

sweet smell of success musical

sweet smell of success musical is a captivating stage adaptation of the classic 1957 film noir drama that has intrigued audiences with its compelling narrative and rich musical composition. This musical version brings to life the intense world of power, ambition, and corruption through a dynamic score and vivid storytelling. The production has garnered attention for its sharp dialogue, memorable characters, and a score that blends jazz, blues, and traditional musical theater elements. This article explores the origins, plot, music, production history, and critical reception of the sweet smell of success musical, providing a comprehensive overview for enthusiasts and newcomers alike. The following sections delve into the background of the musical, its creative team, notable performances, and its impact on contemporary musical theater.

- Origins and Development of Sweet Smell of Success Musical
- Plot and Themes
- Music and Lyrics
- Production History and Notable Performances
- Critical Reception and Legacy

Origins and Development of Sweet Smell of Success Musical

The sweet smell of success musical originated as an adaptation of the 1957 film of the same name, which was itself based on a short story titled "Tell Me About It Tomorrow" by Ernest Lehman. The transition from screen to stage required a nuanced approach to preserve the film's dark themes while

introducing a musical element that could enhance the storytelling experience. The musical's book was written by John Guare, a renowned playwright known for his sharp wit and insightful characterizations. The score was composed by Marvin Hamlisch, with lyrics by Craig Carnelia, combining to create a distinctive sound that reflects the era and mood of the story.

Development Process

The development of the sweet smell of success musical involved extensive workshops and readings to refine the script and score. The creative team aimed to maintain the film's cynical tone and complex characters while using music to deepen emotional resonance. Early versions of the musical experimented with various musical styles before settling on a blend that incorporated jazz influences, reflecting the 1950s setting and the urban atmosphere of New York City.

Creative Team

The musical's success can be attributed to the collaboration of several talented individuals. John Guare's sharp and incisive book provided a strong foundation, while Marvin Hamlisch's composition brought melodic sophistication. Craig Carnelia's lyrics added depth and nuance to the characters' voices. The direction and choreography in various productions further shaped the musical's presentation, emphasizing its dramatic and rhythmic qualities.

Plot and Themes

The narrative of the sweet smell of success musical centers around J.J. Hunsecker, a powerful and ruthless newspaper columnist in 1950s New York City, and Sidney Falco, a struggling press agent eager to succeed at any cost. The story explores themes of manipulation, ambition, moral compromise, and the corrupting influence of power within the media industry. These complex characters navigate a world where personal gain often overrides ethics, creating a tense and morally ambiguous atmosphere.

Main Characters

- **J.J. Hunsecker:** A domineering and influential Broadway columnist who wields his power to control others.
- **Sidney Falco:** An unscrupulous press agent desperate to climb the social ladder.
- **Susan Hunsecker:** J.J.'s sister, caught between loyalty and independence.
- **Dallas:** A nightclub singer and Sidney's love interest, representing vulnerability and hope.

Major Themes

The musical examines the dynamics of power and influence, particularly within the realm of media and celebrity. It also addresses the cost of ambition, portraying how the pursuit of success can lead to ethical degradation. The narrative exposes the darker side of fame and the personal sacrifices made to achieve and maintain status.

Music and Lyrics

The sweet smell of success musical features a score that skillfully captures the mood of 1950s New York while advancing the plot and deepening character development. The music combines elements of jazz, blues, and traditional musical theater styles, creating an atmosphere that is both sophisticated and emotionally charged. The lyrics are crafted to reveal character motivations and internal conflicts, often employing sharp wit and poetic imagery.

Musical Style and Influences

Marvin Hamlisch's composition draws heavily from jazz idioms to reflect the urban setting and tension inherent in the story. The arrangements incorporate brass and rhythm sections typical of mid-century jazz ensembles, providing a backdrop that is both moody and energetic. This choice of musical style enhances the narrative's noir qualities and underscores the characters' emotional states.

Notable Songs

- *"A Friend to Me"* – A soulful number that reveals Sidney Falco's desperation and willingness to compromise.
- *"The Sweet Smell of Success"* – The titular song embodies the allure and danger of power and influence.
- *"I'm Not Your Friend"* – A tense duet between J.J. and Sidney demonstrating their adversarial relationship.
- *"The Girl Who Has Everything"* – Sung by Susan Hunsecker, exploring themes of independence and control.

Production History and Notable Performances

The Sweet Smell of Success musical premiered in the early 2000s after a series of developmental workshops and out-of-town tryouts. Its initial production was met with interest due to the involvement of notable theater artists and the adaptation of a classic film. Over time, the musical has seen various revivals and productions across regional theaters, each bringing new interpretations to the material.

Original Broadway Production

The musical opened on Broadway with a cast that included experienced performers skilled in both acting and singing. The production design emphasized the stark, stylish atmosphere of 1950s New York, with lighting and set pieces that evoked the urban landscape and its underlying tensions. Despite mixed reviews, the show was praised for its ambitious score and strong performances.

Regional and International Productions

Following the Broadway run, the sweet smell of success musical has been staged by numerous regional theaters and companies abroad. These productions often highlight different aspects of the story, sometimes emphasizing the noir elements or the musical sophistication. The adaptability of the show has contributed to its continued presence in the musical theater repertoire.

Critical Reception and Legacy

The sweet smell of success musical has received a spectrum of critical responses since its debut. Critics have lauded the musical score and the compelling adaptation of a complex narrative, while some have noted challenges in balancing the dark themes with musical theater conventions. Nonetheless, the musical is recognized for its artistic ambition and contribution to the genre of film-to-stage adaptations.

Critical Acclaim

Reviewers have highlighted the sharpness of the book and the evocative musical score as key strengths. Performances, particularly those portraying J.J. Hunsecker and Sidney Falco, have been singled out for their intensity and depth. The musical's ability to maintain suspense and tension through song has been praised as a notable achievement.

Impact on Musical Theater

The sweet smell of success musical has influenced the genre by demonstrating how dark, morally complex stories can be effectively adapted into musical format. Its fusion of jazz and traditional musical theater has inspired subsequent productions to explore diverse musical styles. The show remains a reference point for adaptations that seek to balance narrative depth with musical innovation.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'Sweet Smell of Success' musical about?

'Sweet Smell of Success' is a musical based on the 1957 film and the 1950 novel of the same name, focusing on the ruthless columnist J.J. Hunsecker and his manipulation of the press and those around him in 1950s New York City.

Who composed the music for 'Sweet Smell of Success' musical?

The music for 'Sweet Smell of Success' was composed by Marvin Hamlisch, with lyrics by Craig Carnelia.

When did the 'Sweet Smell of Success' musical premiere?

'Sweet Smell of Success' premiered in 2002 at the Martin Beck Theatre on Broadway.

Who are the main characters in 'Sweet Smell of Success' musical?

The main characters include J.J. Hunsecker, a powerful newspaper columnist, and Sidney Falco, an ambitious press agent trying to gain Hunsecker's favor.

How was the critical reception of 'Sweet Smell of Success' musical?

The musical received mixed reviews; while the score and performances were praised, some critics

found the book and pacing challenging.

Is there a cast recording available for 'Sweet Smell of Success' musical?

Yes, a cast recording of the Broadway production of 'Sweet Smell of Success' is available for fans and collectors.

Has 'Sweet Smell of Success' musical won any major awards?

'Sweet Smell of Success' received several Tony Award nominations, including Best Original Score and Best Orchestrations, but did not win major awards.

Additional Resources

1. *Sweet Smell of Success: The Story Behind the Musical*

This book delves into the creation and development of the "Sweet Smell of Success" musical, exploring its origins from the 1957 film and the challenges of adapting a classic story for the stage. It includes interviews with the creators, behind-the-scenes anecdotes, and insights into the musical's unique score and choreography. Readers gain a deeper appreciation of the artistic vision that brought the story to life in a new format.

2. *The Art of Adaptation: From Film to Stage with Sweet Smell of Success*

Focusing on adaptation techniques, this book examines how "Sweet Smell of Success" was transformed from a sharp, cynical movie into a dynamic and engaging musical. It highlights the creative decisions involved in translating screenplay dialogue and cinematic elements into songs and stage action. The book is a valuable resource for theater enthusiasts and professionals interested in the adaptation process.

3. *Broadway's Dark Side: Exploring Themes in Sweet Smell of Success*

This analytical work explores the darker themes of ambition, power, and corruption as portrayed in the

"Sweet Smell of Success" musical. It compares these themes with those in the original film and discusses how the musical's score and staging enhance the narrative's intensity. The book also contextualizes the story within the broader landscape of Broadway dramas.

4. Musical Scores and Lyrics: The Soundtrack of Sweet Smell of Success

A detailed exploration of the musical compositions and lyrical content of "Sweet Smell of Success," this book analyzes the work of Marvin Hamlisch and Craig Carnelia. It discusses how the music supports character development and story progression, providing examples of key songs and their significance. The book is ideal for music students and fans interested in the technical aspects of musical theater.

5. Behind the Curtain: Production Design in Sweet Smell of Success

This book offers a comprehensive look at the visual and technical elements that shaped the "Sweet Smell of Success" musical, including set design, costumes, lighting, and direction. It features interviews with designers and directors, revealing how their creative choices contributed to the overall mood and storytelling. The book serves as an insightful guide to the complexities of mounting a successful Broadway production.

6. Actors and Characters: Bringing Sweet Smell of Success to Life

Focusing on the performers, this volume discusses how actors approached the complex characters of "Sweet Smell of Success," particularly the roles of J.J. Hunsecker and Sidney Falco. It includes actor interviews, rehearsal notes, and discussions of character interpretation and development. The book highlights the challenges and rewards of embodying morally ambiguous figures on stage.

7. The Legacy of Sweet Smell of Success: Influence on Modern Musicals

This book traces the impact that the "Sweet Smell of Success" musical has had on contemporary theater, analyzing its stylistic and thematic influences on later productions. It covers critical reception and its place in Broadway history, noting how it helped pave the way for more complex and character-driven musicals. The book is perfect for readers interested in the evolution of musical theater.

8. From Page to Stage: The Screenplay and Script of Sweet Smell of Success

An in-depth comparison of the original screenplay by Ernest Lehman and the stage script of the

musical, this book highlights the narrative changes and adaptations made for theatrical performance. It offers annotated excerpts and commentary on how dialogue and scenes were modified to suit the musical format. This resource is valuable for students of screenwriting and playwriting.

9. *Critical Perspectives on Sweet Smell of Success*

This collection of essays and reviews presents various critical viewpoints on the musical adaptation of "Sweet Smell of Success." Contributors analyze its artistic merits, cultural significance, and reception by audiences and critics alike. The book provides a well-rounded understanding of the production's strengths and limitations within the broader context of musical theater.

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