCASTA, uses a modern-jazz dance routine during their ironically hilarious production number... (RHODE ISLAND IS FAMOUS FOR YOU). JEFFREY and LILY and LESTER are appalled... they've created a disaster! The scene turns into the actual out-of-town production... and ends with tomatoes and rotted cabbage heads being tossed at TONY and GABRIELLE during their first attempted on stage kiss... already a difficult enough task... since they refuse to acknowledge each other's presence by actually touching lips.

Backstage. JEFFREY informs the cast that he is closing the show out of town. TONY takes a stand: he's lost his money, his reputation and a month's worth of sleep, and he refuses to lose the last shred of his dignity by quitting. TONY sings... (WHEN YOU'RE FAR AWAY FROM A NEW YORK TOWN). GABRIELLE joins him in song: for the first time they look into each other's eyes and smile. They turn away in puppy-love embarrassment. LESTER and LILY will stay with the show and fix the rough spots. JEFFREY pledges his support as well.

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They'll find more money to continue on the road. They'll give the audience what they desire: Entertainment! Now, as a team, they begin to rehearse with re-born vim as the final big production number... (THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT) draws the curtain on our Act One.

(MIDAMBLE: I left out PAUL, GABRIELLE'S boyfriend/choreographer and Guru in the film, on purpose. His absence strengthens GABRIELLE by making her an independent "today" woman with her own mind and heart. She doesn't need a man controlling her.

This change also allows us to have a Black/White relationship without the Race issue being brought up by GABRIELLE'S (probably White) lover PAUL. If this show were kept in the 1950's, the Black/White casting idea would have to be abandoned: the show would have to directly address Bigotry and Inter-Racial relationships. In the 1990's, we'll still have to deal with the issue, but we can examine it with subtlety and beauty.

Max told me Betty Comden admitted to him that the second half of THE BAND WAGON film has no plot because Cyd Charisse couldn't act the book scenes. With that firmly in mind, one must admit that the film is, therefore, structurally flawed; and that's why most of the film's exposition is loaded into Act One.

Act Two will be the actual show they put on: The NEW BAND WAGON. The relationship between TONY and GABRIELLE will blossom, wilt and grow again within their NEW BAND WAGON show. The final scene of Act Two will be one of passion and theatricality... as reality and stage illusion mix and become one at the same instant.)

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Act Two

The New Band Wagon:

(TRIPLETS): TONY, JEFFREY and GABRIELLE.

(MISERABLE WITH YOU): LILY and LESTER.

(I LOVE LOUISA): THE COMPANY.

(CHANGED OUR PLAN): TONY and GABRIELLE.

(A NEW SUN IN A NEW SKY): JEFFREY.

(CONFESSION): GABRIELLE.

(I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO CHANGE MY PLANS): TONY.

(LOUISIANA HAYRIDE): THE COMPANY.

(ALONE TOGETHER): TONY and GABRIELLE.

(THE GIRL HUNT): THE COMPANY.

The preceding production numbers will be seamless, even though they may not yet be programmed in the proper running order. The second act structure is still rough and the settings are undecided... all that will fit together when I sit down and formulate the glue binding production numbers. The invisible veil of libretto glue will map the thread of heartbreak, the warp of romance and the prick of passion during TONY and GABRIELLE'S NEW BAND WAGON relationship.

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The final scene is on the bare stage. GABRIELLE expresses her deep love for TONY. He responds in kind. The COMPANY declares their appreciation. GABRIELLE and TONY embrace and kiss for the first time. Is only a NEW BAND WAGON show romance, or is this real life love? The answer is both... or either: the audience shall be free to decide.

THE COMPANY surrounds GABRIELLE and TONY for the final, lavish, reprise of... (THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT) as the curtain falls on Act Two.