Mel Brooks has capitalised on adapting material between theatre and film in order to sustain his long career in show business — a strategy clearly apparent in the invention and prolonged life of his film The Producers (1968). This process started with The Producers itself, which Brooks originally manufactured largely by appropriating content from Broadway shows. This film, best understood as a jarring hybrid between Broadway and Hollywood, made Brooks's name as a director, and in later years, gradually became a ‘cult’ work with film critics, in part, for its ‘theatrical’ qualities. Brooks then capitalised on that critical popularity by remediating his 1968 film into a Broadway musical, The Producers (2001–7). That version was a massive commercial and critical success internationally. Following that project, Brooks then prolonged the work through adaptation into yet another Hollywood film, The Producers (2005).

This chapter analyzes the circumstances of Levine's sale of his company, Embassy, to the Avco Corporation in 1968. Because of various interrelated factors, corporations were looking to take over film
companies in the mid- to late 1960s, and Levine stood to benefit greatly. Embassy was privately owned, had a huge library of films that were attractive to television, was not burdened by real estate or equipment, and had just had a huge success with The Graduate. Levine turned all of these positive points to his advantage and sold Embassy to Avco for an astonishing $40 million in the bubble created by the corporate feeding frenzy. This chapter also investigates two of Levine’s productions from this time, The Producers and The Lion in Winter, both of which stand as examples of Levine’s continued willingness to take risks.

Millennial Stages
Robert Brustein

Published in print: 2006 Published Online: October 2013
Item type: book

This book offers a unique perspective on the American stage and its artists. The author examines crucial issues relating to theater in the post-9/11 years, analyzing specific plays, emerging and established performers, and theatrical production throughout the world. He relates our theater to our society in a manner that reminds us why the performing arts matter. The book records the author's thinking on the important issues “roiling the national soul” at the start of the twenty-first century. His opening section explores the connections between theater and society, theater and politics, and theater and religion, and is followed by reviews of such landmark productions as The Producers and Spamalot, Long Day's Journey into Night and King Lear. In his final section, the author reflects on people and places of importance in the world of theater today.

Positions and Polemics
Robert Brustein

in Millennial Stages: Essays and Reviews 2001-2005

Published in print: 2006 Published Online: October 2013
Item type: chapter

This chapter discusses how the events during 9/11 have forever destroyed the innocence of Americans, as well as their craving for art and entertainment. For three or four days after September 11th, all Broadway shows, The Producers included, were cancelled. New openings were delayed for a week or more. The Roundabout revival of Stephen
Sondheim’s Assassins was postponed until further notice because, as the director, Joe Mantello, observed, it is a musical “which asks audiences to think critically about various aspects of the American experience,” and in light of the murderous assault on our nation, “this is not an appropriate time to present a show which makes such a demand.” Especially when the musical is about the assassination of American presidents.

Coda

Petra Rau

in Our Nazis: Representations of Fascism in Contemporary Literature and Film

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Item type: chapter

This chapter examines the intertextual strategies and visual grammar of Quentin Tarantino’s alternative history film Inglourious Basterds which deals with the role the cinema in a successful plot to assassinate Hitler. It argues that the film exploits our fascination with fascism and its iconography in a thoroughly ambivalent fashion and through the characteristic trademark of hyperbolic violence. Tarantino’s database narrative refers to war films and Westerns (genres that legitimise violence) but its rather more self-reflexive take on fascism must also be seen in the context of cinematic precursors that send up the audience’s habitually disavowed fascination with fascism, farces such as Mel Brooks’ The Producers and Helmut Dietl’s Schtonk!.