Cabin in the Sky
Howard Pollack

in The Ballad of John Latouche: An American Lyricist's Life and Work
Published in print: 2017 Published Online: November 2017
Item type: chapter

Cabin in the Sky was one of Latouche’s first major triumphs, an all-black 1940 musical for which he wrote the lyrics: music by Vernon Duke; book by Lynn Root; choreography by George Balanchine and Katherine Dunham; and sets by Boris Aronson; Ethel Waters and Dooley Wilson starred. The show proved a critical success, applauded for the sophistication of its score and the novelty of its choreography and set design; this included kudos in the black press, even as some progressive white critics took the work to task for perpetuating stereotypes. The show subsequently became a movie directed by Vincente Minnelli, with new music by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg, and starring also Lena Horne. This chapter discusses differences between the stage and film versions, and further explores revivals of the stage show over the years, and the work’s continued controversial critical reception.

Desegregating Broadway
Carol J. Oja

in Bernstein Meets Broadway: Collaborative Art in a Time of War
Published in print: 2014 Published Online: November 2014
Item type: chapter

The cast of the original production of On the Town included six African Americans (four dancers and two singers). This chapter uses On the Town as a lens to explore the struggle for racial equality in performance during World War II. A cluster of case studies offer perspectives on the era’s mixed-race performance. They include early productions of Marc Blitzstein’s The Cradle Will Rock (1937-38) which employed a mixed-
race chorus and a black choreographer (Clarence Yates); the so-called “collaboration” of the black choreographer Katherine Dunham and her white colleague George Balanchine on the choreography of Cabin in the Sky (1940); the production of Black Ritual (Obeah) (1940), employing African American dancers and choreographed by the white dancer Agnes de Mille for Ballet Theatre’s inaugural season; and the temporary closure of Harlem’s Savoy Ballroom (1943), which famously featured mixed-race dancing. The chapter also analyses the racial dynamics onstage in On the Town.

**Under My Skin Musicals and Race, Musicals and Sexuality**

Richard Barrios

in Dangerous Rhythm: Why Movie Musicals Matter

Published in print: 2014 Published Online: May 2014
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199973842.003.0012
Item type: chapter

This chapter provides a two-part examination of musicals and their minorities, ethnic and sexual. From Hallelujah! in 1929 through Cabin in the Sky and Stormy Weather in the 1940s, the musical gave a few more chances to African-American performers than were usually allowed in other mainstream films. Carmen Jones and Ray were successes, Porgy and Bess and The Wiz were failures, and rock ’n’ roll and hip-hop occasionally peek through more conventional musical forms. Hispanic and Asian performers and musical styles tend to be less visible, while gay artists were occasionally present, subtly on the screen and conspicuously behind the scenes. However, Cole Porter has suffered two bad biopics and the Village People’s Can’t Stop the Music was—all evidence to the contrary—not supposed to be truly gay.

**Where Do They Come From (and Where Do They Go)?**

Richard Barrios

in Dangerous Rhythm: Why Movie Musicals Matter

Published in print: 2014 Published Online: May 2014
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199973842.003.0003
Item type: chapter

This chapter charts the constantly fraught relationship between musical theatre and musical film—mutually dependent, often hazardous, sometimes respectful, occasionally disastrous. It considers musicals from The Desert Song in late 1928 to Anything Goes and Show Boat in 1936,
to Annie Get Your Gun and My Fair Lady and Evita and onward to Les Miz. The chapter then examines the difficulties—and potential rewards—in adapting theatrical shows onto film. The chapter looks at the problem of too much fidelity or too little, the question of how many songs should be retained, problems related to length, the conflicts between realism and stylization, and the relative merits of perceived staginess versus those of cinematic potential.