



GUTHRIE  
THEATER

Wurtele Thrust Stage / June 22 - Aug 25, 2019



# Guys and Dolls

A Musical Fable of Broadway

based on a story and characters of DAMON RUNYON

music and lyrics by FRANK LOESSER

book by JO SWERLING and ABE BURROWS

directed by KENT GASH

PLAY GUIDE

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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

## Guthrie Theater Play Guide

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PHOTO: RODNEY GARDINER AND KIRSTEN WYATT IN GUYS AND DOLLS (T CHARLES ERICKSON)

“A musical is what happens when text collides with motion collides with song collides with spectacle. And spectacle can be the human heart; it doesn’t necessarily have to be a helicopter crashing. You can go see ballet in its purity; you can go to a recital to hear music by itself. But what the American musical does so thrillingly is bastardize these forms into something that is exhilarating and compelling and deeply moving.”

George C. Wolfe, quoted in “The Greatest Musical: ‘I Can’t Live With *West Side Story* Not Being Among the Finalists,” *New York Magazine*, January 7, 2011

## About This Guide

This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show’s history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read

up on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you’re a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We’re glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of this extraordinary story. [G](#)

### DIG DEEPER

If you are a theater company and would like more information about this production, contact Dramaturg Carla Steen at [carlas@guthrietheater.org](mailto:carlas@guthrietheater.org).



PHOTO: THE CAST OF GUYS AND DOLLS (T CHARLES ERICKSON)


## Synopsis

**“You’ve seen me roll for a hundred G’s. But I’ve got a little more than dough riding on this one.”**

– Sky Masterson to Harry the Horse in *Guys and Dolls*

The city that never sleeps is home to a colorful, comic world of gamblers, missionaries and nightclub dancers. Among them are Nathan Detroit, who runs the oldest established permanent floating craps game in New York City; his ever-loving showgirl fiancée of 14 years, Miss Adelaide; Sky Masterson, a high-stakes gambler who’ll bet on just about anything; and Miss Sarah Brown, a sergeant in the Save-A-Soul Mission who hopes to save the denizens of Broadway from their sinful ways.

Nathan operates his craps game on the down low to avoid both the police and Adelaide, who makes him promise to end the game. There are a lot of big players in town, but he can’t find a place to hold the game. To get the dough he needs to secure a location, he bets Sky that he can’t take Sarah to Havana. Sky accepts the challenge and promises Sarah that he’ll deliver a dozen genuine sinners to her upcoming prayer meeting if she has dinner with him. She accepts only after learning the mission might close.

Meanwhile, Adelaide and the cops both stumble upon Nathan planning the craps game. To get him out of a pickle, Nathan’s fellow gamblers say they’re throwing him a bachelor party, and he agrees to elope with Adelaide. But when Nathan finally lands a place for his craps game, it blows up both men’s romances and only the biggest bet of all can bring the dolls back to their guys. 

### SETTING

Several locations on Broadway near Times Square, Manhattan, and Havana, Cuba, in the mid-1950s

### CHARACTERS

**Nathan Detroit**, a gambler who runs a floating craps game

**Miss Adelaide**, his fiancée

**Benny Southstreet**, one of Nathan’s gambler friends

**Nicely-Nicely Johnson**, one of Nathan’s gambler friends

**Lt. Brannigan**, a Manhattan police officer

**Mimi**, a Hot Box dancer with Adelaide

**Miss Sarah Brown**, a sergeant at the Save-A-Soul Mission

**Arvide Abernathy**, her grandfather

**Martha**, a missionary

**Agatha**, a missionary

**General Matilda B. Cartwright**, the head of the Save-A-Soul Mission

**Sky Masterson**, a gambler

**Angie the Ox**, a gambler

**Rusty Charlie**, a gambler

**Harry the Horse**, a gambler visiting from Brooklyn

**Big Jule**, a gambler visiting from Chicago

**Joey Biltmore**, owner of the Biltmore Garage

# When a Gamble Pays Big: The Story of *Guys and Dolls*

By Carla Steen  
Dramaturg

The names of Cy Feuer and Ernest H. Martin may not appear as authors of *Guys and Dolls*, but without the young producers' inspiration and perseverance, the musical comedy wouldn't exist. In 1949, Feuer and Martin were coming off the modest success of their first foray into producing with *Where's Charley?* — an adaptation of *Charley's Aunt* — with music and lyrics by fellow Broadway newcomer Frank Loesser. While they were looking for their next project, Martin's wife Nancy suggested they consider the anthology of short stories she was reading: Damon Runyon's *Guys and Dolls*.

Runyon was a newspaper columnist and sports writer who had, beginning in the 1930s, created a popular series of short stories chronicling the lives of fictional characters who populated Times Square and Broadway. In dozens of stories and with a distinctive comic voice, Runyon wrote about the gamblers, dancers, safecrackers, pickpockets, coppers and other denizens of what became known as Runyonland.

Feuer and Martin loved Runyon's stories and, without an idea of what the plot would be, knew their next show would be titled *Guys and Dolls*. Runyon had passed away in 1946, so they contacted his estate to secure the rights. Not unsurprisingly, the estate agent asked which story they wanted to adapt, as many of them had already been optioned for movies. But the producers hadn't gotten that far; they just knew they wanted the style, characters and verve of Runyon's stories. They

agreed to an unusual contract that would allow them to name the specific story later.

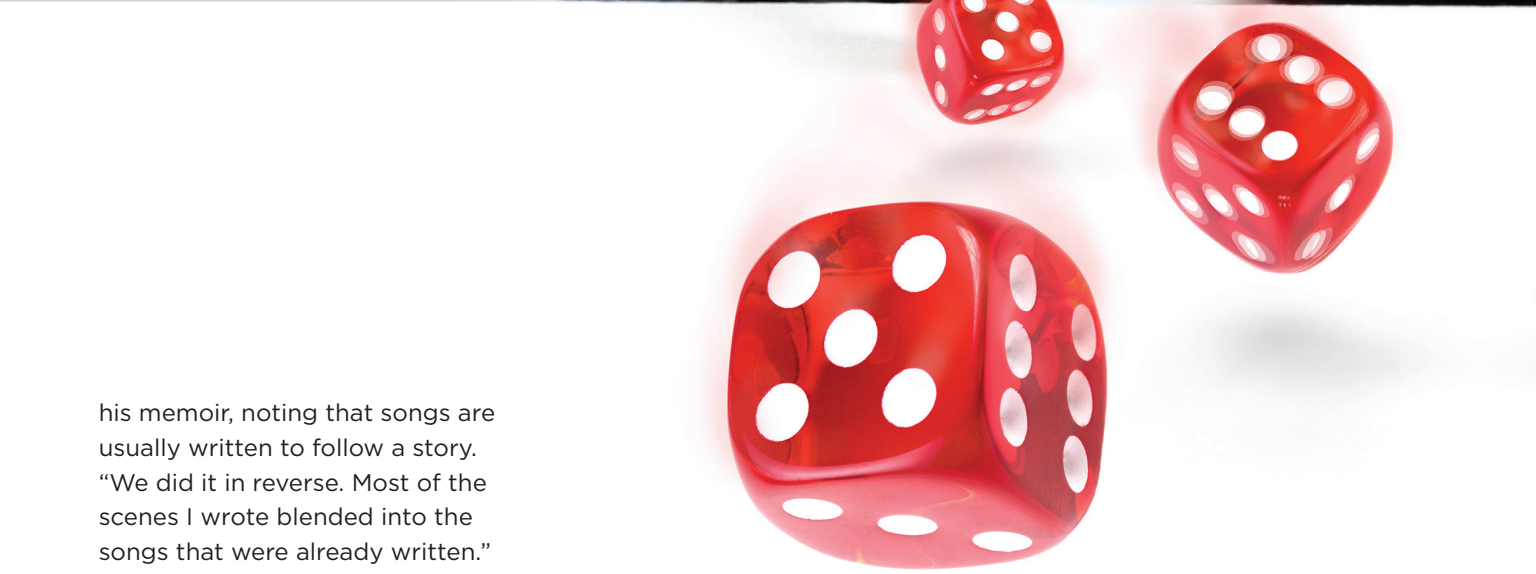
They promptly called Loesser, who agreed to do the project in action if not in words. Martin joked about Loesser's inability to make an official commitment: "Several of our shows, he didn't agree to do them until after they got on the stage! He never said, 'Okay, I'll write *Guys and Dolls*.' Never. One day he hands us four songs, and now we knew he was doing it!" Loesser wrote several songs, including "Fugue for Tinhorns," before there was even a plot for the show.

Feuer and Martin finally identified the Runyon story to adapt — "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown," which introduces the Save-A-Soul missionary and her encounter with the high-flying gambler Sky Masterson. The producers hired film writer Jo Swerling to draft the musical's book (or libretto), but

Feuer and Martin weren't satisfied with the results. They realized the story needed an early significant bet to establish the stakes.

Swerling didn't agree, so they parted company. The producers hired a new book writer, Abe Burrows, who was Feuer's high school classmate and a popular radio personality and comedy writer. There was just one problem: He had never written a Broadway show. Feuer and Martin convinced him that taking on a high-risk challenge was perfectly fitting for a story about gamblers.

Not only did Burrows have an uncanny ability to capture the spirit, tone and language of Runyonland without directly quoting or parodying the stories, he was also able to write a book that incorporated Loesser's songs, which were originally written for Swerling's book. "Frank Loesser's songs were the guideposts for the libretto. It's a rare show that is done this way," Burrows recalled in



his memoir, noting that songs are usually written to follow a story. “We did it in reverse. Most of the scenes I wrote blended into the songs that were already written.”

Feuer and Martin sent Burrows’ completed scenes to George S. Kaufman — the only director they seriously considered for the project. Though ironically not a fan of musicals, Kaufman agreed to the project and suggested many changes and improvements, including the addition of a second storyline to parallel the Miss Sarah Brown/Sky Masterson romance. Thus, Nathan Detroit and his perpetual fiancée Miss Adelaide were born out of Runyon’s story “Pick the Winner.” (A third story, “Blood Pressure,” also fuels the world of *Guys and Dolls*, though characters from the musical can be found in numerous Runyon stories.)

Kaufman oversaw Burrows as he wrote the rest of the book, which allowed Feuer and Martin


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***Guys and Dolls* opened on Broadway on November 24, 1950, to almost universal critical and popular acclaim, winning five Tony Awards and running for three years.**

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to focus on casting and arranging for rehearsals and out-of-town tryouts. In Philadelphia, the script, songs and performances were fine-tuned. “Fugue for Tinhorns” finally settled into place as the opening number, and “The Oldest Established” was written to provide a first-act introduction to the endearing gamblers.

*Guys and Dolls* opened on Broadway on November 24, 1950,

to almost universal critical and popular acclaim, winning five Tony Awards and running for three years. Burrows and Loesser would collaborate once more, when Feuer and Martin had the idea that the book *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying: The Dastard’s Guide to Fame and Fortune* could be turned into a musical befitting the new era of the Kennedy administration — yet another gamble with a big payoff. 

## Responses to *Guys and Dolls*

I don't think I ever had more fun at a musical comedy than I had the other night, when an association of strangely gifted men put on a Broadway epic known as *Guys and Dolls*. There have been loftier moral and aesthetic experiences, like *Show Boat* and *South Pacific*; there have been more enduring musical accomplishments, like *Porgy and Bess*; there have been occasions when the humor was clearly on a more ambitious level, like *Of Thee I Sing*; there have been more sensational individual performances, like practically anything involving Miss Ethel Merman. There has, however, been nothing I can remember that sustained a higher general level of sheer entertainment.

Wolcott Gibbs, "Bouquets, Brickbats and Obituaries," *The New Yorker*, December 2, 1950

*Guys and Dolls*, at which I am privileged to take a peek last evening, is a hundred-per-cent American musical caper, cooked up out of a story called "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown," by the late Damon Runyon, who is such a scribe as delights to give the English language a nice kick in the pants. ...

Personally, I found myself laughing ha-ha last night more often than a guy in the critical dodge has any

right to. And I am ready to up and drop on my knees before Frank Loesser, who writes the music and lyrics. In fact, this Loesser is maybe the best light composer in the world. In fact, the chances are that *Guys and Dolls* is not only a young masterpiece, but the Beggar's Opera of Broadway.

Kenneth Tynan, in his 1952 review of the London production of *Guys and Dolls*, reprinted in *Curtains*, New York: Atheneum, 1961

[Loesser's] previous effort, *Guys and Dolls*, had opened in November 1950 and would run 1,200 performances, a tremendous popular and critical success in the mature strain of musical comedies descending directly from *Oklahoma!*, including *Kiss Me, Kate*, and continuing into the 1950s. It is mature in the sense that the techniques of musical-dramatic integration, so new and almost mysterious in *Oklahoma!*, are by now completely mastered and seem almost easy.

*Guys and Dolls* is a typical example of the embellished love story tradition against which *The Most Happy Fella* stands out so clearly. The libretto of Abe Burrows makes a double plot of "The Idyll of Sarah Brown," a short story of Damon

Runyon, by adding a number of characters from Runyon's other stories. That Nathan Detroit and Adelaide are in love, as are Sky Masterson and Sarah Brown, is an accepted fact from early on in the play. The audience does witness the capitulation of Sarah, but it is not a slow process and not a dramatic issue. At issue are the obstacles to true happiness. Nathan has a compulsion to run a floating dice game, and the unpredictable exigencies of this profession interrupt his relationship with Adelaide: Their wedding has been postponed for fourteen years. On the other side, Sarah, a Salvation Army mission officer, is put off by Masterson's principal activity of high-stakes betting.

There is no question that *Guys and Dolls* is a consummate example of the comic love-story formula at its best. Perhaps its greatest virtue is the translation of Runyon's highly ironic language, with its curious insistence on the present tense and sophisticated vocabulary in the mouths of gangsters and gamblers, into musical numbers.

Joseph P. Swain, *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990

*Guys and Dolls* achieves its musical power and unity from the rhythms associated with specific characters. The “guys” and “dolls,” even when singing their so-called fugues, display a conspicuous amount of syncopation and half-note and quarter-note triplet rhythms working against the metrical grain. ...

The clearest and most consistently drawn rhythmic identity occurs in Adelaide’s music. Even when “reading” her treatise on psychosomatic illness in “Adelaide’s Lament,” this convincing comic heroine adopts the quarter-note triplets at the end of the verses. ... By the time she translates the symptoms into her own words and her own song, the more common rhythmically conventional eighth-note triplets are almost unceasing.

In order for Loesser to convince audiences that Sarah Brown and Sky Masterson are a good match, he needed to make Sarah become more of a “doll” like Adelaide; conversely, he needed to portray Sky as more gentlemanly than his crapshooting colleagues. He accomplishes the first part of this task by transforming Sarah’s rhythmic nature, giving the normally straitlaced and rhythmically even “mission doll” quarter-note triplets in “I’ll Know” and syncopations in “If I Were a Bell.” ...

After audiences learn from his dialogue with Sarah that Sky’s interest in and knowledge of the Bible sets him apart from the other “guys,” his music tells us that he is capable of singing a different tune. His very first notes in “I’ll Know” may depart from Sarah’s lyricism, metrical regularity and firm tonal harmonic underpinning, but after Sarah finishes her chorus, audiences will discover that Sky

shares her chorus and verse as well as chapter and verse.

Following Sarah’s more “doll-like” acknowledgement of her changing feelings toward Sky in “If I Were a Bell,” Sky is almost ready to initiate their second duet, “I’ve Never Been in Love Before.” But first he needs to tell Sarah in “My Time of Day” (pre-dawn) that she is the first person with whom she wants to share these private hours. The metrical irregularity, radical melodic shifts and above all the harmonic ambiguity that mark his world before he met Sarah capture the essence of Sky’s dramatic as well as musical personality.

**Geoffrey Block, *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical From Show Boat to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009**

PHOTO: JUSTIN KEYES AND THE CAST OF GUYS AND DOLLS (T CHARLES ERICKSON)







## Damon Runyon

Damon Runyon (1880–1946) was a newspaper columnist and sportswriter who carved out a niche in American letters when he began writing short stories about the characters he encountered on Broadway around Times Square. The world he wrote about was so original and specific that it became known as Runyonland, and the language he used was dubbed “Runyonese.” He based some of his

characters on real-life people — including Walter Winchell, Arnold Rothstein, Al Capone and others — but the world they inhabit in his stories is an invention all his own. Usually narrated by an unnamed character sitting in for Runyon himself, the stories are dotted with slang, street idioms, present-tense verbs and a strong sense of honor among gamblers, thieves and other shady characters.

Runyon was born in Kansas in 1880 and grew up in Colorado. Following in the footsteps of his newspaper editor father, Runyon was a full-time reporter by age 15. Just shy of 18, he lied about his age so he could join in the war against Spain in 1898. After a few itinerant years, he spent four years working at the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver before joining *New York American* as a sportswriter in 1911.

His career took off in New York, where his vivid writing found an eager audience. His first Broadway short story, “Romance in the Roaring Forties,” was published in *Cosmopolitan* in 1929 and met with immediate approval. More stories followed during the next decade and proved so popular that many were adapted into films, including *Lady for a Day* and *Little Miss Marker*. His stories were published in magazines, most often *Collier’s*, before being collected and published as anthologies. He continued writing newspaper columns, and selections of his favorites were also published as collections.

Well-regarded as a journalist, remarkable for his sports writing and indelible for his short stories, Runyon is a singular voice among American writers. His career was cut short when he died of throat cancer at age 66. After his death, Runyon’s friend and fellow journalist Walter Winchell launched the Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation in his honor. [G](#)



PHOTO: THE CAST OF GUYS AND DOLLS (T CHARLES ERICKSON)

## Responses to Damon Runyon

Ask any of us who jot down notes for the various gazettes in New York our idea of a big-time, first-rate, Grade-A reporter — and eleven times out of ten, the retort will be “Damon Runyon!” ...

He was content, until recently, it appears, to rest on his laurels as a sports chronicler for the more widely read journals throughout the country. When you discussed sports and sports experts — you naturally discussed Damon Runyon. You’d think a fellow who enjoyed that distinction would let it go at that.

Then suddenly like an old Dempsey left hook — he startled his best critics and severest friends with magazine articles. The sort that not only were read and enjoyed, but the sort that tilted circulation. From these delightfully comical stories

about Broadway, the prize ring and the banditti — embroidered in a language rich with style — came a book by Damon called *Guys and Dolls*.

Stop reading this foreword and phone for a copy of it — and then thank Walter. Particularly, “Romance in the Roaring Forties,” which is in it, and then choke from laughing — but loud! I say — send for *Guys and Dolls* now — because after you’ve ached all over reading it — you will be better prepared to take the laugh convulsion in this, his newest hit.

Walter Winchell, in the foreword to *Blue Plate Special* by Damon Runyon, 1934

It was Damon Runyon’s gifted pen that gave Broadway’s characters — the gambler, the race-track

bookie, fight managers, theatrical agents, promoters, synthetic big “shots,” the habitués of the wide street — an enthralling luster for a host of readers. His appellations for these characters were known to schoolboys and college students. A man was a “guy”; a girl, “doll”; money, “potatoes.” ...

And Damon Runyon was as much a part of the New York scene as his Broadway creations. Consuming quarts of coffee (he never touched liquor), he would sit for long hours running into the early dawn, playing host to a never-ending procession of characters.

The setting invariably was Lindy’s restaurant on Broadway, “Mindy’s” of many of his short stories, where his mad and enticing assortment of characters met. In Lindy’s where one “tore a herring” with

consummate ease, Damon Runyon would raptly absorb Broadway's newest additions to the English language, listen to the latest departures from the conventional. A Runyon short story or article would ultimately blossom forth.

**"Damon Runyon, 62, Columnist, is Dead,"**  
*The New York Times*, December 11, 1946

Of all the pop formalists, the purest and strangest may be Damon Runyon, the New York storyteller, newspaperman and sportswriter who wrote for the Hearst press for more than thirty years, inspired a couple of Capra movies and died in 1946. Runyon's appeal ... came from his mastery of an American idiom. We read Runyon not for the stories but for the slang, half found on Broadway in the nineteen-twenties

and thirties and half cooked up in his own head. ...

The Narrator is, crucially, one of the lowest-status figures in Runyon's bicameral world, where the petty hustlers and horseplayers who haunt Lindy's by day are set against their sinister opposites, hit men and gangsters, who mostly hail from Brooklyn and Harlem and arrive at night. (The chorus dolls of the Hot Box nightclub move between the two.)

"One evening along about seven o'clock I am sitting in Mindy's restaurant putting on the gefilte fish, which is a dish I am very fond of, when in come three parties from Brooklyn wearing caps as follows: Harry the Horse, Little Isadore and Spanish John" — that's

the essential Runyon opening. The Narrator has to be careful; he is telling stories, often, of what elaborate politesse it takes to keep from getting killed, and his care is the source of a lot of his comedy. A wise guy on the lower end of the totem pole is of necessity an expert in courtesy. ...

Reading the thirties stories straight through, one is startled by the lack of characterization. Runyon doesn't really study gangsters; he just makes up a cookie-shape called Gangster and bakes extras as needed. The lack of sentiment and the love of language are what's new in his work. Where the other newspaper-made writers tended to be, as newspaper columnists still are, moralistic — Lardner, although a master of common speech, is intent on unmasking the cruelty beneath the cheerfulness of American life — Runyon's stuff is strictly amoral, with a tearjerking moment set down here and there like last night's carnation floating by in the gutter. No one grows or changes or learns, everyone's motive is mercenary, everyone is flat as a pancake, no moral drama takes place — all the life is in the language. Like Wodehouse, whom he in some ways resembles, Runyon inherited a comedy of morals and turned it into a comedy of sounds, language playing for its own sake.

**Adam Gopnik, "Talk It Up,"** *The New Yorker*,  
March 2, 2009



PHOTO: JOEL LIESTMAN AND JON ANDREW HEGGE IN *GUYS AND DOLLS*  
(T CHARLES ERICKSON)

# Loesser, Swerling and Burrows



Composer and lyricist **Frank Loesser** (1910–1969) was a natural musician who resisted the formality of the


field for many years. His father and brother were pianists, but Frank's tastes were eclectic. He dropped out of college at age 15 and held a variety of non-music jobs.

In 1936, he headed to Hollywood and wrote song lyrics for film in the pre-war years. While serving

in the Air Force, Loesser found his voice as a composer, writing more than 100 wartime songs, including "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," "What Do You Do in the Infantry?" and "Ballad of Rodger Young." After the war, he continued to write both music and lyrics, including "Baby, It's Cold Outside" for the film *Neptune's Daughter*.

His first Broadway musical was *Where's Charley?* in 1948, which was followed by *Guys and Dolls* two years later. The songs from *Guys and Dolls* are often cited as among the best created for musical theater.

Loesser's work also included a film score for *Hans Christian Andersen* in 1952; the musical *The Most Happy Fella* in 1956, for which he wrote the music, lyrics and book; a failed musical, *Greenwillow*, in 1960; and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* in 1961, for which he and Abe Burrows received the Pulitzer Prize.

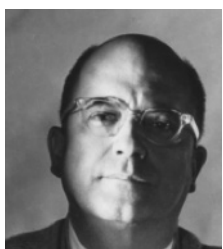
Loesser established his own music publishing company, Frank Music, which enabled him to retain control over his own work and provided him a means to aid younger musicians. He died of lung cancer at age 59. 



Born in Russia, **Jo Swerling** (1897–1964) was an American playwright, screenwriter, lyricist and

vaudeville sketch writer who grew up on the Lower East Side of New York City. He began his career in the 1920s as a reporter and feature writer and eventually became a playwright, launching his career with *The Street Cinderella*, an early Marx Brothers comedy.

After moving to Hollywood and working on scores of films, he returned to Broadway in 1950 and co-wrote the book for *Guys and Dolls* with Abe Burrows, which won them a Tony Award for Best Musical.



**Abe Burrows** (1910–1985) was born and raised in New York City, where he launched a career on Wall Street

before becoming a radio writer and comedian working the Borscht Belt.


In 1938, he moved to Hollywood to write for "The Rudy Vallee-John Barrymore Show." Burrows became a much-desired party guest, as his quick wit allowed him to write songs on the spot. (*The Abe Burrows Song Book* was published in 1955.) In 1941, he helped create the "Duffy's Tavern"

radio comedy and was its chief writer for four years.

His break as a performer came when he was a writer for "The Joan Davis Show" and warmed up the studio audience. CBS radio executives took notice and offered Burrows his own show. "The Abe Burrows Show" launched in 1947 and quickly gained a national following, which led to a second show, "Breakfast With Burrows," and forays into television with "This Is Show Business" and "Abe Burrows' Almanac."

Burrows broke into Broadway when the *Guys and Dolls* producers hired him to write a new book after Jo

Swerling's book wasn't working. He established a lengthy career in the theater as a director, playwright and play doctor.

Burrows' work also included the musicals *Can-Can* and *Silk Stockings* (both with scores by Cole Porter); *Say, Darling*, with songs by Adolph Green, Betty Comden and Jule Styne; his own adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*; and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, which he also directed. His memoir, *Honest, Abe: Is There Really No Business Like Show Business?*, was published in 1980. He passed away in 1985. 

## Responses to Loesser and Burrows

Abe Burrows, the playwright, play doctor, director, songwriter, piano player, radio and television writer, and radio, television, nightclub, summer-hotel and house-party performer, is essentially a Renaissance-type man who thinks fruitfully in the historical present, communicates in a rich vulgate and, in moments of excitement, lapses into words like “teleological” or references to Carlyle, Sir William Osler, Horace, Max Beerbohm, James Stephens and Dr. Morris Fishbein, which he did the other day.

Burrows is currently only co-writing, rewriting and directing *Three Wishes for Jamie*, a musical comedy opening on Broadway this week, and appearing every Wednesday night on a television quiz show known as “The Name’s the Same.” When *Jamie* is out of the way, he will write and direct *The Baker’s Wife*, after which he intends to finish his autobiography (he has been under contract to a publisher for roughly four years and has long since spent the advance) and write a new batch of songs. He already has a title for one of them: “Yesterday They Told You You Wouldn’t Go Far. Last Night You Opened and They

Were Right.” He takes between 55 seconds and two minutes to write songs, exclusive of titles.

Gilbert Millstien, “The Ratiocinating Mr. Burrows,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 1952

You can’t be condescending about Frank’s musical genius. He was one of the greatest songwriters the United States ever produced. His songs were authentic Americana. He reached the top of his form with

*Guys and Dolls*, in which he sensed the rhythms of American speech and captured them in that score.

Composer William Schuman, president emeritus of The Juilliard School, who collaborated with Loesser on the song “In Love With a Memory of You,” quoted in “Frank Loesser, Composer, Dead,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 1969

The public Loesser was a cerebral, tough, sharp man with wit and charm. In a working relationship,

PHOTO: JEREMIAH JAMES AND OLIVIA HERNANDEZ IN *GUYS AND DOLLS* (T CHARLES ERICKSON)



he was a demanding perfectionist with a short fuse on his temper, his anger directed against himself as much as anyone else. But all of these qualities were surface. Somewhere, buried very deep, was a gentle something that wanted to “make them cry.” ...

Frank was one of the song men in the musical theater who “did it all.” A man with the technique and talent to cover the whole range of what is needed to get a musical show on. Ballads, character things, group songs, comedy numbers and anything else, including a good overture. There haven’t been many men who could “do it all” and, among the few who could, Frank ranks with the greatest.

**Abe Burrows, “Frank Loesser: 1910–1969,”**  
*The New York Times*, August 10, 1969

Measured quantitatively against the large output of some of his more prolific contemporaries, the volume of what [Loesser] left behind is, alas, small. But apply the yardsticks of quality, of execution, of brilliance of idea, and it’s an entirely different horse race. In that sweepstakes Loesser moves ahead of the field and stays there. In the argot of the Broadway types he so deftly portrayed in *Guys and Dolls*, Loesser has class, he has style, he has that extra-special something that is blue-ribbon all the way.

**Max Wilk, ““Guys and Dolls”: Frank Loesser,”**  
*They’re Playing Our Song*, New York:  
Da Capo Press, 1997

The first book that we had done [for *Guys and Dolls*], by Jo Swerling, wasn’t right. We wrestled with it for weeks, but it didn’t capture the Runyon quality at all. So we finally brought in Abe Burrows to rewrite it based on a

different concept and a new story line — the business of the wager, Sky betting all the horse-players their souls. But by this time Frank had written an entire score ... to the original wrong book! Then Abe rewrote the book to suit Frank’s score, keeping all of Frank’s songs! In other words, Frank’s instincts on it were so right that Burrows actually fashioned the new book from song to song, created scenes about the songs that Frank had already written!

**Producer Ernest H. Martin, quoted in ““Guys and Dolls”: Frank Loesser”** by Max Wilk,  
*They’re Playing Our Song*, New York:  
Da Capo Press, 1997

You’d think that for my initial professional outing the first lyricist I’d imitate on the way to finding my own niche would be Oscar Hammerstein II, but as most of the lyrics for *Saturday Night* indicate, my model turnout to be Frank Loesser. This was an unconscious choice, although it may have been influenced by my knowing that Loesser had turned *Saturday Night* down when Lemuel Ayers appropriately enough had offered it to him. More likely, it’s because I knew and admired his work, especially the urban songs, like those in *Guys and Dolls*.

Loesser ... was a master of conversational lyrics, though with a difference: He tailored his lyrics to the individual characters at hand. ... When they were characters he could understand instinctively, urban or raffish or both, as in *Guys and Dolls* or *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, Loesser was able to perform the rare trick of sounding modestly conversational and brilliantly dexterous at the same time. ...

Loesser was one of the very few lyricists who were genuinely funny. The lyrics of Gershwin and Hart received appreciative smiles and sometimes even chuckles, but not the kind of hearty laughter that songs like “Adelaide’s Lament” got. Even Porter, Harburg and Berlin got laughs only occasionally. The reason for this can in part be attributed to Loesser’s blossoming when musicals were becoming more grounded in character after the *Oklahoma!* revolution. If the character was funny, as in “Adelaide’s Lament,” then the lyric didn’t have to generate guffaws entirely on its own. And if the situation was funny as well, the lyrics didn’t have to do anything at all except emphasize it. ...

Most impressive to me are the ideas behind Loesser’s songs. The concepts of “Make a Miracle” from *Where Charley?* and “Fugue for Tinhorns” from *Guys and Dolls*, among many others, are so strong that the lyrics need not be brilliant in execution: They can ride on their notions alone and bring the house down. Which they did, and still do.

**Stephen Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat: Collected Lyrics (1954–1981) With Attendant Comments, Principles, Heresies, Grudges, Whines and Anecdotes***, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010

# Selected Stories by Damon Runyon

## “ROMANCE IN THE ROARING FORTIES” (1929)

Waldo Winchester takes a fancy to Miss Billy Perry, Dave the Dude’s doll. Instead of roughing Waldo up, as the narrator expects, Dave the Dude arranges for the couple to get married. But at the last minute, Waldo’s wife Miss Lola Sapola shows up, tipped off by the narrator. Dave the Dude and Miss Billy Perry get married instead.

## “BLOOD PRESSURE” (1930)

The narrator, just diagnosed with high blood pressure, spends a harrowing evening on the town with Rusty Charley: Nathan Detroit’s craps game, Ikey the Pig’s stuss game, a run-in with coppers at Knife O’Halloran’s and then to Charley’s house, where his wife attacks both Charley and the narrator with a bat. The next day, the narrator has a huge bump on his head but his blood pressure is down. *This is one of the source stories for Guys and Dolls.*

## “MADAME LA GIMP” (1931)

Dave the Dude pulls off an elaborate hoax to make Madame La Gimp appear to be a high-society, well-married woman because her daughter, her daughter’s fiance and the fiance’s family are visiting from Spain and Madame La Gimp has told her daughter a pack of lies. He gets an apartment at the Marberry, and Broadway regulars pretend to be everyone from the husband to

the U.S. Vice President. *The 1933 film Lady for a Day, directed by Frank Capra, is an adaptation of this story.*

## “THE HOTTEST GUY IN THE WORLD” (1931)

Big Jule’s been in Canada recovering from a gunshot wound and shooting rats. He’s “hot” to the cops, but he’s come back to visit his sick mother and see Kitty Clancy. Keeping a low profile because Lt. Brannigan lives near his mother, he walks over with the narrator. They encounter a circus gorilla holding a baby on Madison Square Garden. Big Jule shoots the gorilla between the eyes and saves the baby, who turns out to belong to Lt. Brannigan and Kitty.

## “THE SNATCHING OF BOOKIE BOB” (1931)

It’s 1931 and money is scarce, so Harry the Horse, Spanish John and Little Isadore kidnap people for ransom. They snatch Bookie Bob, who can’t call his wife, so he calls his partner Sam Salt, who can’t get the money for a day or two. To pass the time, the guys place bets with Bob, but keep losing. Bob pays 25 G’s for the ransom, but the guys owe him 50 G’s, plus a commission to be paid to the finger (who said Bob would make a good snatch), who turns out to be Bob’s wife.

## “LITTLE MISS MARKER” (1932)

Sorrowful is left with a little girl as a marker for a bet. He grows attached to her, takes her home, moves apartments and hires a chauffeur and nurse. She gets pneumonia after running barefooted from the apartment to the Hot Box in search of Sorrowful, and she dies several days later. Her father shows up (too late), claiming amnesia and saying now everything will be fine. Sorrowful asks for the deuce the man owes him and walks away. *This story was adapted into the 1934 film of the same name starring Shirley Temple.*

## “THE IDYLL OF MISS SARAH BROWN” (1933)

Sky Masterson is the highest player and falls hard for mission worker Miss Sarah Brown, but when she finds out he’s a gambler, she rejects him. At Nathan Detroit’s craps game, a chance remark sets Sky betting on Brandy Bottle Bates’ soul, but Bates keeps winning. Sarah enters, throws the dice against a deuce and wins Sky’s soul. They get married and Sky joins the mission: “I never seen a guy look happier,” says the narrator. Turns out Bates’ dice were loaded. *This is the primary source story for the Sky Masterson/Miss Sarah Brown storyline in Guys and Dolls.*

**“BROADWAY COMPLEX” (1933)**

Drama critic Ambrose Hammer has a professional conflict with actor Fergus Appleton, who wants to marry Hammer’s boss’s daughter Florentine. Emcee Cecil Earl has a complex that makes him believe he’s other people. Fergus manipulates Cecil into believing he’s a murderer in order to kill Fergus’ invalid wife and free him to marry Florentine. Hammer learns of the plot and convinces Cecil that he’s Don Juan. As a result, Cecil wins the girl and Hammer doesn’t lose his job.

**“PICK THE WINNER” (1933)**

The narrator goes to Miami with Hot Horse Herbie and his fiancée of 10 years, Miss Cutie Singleton. Herbie convinces a professor from Princeton to place bets. Before a big race, Cutie’s fortune teller describes winds, which Herbie interprets to mean that Breezing Along will win (which doesn’t happen). The professor and Cutie elope, and he later writes Herbie to say that he took “winds” as a clue to bet on Mistral, who won 10 to 1. *This is the primary source story for the Miss Adelaide/Nathan Detroit storyline in Guys and Dolls.*

**Runyonese Slang in *Guys and Dolls*****according to Hoyle**

A phrase meaning “according to the rules,” derived from Edmond Hoyle (1672–1769), an authority on card playing

**action**

Gambling opportunities

**bum steer**

Bad information or advice

**clocking**

Watching, noticing

**dodge**

Trick or gimmick to elude or cheat

**fade me**

To bet against the player holding the dice

**heat is on**

Police pressure

**high players**

Gamblers playing for big stakes

**lettuce**

Money, especially paper bills

**marker**

An IOU for gambling debt

**no-good-nik**

An unreliable person

**Nu**

A Yiddish expression meaning “What can you do?”

**one hundred percent**

Completely, with no artifice

**paint cards**

A poker term for face cards (jack, queen and king)

**parlay**

A series of cumulative bets, usually on horse races; the winnings from one race are used to stake the next and can result in a higher payout

**tinhorn**

A second-rate class of gambler, derived from the dice game chuck-a-luck where gamblers shook dice in a metal can

**weight for age**

A way of saying “All things being equal,” derived from horse racing, in which some horses carry extra weight so the race is more equitable and competitive

**well-heeled**

Wealthy





PHOTO: THE CAST OF GUYS AND DOLLS (T CHARLES ERICKSON)

## People, Places and Things in the Play

### PEOPLE

#### Emily Post (1872-1960)

Author of *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home*, which was published in 1922 and became an enormously popular guide to manners.

#### Galahad

A knight from Arthurian legend and the son of Lancelot, who achieved a supreme spiritual love through his quest for the Holy Grail. His name is usually connected to courtesy, nobility and integrity.

#### Guy Lombardo (1912-1977)

A big band musician from Canada famous for his long-running annual radio broadcasts on New Year's Eve that featured his band playing "Auld Lang Syne."

#### Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

The horses that were part of Sky's winning parlay, named after three figures from the book of Daniel in the Bible. Refusing to bow down to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, the three Jewish men were thrown into a fiery furnace and believed God would protect them. Nebuchadnezzar then saw four figures in the fire, the fourth being God. When he brought them out of the fire, the three men were not even singed.

### PLACES

#### Biltmore Garage

The six-floor garage shared by the Commodore and Biltmore Hotels near Grand Central Terminal in midtown Manhattan. The Biltmore was built in 1913; the Commodore and garage were built in 1919.

#### East Cicero, Illinois

Cicero is a western suburb of Chicago. There is no East Cicero, so it could be a way of saying "Chicago" in code.

#### Havana

The largest city and political and cultural center of Cuba, located about 1,300 miles from New York City. The U.S. and Cuba had close ties until 1959, and Havana was a popular tourist destination for Americans, especially in winter.

#### Klein's

Short for S. Klein department store, which opened on Union Square in 1910 and was known as "a magnet for bargain hunters."

**Mindy's**

Runyon's name for Lindy's deli at Broadway and 51st Street, which was opened by Clara and Leo Lindemann in 1921 and became a popular hangout for Broadway and vaudeville folk. Lindy's was known for its cheesecake, enormous sandwiches and apple pancakes.

**New Rochelle**

A suburb of New York City in Westchester County, just north of the city.

**Niagara**

Refers to Niagara Falls, a city in western New York that has been a popular honeymoon destination since the 1800s.

**Pimlico**

Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore, Maryland, which has hosted the annual Preakness Stakes horse race since 1873.

**Radio City Music Hall**

An art deco theater in New York City that opened in 1932 as a destination for quality entertainment. It was conceived by John D. Rockefeller as the cornerstone of Rockefeller Center.

**Rogers Peet**

An American ready-made men's clothing company founded in 1874 by Marvin N. Rogers and Charles Bostwick Peet with a motto of "Honesty, quality, respectability and customer service."

**Roseland**

A ballroom that opened at Broadway and 51st Street on December 31, 1919. It had two bands and held various contests and other stunts to boost attendance.

**Roxy**

The largest movie theater in the world when it opened in 1927 at 50th Street and 7th Avenue in New York City. It seated nearly 6,000 people and offered standing room for 500 more.

**Saks**

A Manhattan department store that opened in 1924 by rival retailers Horace Saks and Bernard Gimbel on 5th Avenue between 49th and 50th Streets.

**Saratoga**

Saratoga Race Course in Saratoga Springs, New York — a horse racing track located about 165 miles north of New York City.

**Scarsdale**

An upper-class suburb of New York City in Westchester County, just north of the city.

**Wanamaker's**

A department store founded by John Wanamaker in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1876. There used to be a Wanamaker's at Broadway and 8th Street in Manhattan, but it closed in 1954.

**THINGS****Bacardi**

A brand of rum made by the Bacardí family in Santiago de Cuba, Cuba, beginning in 1862.

**Barbasol**

A brand of shaving cream developed by Frank Shields in 1919. In the 1950s, the formula changed from a thick cream to a fluffy foam with the arrival of aerosol cans.

**Bromo Fizz**

A nickname for Bromo-Seltzer, an antacid composed of acetaminophen (pain reliever), sodium bicarbonate (antacid) and citric acid that was advertised as a remedy for headaches exacerbated by an upset stomach and jumpy nerves.

**Brooks Brothers**

The oldest clothing retailer in the U.S. It was founded in 1818 in New York City and considered "The authority on classic American style."

**craps game**

A dice game where bets are placed based on the probability that a pair of dice will result in certain numbers. Some numbers (7) will occur more frequently than others (2, 12). Craps evolved from a parlor game that the French brought to the U.S. in the early 19th century. The numbers 2, 3 and 12 were called "crabs," and in New Orleans, players began calling the game "craps."

**Equipoise**

Also known as "Big Chocolate," this thoroughbred racehorse won 29 stakes from 1930 to 1935.

**folderol**

A useless ornament or accessory; a trifle.

**Gideon Bible**

Gideons International does its Christian evangelical work in part by distributing copies of Bibles and the New Testament. Because most early Gideons were travelers, the idea to put Bibles in hotel rooms was proposed to help them "be more effective witnesses." The Bible Project launched in 1908 and has since supplied more than two billion Bibles or New Testaments.

**la grippe**

Influenza or the flu; from the French “to seize.”

**Hollanderize it**

A. Hollander & Son, located on West 29th Street in Manhattan, was the leading fur cleaner of its day. Their process included putting the furs in a drum with sawdust and chemicals and swirling them around to keep them fresh.

**Howard Johnson’s**

A chain of American restaurants founded in 1925 in New England that began as an ice cream store. The first Howard Johnson’s opened on Times Square in the late 1940s on Broadway and 49th Street.

**morning line**

A list created by a bookie before a race of all the entries and their odds, which is posted before betting begins.

**streptococci**

A strain of bacteria that can cause rheumatic fever, scarlet fever, puerperal fever, strep throat, tonsillitis and other infections affecting the upper respiratory tract.

**Telegraph**

*The Morning Telegraph*, a New York newspaper that was published from 1897 to 1972 and considered “America’s oldest authority on motion pictures, theatre and turf” (“turf” meaning horse racing).

**Vitalis**

A hair tonic for men by Bristol-Myers that offers a greaseless way to style hair.

## How to Play Street Craps

**Street craps, or shooting dice, is played without a craps table, so it differs slightly from casino craps.**

**Needs**

- A pair of identical dice
- Players to make wagers on the numbers rolled

**Basics**

Craps is based on how often different combinations of numbers appear when the dice are rolled. For example, 2 (1 + 1) and 12 (6 + 6) each have only one possible combination, while 7 has six combinations (1 + 6, 6 + 1, 2 + 5, 5 + 2, 3 + 4, 4 + 3). So rolling a 7 is more likely than rolling a 2 or 12.

Rolls in craps fall into three categories:

- A natural (7, 11)
- A point (4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10)
- Craps (2, 3, 12)

No roll is necessarily a bad roll — it all depends on the bet. Someone may win when craps is rolled while someone else may lose.

**Betting**

The shooter is chosen. Anyone can be the shooter and anyone can win on any roll. The shooter makes a bet first, followed by all the other players in a clockwise direction. The other players can cover part or all of the shooter’s wager, but betting continues until the whole of the shooter’s wager is covered.

In *Guys and Dolls*, Big Jule says, “I’m shooting five hundred,” and Benny Southstreet responds with, “Take two hundred.” In this case, Benny is covering \$200 of

Big Jule’s \$500 bet. If Big Jule wins, Benny loses.

**First Roll**

All three outcomes are at play in the first roll (also known as the “come out” roll): a natural, a point or craps.

- If they roll a natural (7, 11), the shooter wins.
- If they roll craps (2, 3, 12), the shooter loses.
- If they roll a point (4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10), play continues. In order to win, the shooter must roll that same number again *before* rolling a 7. No money is paid out yet.

**Point Rolls**

The shooter now needs to roll the point (in Big Jule’s case in *Guys and Dolls*, a 10) before rolling a 7. There aren’t new wagers — this is all still playing out the first roll. Any other number has no payout, but shooting continues until either a 7 or the point is rolled.

Additional first rolls may be played as long as there are players willing to bet. In *Guys and Dolls*, after playing for 24 hours, Big Jule still forces additional first rolls, eventually betting only with Nathan. Sky gets the highest-stakes first roll after singing “Luck Be a Lady.” The musical doesn’t say what Sky rolls, but it has to be a 7 or 11 for Sky to win on one roll of the dice. **G**

# From Director Kent Gash

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**My relationship with *Guys and Dolls* began at age 14 when I played the role of Nicely-Nicely Johnson in a citywide summer theater program in Denver, Colorado. What I loved about the musical then still remains: It's funny, fast and colorful, and it represents a version of New York City that is full of rhythm, resilience and an aspirational energy. Even the skyscrapers are reaching for something.**

New York City is one of the most compressed and stimulating cities in the world. It's like the genie in *Aladdin*: This gigantic presence has to fit into this tiny space. I've lived in the city since 1982, and there's still a sense that everyone is striving to be the world-class version of themselves. *Guys and Dolls* embodies this idea, as we see crapshooters, nightclub dancers and missionaries alike hustling to be their best and achieve a certain level of respectability.

There's a real code of honor among Damon Runyon's characters. Your word is your bond. If not, you risk becoming a pariah. Today, you hear words like "honor" and "character" and they can have no meaning at all. In Runyonland, being true of heart carries deep meaning. Adelaide *really* loves Nathan and wants him to marry her. And Nathan *really* loves her. If you don't

believe that, then we haven't told the right story. It's a celebration of people realizing their capacity to love and finding their authentic selves within that love.

Love is a powerful thing in *Guys and Dolls*. It changes many people and many souls, including ours. That's a side of the musical we sometimes forget. It's easy to remember the flash, the dancing and the jokes. But beyond the fun and nostalgia is its heart. There are some extraordinary things to be learned from *Guys and Dolls* about camaraderie, loyalty, honor, friendship and love.

I've always believed that a more fitting title would have been *Dolls and Guys* because the women are smarter than the men. They *have* to be. The men are stuck in an arrested adolescence where the most important thing in their lives is a craps game. Meanwhile, Sarah



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**In this production, our goal is to honor the intent of the original creators and celebrate what they were celebrating. But it will feel less like your grandparents' *Guys and Dolls* and more of the moment.**

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is trying to keep a mission afloat, save souls and make the world a better place. Adelaide is working at a nightclub so she can save enough money to make a home with Nathan. So they wait for these charming, loveable, knuckleheaded men to grow up. Thankfully, both Nathan and Sky come to realize that love is far more important than playing a game or winning a bet.


In this production, our goal is to honor the intent of the original creators and celebrate what they were celebrating. But it will feel less like your grandparents' *Guys and Dolls* and more of the moment. For example, without changing

the words, we've taken a unique and surprising approach to the scene in Havana that reveals a very self-possessed and empowered Sarah Brown who Sky can't help but fall in love with. If you've never seen *Guys and Dolls*, you'll be delighted by all the things that have delighted audiences since 1950. And if you've seen it before, there will be enough surprises to make it feel like you're watching a new musical.

*Guys and Dolls'* capacity to surprise and delight has always been there, but it's so much more than that. The story spends most of its time in the Save-A-Soul Mission — and

isn't that the mission of all theater and entertainment and art? To save the soul, touch the soul, ignite emotion and make us feel something? I don't know if theater actually changes our minds. But I do think it expands our souls as we gain a greater understanding of the human experience.

That's why we cast a diverse ensemble of wonderful actors who look like the streets of New York City and make the story feel vivid and alive. It's a classic musical that belongs to everyone, so everyone should be part of telling the story. That hasn't always been the case with *Guys and Dolls*, but it's a story about what it means to aspire to be your truest self. And everyone is welcome in that.

*My work on this production is dedicated to composer and musical director Darius Smith.* 

## For Further Reading and Understanding

### ALSO BY FRANK LOESSER AND ABE BURROWS

*Where's Charley?* Music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, book by George Abbott based on the Brandon Thomas play *Charley's Aunt*, 1948.

*Can-Can*. Book by Abe Burrows, music and lyrics by Cole Porter, 1953.

*Silk Stockings*. Book by Abe Burrows, George S. Kaufman and Leueen MacGrath, music and lyrics by Cole Porter, 1955.

*The Most Happy Fella*. Book, music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, based on Sidney Howard's *They Knew What They Wanted*, 1956.

*Say, Darling*. Book by Marian Bissell, Richard Bissell and Abe Burrows, music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, 1958.

*Greenwillow*. Music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, libretto by Lesser Samuels and Frank Loesser, based on B. J. Chute's novel *Greenwillow*, 1960.

*How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. Music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, book by Abe Burrows, 1961.

*Cactus Flower*. Written by Abe Burrows, based on a play by Pierre Barillet and Jean-Pierre Grédy, 1965.

### ABOUT FRANK LOESSER, ABE BURROWS AND *GUYS AND DOLLS*

Abe Burrows, *Honest, Abe: Is There Really No Business Like Show Business?*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980.

Cy Feuer, with Ken Goss, *I Got the Show Right Here: The Amazing, True Story of How an Obscure Brooklyn Horn Player Became the Last Great Broadway Showman*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

Keith Garebian, *The Making of Guys and Dolls*, Niagara Falls, NY: Mosaic Press, 2002.

Susan Loesser, *A Most Remarkable Fella: Frank Loesser and the Guys and Dolls in His Life, A Portrait by his Daughter*, Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2000.

### ABOUT DAMON RUNYON

Jimmy Breslin, *Damon Runyon: A Life*, New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1991.

John Mosedale, *The Men Who Invented Broadway: Damon Runyon, Walter Winchell & Their World*, New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1981.

Jean Wagner, *Runyonese: The Mind and Craft of Damon Runyon*, Paris: Stechert-Hafner, Inc., 1965.

### RECORDINGS

*Guys and Dolls: a musical fable of Broadway*, cast album of the original Broadway production, starring Vivian Blaine, Robert Alda, Sam Levene and Isabel Bigley, 1951.

*Guys and Dolls*, original cast album of the 1976 revival, arranged and conducted by Howard Roberts, starring Ernestine Jackson, Norma Donaldson, James Randolph and Robert Guillaume.

*Guys and Dolls: the new Broadway cast recording*, 1992 revival, starring Peter Gallagher, Jose De Guzman, Faith Prince and Nathan Lane.

### FILM

*Guys and Dolls*, written and directed by Joseph Mankiewicz, starring Marlon Brando, Jean Simmons, Frank Sinatra, Vivian Blaine, Robert Keith and Stubby Kaye, 1955.

### ONLINE

Dozens of stories by Damon Runyon as published in *Collier's* magazine.  
<http://www.nesssoftware.com/www/runyon.php>