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The Musical Worlds Of Lerner And Loewe



Synopsis

Lyricist Alan Jay Lerner (1918–86) and composer Frederick Loewe (1901–88) wrote some of the most successful musical shows on Broadway and in motion-picture history: *Brigadoon*, *My Fair Lady*, *Camelot*, *Gigi*, and *Paint Your Wagon*. They worked with stars such as Rex Harrison, Julie Andrews, Richard Burton, Audrey Hepburn, Louis Jourdan, and Robert Goulet. Lerner was raised on Park Avenue, attended Choate and Harvard, lost sight in one eye from a boxing injury, and was legendary for his eight marriages and countless affairs on the side. Loewe was born in Berlin and in 1925 came to New York, where he played piano in silent-movie theaters. After a brief career as a boxer and then as a Montana cowboy, he returned to New York and to songwriting. In *The Musical Worlds of Lerner and Loewe*, Gene Lees has fashioned a readable, in-depth portrait of two creative talents: how they met and joined forces to create some of the finest musical theater, and also how marriages, legendary affairs, addictions, and backstage friction affected their art in many surprising ways.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gene Lees' extensive biography on both the lives and careers of Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe is an OK book overall, with some glaring omissions and strident personal asides keeping it from becoming the definitive look at their lives. The author correctly states that Alan Jay Lerner's life was documented to a far greater degree than Frederick Loewe's; and thus, most of the biography's chapters concern Lerner and his endless parade of wives, as well as the drug and gambling

addictions which wasted his later life. But it is the musicals which they composed which most interested me, and while the major ones receive adequate coverage, especially "My Fair Lady", "Gigi", and "Camelot", their pre-"Brigadoon" shows: "Life of the Party", "What's Up" and "The Day Before Spring" barely get a passing mention, with the author apparently agreeing with Lerner's assessment that they were slight, unimportant vehicles. More disappointing to me was the author's omission of the stage version of "Paint Your Wagon" which he dismisses out of hand, slighting Loewe's robust Americana score and saving all his venom for the wretched film version, which bears only a pale resemblance to the stage show. After the team's breakup, much of the remainder of the book is a downward spiral, looking at the various failed attempts by Lerner at recapturing the magic of his successes with Loewe, and passing glances at Loewe's retirement after "Camelot". Sordid newspaper accounts of Lerner's last few marriages, his addictions and gambling excesses, fill the pages, and it all becomes a bit sour. Additionally, the author quotes extensively from Lerner's own biography, although he takes great care to note the extensive amount of self-created myths which Lerner was infamous for. Having great love and respect for all of Lerner & Loewe's musicals made me hope that this biography would illuminate their talents, but Lees seems more concerned with exposing their personal flaws and weaknesses than celebrating what made their shows sparkle.

I was wondering how Gene Lees could follow up his book "Inventing Champagne" with another book about Lerner and Loewe, and the answer is that he couldn't. This is essentially the same book -- the same anecdotes, the same zingers, the same observations retold. There's a little more information given about the early life of Frederick Loewe, but who cares about his professional boxing triumphs? Gene Lees also seems to harbor a personal distaste for Alan Jay Lerner, so I wonder about the purpose of this book, which was among his last.

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