

# Rodgers & Hammerstein's *OKLAHOMA!* An Experience L.A. Event

Tuesday, September 20, 2022

Ahmanson Theatre  
Downtown Los Angeles

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- *Oklahoma!* is a classic American musical by Rodgers & Hammerstein that originally premiered on Broadway in 1943.
- *OKLAHOMA!* is director Daniel Fish's 2019 revival, which won the Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical.

## OKLAHOMA!

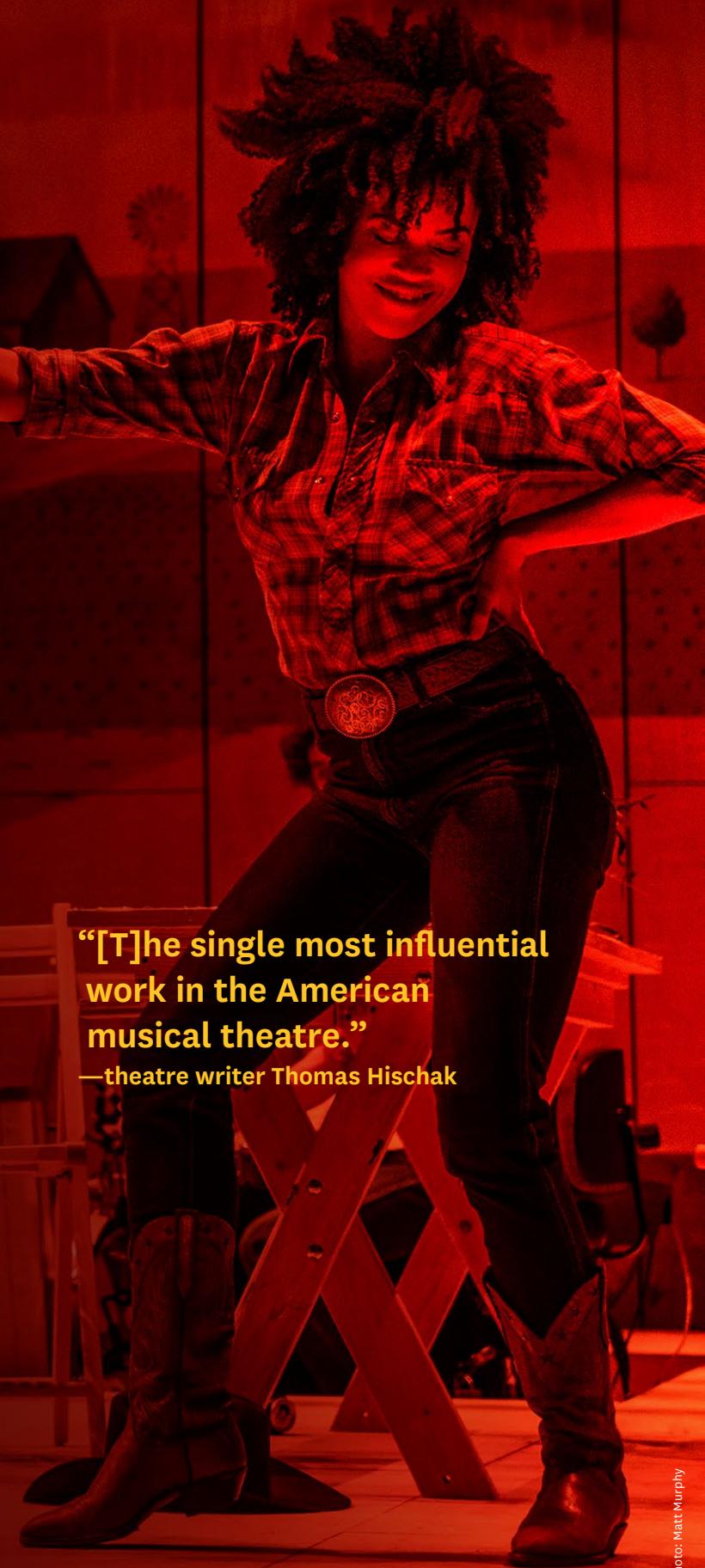
*Oklahoma!* premiered on Broadway in 1943. It was “the first fully integrated musical play and its blending of song, character, plot and even dance would serve as the model for Broadway shows for decades,” wrote Thomas Hischak. An Oscar-winning film version came out in 1955. For decades, *Oklahoma!* has been one of the most frequently performed American musicals, from school productions to professional revivals.

The musical was based on a 1930 play, *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs. The setting of the original musical production was the Indian and Oklahoma Territories in 1906, one year prior to Oklahoma's becoming a U.S. state. At the time, much of what is now the state of Oklahoma was called Indian Territories, an area where the United States had forcibly relocated Native American tribes from the Southeast over the course of a century. By 1906, ranchers from Texas and other settlers were also living in the area.

*OKLAHOMA!* follows the original script and score faithfully, while radically updating the show for the 21st century.

“[T]he single most influential work in the American musical theatre.”

—theatre writer Thomas Hischak



## RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN

*Oklahoma!* was the first collaboration between Richard Rodgers (music) and Oscar Hammerstein II (lyrics). Their artistic partnership would go on to produce numerous classics of what has been deemed the golden age of American musicals, including *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*. Rodgers & Hammerstein's musicals won 42 Tony Awards, 15 Academy Awards, two GRAMMY Awards, and two Emmys.



Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II

## DANIEL FISH

Daniel Fish is the director of *OKLAHOMA!* Fish's work spans and sometimes blurs the boundaries of theater, film, and opera, and is known for being experimental. His work has been seen at theatres and festivals throughout the U.S. and Europe. Fish is a graduate of Northwestern University's Department of Performance Studies and a recipient of the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts for the Theater.

## CHOREOGRAPHY

The original *Oklahoma!* was choreographed by Agnes de Mille. De Mille was an established ballet choreographer who had also worked in modern dance when she was asked to work on *Oklahoma!*, her first musical and first Broadway show. De Mille created the famous 18-minute "dream ballet" for the original *Oklahoma!*—introducing the idea of using dance to advance the plot of a musical, in a sequence with no dialogue and only movement. This would become a hallmark of musical theatre, and de Mille would go on to choreograph more than a dozen musicals, including *Brigadoon* and *Paint Your Wagon*, as well as ballets for American Ballet Theatre.

John Heginbotham choreographed this revival production of *OKLAHOMA!* Like de Mille before him, *OKLAHOMA!* marked his first time choreographing a musical. Coming from a dance rather than a theatre background, Heginbotham was a member of the Mark Morris Dance Group from 1998 to 2012 and is co-founder and director of Dance Heginbotham.

## CENTER THEATRE GROUP

The nonprofit Center Theatre Group is one of the largest theatre companies in the United States, offering year-round programming at the Mark Taper Forum, the Ahmanson Theatre, and the Kirk Douglas Theatre. The company has been producing theatre for more than 50 years, and regularly programs award-winning revivals as well as world premieres.

## THE AHMANSON THEATRE

The Ahmanson Theatre opened in 1967. The building is named for Caroline Leonetti Ahmanson, a philanthropist and the wife of Howard F. Ahmanson, Sr., who founded the insurance and savings and loan company H. F. Ahmanson and Co. The venue underwent a major renovation in 1994.



Daniel Fish



John Heginbotham

Photo: Janelle Jones

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- The set design, lighting, and costumes in this revival are very different from what audiences saw in the original 1943 production. How do these things affect the story?
- The original *Oklahoma!* premiered during World War II. How do you think current events affected the reception of the show in 1943, and how do you think they affect how the revival production is received today?
- Daniel Fish told *New Yorker* writer Cynthia Zarin, “Investigating what it means to be American is a subject for me.” What do you think this revival, *OKLAHOMA!* says or asks about what it means to be American?
- *Oklahoma!* is considered the quintessential American musical. Do you think *OKLAHOMA!* is a quintessential American musical of today? Why or why not?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

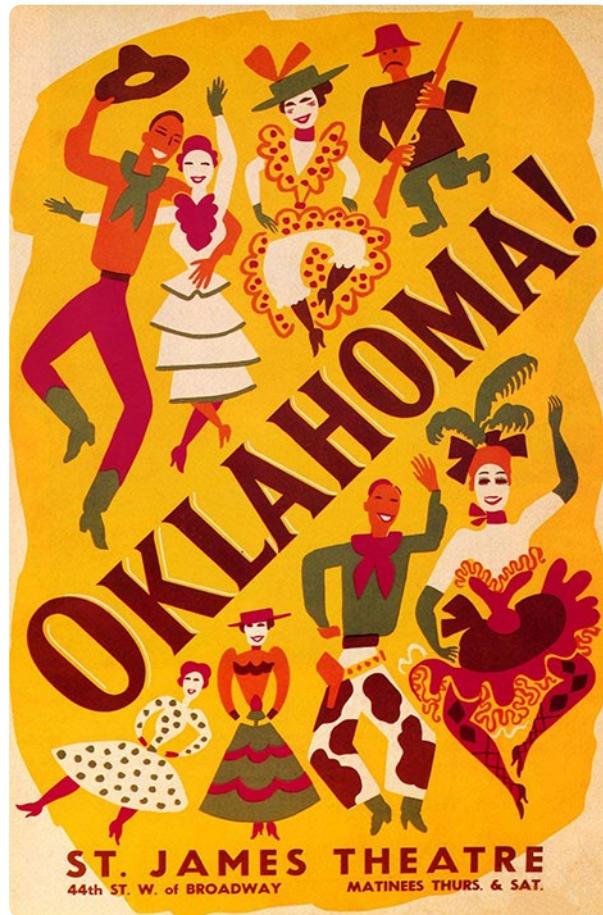
- Other events presented by Center Theatre Group [centertheatregroup.org](http://centertheatregroup.org)
- The Hollywood Pantages Theatre [broadwayinhollywood.com](http://broadwayinhollywood.com)
- Rodgers & Hammerstein [rodgersandhammerstein.com](http://rodgersandhammerstein.com)
- Upcoming Visions and Voices events, including  
**9/29** [Monica Bill Barnes & Company: \*The Running Show\*](#)  
**9/30** [Live Artists Live: Sings of Freedom](#)  
**10/11** [Interstitial: A Book of \(Musical\) Stories](#)  
**10/20** [\(Un\)Documents](#)  
**10/25** [Lido Pimienta in Concert](#)  
**11/3** [Dahlak Brathwaite: Try/Step/Trip](#)  
**11/13** [August Wilson's Radio Golf](#)  
**3/30** [Musicals in the Metaverse featuring \*Urinetown\*](#)

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

CHRISTINA SNIDER of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu) but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

### BOOKS

- Tim Carter, [Oklahoma! The Making of an American Musical](#) (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2007).
- Thomas S. Hischak, [The Rodgers and Hammerstein Encyclopedia](#) (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007).
- John Kenrick, [Musical Theatre: A History](#) (New York: Continuum, 2008).



Original Broadway poster (1943)



The Hollywood Pantages Theatre

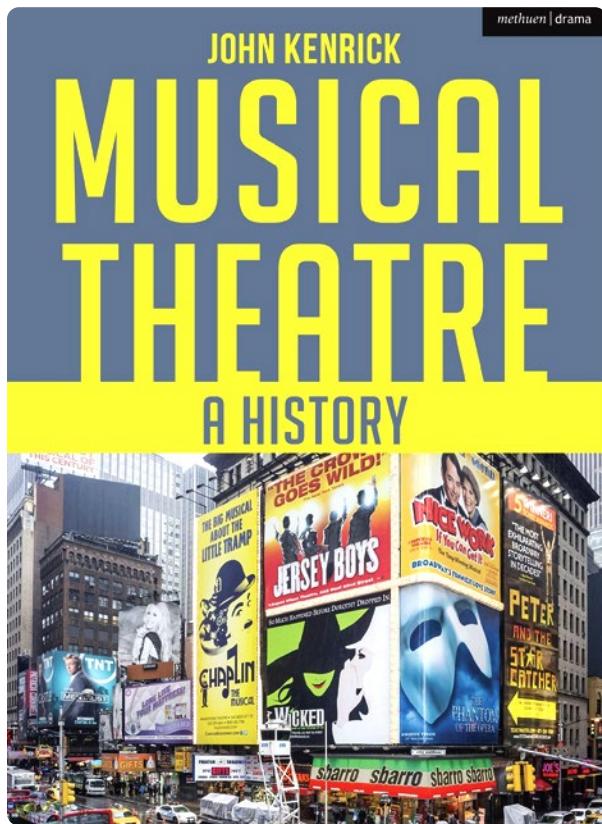
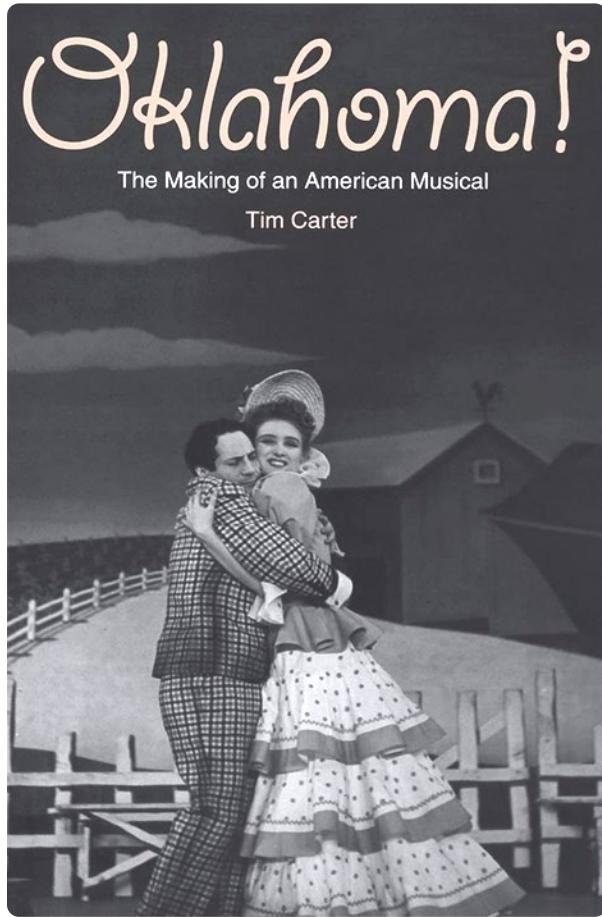


Monica Bill Barnes & Company: *The Running Show*



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- Max Wilk, *Overture and Finale: Rodgers & Hammerstein and the Creation of Their Two Greatest Hits* (New York: Back Stage Books, 1999).
- Max Wilk, *OK! The Story of Oklahoma!* (New York: Grove Press, 1993).

#### DATABASES

- [Alexander Street BroadwayHD Collection](#)
- [Alexander Street Music and Dance Online](#)
- [Alexander Street Theatre in Context Collection](#)
- [ProQuest Music & Performing Arts Collection](#)
- [ProQuest Performing Arts Periodicals Database](#)

#### DVD

- *Oklahoma!* (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 1999).

#### JOURNALS

- [Studies in Musical Theatre](#)

#### VOCAL SCORE

- “*Oklahoma! A Musical Play Based on the Play ‘Green Grow the Lilacs’ by Lynn Riggs*” (New York: Williamson Music Co., 1943).

